

The French veterans and the Republic:
The Union nationale des combattants,
1933-1939

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Since Antoine Prost's three volume *Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939* (1977), subsequent histories of the period have largely accepted the benign role of French Great War veterans during the interwar period. This thesis re-examines the history of the veterans' movement. Were the veterans integral to French democracy? Did they reject political extremism in favour of a peaceful and Republican civic action? Can one judge their associations to have been an important obstacle to the development of a French fascism? What influence did the culture of the Great War, widely held to have been important in Germany and Italy at the time, have on French veterans?

These questions are addressed in a detailed study of the Union nationale des combattants (UNC) from 1933 to 1939. Through the examination of the association's political discourse and militant action, the thesis argues that the UNC challenged the democratic claim of elected representatives to lead France. The association's plans for reform of the state would not have left parliamentary democracy intact. The UNC undertook militant political action that endorsed illegality and mirrored that of anti-Republican extra-parliamentary leagues. Ultimately, the association was one of many actors that contributed to the destabilisation of the French regime in the years before the defeat in May 1940.

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Abbreviations

ACJF	Association catholique de la jeunesse
AD	Alliance démocratique
AF	Action française
AGMG	Association générale des mutilés de la guerre
ARAC	Association républicaine des anciens combattants
CNE	Conseil national économique
CGSCM	Confédération générale des syndicats des classes moyennes
DRAC	Ligue des droits du religieux ancien combattant
FARAC	Fédération des amicales régimentaires et d'anciens combattants
FFCF	Fils et Filles des Croix de Feu
FIDAC	Fédération interalliée des anciens combattants
FN	Fédération nationale
FNAPG	Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre
FNBPC	Fédération nationale des blessés du poumon et chirurgicaux
FNCR	Fédération nationale des combattants républicains
FOP	Fédération ouvrière et paysanne
FR	Fédération républicaine
GRP	Groupe de la région parisienne de l'UNC
JP	Jeunesses Patriotes
JUF	Jeunes de l'UF
JUNC	Jeunes de l'UNC
MSF	Mouvement social français
PDP	Parti démocrate populaire
PPF	Parti populaire français
PRNS	Parti républicain national et social
PSF	Parti social français
SDC	Semaine du combattant
SF	Solidarité française
SFIO	Section française de l'internationale ouvrière
SPES	Société de préparation et d'éducation sportive
UF	Union fédérale
UNC	Union nationale des combattants
UNMR	Union nationale des mutilés et réformés
USF	Union sportive française
VN	Volontaires nationaux

Introduction

Historians have argued that the 1930s witnessed the outbreak of an undeclared civil war in France.¹ Groups that were often violently opposed to democracy attacked the French Third Republic. Anti-parliamentarianism was not a new phenomenon. In the 1880s, General Boulanger's movement had threatened to engage the masses in an anti-parliamentary campaign for constitutional revision. The following decade, the flawed conviction for treason of Captain Alfred Dreyfus divided the nation between the generally Republican Dreyfusards and the clericalist and right-wing anti-Dreyfusards. Nationalist intellectuals lent their weight to the cause against the regime. Maurice Barrès's theory of 'rootedness' and Charles Maurras's depiction of the divorce between the *pays légal* (parliament) and the *pays réel* (the people) influenced the Republic's enemies and the right for decades.² Maurras's monarchist Action française (AF) movement presented the most strident challenge to the Republic at this time.

The outbreak of war in 1914 rallied the left and right to the regime in the Union sacrée. However, the successful outcome of the war did not appease the Republic's detractors for long. Left-wing agitation in the strikes of 1919-1920 spread the fear of communist revolution. On the extreme right, militant groups such as Georges Valois's Faisceau sprang up in response to the electoral victory of the Cartel des gauches in 1924. A growing number of personalities and formations came to express dissatisfaction with the regime.³ Extra-parliamentary leagues attempted to engage the masses in their campaigns against the Republic, while the business and industrial elites took up the cause of Ernest Mercier's Redressement Français.⁴ Increasing political confrontation came at a time of economic difficulty for France. As the cost of living

¹ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 65; Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (New York: Knopf & Random House, 1972), p. 243. For a summary of the period see Samuel Kalman, *The Extreme Right in Interwar France: The Faisceau and the Croix de Feu* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 2.

² Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 14.

³ Kalman, *Extreme Right* examines the Faisceau in the 1920s. On the Jeunesses Patriotes in the 1920s see volumes I and II of Jean Philippet, *Le Temps des Ligues: Pierre Taittinger et les Jeunesses Patriotes*, 5 vols (Lille: Atelier National de Reproduction de Thèses, 2000). Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986) looks briefly at the Légion and Action française and in depth at the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Faisceau.

⁴ François Monnet, *Refaire la République: André Tardieu, une dérive réactionnaire, 1876-1945* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), pp. 201-202. On Ernest Mercier see Richard F. Kuisel, *Ernest Mercier: French Technocrat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

increased and the Franc lost value, the government's use of decree laws drew stinging criticism of the apparently ailing parliamentary regime.

Though the Republic weathered these storms, the extent of the challenge it faced during the 1930s was unprecedented. Parliamentary scandals, the onset of the global financial crisis in France and the instability of government coalitions reinvigorated the Republic's foes. Anti-parliamentarianism, previously the preserve of extremist groups and relatively isolated thinkers, entered the mainstream press and society at large. The riots of 6 February 1934, in which thousands of members of nationalist leagues and war veterans forced the government to resign, polarised French politics. Membership of the leagues rocketed. They attracted hundreds of thousands of French men and women into mass organisations that sought the overthrow of the Republican system. The exemplar of this growth, Colonel François de La Rocque's paramilitary organisation the Croix de Feu, and its successor, the Parti social français (PSF), became the largest political group in French history. While a violent seizure of power did not take place, large sectors of society engaged with and supported the extreme right's agenda. Alarmed at what they saw as the attempted 'fascist' coup of February 1934, the extreme and parliamentary left joined forces in the Popular Front. Its victory in the elections of May 1936 compounded the division of French politics.

The veterans of the Great War could not escape the consequences of these political developments. Their numerical strength in French society was significant. In 1920 there were 6.4 million war veterans in France. Half of all men and, therefore, voters (in a country where women were not yet enfranchised) were veterans. Based on the shared experience of the war, these men laid claim to a common identity that made the veterans a potentially powerful political force.⁵ Associations such as the Union nationale des combattants (UNC) and the Union Fédérale (UF) claimed approximately 900,000 members each. The veteran became an important symbol. For veterans and non-veterans alike, the former *poilu* more than anyone understood the interests of a country for whom he had shed his blood. His morality was irreproachable, forged in the egalitarian society of the trenches where men gave their lives for their comrades. At once a patriotic and moral force, the veteran would restore France after the catastrophe of the war because, after all, only he knew how. Standing in his way were the elected men of the Republic.

⁵ Richard Bessel, 'The 'front generation' and the politics of Weimar Germany', in *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany, 1770-1968*, ed. by Mark Roseman (Cambridge and New York: CUP, 1995), pp.121-122.

They had escaped the trenches and waited out the war in the relative comfort of the Chamber. Consequently, they could not understand the notion of self-sacrifice. Corrupted by the pursuit of power, parliamentarians looked after only their personal interest. For twenty years, the veterans would stake their claim to the leadership of France based on this opposition.

Heterogeneity characterised the veterans' movement throughout its existence. From its inception, veterans were united in little more than the belief in their moral superiority over politicians and the defence of pension rights. Associations and their civic action programmes came to reflect the political loyalties of their founders and members. The two largest associations during the interwar period were the conservative UNC and the centre-left UF. Besides the two 'heavyweight' associations, many more existed. On the right wing of the combatant movement, the UNC was joined by the Association générale des mutilés de la guerre (AGMG), the Fédération des amicales régimentaires et d'anciens combattants (FARAC) and the Fédération nationale (FN). On the centre right were the Union nationale des mutilés et réformés (UNMR), the Fédération nationale des anciens prisonniers de guerre (FNAPG) and the Semaine du combattant (SDC), close to the UF in its pacifism but similar to the UNC on domestic issues. The UF and professional organisations occupied the centre, led by *professeurs*, *instituteurs* and other *fonctionnaires* who felt close to the Radical party and the secular republican tradition. The Fédération nationale des blessés du poumon et chirurgicaux (FNBPC) and the Fédération ouvrière et paysanne (FOP) were left wing. The communist-sponsored Association républicaine des anciens combattants (ARAC) represented the extreme left. The UF, UNC, AGMG, FN and UNMR were the only groups with the support and resources to have any hope of influencing politicians.⁶ The various associations were grouped in the Confédération nationale des anciens combattants et victimes de la guerre. Founded at a 'congress of congresses' of associations in November 1927, Georges Rivollet (later minister for pensions) became its longest serving president. The potency of the Confederation depended on the enthusiasm of the UNC and UF for the inter-associational body.⁷ ARAC, judged a political group, was denied membership.

During the twenties, the veterans assumed their self-appointed role as moral arbiters of the Republic. Primarily concerned with securing fair pensions for their members, the associations did not shy away from other issues. In July 1926, for example, the Mellon-Bérenger

⁶ Antoine Prost, *Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939*, 3 vols (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1977), I, pp. 83-86.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111 and p. 124.

agreement on war debt failed to prioritise the issue of reparations over that of war debt repayments. If Germany defaulted, France would go on paying. On 11 July 1926, veterans from all groups protested on the streets of Paris. They aimed to force a change in government by means of a public display of discontent.⁸ It would not be the last time that the veterans took to the streets with a political goal in mind.

During the thirties, the veteran movement's attention focused less on their material demands and more on political action. Their belief in a historical legitimacy based on the war experience, which trumped the democratic authority of Republican politicians, contained a subversive potential. The veterans claimed a privileged place in society. The associations believed this gave them the right to pronounce on matters of moral, political and national importance while they demanded 'just rewards' for their members. Antiparlamentarianism was always a characteristic of the movements yet it became more prominent at this time. Both the UNC and UF were irritated by perceived government incompetence and corruption. More than ever politicians and parties appeared to represent narrow and corrupt interest groups. After the unrest on the streets of Paris in January and February 1934, the veterans resolved to intervene in national life as never before.

Historiography

Antoine Prost's three volume *Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939* (1977) dominates the historiography of the French veterans' movement. This detailed study demonstrates the importance of the veterans in French society, from their national campaigns that sought to influence government policy on a multitude of issues, to the activity of veterans in the daily associational life of most rural French communes. Furthermore, Prost asserts that the ex-servicemen's associations were integral to a French interwar democratic political culture. The middle classes used the *anciens combattants* associations to pursue their interests behind the cover of an apolitical front. This allowed them to defend their interests, avoid entry into the class struggle and act as mediator between the working class and the bourgeoisie, to whom they proposed conciliatory policies.⁹ The veterans' associations entrenched the social classes most susceptible to fascism within democratic organisations. Republican in their aims, methods and

⁸ Ibid., p. 100.

⁹ Prost, III, pp. 219-223.

‘spontaneous reactions’ they constituted ‘one of the major obstacles to the development of fascism in France’.¹⁰

Unlike in Germany and Italy where political violence was common, the French veterans’ morality forbade this action. The combatants, Prost argues, were anti-parliamentarian and wanted a strong regime but they refused to treat their fellow Frenchmen as enemies.¹¹ Not only, therefore, did the fascist seed fall on the stony ground of an established democratic culture but there was also very little room for it to grow. While some ‘fascistic’ veteran leaders and UNC section presidents envisaged the creation of a mass movement for state and social reform that would be ‘vichyssoise avant l’heure’, the Republicanism of provincial veterans meant they did not (and could not) launch a coup. However, the respect and esteem in which members held their leaders often led them to approve of dangerous ideas.¹²

While Prost offers the most complete examination of the veterans’ movement, several partial studies provide further insight. Lynette Shaw has examined the veterans’ participation on the night of 6 February 1934.¹³ Though Shaw shows the existence of a radical element in the veterans’ movement, she is concerned more with writing the history of the event rather than drawing any significant conclusions from it. Jean-Noël Jeanneney follows Prost’s argument that the veterans’ moralism, abhorrence of violence and bombastic yet empty rhetoric prevented the development of a French fascism.¹⁴ Lyn Gorman’s analysis of combatant foreign policy after Munich underlines the diversity within the movement.¹⁵ Gorman questions the conclusion that the veterans were united in their appeasement of Germany and in doing so hints at a combatants’ movement that was not as unanimous in its politics as Prost asserts. Didier Leschi further emphasises the heterogeneity of the veterans’ movement. Leschi questions Prost’s conclusion on the wholesale Republicanism of the veterans. He argues that veterans patronised and joined the

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 217.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 179.

¹² Prost., I, pp. 164-165.

¹³ Lynette Shaw, ‘The anciens combattants and the events of February 1934’, *European Studies Review*, 5 (1975), pp. 299-311. Shaw’s article was published in 1975, the same year as Serge Bernstein, *Le 6 février* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). Recent works on the veterans include Sophie Delaporte, *Gueules cassées de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Viénot, 2004) and Rebecca Scales, ‘Radio broadcasting, disabled veterans, and the politics of national recovery in interwar France’, *French Historical Studies*, 31 (2008), pp. 643-678.

¹⁴ Jean-Noël Jeanneney, ‘Les anciens combattants: Fascistes ou démocrates?’, *Histoire*, 1 (1978), pp. 86-88. See also Robert Soucy, ‘France: Veteran politics between the wars’, in *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, ed. by Stephen R. Ward (Port Washington & London: Kennikat Press, 1975), pp. 59-103.

¹⁵ Lyn Gorman, ‘The anciens combattants and appeasement: From Munich to war’, *War and Society*, 10 (1992), pp. 73-89.

Croix de Feu. In doing so, they supported a group that neither respected legality nor democratic legitimacy.¹⁶ Building on the conclusions of Gorman and Leschi, this thesis will argue that the veterans' movement was a heterogeneous body to which one cannot ascribe a common politics.

There is a sizeable literature on extremism among ex-servicemen and groups that laid claim to the veteran mystique.¹⁷ The image of the veteran, whether the living incarnation of order, moral authority and the nation, or a hero of the working class opposed to capitalist warmongers, provided a convenient mobilising myth for an array of groups. Veterans were the founders and main clientele of several extreme-right movements that desired an end to the Republic. The Faisceau, founded in 1924, sought to attract veterans to a project for their *Etat combattant*. The same year, veterans figured among the founders and leaders of Pierre Taittinger's Jeunesses Patriotes (JP). The Croix de Feu was created in 1927 as an organisation for decorated veterans. In 1930, the AF established the Association Marius Plateau for veteran supporters. On the extreme left, the communist sponsored ARAC no more sought to shore up the bourgeois regime than did its opponents on the anti-Republican extreme right. These groups demonstrate that a sector of the veterans' movement was attracted to extreme and often violent politics.

However, the relatively minor proportion of veterans within extremist associations means that they are largely considered unrepresentative of the *mouvement ancien combattant*. Even the

¹⁶ Didier Leschi, 'L'étrange cas La Rocque', in *Le mythe de l'allergie française au fascisme*, ed. by Michel Dobry (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003), pp. 155-194.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the extreme right that covers both decades of the interwar period see Robert Soucy, *First Wave* on the Jeunesses Patriotes and the Faisceau, while Soucy's *French Fascism: The Second Wave* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) examines the Solidarité Française, Croix de Feu/Parti social français and the Parti populaire français. On the Croix de Feu/Parti social français see Gareth Adrian Howlett, 'The Croix de Feu, Parti Social Français and Colonel de La Rocque' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Nuffield College, Oxford, 1986); William D. Irvine, 'Fascism in France: The strange case of the Croix de Feu', *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991), pp. 271-295; Kalman, *Extreme Right*; Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France Against Democracy: The Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1929-1935* (Montreal & London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); Cheryl Koos, 'Fascism, fatherhood, and the family in interwar France: The case of Antoine Rédier and the Légion', *Journal of Family History*, 24 (1999), pp. 317-329; Leschi, 'L'étrange cas La Rocque'; Kevin Passmore, 'Boy-scouting for grownups? Paramilitarism in the Croix de Feu and the PSF', *French Historical Studies*, 19 (1995), pp. 527-557, 'The Croix de Feu: Bonapartism, national-populism or fascism?', *French History*, 9 (1995), pp. 93-123, 'Planting the tricolour in the citadels of communism: Women's social action in the Croix de Feu and Parti Social Français', *Journal of Modern History*, 71 (1999), pp. 814-852; John Rymell, 'Militants and militancy in the Croix de Feu and Parti Social Français: Patterns of political experience on the French far right (1933-1939)', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 1990). On the Faisceau see Allen Douglas, 'Violence and Fascism: The case of the Faisceau', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4 (1984), pp. 689-712; Kalman, *Extreme Right*. On smaller groups in the twenties and thirties that contained some veteran element see Robert O. Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism: Henry Dorgères's Greenshirts and the Crisis of French Agriculture, 1929-39* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1997); Philippet, *Le Temps des Ligues*.

Croix de Feu eventually opened its ranks to non-veterans. Historians have downplayed extremism in the mass of the veterans' movement. The influence of Prost's work is evident here. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker claim that, unlike in Germany and Italy, once the material demands of the French veterans were satisfied they faded into the background. Robert Soucy admits that the UNC leadership flirted with fascism but that the general membership remained aloof to extremism. Albert Kéchichian states that the UNC and UF were more representative of the veterans' movement than the Croix de Feu. While arguing that the UNC was important to the growth of the Croix de Feu, Kevin Passmore supports Prost's conclusion that most veterans were loath to follow the political designs of their leaders. Contrary to this view, Samuel Kalman questions Prost's conclusion on the benignity of veteran rhetoric but makes no assertion on the extent of its influence on ordinary veterans.¹⁸

While Prost offers an excellent history of the veterans' movement as a whole, this thesis will investigate his conclusions through the detailed study of one association. It will reappraise the role of the UNC during the 1930s. Founded in Paris on 11 November 1918, the association used the existing networks of its patrons – the social authorities, Church and army - to spread throughout France. By the time of its first general assembly on 23 February 1919, the association claimed to have 100,000 members in 72 departments. In July 1919, the UNC launched a national weekly newspaper, *La Voix du combattant*.¹⁹ Of the three million veterans who held membership of an association, the UNC accounted for approximately 850,000 during the 1930s.²⁰

UNC action and policy were grounded in conservatism yet, as with the veterans' movement in general, members held diverse political opinions. Certain veterans of the UNC were deputies. Though the association did not publish a list of these members, one may glean from its publications the various political allegiances of these men. On the right, the UNC counted eleven deputies who were part of or near to the Fédération républicaine (FR). These included Jean Ybarnégaray and Georges Scapini, both of whom were close to La Rocque's movements on the extreme right. Among its centrist deputies the UNC claimed four from the

¹⁸ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (London: Profile, 2002), p. 232; Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 47, footnote 123; Albert Kéchichian, *Les Croix de Feu à l'âge des fascismes* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2006), p. 33; Kevin Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism: The Right in a French Province, 1928-1939* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 223; Soucy, *Second Wave*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ Prost, I, p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Alliance démocratique (AD), two from the Parti démocrate populaire (PDP), and one from the radical left (*gauche radicale*). Future radical prime minister Georges Bonnet was on the executive committee of the UNC's Dordogne section. Other UNC members in the radical party included Jean Montigny, secretary-general of the radical group in the Chamber and André Marie, a member of Edouard Daladier's government in February 1934.²¹ Among the mass membership, most of the UNC's support came from traditionally conservative sectors yet the association counted socialists and communists among its members too. The executive committee (*conseil d'administration*) estimated that up to a third of the association's membership was loyal to the left.²² UNC members held diverse political opinions. Indeed, the leadership recognised that though there was unanimity on material questions, once the question of civic action was raised members split into political factions.²³

The main concern of this thesis is the UNC's action between 1933 and 1939. It offers a new study of the associations' politics and discourse in this period. During six years the UNC responded to the perceived crisis in France with increasingly political actions. On 15 October 1933 the association convened a meeting of 6000 members at the Salle Wagram in Paris. In response to economic hardship among veterans and alleged corruption in government, the meeting ratified the Wagram manifesto. It stated: "Si l'évolution nécessaire ne se fait pas par des réformes adéquates, la révolution les imposera brutalement...[il faut] restaurer l'autorité... la libérer de l'intolérable tyrannie des partis et des groupements, des appétits et des forces d'argent".²⁴ The text of the manifesto and subsequent commentaries displayed a disquieting change of tone for a veterans' association. The UNC did not temper its discourse as the thirties wore on.

Contemporary French politics did not leave room for moderation and the UNC could not escape the radicalisation of French politics after the riot of 6 February 1934. Co-operation between the association and militant extra-parliamentary groups, known as leagues, multiplied. The association founded its own auxiliary called Action combattante. The UNC's youth group,

²¹ See the articles 'Le ministère Sarraut', *La Voix du combattant* (hereafter *La Vdc*), 4 November 1933; 'Nomination au gouvernement', *L'UNC de Normandie*, February 1934; H. Arbeletche, 'Une lueur d'espoir', *Le Poilu basque*, December 1935; 'Députés nous ayant été signalés comme Membres de l'UNC', *La Vdc*, 9 May 1936. A complete collection of the UNC's national weekly newspaper is available at the organisation's Parisian headquarters, 18 rue Vézelay, Paris. Where no author is cited in the notes, the article was anonymous.

²² Minutes of the UNC's executive committee (hereafter UNC/EC), 28 July 1934; 29 February 1936.

²³ UNC/EC, 23 October 1937.

²⁴ 'Le texte du manifeste', *La Vdc*, 21 October 1933.

the Jeunes de l'UNC (JUNC), advocated entry into the political arena. These sub-groups allowed the UNC to go further in its political action while it attempted to preserve its apolitical facade. The association developed a programme on state reform that was close to the right. Its ideas were not supportive of the Republic's parliamentary democracy. After the elections of May 1936, the UNC sought to become the centre of an anti-Popular Front movement that included elements of the extreme right. As industrial disputes paralysed the French economy and Hitler's violations of the Treaty of Versailles multiplied, the veterans turned to authoritarian plans for French renewal. In 1938, the UNC, with the UF, called for a government of public safety (*salut public*). This government, which would operate without the machinery of parliamentary democracy, revealed the authoritarianism of veteran plans.

While accepting that the UNC's Parisian based leadership was fascistic, Prost argues that the mass of the movement was Republican. This dismissal of support among provincial members for the UNC's political action raises several points. Can one merely attribute provincial support for the UNC's more suspect ideas to the goodwill and esteem of the membership? Or were veterans receptive to authoritarianism? Indeed the Croix de Feu exerted an attraction upon some UNC members whom, Prost claims, were 'seduced'.²⁵ Allegedly moderate elements turned to alternative methods. UNC president of honour Humbert Isaac, who was briefly national president in 1925, was certainly less polemical than some of his colleagues yet nevertheless supported the UNC's plan for an authoritarian government of public safety in 1938. His move from moderation to authoritarianism followed a path that many conservatives took when the established order appeared threatened. This thesis argues that UNC veterans turned to authoritarianism as the perceived French crisis worsened.

La Voix du combattant was not solely concerned with veterans' material rights. Political articles frequently appeared. One cannot judge how audiences perceived veteran discourse. Did they simply enjoy the showmanship of the speechmaker or the flamboyancy of the author, as Prost suggests? Or did they read more into such expressions? From our position in the present, we know that the veterans' calls to action were not carried out. It is with the benefit of hindsight that one dismisses these calls as 'incantatory'. As Michel Dobry argues, "After all, how can we tell the difference between 'pseudo-revolutionary' and 'authentic revolutionary', especially in the domain of language, except by referring to the fact that in the end the 'revolution' never

²⁵ Prost, I, p. 173.

happened?”²⁶ Would a veteran at the time, living through a period of crisis and upheaval, have appreciated the benign nature of these calls? Would some have interpreted them as genuine calls to act? Veteran discourse may have appeared only as a rally cry to urge the unification of the French but it was open to interpretation.

This thesis neither argues that the veterans in general, nor the UNC in particular, were fascist. I am in agreement with Dobry that the classification of a group can hinder its study if one attempts to define an ‘essence’ or ‘nature’.²⁷ While avoiding the classificatory quagmire, which is discussed further in chapter three, the work nevertheless represents an attack on what Dobry has termed the ‘immunity thesis’, or the ‘orthodox school of French historiography’ according to William Irvine and Soucy.²⁸ The immunity thesis pertains to France’s alleged ‘allergy’ to fascism. Developed in the 1950s and 1960s, under the influence of the resistance-centric history of the Vichy years and the totalitarian model that sought to compare fascist and communist regimes in order to discredit the latter, the immunity thesis has proved robust.²⁹ Defence of the immunity thesis most often entails reference to a political culture founded upon the long implantation of democracy in France. Immunity thesis historians argue that certain groups spread their values and ideas to a diverse set of social formations, especially the middle classes, and so oriented them towards democracy. One such group, the *mouvement ancien combattant*, was essential to the edification and maintenance of this democratic culture. Veteran anti-parliamentarianism therefore expressed a legitimate dissatisfaction with a regime that no longer functioned. The associations’ true convictions lay in their ideas on a democratic reform of the state.³⁰

In recent years, a largely Anglophone group of historians (Dobry being a notable exception) has challenged the French orthodoxy on fascism.³¹ The anti-immunity thesis school

²⁶ Michel Dobry, ‘February 1934 and the discovery of French society’s allergy to the ‘Fascist Revolution’, in *France in the Era of Fascism*, ed. by Brian Jenkins (New York: Berghahn, 2005), p. 134. Dobry’s chapter is a translation of the article ‘Février 1934 et la découverte de l’allergie de la société française à la ‘Révolution fasciste’, *Revue française de sociologie*, XXX (1989), pp. 511-533.

²⁷ Michel Dobry, ‘La thèse immunitaire face aux fascismes: Pour une critique de la logique classificatoire’, in *Le mythe de l’allergie française au fascisme*, p. 5.

²⁸ Irvine, ‘Fascism in France’, p. 294; Soucy, *Second Wave*, p. 6.

²⁹ Brian Jenkins, ‘Introduction: Contextualising the immunity thesis’, in *France in the Era of Fascism*, p. 6.

³⁰ Prost, III, p. 219.

³¹ See the collection of essays in *Le mythe de l’allergie française au fascisme* especially Dobry, ‘La thèse immunitaire’; Irvine, ‘Fascism in France’; Passmore, *From Liberalism*; ‘The Croix de Feu’; Robert Soucy, ‘French fascism and the Croix de Feu: A dissenting interpretation’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 26 (1991), pp. 159-

stresses that fascism was a significant force in France on the level of ideas and political movements. Moreover, the argument for the existence of a common political culture is problematic. However widely a group may publicise its doctrine or ideology, the internalisation of such a culture on an individual level, that is to say for 'ordinary' citizens, is subjective. Each person has prejudices and preconceptions that would make them more or less receptive to one idea or another. One cannot credit a whole nation with the same fundamental political values.³² In the case of the veterans, Leschi questions the preponderance of this culture in stating that the virulent antiparlamentarianism of the veterans was greater than a marginal phenomenon within the wider movement.³³ In short, the argument that three million veterans, let alone forty million Frenchmen, shared a common political culture is untenable. This thesis therefore contributes to the increasing amount of research that considers the 'historical hinterland' of the Vichy regime.³⁴

This thesis argues that the UNC treated an important group of its compatriots as adversaries. Believing the Popular Front to be a Russian conspiracy and its communist supporters to be spies, the UNC's call for unity excluded the French left. Recent developments in the historiography of the First World War make a new approach possible. Audoin-Rouzeau, Becker and Alan Kramer have investigated the culture of the First World War at the front and the rear. Soldiers and civilians internalised pre-war and wartime scientific and racial thinking and synthesised patriotism and religion to construct the war as a conflict of races, fought in defence of Western civilisation and for God Himself.³⁵ Nations on both sides interpreted the war as a conflict between civilisation and barbarity.³⁶ Visceral hatred of the enemy sustained the consent of soldiers to the conflict long after the illusions of a short war had disappeared. Similarly, public support was an organic and self-sustaining phenomenon.

188; *Second Wave*; 'Fascism in France: Problematising the immunity thesis', in *France in the Era of Fascism*, pp. 65-104.

³² Kevin Passmore, 'The construction of crisis in interwar France', in *France in the Era of Fascism*, p. 164.

³³ Leschi, 'L'étrange cas La Rocque', p. 167.

³⁴ Jenkins, 'Introduction', p. 3.

³⁵ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, chapters four and five, pp. 94-159; Annette Becker, *La Guerre et la foi* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994); Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 175-180; George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: OUP, 1990), p. 32; Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 62-75. For a critique of the culture of war thesis see Rémy Cazals, '1914-1918: Chercher encore', *Le Mouvement Social*, 199 (2002), pp. 107-113; Antonio Gibelli, 'Le refus, la distance, le consentement', *Le Mouvement Social*, 199 (2002), pp. 113-119; M. Isnenghi, 'Un livre problématique et inquiet', *Le Mouvement Social*, 199 (2002), pp. 103-107; Antoine Prost, 'La guerre de 1914 n'est pas perdue', *Le Mouvement Social*, 199 (2002), pp. 95-102; 'Les limites de la brutalisation: Tuer sur le front occidental, 1914-1918', *Vingtième Siècle*, 81 (2004), pp. 5-20.

³⁶ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 102.

The culture of war thesis claims that the French believed themselves to be a superior race, while Germany was the incarnation of barbarity and evil.³⁷ Becker goes as far as to say that the war was "...a struggle between two intrinsically opposed races".³⁸ Kramer's work throws some light upon the situation in France. He mentions French historian Joseph Bédier's wartime pamphlet *Les Crimes allemands d'après les témoignages allemands*, which made use of captured Germans' diary entries to expose to the world the seemingly boundless German destruction of human and material matter.³⁹ Significantly, Kramer writes that the French accusation of barbarity against the Germans actually preceded reports of atrocities. As early as 4 August 1914, *Le Matin* described the conflict as 'a holy war of civilisation against barbarity'. The French media ascribed racial characteristics to the enemy, such as 'square heads, sack-like bodies' and a smell like a rabbit hutch, rancid fat and stale beer. Scholarly articles stated and restated these insults.⁴⁰

This thesis does not investigate the brutalisation of French veterans per se. French soldiers are largely understood to have ended the war satisfied with the fruits of victory and supportive of Republican democracy. Emphasising the relatively low incidence of political violence in France, this orthodox view claims that the culture of war was sublimated into a millenarian culture of peace. Many in French society did embrace pacifism after 1918. It was dominant in the veterans' movement and in this the UNC was no exception. There is evidence though that the culture of war's influence persisted. Passmore suggests that it was channelled into an anti-communism that both right and extreme right appropriated for themselves. During the 1920s, it remained a sub-current on the right that waxed as the perceived threat of communism grew at home and abroad.⁴¹ The culture of war was not strong enough to supplant pacifism in the veterans' movement yet it remained an available discourse that some right-wing veterans used in exceptional circumstances. The thesis will investigate the war culture's influence on the discourse of the UNC, in which the association depicted a conflict of civilisations between France and the barbaric communist especially after May 1936.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

³⁸ Annette Becker, 'From war to war: A few myths, 1914-1942', in *France at War in the Twentieth Century: Propaganda, Myth and Metaphor*, ed. by Valerie Holman & Debra Kelly (Oxford: Berghahn, 2000), p. 19.

³⁹ Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴¹ Kevin Passmore, *The Right in the French Third Republic* (forthcoming, 2010).

The veterans of the UNC did not declare their aversion to the Third Republic as a regime. However, they denied its component parts legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy is subjective and therefore difficult to define. It is hard to ascertain how or indeed if the UNC undermined the perceived legitimacy of the Republic in the eyes of French citizens. To begin with, political organisations held diverse conceptions of the Republic itself, which often entailed ideas on what the Republic *should be*. The UNC's ideal Republic, for example, was a right-wing authoritarian regime with limited political pluralism and the representation of economic and social forces in state institutions. As the Third Republic at the time did not resemble this, the association openly questioned whether the regime was still the Republic. This took place more often when the left was in power and especially after May 1936.

One must question though to what extent the often violent criticism of the component parts of the Third Republic constituted an attack on the regime itself. I argue that the veterans undermined the legitimacy of the Republic by casting doubt on the competence and suitability to govern of its personnel and institutions. Though they did not explicitly demand an end to the regime, they decried the practices and inefficiencies of the parliamentary system, the conduct and alleged self-interest of parliamentarians and a lack of discipline and authority. Their attacks targeted successive administrations of left and right, ministers and ministries and the electoral system. Their depiction of the government as in opposition to a subjective 'national' interest eventually came to encompass the regime itself after May 1936. As a result, the veterans' plans for state reform would not have left the institutions of the Third Republic intact. In a democratic and parliamentary sense, the *République des combattants* would little resemble the old.

The outbreak of the Second World War and the establishment of the Vichy regime meant that the veterans no longer needed to establish their own government of national and moral union. It is unconvincing to suggest that their rejection of violence and eventual support for a legally established authoritarian regime in 1940 somehow attenuates their extremism. What one can say is that the politics of the UNC became more authoritarian during the 1930s. Their plans for state reform were not democratic. Ostensibly concerned for the continuation of the Republic, the UNC defined effective government as a strong right-wing regime of military figures and veterans that would restore discipline and authority to France.

Sources

Research for this thesis is based on the publications of combatant associations and police reports on veteran activities. Combatant newspapers reveal the national policy of the parent organisation and its attempts to shape reader opinion. Although words and acts often differed, the combatant press nevertheless informed the membership and the public at large of the associations' policies and so may have influenced perceptions in private and public spheres. However, one must bear in mind that French people were subject to multiple political, social and economic groups. The veterans' publications alone did not solely influence a person's political opinion.

Due to Prost's differentiation between the more politically active national UNC leadership and the moderate provincial membership, I included national and local UNC newspapers in my research. In total, for his analysis of veteran discourse, Prost studied 216 articles from across the *monde ancien combattant*, 117 from the 1920s and 99 from the 1930s. If one amalgamates Prost's eight categories of political affiliation into two groups, left and right, several interesting points are raised.⁴² Prost analysed 100 right wing articles compared to 116 from the left, a rough 46-54 percentage split. For the year 1934, when veterans appeared most active, Prost consulted one-third more articles of the left than of the right – 22 left versus 14 right. This under-representation of right-wing articles is important as it was in 1934 that the right appeared to threaten most the Republic, especially before and after the riots of February. This imbalance may have meant that the veterans' movement appeared more pro-Republican than it was. More seriously, for the years 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1939, Prost did not consult any articles from the right and only 11 from the left. For 1937, only one article *in total* was consulted. One would expect such an omission to affect the overall image of veteran politics during these years. Indeed Prost states that the UNC preached reconciliation after the election of the Popular Front. However, as we will see, the reality was more complicated than this. The UNC intensified its attacks on the government and communism, and this period is crucial to the understanding of the association's role before the war.

This thesis is largely based on the publications of the UNC. Between the wars *La Voix du combattant* appeared weekly and printed 30,000 copies by 1937.⁴³ I consulted 331 editions from January 1933 to May 1939. While the newspaper engaged with issues unique to the

⁴² Prost classifies each article according to the following categories: right, right-national UNC, right-regional UNC, extreme right and left-national UF, regional left, independent left and extreme left.

⁴³ Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris (hereafter referred to as APP), BA 2313, 4 September 1937.

veterans' world, such as the defence of material benefits, articles that dealt with political developments in France and abroad appeared frequently. *La Voix du combattant* covered political issues more regularly than the UF's bi-monthly publication the *Cahiers de l'UF*. It also contained information on the activities of local sections and a dedicated youth page.

Journalist and UNC vice-president Hubert Aubert directed the newspaper and contributed a weekly editorial piece. Paul Galland, a member of the association's policy-making committee (*bureau*) and a vice-president, assisted Aubert and regularly authored the lead article in each issue. Aubert and Galland were perfectly placed to formulate UNC doctrine on numerous issues. They thus exerted great influence on the association's direction. Other regular contributors included UNC national vice-presidents Aimé Goudaert and Alfred Charron. Articles by Jean Goy (president, December 1935-1940), Georges Lebecq (president, February 1934-December 1935), Henry Rossignol (president, 1926-February 1934) and Humbert Isaac appeared less frequently.

The fact that a relatively small group of men controlled the UNC's national publication presents the researcher with a problem. Drawn from the association's executive committee, the small group of men who controlled the newspaper used it to disseminate ideas and propaganda. Fascistic in character, the dominance of this select few calls into question the extent to which the national *La Voix du combattant* represented the mass membership. Though regional issues of this newspaper were also published, such as *La Voix du combattant: Seine-et-Marne* and *La Voix du combattant: Tarn-et-Garonne*, their titles are revealing; they were shorter versions of the national press. To compensate for this Paris-centric bias, I included the publications of local UNC sections in my research. These were of two sorts. On the one hand, as mentioned above, some merely reprinted articles from the national newspaper and included little originality. On the other hand, some contained original material produced by activists in that area. Local editions contained articles on politics, veterans' rights and the activities of the local and national UNC. In all, 22 regional UNC newspapers were included in the study. Some collections of these documents were incomplete and so a less thorough consultation resulted.

Occasionally the UNC published information and propaganda booklets, which outlined policy or contained the proceedings of the annual national congress. The UNC produced, for example, *La Route de Salut: Pensées, espoirs, volontés des Anciens Combattants et des jeunes. Pour remonter la pente de la Décadence vers la Rénovation*, written by Humbert Isaac in 1935

and *Les Anciens Combattants et la Confédération Générale du Travail*, published by Action combattante. The UNC also kept minutes for meetings of its executive committee. The minutes do not provide a word for word account of each meeting. While they can be detailed, in some places they are less so. Nevertheless, these minutes were not published and so often reveal ideas and incidents not reported in the association's press. The minutes of 36 such meetings between 18 June 1932 and 18 February 1939 were consulted.

Other than UNC publications, the UF's *Cahiers de l'UF* and the Fonds Henri Pichot provided another viewpoint on combatant life. Appearing less regularly than *La Voix du combattant* and less concerned with politics, editions of the *Cahiers* were useful in different measures. I examined 141 editions of the *Cahiers* from January 1933 to May 1940. I also consulted several other UF publications and speeches. Using the archives of Colonel François de La Rocque at the Archives nationales and the Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po in Paris, I investigated the UNC's relationship with the Croix de Feu.

Other than associational press, I studied police reports. These contain incidents, meetings and speeches that were perhaps not published. Although certainly useful, one must be cautious about the reliability of police documents. There is a danger that their authors reported what they believed their superiors wanted to hear. Members of the police often tendentiously summarised speeches and newspaper articles and so this diminishes the value of their reports. As long as one bears these limitations in mind, police reports can afford the researcher a glimpse into a more private sphere. Through the documentation of rumours, actions and reactions, police reports have the potential to complement the official press. Police records held at the Parisian prefecture of police and in the F⁷ Series at the Archives nationales formed part of my research. Recently repatriated from Russia, the Moscow archives held at Fontainebleau contain a variety of materials including police reports, press cuttings, and several dossiers on leading figures in the combatant world.

The following chapter re-examines the role of the UNC in the riots of 6 February 1934. Important to an understanding of the Third Republic and its decline, the night opened a virtual French civil war that would not end until the Liberation a decade later.⁴⁴ The chapter does not argue that the veterans attempted a coup but it does offer a more nuanced interpretation than

⁴⁴ Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 65.

previous accounts. UNC veterans were unable (and in some cases unwilling) to remain separate from the violence. While only the UNC's Parisian group took part, provincial sections approved of its action against the government. Chapter two examines the UNC's plans for state reform. Close to the right and extreme right in its programme, one can say that their plans were not democratic. The UNC's design for the Republic would see a constituent assembly (*constituante*) remodel the regime along the lines of limited political pluralism, a corporatist organisation of the economy and an authoritarian executive. Chapter three investigates political militancy within the UNC. Based on the success of the Croix de Feu, the UNC launched its own auxiliary to spread these ideas and enter into the political fray. Action combattante found support among local sections and marked an escalation in UNC political tactics. The chapter also looks at the relationship between the UNC and the extreme right at a local and national level. While the UNC was not a fascist group, it is argued that co-operation with and membership of these groups among UNC veterans attests to an anti-democratic political militancy in the veteran world. Chapter four explores the way in which the UNC used youth to attack Republican politicians. Through the medium of their youth group, the JUNC, the association engaged in political action. It is argued that the JUNC went further in its doctrine than the UNC and did not shy away from demands for authoritarian government. Finally, chapter five analyses the influence of the language and culture of war in UNC political discourse. The UNC regularly referred to the culture of war in its attacks on the left and the Popular Front government. It associated the Popular Front with the wartime foreign invader and depicted it as an illegitimate regime.

Chapter One

6 February 1934: The veterans' riot

Scène IV

VILLATTE: "...moi, je ne manifeste pas.... mais mon frère Jean est convoqué par les anciens combattants, et alors, là, vous savez, si les mutilés et grands blessés manifestent, le Gouvernement va chanceler."

Scène V:

VILLATTE: "Certainement, les anciens combattants rétabliront le calme, on n'osera rien faire quand ils défileront".⁴⁵

In 1933, as the world economic crisis made itself felt in France, the failure of successive Radical governments to find a viable solution served to sharpen hostility to the regime. When leading figures in the Radical party were apparently implicated in the schemes of the fraudster Alexandre Stavisky, the right-wing press and extra-parliamentary leagues sensed a story. They alleged that leading Radicals, including Georges Pressard, the brother-in-law of incumbent premier Camille Chautemps, had helped Stavisky escape justice. When his most recent swindle, the Bayonne Municipal Pawnshop, came to the attention of the police, Stavisky fled. At Chamonix on 9 January 1934, surrounded by police, he took his own life. The right and left exploited this 'convenient' suicide. They alleged that the forces of order had silenced Stavisky before he could make potentially damaging revelations. Throughout January 1934, Chautemps persistently refused to open a parliamentary enquiry into the scandal. Contempt for the men in the Chamber grew. The press roundly condemned parliamentary corruption. Citizens booed and whistled newsreel footage of politicians and daubed graffiti on the walls of the Chamber and Senate. Some café owners displayed signs stating that deputies would not be welcome in their establishment.⁴⁶ The leagues took to the streets in protest.

⁴⁵ P. Breittmayer, *6 février: Comédie en un acte pour Eclaireurs* (Courbevoie, 1935), p. 11 and p. 15.

⁴⁶ Maurice Chavardès, *Une campagne de presse: La droite française et le 6 février 1934* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), p. 23.

A further financial scandal brought down the Chautemps administration on 28 January. The new government under Edouard Daladier set about reorganising the departments compromised in the Stavisky affair. Jean Chiappe, prefect of the Paris police, was the most contentious casualty of this reshuffle. Conservatives held Chiappe, a native of Corsica, in high regard for his heavy-handed treatment of communists, while the left condemned his leniency towards the nationalist leagues. Unsurprisingly, the left-wing press welcomed Daladier's decision.⁴⁷ The right denounced Chiappe's transfer to a backwater job in Morocco as a concession to the socialists whose support Daladier was trying to win. *L'Action française* alleged that the government had conceded to socialist and Masonic blackmail. *Le Temps* declared a socialist victory and *Le Figaro* warned of a left-wing coup.⁴⁸ *Echo de Paris* condemned the removal of "...le meilleur chef que la police ait jamais eu".⁴⁹ Former French Prime Minister André Tardieu alleged in *La Liberté* that Daladier had offered the head of the Corsican to the socialists. On 5 February, Parisian municipal councillors used a poster to invite the people of Paris to protest. The council included several leaders of the extreme right and veterans' organisations hostile to the government and parliament including Georges Lebecq, newly-elected to the UNC presidency.⁵⁰ Following a month of street protests against the government, the leagues called a demonstration for the night of 6 February.

The excerpts from P. Breittmayer's play at the beginning of the chapter present two different conceptions of the veterans' influence on the night of the Paris riot. At once attributed with the power to make the government 'totter' (*chanceler*) and then the means by which order would be restored, the impression is that their involvement was important. However, only a minority of the three million strong veterans' movement took part on the night. The UNC's Groupe de la Région Parisienne (GRP) made up the biggest proportion of the *anciens combattants* contingent. The communist backed ARAC and several regimental associations were also involved. Additionally, the nationalist groups that rioted on the Place de la Concorde each had a veteran wing. Contrary to this relatively minor involvement, the extreme right propagated the myth that *only* veterans had rioted in order to vilify the government. As a result,

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.59.

⁴⁸ Pierre Pellissier, *6 Février 1934: La République en flammes* (Paris: Perrin, 2000), p. 84.

⁴⁹ Marcel Le Clère, *Le 6 Février* (Paris: Hachette, 1967), p. 115.

⁵⁰ Chavardès, *Une campagne*, p. 42. On the Parisian municipal council see Yvan Combeau, *Paris et les élections municipales sous la Troisième République: La scène capitale dans la vie politique française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

the image of the riot as a veterans' protest violently and bloodily put down entered the popular imagination after the event. The government was depicted as the heir to the barbarous adversary of the First World War. The press often equated the victims with the war dead. In April 1935, for example, the Galérie A. Barreiro in Paris held an exhibition of newspaper cartoonists under the title 'Satire 1935'. One of the exhibits entitled '6 Février' pictured Death holding a bloodied protester on the Place de la Concorde. The legend read: "Je t'avais raté en 1914".⁵¹

This chapter will re-examine the role of the UNC on the night of the riots. Firstly, I will examine the UNC's attitude to violence. Violent language in the association's press presented politics as a wartime battle between the veterans and parliamentarians. Secondly, I will engage with existing interpretations of the riot. I will argue that the UNC played a greater part in the violence than historians have claimed. Thirdly, I will consider the reaction of provincial UNC sections. Contrary to the claim that these groups rejected the acts of the national leadership, I will demonstrate that their condemnation was not unanimous. Finally, I will assess the influence of the war culture in the association's public discourse on the events.

Militarised discourse

Before and after 6 February 1934, UNC discourse often cast the association's struggle against politicians in the language of military engagement. The UNC was not unique in this. After the riot, violent discourse and the use of military tropes created a climate of civil war. Threats of violence were not without consequence. Violent confrontations did not occur on a scale similar to Germany and Italy but even before the tense times of the thirties physical violence was a characteristic of the Third Republic.⁵² In the mid-1920s the Faisceau violently confronted the left and its competitors on the extreme right. From 1929-1931, the communist party committed indiscriminate violence against its enemies. After 1934, the paramilitary Croix de Feu fought the Popular Front. Left and right cited their rivals' aggression as proof of insurrectional aims and both claimed to be acting defensively. The period between 6 February 1934 and 30 November

⁵¹ Archives Nationales (hereafter referred to as AN) F⁷ 13320, report, 'Le Vernissage du Salon des Dessinateurs de Journaux', 7 April 1935.

⁵² On French political violence in the interwar period see Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, 'Le parti communiste et la violence, 1929-1931', *Revue historique*, CCLXIX/2 (1983), pp. 365-383; Douglas, 'Violence and Fascism'; Passmore, 'Boy scouting for grown-ups?'; Daniella Tartakowsky, 'Stratégies de la rue. 1934-1936', *Le Mouvement social*, 135 (1986), pp. 31-62; Andreas Wirsching, 'Political violence in France and Italy after 1918', *Journal of Modern European History*, 1 (2003), pp. 60-79.

1938 saw 75 people killed.⁵³ Furthermore, for activists of political groups, violence became an accepted risk. Associations including the UNC urged their members to wear insignia in order to show solidarity with the group. *Le Combattant du Sud-Est* asked readers: “Seriez-vous un homme d’assez peu de courage pour cacher vos sentiments? Etes-vous UNC ou ne l’êtes-vous pas?”.⁵⁴ With allegiance worn publicly on the lapel, this also meant that members risked violence from activists of political rivals. Even when violence was expected at a meeting, members still attended.⁵⁵

The UNC made regular references to the army in its discourse. It praised the noble life of discipline, morality and selfless patriotism of the soldier, which contrasted sharply with domestic decadence in politics.⁵⁶ Young Frenchmen were encouraged to live by this credo in daily life before and after their military service. The association claimed that two years’ military service would overcome the effects of the ‘état d’esprit du moment’ and education that 20 year olds across France had received. It would leave them ‘physically, morally and spiritually stronger and better suited to life’.⁵⁷ The Jeunes de l’UNC (JUNC) urged the *anciens* to send the *jeunes* to their sections and: “Transposez dans la vie civile leurs vertus militaires”.⁵⁸ The youth association claimed to have inherited the *esprit combattant* from their veteran fathers and sometimes referred to its groups as *escouades*. However, the UNC’s appreciation of army life did not end with the moral education of the young. It informed their prescription for society and their interpretation of French politics.

In reference to the army, the UNC expressed a preference for a military personality, such as Marshal Pétain, to be head of government. Henri Pichot, president of the largest veterans’ association, the UF, suggested that a government function as a general staff.⁵⁹ The UNC described the nation as an army. Although the ‘great democratic fact’ of the army was that it encouraged the intermingling of all classes in a ‘great social fusion’, this view of society was based on a hierarchy in which everyone ‘knew their place’.⁶⁰ Authority, discipline and hierarchy

⁵³ Douglas, ‘Violence and Fascism’, p. 707.

⁵⁴ ‘Un excellent moyen de recrutement’, *Le Combattant du Sud-Est*, October 1934.

⁵⁵ Tartakowsky, ‘Stratégies de la rue’, note 5, p. 32.

⁵⁶ R. Dulys, ‘Le devoir militaire’, *La Vdc*, 20 April 1935.

⁵⁷ A. Drauet, ‘L’armée et ses cadres’, *La Vdc*, 5 November 1935.

⁵⁸ J. R. Moustiers, ‘Maintenant que vous êtes forts, soyez actifs’, *La Vdc*, 25 September 1937.

⁵⁹ H. Pichot, ‘Discours de Pichot’, *La Vdc*, 20-27 Mai 1939.

⁶⁰ P. Galland, ‘Les bons ambassadeurs de la République’, *La Vdc*, 20 July 1935; ‘Etrennes 1938’, *La Vdc*, 1 January 1938; H. Aubert, ‘Pour que ça aille bien’, *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935.

were 'human rules' fundamental to order in the army.⁶¹ Soldiers raised themselves above individuality for the good of the 'great united duty called Patriotism'.⁶² The association's conception of a society dependent on a single national interest was incompatible with a regime based on equality, parliamentary debate and the vote. Those people not considered to be working towards the single national interest were deemed enemies of France.⁶³ It is in this interpretation that one perceives the UNC's authoritarianism.

Prior to 6 February 1934, the UNC did not encourage its members to engage in political violence. This did not change after the riot. However, given the context of French politics at that time the association's use of violent military images appeared to endorse a means of political struggle other than the democratic process of electoral competition. The association had long rejected electoral participation. Veterans preferred to lobby deputies through letter writing campaigns. However, the association's discourse did not extol the might of the pen over the sword. The UNC presented French society as divided by a conflict between the veteran-led 'honest' elements and the anti-national and decadent political classes. It framed the veterans' task as similar to the one they had faced in wartime. The use of military metaphors identified the association with the national interest. The UNC chose to situate its conflict with politicians on the battlefield rather than in the recognised institutions of democratic representation. In doing so, they questioned implicitly the value of the parliamentary process.

Employing terms such as *bataille*, *en avant!*, *marche*, *rangs* and *mission*, UNC veterans compared their civic duty to the military *devoir* in the periods before and after the riot.⁶⁴ In January 1933, for example, the UNC responded to government reductions in veteran benefits with: "C'est donc la bataille...".⁶⁵ Later that year, Aimé Goudaert declared 'a merciless war' on the spirit of the political party.⁶⁶ The congress of the Deux-Sèvres group announced that 'Jour J' and 'Heure H' had sounded. It was time to confront French decadence, which was more

⁶¹ A. Drauet, 'L'armée et ses cadres', *La Vdc*, 5 November 1935.

⁶² Dulys, 'Le devoir militaire', *La Vdc*, 20 April 1935.

⁶³ P. Galland, 'Les bons ambassadeurs de la République', *La Vdc*, 20 July 1935; 'Etrennes 1938', *La Vdc*, 1 January 1938.

⁶⁴ For example see the notice titled 'Chéron contre la Génération du Feu', *La Vdc*, 21 January 1933; Georges Heldet, 'L'infernel dilemme', *La Vdc*, 28 January 1933; the poster titled 'L'heure des Anciens Combattants', *L'UNC de Paris*, 22 February 1934.

⁶⁵ Notice titled, 'Chéron contre la Génération du Feu', *La Vdc*, 21 January 1933;

⁶⁶ A. Goudaert, 'De quoi s'agit-il?', *La Vdc*, 23 December 1933.

dangerous than mustard gas.⁶⁷ After the bloodshed of February, several provincial sections described government violence against the protesters as an ambush (*guet-apens*).⁶⁸ Hubert Aubert's suggestion for UNC action was threatening and ambiguous in its call to adopt the methods of the front: "Employons donc, aujourd'hui encore, les mêmes armes et, d'abord, le coude-à-coude fraternel et farouche".⁶⁹ In addition to this ambiguous use of language, UNC veterans often stated that they would 'sweep' (*balayer*) the politicians from power and that they possessed the 'brooms' to do this. Aubert wondered: "Quand donc sera donné le coup de balai qui mettra fin à la «république des camarades». La France en meurt".⁷⁰ The veterans were *le bloc des balayeurs*, ready to clean the house. Furthermore, on 6 February 1934 the veterans had not carried arms but 'moral brooms'.⁷¹ In military terms, the verb *balayer* implied armed action. It meant 'to drive away the enemy' or described the broad range of fire of a machine gun.⁷² Even this term, therefore, contained an aggressive meaning that the UNC did not hesitate to express explicitly in other ways

The UNC imposed the landscape of the war onto politics. This language became more common after the agreement of the Wagram manifesto in October 1933. It divided France into two opposing trenches. Aubert described the trenches as standing opposite each other across the 'civic Marne'.⁷³ Facing the trench of the veterans was that of France's enemies: the parties and politicians, shadowy interest groups and the forces of finance.⁷⁴ P. Delore, vice-president of the Lyon section, hinted that the veterans would bring the fight to the enemies of France: "...notre erreur fut de croire qu'une fois démobilisés, nous n'avions plus rien à combattre... Nous avons d'autres tranchées à enlever, celles de l'intérieur. La lutte continuait entre les forces du bien et les forces du mal...".⁷⁵ UNC president Rossignol referred to the violence of the war in his prescription for combatant action: "... il nous faudra avoir le courage, l'heure H venue, de sortir

⁶⁷ Extract from an *appel* by the Deux-Sèvres group, printed in C. Vilain *Les Combattants exigent.... Du manifeste de la salle Wagram au Congrès de l'UNC à Metz: Préface de Georges Lebecq* (Rouen, 1934).

⁶⁸ See the last line of the poem '6 février 1934', by J. Douarre, *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, April 1934; report from a meeting in Arras held on 15 April 1934, 'Arras: La Conférence de Jean Goy', *Le Créneau*, May 1934; report from a meeting in Creil held on 18 April 1934, 'Vie des Sections: Creil', *Le Trait d'Union*, June 1934.

⁶⁹ H. Aubert, 'Toujours dans le borbier', *La Vdc*, 22 December 1934.

⁷⁰ H. Aubert, 'A la recherche des responsables', *La Vdc*, 6 January 1934.

⁷¹ P. Galland, 'Ambassadeurs de la justice', *La Vdc*, 10 March 1934.

⁷² G. De Cromières, 'Vérité', *Le Combattant du Centre*, March 1934.

⁷³ H. Aubert, 'Et d'abord...', *La Vdc*, 7 October 1933.

⁷⁴ 'Après la Manifestation de l'UNC à la salle de Wagram à Paris', extract from an article by Clément Vaitel published in *Le Journal* reprinted in *Le Combattant du Centre*, November 1933.

⁷⁵ Dr. P. Delore, 'Pensées d'automne', *La Vdc*, 11 November 1933.

de notre tranchée... On ne part pas sans avoir fait ample provision des munitions... Lorsque tout sera prêt, nous partirons et nous vaincrons". Rossignol claimed he had restrained the more militant members of his movement: "...si j'avais écouté aussi le désir de nos camarades, prêts depuis longtemps à agir, j'aurais déjà déclenché les tirs... Quand nous serons partis chacun sachant ce qu'il a à faire, il conviendra de poursuivre l'attaque sans arrêt et avec une énergie tenace".⁷⁶ After February 1934, as political confrontation in France sharpened, Henri Arbeleche, president of the Basque group, was unequivocal: "A tous, un devoir très net nous est tracé. Il nous faut choisir. Sans distinction de partis, d'étiquettes ou de confessions, il nous faut être du bord «France» ou du bord «Anti-France»... nous sommes au Verdun de l'après-guerre".⁷⁷ Goudaert inscribed the battle of February into French history alongside other incidences of French heroism: "Nous avons fait la Marne; nous avons fait Verdun; nous avons fait le 6 février".⁷⁸

The UNC also projected the imagery of the trenches onto politics in order to highlight corruption, described as fetid mud. The task of cleaning up the government was likened to that of unpleasant tasks in the trenches. In late February 1934, *L'UNC de Paris* featured a cartoon that depicted two poilus with shovels in a trench. The description read: "On a enlevé celle des tranchées, on enlèvera p't'être celle qu'est ailleurs".⁷⁹ Later that year, Aubert compared the days of the trenches to those of the interwar years: "Souvenez-vous de certaines journées de printemps ou de l'automne pendant la guerre, dans certains secteurs. Là aussi, normalement, la boue devait nous submerger, et, cependant, nous en sommes venus à bout et nous l'avons vaincus....".⁸⁰

Both reflecting and contributing to the violent atmosphere in French politics, UNC discourse did not make for moderation. UNC veterans occupied the French trench while politicians fought against the national interest from the enemy trench. In doing so, their discourse was detrimental to the Chamber's claim to represent the national interest. The association did not call for violent action but its use of military metaphors portrayed violence as a possible and effective solution. This was not compatible with parliamentary democracy. The UNC counted deputies among its members and leadership, yet some defined themselves first in

⁷⁶ H. Rossignol, 'Parallèle de départ', *La Vdc*, 21 October 1933.

⁷⁷ H. Arbeleche, 'Drapeau tricolore ou torchon rouge', *Le Poilu Basque*, May 1935.

⁷⁸ A. Goudaert, 'Ayons confiance...en nous', *La Vdc*, 12 January 1935.

⁷⁹ P. Galland, 'Refus d'obédience', *La Vdc*, 31 March 1934; cartoon on page one of *L'UNC de Paris*, 22 February 1934.

⁸⁰ H. Aubert, 'Toujours dans le borbier', *La Vdc*, 22 December 1934.

their capacity as a veteran and not a member of parliament. On his accession to the presidency of the UNC in 1935, Jean Goy announced: "...le Jean Goy UNC tuera le Jean Goy député".⁸¹ The UNC rejected participation in the electoral process. When it spoke of taking the enemy trench this did not mean via an electoral campaign but perhaps through an extra-parliamentary route to power.

The History of 6 February 1934

Historians have spilled much ink over the intentions of the rioters on the night of 6 February 1934.⁸² The debate is split along the lines of the immunity thesis opposition. Some French historians argue that the failure of the rioters to install a fascist regime attested to the democratically minded French people's rejection of fascism and their 'immunity' to the doctrine. For René Rémond the events of 6 February were little more than a protest that went wrong. Had the night not turned to tragedy, it would have been quickly forgotten.⁸³ Serge Bernstein claims that the lack of co-ordination between the nationalist leagues and the absence of a plan to invade the Chamber prove that the riot was not an attempted coup. The heterogeneity of the *six février* groups underlines the disjointed nature of the protest.⁸⁴ Pierre Pellissier suggests that the rioters in no way threatened the Republic as the failed insurrection did not follow the 'strict rules' of past revolts, such as Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's coup of 2 December 1851. A successful coup requires the utmost secrecy in preparation, the selection of one supreme leader and the use of arms or the threat of armed action. The action failed in February 1934 as agitation throughout January alerted the authorities to trouble, no group would submit to the leader of another, and arms were not employed.⁸⁵

⁸¹ UNC/EC, 7 December 1935.

⁸² There are several works in French on the 6 February 1934. The most influential, particularly for the immunity thesis, is Bernstein, *6 février*. See also Chavardès, *Une campagne* and *Le 6 février: La République en danger* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1966). Pellissier's *6 février* (Paris: Perrin, 2000) offers a detailed if rather dramatic account of the events. For a 'dissenting' interpretation in French see Le Clère, *6 février* and Dobry, 'Février 1934' (or 'February 1934'). Books in English are lacking. The fullest treatment is that of Brian Jenkins, 'The Paris riots of February 1934: The crisis of the Third French Republic' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, LSE, 1979). See also Jenkins' historiographical article, 'The *six février* 1934 and the 'survival' of the French Republic', *French History*, 20 (2006), pp. 333-351. Specifically on the veterans' involvement in the riot see Shaw, 'The anciens combattants'. Works written at the time include Laurent Bonnevey, *Les journées sanglantes de février 1934: pages d'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1935) and Philippe Henriot, *Le 6 février* (Paris: Flammarion, 1934).

⁸³ Chavardès, *Une campagne*, p. 95.

⁸⁴ Bernstein, *6 février*, pp. 247-251.

⁸⁵ Pellissier, *6 février*, p. 308.

Brian Jenkins has specifically questioned the immunity thesis as applied to 6 February.⁸⁶ Firstly, immunity thesis historians mistakenly equate a fascist takeover with a violent coup. This was neither true in the case of the Nazis in Germany nor the Italian fascists. Secondly, despite Bernstein's judgement on the alleged heterogeneous nature of the groups, Jenkins writes that the organisations that took part on the night shared common ideas and an anti-democratic attitude.⁸⁷ Their memberships often overlapped and were largely drawn from the same social groups. Thirdly, there is evidence that despite the apparently disparate nature of rioting groups, a collective mood took hold as the evening progressed. Witness statements do give some indication of a common feeling among protesters. One witness told *Le Matin*:

Je me suis trouvé au milieu d'hommes qui ne se connaissaient pas, de générations très différentes, d'anciens combattants n'appartenant à aucun groupement, ou bien, comme moi, ayant perdu contact avec leurs associations ou déjà disloqués de leurs cortèges, mais en tout cas dans une atmosphère de sympathie... secoués par un même sursaut de conscience publique, ébranlés par la même émotion et une volonté commune d'assainissement.⁸⁸

Finally, the teleological argument that uses the outcome of events to presume the intentions of actors is dubious. In short, the failure of rioters to enter the Chamber does not prove that no such intentions existed. Moreover, the disappointment of the extreme right on one night should not neutralise the threat that it posed during the decade. In France, extra-parliamentary movements like the Croix de Feu grew while parliament gradually gave way to a government reliant on decree powers.

Admittedly, there is a lack of documentation to prove that an alliance between the various groups existed. No blueprint for the overthrow the Republic has been found. Immunity thesis historians cite this shortage of evidence in their argument. However, in reference to the French penal code Marcel Le Clère argues that a plot did exist. Though it is largely futile to re-classify the riot as a plot largely based on a legal technicality, as Le Clère does, he makes several valid points. The leagues had co-operated throughout January. Activists of the AF and the Fédération nationale des contribuables worked together on 9 January, as did members of the JP and the Solidarité Française (SF) on 11 January. On 23 January, the call to demonstrate saw the names

⁸⁶ Jenkins, 'The six février', pp. 336-340.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 339.

⁸⁸ Statement of M. Jean Rottembourg, 'L'histoire d'une émeute', *Le Matin*, 25 February 1934. *Le Matin* published many letters from eye-witnesses in its enquiry into the riot entitled 'L'histoire d'une émeute'.

of the AF, the JP and the Contribuables on the same poster.⁸⁹ Collusion on the night should not be discounted simply because it was not ‘total’.⁹⁰

On 6 February, the arranged meeting time for each group would see them converge on the Concorde between 8 and 9pm. For Pellissier, the dispersal of meeting places and times either suggests that there was no plot or that the groups wanted to stretch the police.⁹¹ Le Clère concludes that this synchronisation shows a devised plan and an evident entente among the groups. Le Clère may have a point here. After all, the original UNC march was planned for 3pm on Sunday 4 February. On 6 February, the meeting time was much later, at 8.30pm and this coincided with the plans of other groups. However, the later meeting time may simply be attributed to the fact that a maximum number of members would be able to attend a weekday evening rather than a weekday afternoon during business hours. Yet within the UNC, preparations for some sort of militant action had been underway in the weeks leading up to February. In late December 1933, the Parisian UNC circulated a notice to its 95 sections, asking them to provide: “...les noms et adresses de camarades éprouvés pour composer le corps de commissaires de groupe, corps spécial destiné à encadrer nos troupes, à les diriger, dans l’éventualité d’une action quelconque déclenchée par le siège central”.⁹²

There was collaboration between individuals. On 6 February, town councillors Charles des Isnards and Puymaigre joined the marches of the JP and the Croix de Feu respectively. Prominent members of several groups were in regular contact and had met before the riot. The Parisian municipal council included Lebecq and Jean Ferrandi, president of the UNC-coloniaux and the Association nationale des officiers combattants. JP leader Pierre Taittinger was also a member of the council and a deputy in the Seine. His name appeared alongside Goy’s and twenty-eight other deputies at the bottom of an open letter of protest to interior minister Eugène Frot. This was turned into a poster and stuck up around Paris on the night of 5 February. An unsigned poster calling on the people of Paris to demonstrate appeared on 6 February. According to Pellissier, it is likely that Lebecq and Ferrandi were involved in the poster’s production, as were des Isnards, Puymaigre, Pinelli, Fontenay and Frédéric-Dupont.⁹³ At 7pm a group of nineteen councillors including Taittinger and Ferrandi left the Hôtel de ville,

⁸⁹ Le Clère, *6 février*, p. 225.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

⁹¹ Pellissier, *6 février*, p. 111.

⁹² Le Clère, *6 février*, p. 95.

⁹³ Pellissier, *6 février*, p.109. See also Philippet, *Le Temps des Ligues*, V, annex III-B-3, p. 276.

accompanied by the leadership of the JP and Maxime Réal del Sarte of the AF. The group made for the Chamber of deputies, joined by JP activist on the way. After several clashes with police, only des Isnards, Massard, Piel and Contenot managed to gain entry to the Chamber where their demand that the government resign was not satisfied.⁹⁴

Prominent members of the UNC had contact with leaders of the JP prior to the riot and publicly associated their names with these men. Were they part of a plan to establish a provisional government? Colonel de La Rocque thought so. Speaking to Daladier while both were prisoners of the Germans in 1944, La Rocque claimed that Lebecq, Taittinger and AF leader Maurras among others were in the process of planning a coup when Chiappe lost his post. Deciding to bring their action forward, the leagues and the UNC moved against the government.⁹⁵ Perhaps La Rocque, with one eye on the post-war period, was looking to blame others for weakening the Republic. Daladier, also looking to his post-war political career, may have wanted to discredit La Rocque. However, Daladier noted that La Rocque refused to involve himself in the plan. If Daladier fabricated the meeting then he would have had more to gain by implicating the colonel. Perhaps, then, La Rocque's story was true. In support of this hypothesis is the fact that on the afternoon of 6 February an unnamed municipal councillor offered Réal del Sarte a place in the new government. This suggests that the plan was still in gestation and supports La Rocque's claim that the plotters had brought their action forward after the fall of Chiappe.⁹⁶

Whether or not a plan existed does not mean that the riot did not undermine the Republic, which six years later gave way to an authoritarian regime. One may view the riot as part of a longer process of radicalisation that destabilised the Republic, a process in which the veterans of the UNC were one of many actors. The aim of this chapter is not to prove that the UNC attempted a coup, or that the association was the driving force behind the violence on the Place de la Concorde. The UNC's actions on the night and the reaction to the events on a national and local level illustrate the ambiguous nature of this veterans' association. After the riot, the progressive politicisation of the UNC advanced and made a veteran attempt on power seem possible for the first time.

⁹⁴ Pellissier, *6 février*, p. 135.

⁹⁵ Edouard Daladier, *Prison Journal, 1940-1945* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), p. 259.

⁹⁶ Pellissier, *6 février*, p. 135.

The road to February 1934

The UNC 'duped'

Within the context of the *monde ancien combattant*, the Stavisky scandal came after two years of simmering discontent over the monetary sacrifices asked of the veterans and demands for state reform. At the Wagram meeting in October 1933, the UNC adopted a series of demands and conditions that the association claimed would save France. According to Aubert, the time had come to restore order to France. He offered the collaboration of the UNC to any group with the same interest.⁹⁷ The Stavisky affair, the 'scandal of scandals', only confirmed what the UNC had long believed: France risked death if the decay within government was allowed to continue. The time had come to 'return order to the house' and 'sweep away the *République des camarades*.'⁹⁸

In spite of the association's moralising, Rossignol, president of the UNC since 1926, was embroiled in Stavisky's shadowy dealing. Reproached by members of the leadership for having had contact with men of questionable moral standing, Rossignol also faced the threatened resignation of certain sections if he remained in office.⁹⁹ He resigned on 3 February. Humbert Isaac, president of honour, twice refused the presidency. He suggested that as first vice-president Lebecq should take over. Lebecq, president of the GRP, agreed to become interim national president until the national congress in May. Under Lebecq, the UNC developed its political action. A fervent propagandist, he spoke at many section general assemblies and meetings.¹⁰⁰

Prost names Lebecq as chief instigator of the UNC's 6 February march. Lebecq wanted 'his' protest and got his way, contrary to the wishes of the rest of the combatant world.¹⁰¹ It is true that within the UNC Lebecq represented a right-wing activist tendency. As we will see in chapter three, he favoured a political activism that often entailed collaboration with the extreme right. In a movement as large as the UNC, though, a variety of political loyalties co-existed. Even in the executive committee unanimity was hard to come by. The vote that saw Lebecq

⁹⁷ H. Aubert, 'Et d'abord...', *La Vdc*, 7 October 1934.

⁹⁸ H. Aubert, 'A la recherche des responsables', *La Vdc*, 6 January 1934; H. Aubert, 'Toute la vérité?', *La Vdc*, 20 January 1934.

⁹⁹ UNC/EC, 3 February 1934.

¹⁰⁰ Centre des archives contemporaines, Fonds Moscou (hereafter referred to as FM), 19 9490459: dossier Georges Lebecq.

¹⁰¹ Prost, I, p. 160.

elected to the presidency of the association demonstrated the difference of opinion in the movement and how this could swing between relative opposites.

The UNC's first choice of president was Isaac, a man less inclined to political activism and who rejected co-operation with the extreme right. Isaac was closest to what one may identify as a conservative Republican trend in the movement. In the first round of voting, he won thirty-three votes, Lebecq won two and three other candidates shared four. In the second vote, after Isaac's withdrawal Lebecq came out on top with sixteen out of thirty-nine votes. This meant that for twenty-three members of the committee, Lebecq was not their first choice of president. In the final round, Lebecq won twenty-six votes, eight went to other candidates and there were three abstentions.¹⁰² One can see, therefore, that the UNC's interim president did not have the unanimous backing of the executive committee. Furthermore, one wonders how much Lebecq owed his victory to Isaac's endorsement. As we will see, Lebecq's appointment as president had consequences for the UNC's subsequent action.

Originally, the UNC had planned to demonstrate on Sunday 4 February, to demand punishment of the 'Stavisky majority' in the Chamber.¹⁰³ The planned itinerary of the march would see the veterans meet at the Clemenceau statue on the Champs Elysées and then move toward the Concorde. Unlike previous public displays, which usually saw the veterans march in the opposite direction to the Unknown Soldier, this demonstration would have a political terminus.¹⁰⁴ The UNC postponed these plans upon a government warning that troublemakers would hijack the demonstration. On 2 February, Frot, Ducos, minister for pensions, and Chiappe met with Lebecq to persuade him to call off the march.¹⁰⁵ Lebecq and Roux-Desbreaux, secretary general of the GRP, alleged at the commission of enquiry into the riot that earlier that day Ducos attempted to bribe them into calling off the march with Legion of honour rosettes. Ducos denied the allegations. At the later meeting, Chiappe threatened to resign if the march went ahead because he would not send the police against veterans. Lebecq yielded. He informed the national executive committee at a meeting on the morning of 3 February. Given

¹⁰² UNC/EC, 3 February 1934.

¹⁰³ Notice, 'Dimanche prochain, 4 février 1934', *La Vdc*, 3 February 1934.

¹⁰⁴ Le Clère, 6 février, p. 95. During May 1932-January 1934, 20% (6/30) of *manifestations* were directed towards the Chamber of Deputies. See Daniella Tartakowsky, 'La construction sociale de l'espace politique: Les usages politiques de la place de la Concorde des années 1880 à nos jours', *French Historical Studies*, 27 (2004), pp. 145-173.

¹⁰⁵ GRP secretary general A. Roux-Desbreaux, UNC official Camon and *directeur* of the municipal police Paul Guichard also attended this meeting.

that Lebecq did not mention the incident with the rosettes in this meeting, it seems unlikely that it was true. Nine of the twelve members of the GRP's executive committee disagreed with the decision to call off the protest.¹⁰⁶

Despite the postponement, 150 UNC activists gathered in front of the statue of Clemenceau on 4 February at the scheduled meeting time of 3pm. The crowd, after being informed of the deal between Lebecq and Chiappe, criticised the leadership for this decision. Cries of 'Vive Chiappe!', 'A bas le Ministère de l'Intérieur!' and 'Vive Hitler!' were reportedly overheard by police. Joined by members of several suburban sections, the group of 300, under the orders of Aubert, marched to the Arc de Triomphe, where security forces dispersed the troop.¹⁰⁷

After Chiappe's removal, the UNC, angry and humiliated by the perceived dupery, condemned Frot's 'deception', which had delivered the former prefect to the 'vengeance of the socialist party'. At a meeting of the GRP in Courbevoie, Lebecq revived the idea of a demonstration at the time of the inauguration of the government. The veterans in attendance approved. UNC veterans at Châtenay-Malabry voted a similar motion. At 5pm the executive committee of the GRP fixed the date of the new demonstration for Tuesday evening. Lebecq neither consulted with the authorities nor the national UNC leadership.¹⁰⁸

The UNC's call to demonstrate, *Pourquoi nous manifesterons Mardi*, asked all veterans, not just those of the UNC, to join the march.¹⁰⁹ Goy was confident that the police would not act against the veterans as they were former comrades themselves.¹¹⁰ He declared that UNC members would be ready for the government's response and would use force if provoked.¹¹¹ As for the other groups present on the night, the decision to convene their activists appears to have come after the UNC's decision. Newspapers, tracts and posters carried statements and calls to protests from the AF, the JP, SF, ARAC and about fifteen Parisian municipal councillors.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ UNC/EC, 3 February 1934.

¹⁰⁷ APP, BA 1853: folder *manifestations sous le ministère Daladier*.

¹⁰⁸ Chavardès, 6 février, p. 163.

¹⁰⁹ Le Clère, 6 février, p. 121.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

¹¹¹ 'Nous serons ce soir 50, 000 dans la rue déclare M. Jean Goy', *L'Ami du peuple*, 6 February 1934.

¹¹² Pellissier, 6 février, pp. 108-109.

The aims of the UNC

Before the postponed march of 4 February, Lebecq set out the aims of the action in *La Voix du combattant*. UNC street demonstrations up to that point had concerned the defence of the veterans' material rights. The aim now was to protest against the parliamentary corruption at the heart of the Stavisky affair and the politicians who had subsequently attempted to cover up their crime. A mass demonstration of the UNC's strength would cow the government into meeting the UNC's demands on the punishment of political corruption. At no point did the aims of the march call for a coup or an attack against the Republic. The protest was not intended to be the final act in the UNC's plan for national renovation. Rather it was a dummy run for 'D-Day' and 'H-Hour'.¹¹³ This suggests that the plan was to stage a dress rehearsal for a later more meaningful action. The UNC would fire a *coup de semonce*, but would not deliver the *coup de grâce*.¹¹⁴

However, immediately before the riot, UNC discourse depicted the government as contrary to the Republic. This tactic, therefore, precluded any mention of an attack on the Republic for the existing regime was not the Republic of the veterans. If the UNC no longer believed the regime *was* the Republic by their definition then the absence of a statement against it is less important. Aubert gave the UNC's wholehearted backing for the words of Henri Béraud in *Gringoire*:

La République, ça? Allons donc! La République, cette puance macédoine de faisans, de mendiants, de croupiers, de prévaricateurs, de trafiquants d'influence, de ministres véreux? Le régime, ce chassé-croisé des dîners d'affaires et de commissions d'enquête? Le temple des lois, ce caravansérail aux antichambres encombrées de maîtres chanteurs, de rastaquouères, de filous, où le regard de l'homme sans reproche cherche d'instinct à chaque poignet la trace à menottes.¹¹⁵

After the riot, the organisation continued to frame its action as Republican against a government that was not.¹¹⁶ Though the UNC claimed that politicians, 'the guests of the Chamber', should not be confused with the Republic, it nevertheless identified the constitutional regime with the political content of the government: "Le Régime n'était pas, n'est pas en cause... La République est le gouvernement qui réclame le plus de vertu. Elle n'a rien à voir, elle ne

¹¹³ Notice, 'Dimanche prochain, 4 février 1934', *La Vdc*, 3 February 1934.

¹¹⁴ P. Galland, 'D'étape en étape', *La Vdc*, 14 April 1934.

¹¹⁵ H. Aubert, 'La racine du mal', *La Vdc*, 3 February 1934.

¹¹⁶ G. Berthau, 'Servir et non desservir. Lettre à Albert Sarraut, Ministre de l'Intérieur', *La Vdc*, 21 April 1934.

aurait se confondre avec ceux qui, au lieu de la servir, se servent".¹¹⁷ In a letter to the president of the Republic, it claimed that harmony between ministers and the wishes of the nation no longer existed. The regime's democratic character had disappeared.¹¹⁸ For fifty years, the UNC claimed, an organised gang had lived off the Republic, financed by secret funds. The UNC did not support a government that had come to represent the worst excesses of the *ancien* regime: the arbitrary use of power, a biased judiciary, favouritism, *gaspillage*, the privilege of castes, injustice, fraud and a new feudalism in the form of electoral fiefdoms.¹¹⁹

La Voix du combattant railed against all the deputies who claimed to be Republican but were not.¹²⁰ The Chamber governed against the country and had relied on armed force to remain in power. In a situation where the very life of the nation itself was deemed to be under threat, the regime no longer represented the country and had to take second place to that of the *patrie*.¹²¹ *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, for example, reported that protesters had not faced the French government on the night of 6 February 1934. Instead, they had walked into the ambush of an 'anonymous faction' and been pitilessly struck down.¹²² The true Republic was not the 'Republic of *métèques*, the bandit Frot and international finance', but the Republic of the combatants.¹²³ Though the UNC did express loyalty to the Republic this came *after* it had helped to force out an elected government so reversing the mandate voted for in 1932. This post-riot 'Republic' was, for the time being at least, more acceptable than the 'Republic' that had gone before it. The Daladier government had not been a legitimate regime and direct action against it was therefore justified.

The UNC's riot

A protest within a protest?

Veteran participation in the riot was not representative of the movement in general. Of all the veterans' associations, only the Parisian group of the UNC and ARAC joined the demonstration. ARAC's aims were different to those of the UNC. *L'Humanité* claimed that the communist

¹¹⁷ H. Aubert, 'Le Bilan d'un soir tragique', *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934.

¹¹⁸ 'Lettre au président de la République', *La Vdc*, 10 February 1934.

¹¹⁹ H. Aubert, 'Le Bilan d'un soir tragique', *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934; P. Galland, 'Raisons de la crise', 24 March 1934.

¹²⁰ H. Aubert, 'Le Bilan d'un soir tragique', *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934.

¹²¹ H. Aubert, 'Des volontés en caoutchouc', *La Vdc*, 10 February 1934; La Louve, 'Il faut en finir!', 6 April 1935.

¹²² J. Douarre, '6 février 1934', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, April 1934.

¹²³ G. De Cromières, 'Vérité', *Le Combattant du Centre*, March 1934.

sponsored veterans' movement would protest against the regime while the UNC would march in solidarity with Chiappe.¹²⁴ ARAC demanded the arrest of Chiappe and Rossignol in its call to protest. The Croix de Feu was no longer the exclusive preserve of veterans and the other leagues present on the night were not in the majority made up of former soldiers. Yet, the UNC veterans, marching in orderly ranks, medals worn proudly, preceded by flags and banners, perhaps made a greater impression on observers than their number suggested.¹²⁵ The presence of the UNC attracted people to the protest, including veterans of other groups and those who attended in an individual capacity. One eyewitness came to the riot in response to a telephone call from his friend who told him that the government had fired on the veterans.¹²⁶

The UNC's role in the riot requires careful consideration. Prost depicts the UNC column as staging a kind of 'protest within a protest'. The march remained separate to the riot on the Place de la Concorde, as well as the charges made towards the barricaded bridge, and the clashes that left police and protesters dead and injured. Upon reaching the Concorde, the column turned away from the Chamber and towards the Madeleine, a decision that proved the UNC's involvement was: "...un épisode original qui se suffit à lui-même et se juxtapose aux scènes d'émeute comme s'il leur était entièrement étrange".¹²⁷ Bernstein's history of the night concurs. Despite the political aims of the leadership, the veteran demonstration did not become embroiled in the riot on the Concorde.¹²⁸ Bernstein supports this point with the fact that no UNC members suffered gunshot wounds or were shot dead. Lebecq cited the same reason as 'proof' that UNC members did not riot.¹²⁹ However, to use a gunshot wound as the criterion for participation in the riot disqualifies the majority of people on the Concorde from being rioters. Conversely, innocent bystanders who were shot must logically be considered rioters.

One cannot say that the UNC's march was completely separate to the rest of the riot. As the column advanced towards the Concorde, turned away from the Chamber and then returned towards the riot albeit significantly reduced in number, the cortege gained and lost numerous members, leaguers and simple bystanders. Contrary to the UNC's claim that 30,000 members turned out, the police estimated that of the 8000 marchers about 5000 were genuine UNC

¹²⁴ Chavardès, *Une campagne*, p. 63.

¹²⁵ Shaw, 'The anciens combattants', pp. 304-305.

¹²⁶ 'La vérité: Paris la connaît mais la province qu'en sait-elle?', *Le Jour*, 26 February 1934.

¹²⁷ Prost, I, p. 162.

¹²⁸ Bernstein, *6 février*, p. 170.

¹²⁹ UNC/EC, 24 February 1934.

members, the remainder being from the Croix de Feu – remnants of the group's march had crossed the Pont Alexandre III to join the UNC – and onlookers.¹³⁰ Paul Chopine, at the time head of the Croix de Feu's shock troops (the *dispos*), witnessed the mixing of Croix de Feu and UNC members at the Cours de la Reine. According to Chopine, these men fought hard when the UNC column reached the rue Royale and the faubourg Saint-Honoré. Although one cannot corroborate Chopine's opinion, he wondered if this co-operation had not been pre-planned to give the UNC formation a more combative edge.¹³¹

The main body of the veteran demonstration set out towards the Concorde at 8.30pm yet some small groups of UNC and Croix de Feu members were reportedly moving towards the Concorde as early as 7.15pm.¹³² At 7.30pm, *gardien* Max Gurney was involved in a confrontation at the barricades with a group that contained members of both groups. Blows were exchanged.¹³³ Victor Broissiat, *inspecteur principal* of the 10th *arrondissement*, reported a confrontation with a column of UNC veterans who had advanced to the north end of the Pont de la Concorde. The veterans refused to retreat until a fire hose dispersed them. This incident took place at 'about 8pm'.¹³⁴ The report of Laurence, commander of police group 135, supports Broissiat's statement. He claimed that the veterans arrived on the Concorde at about 8pm, over thirty minutes prior to the arrival of the main body of the UNC. An hour later, the *anciens combattants* were completely mixed up with the other demonstrators and put pressure on the police cordon.¹³⁵

This observation uncovers a further flaw in the belief that the UNC was able to maintain itself as a discrete group. Photographs from the night show members dressed in suits and overcoats, the only distinguishing feature being the war medals pinned on their chests, medals that some lost on the night. At the height of the riot, it would have been difficult to distinguish who was a genuine veteran and who was not. In response to accusations that rogue elements were mixed up with the veterans, Maurice-L. Martin, an eyewitness quoted in *Le Matin*, stated

¹³⁰ APP, BA 1852/B1. Le mouvement Croix de Feu, undated.

¹³¹ Paul Chopine, *Six ans chez les Croix de Feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1935), p. 115.

¹³² APP, BA 1853: folder *manifestations sous le ministère Daladier*.

¹³³ AN Archives of the commission of enquiry into 6 February 1934 (hereafter referred to as February 1934 enquiry), C 15092: '25 février 1934, Entendu, le gardien Gurney, Max, 42 ans, du 10e arrondissement, a déclaré'.

¹³⁴ AN C 15092, February 1934 enquiry: '25 février 1934, M. Broissiat, Victor 51 ans, Inspecteur Principale du Xème Arrt, a déclaré'.

¹³⁵ AN C 15094, February 1934 enquiry: 'Rapport de l'adjudant-chef Laurence, commandant le Peloton no. 135, 8 février 1935'.

that there were many men dressed as everyone else (*comme tout le monde*), on the square at 7.20pm.¹³⁶ Members of the leagues wore the same clothes as UNC veterans. One could only distinguish between the two by the advanced age of the latter.¹³⁷ However, even older men were reported to have aided the younger rioters. Respectable old bourgeois men helped younger rioters to uproot benches and reinforce barricades.¹³⁸ To add to the confusion, several UNC flags were allegedly stolen and used by rioters on the Concorde to disguise their true allegiance. In some cases, this appears the likely explanation but one should not discount the possibility that UNC members took part in violence and lost their flags on the Concorde. Indeed Lebecq congratulated the flag bearers who had not hesitated to use their flagpoles as weapons.¹³⁹ An accurate identification of the provenance of rioters is therefore problematic.

At approximately 8.30pm, Lebecq, joined by Parisian municipal councillors Le Provost de Launay, Charles Levée, André Boulard, Robert Monnier and Clément Roëland, led the UNC procession from its meeting place at the Cours de la Reine.¹⁴⁰ Upon the UNC's entry to the Place de la Concorde some reports state that the police saluted the veterans. This lends weight to the argument that the UNC had a calming effect on the riot. Many policemen were veterans and that may have stayed their hand. The UNC itself claimed that upon arriving at the Concorde rogue elements attempted to incite UNC members to advance on the Chamber. As they reached the Concorde *agents provocateurs* cried for the veterans to go 'A la Chambre!' but the cortege turned away as its aims were not political.¹⁴¹ At this stage, it appeared that the plan was not to invade the Chamber and install a government of veterans.

It is difficult to deduce what the intentions of the UNC actually were. The *Bulletin de l'UNC*'s account of the riot claimed that the plan was to march towards the Elysée for an audience with the president. Lebecq's statements to the commission of enquiry told a different story. The column's change of direction towards the Elysée, he testified, was a spontaneous move as passage to the Madeleine was blocked. Lebecq admitted that some members did

¹³⁶ Letter from Maurice L.-. Martin in 'L'histoire d'une émeute', *Le Matin*, 1 March 1934.

¹³⁷ Philippet, *Le Temps des Liges*, III, p. 1468.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 1468.

¹³⁹ AN F⁷ 13320, report from UNC GRP congress, 8 April 1935.

¹⁴⁰ According to *Le Poilu*, the UNC procession included Lebecq, Goy, Roux-Desbreaux, Désiré Bertrand, Verdier, Père Croisier, Victor Beauregard, André Boulard, Paul Galland, Alfred Charron, Alfred de Pontalba, Léon Berthier, Colleau, Buffard of the SDC, Monnier of the Officiers de réserve, and Jacques Péricard, *Le Poilu*, supplement to the edition of January 1934.

¹⁴¹ 'La manifestation de l'UNC', *La Vdc*, 10 February 1934.

demand an advance on the Chamber as the ‘contagion’ spread by the *agents provocateurs* took hold. Roëland recounted that when he heard calls to move towards the Chamber he joined in as this course of action seemed a rational one.¹⁴² One cannot know who was shouting yet the fact that it seemed rational to Roëland opens up the possibility that some veterans shared this view. A unanimous opinion cannot be ascribed to a group of several thousand people.

Furthermore, the entire UNC column did not turn towards the rue Royale on the orders of Lebecq. A large number followed Lebecq but others, reportedly joined by AF leaguers, continued to advance and the violence resumed.¹⁴³ Capitaine Gilles, commandant of the 9th *arrondissement*, reported that as soon as the UNC column arrived on the Concorde numerous demonstrators broke away, shouted insults and launched a hail of projectiles at the police.¹⁴⁴ Veterans mixed with young men advanced towards the Pont de la Concorde behind a tricolour flag. About 250 men of the *Légionnaires décorés au peril de leur vie* turned towards the bridge when the UNC arrived at the Concorde. Philippet argues that these men were confused with the UNC during the riot.¹⁴⁵ Le Clère’s account differs slightly. Instead of turning toward the rue Royale after a moment of hesitation, UNC veterans exerted pressure on the barrage at the bridge as they attempted to engage in discussion with the forces of order. They did not throw projectiles.¹⁴⁶

In the absence of a premeditated plan, one may only speculate at what point unfolding events dictated the direction of the column. Upon reaching the Concorde, Lebecq and the leadership hesitated. They decided to proceed towards the rue Royale (and away from the Chamber) to avoid death and injury against a police force that had fired on the crowd. Whether one can read this hesitation as the moment when the plan to advance on the Chamber was abandoned, due to a lack of weapons and the willingness of the police to use theirs, is conjecture. However, the editor of *L’Intransigeant* and UNC member Jacques Péricard hinted at a different plan: “Disons et répétons avec force que, parmi nous, aucun des manifestants n’était armé. Leur

¹⁴² AN C 15092, February 1934 enquiry: ‘Lettre à Monsieur le Président de la Commission de C. Roëland, Conseiller municipal de Paris, 2 mai 1934’.

¹⁴³ AN C 15092, February 1934 enquiry: ‘Rapport spécial, Préfecture de police, Compagnie de circulation, Paris, 15 février 1934, du commissaire spécial Tiha’.

¹⁴⁴ AN C 15094, February 1934 enquiry: ‘Rapport du Capitaine Gilles, Commandant de la 9^e Compagnie, 9 février 1934’.

¹⁴⁵ Philippet, *Le Temps des Liges*, III, p. 1519.

¹⁴⁶ Le Clère, 6 février, p. 150.

action s'est bornée à vouloir passer sur le pont avec la seule force de leurs poitrines".¹⁴⁷ More extreme measures were not completely discounted. *Le Journal* published a report of the meeting between the Parisian municipal council and the President of the Republic, at which the councillors requested that the President install a government of *salut public*. Goy warned the president that even though the UNC would not send its members against better-armed adversaries, they might make hostages of those responsible for the bloodshed.¹⁴⁸

As the veterans entered the rue Royale a police manoeuvre on the street angered some veterans. Police superintendent Siron and fifty officers had received orders to occupy both sides of the street. Siron ordered his officers to do this just as the UNC column passed by. Le Clère alleges that Lebecq had always planned to go to the Elysée if the bridge to the Chamber could not be crossed. Siron's action, which caused some veterans to believe that the police were attempting to infiltrate their ranks, provided the justification to employ this secondary plan.¹⁴⁹ The UNC procession attempted to reach the Madeleine but, its passage blocked by a barricade, the column split and was forced into the faubourg Saint-Honoré. Witnesses disputed the existence of this barricade. Lebecq claimed that the only way to take the column was to the left as the barricade prevented a move northward. To turn right would have led back to the Place de la Concorde. However, the advance of the majority of the column towards the Madeleine supports the statements of witnesses who claimed that there was no such barricade.¹⁵⁰

The veterans advanced towards the president's residence and almost reached their objective. Now split in two, Lebecq led a smaller column, which broke through police barricades, forced officers to retreat and set a car alight outside the British embassy. Only when the veterans found themselves less than fifty metres from the palace did the forces of order (mounted police and officers on foot) manage to halt their progress.¹⁵¹ Paul-Frédéric Charles Jousset, Parisian *chef de secteur* of the JP joined the UNC column on the night. Wounded on the head and the shoulder blade as the column found its way blocked on the faubourg Saint-Honoré, he claimed to have suffered his injuries 20 metres from the Elysée palace. At that time, he was in the tenth or twelfth row of the cortege. Philippet points out that to reach this point, the

¹⁴⁷ J. Péricard, 'Après la nuit tragique: La manifestation de l'UNC', *L'Intransigeant*, 8 February 1934.

¹⁴⁸ 'Lendemain d'émeute à Paris. A l'Hôtel de ville', *Le Journal*, 8 February 1934.

¹⁴⁹ Le Clère, 6 février, p. 151.

¹⁵⁰ Pellissier, 6 février, p. 167.

¹⁵¹ Le Clère, 6 février, p. 151.

veterans must have broken through three barricades.¹⁵² Maurice Chavardès concludes that the Republic was most at risk when the UNC nearly reached the presidential residence.¹⁵³ Brutalised by police, the peaceful protest transformed into a group of indignant and vengeful veterans. A witness overheard some veterans planning to return with their rifles the next day.¹⁵⁴

The association claimed that it did not want violence but it nevertheless forcefully overcame police barricades. Several reports attest to veteran violence against the authorities. Police reacted to this aggression. On the faubourg Saint-Honoré, a confrontation with the police saw Lebecq struck on the head with a rifle butt and Goy injured. A second and third barricade at rue Boissy-d'Anglas blocked the way. Both were broken by UNC *camarades*. Violence also took place among UNC members themselves. A UNC vice-president who refused to fight with the forces of order was beaten by other veterans. He requested that the police protect him from his comrades.¹⁵⁵

At about 10pm, the contingent of veterans that had advanced towards the Madeleine about-faced and headed back towards the scene of the riot. The police now found it impossible to distinguish veterans from youths mixed up in the crowd. A report stated that 2000 veterans were heading to the Concorde, shouting 'Au Poteau Daladier' and inviting people to join them.¹⁵⁶ The violent action that forced the barricade at the rue Royale was not solely due to young men masquerading as veterans of the UNC. Blind and disabled veterans preceded young rioters.¹⁵⁷ Alexandre d'Aste, a witness on the night, remained with his friend, a UNC member, throughout the events. After the UNC column split, both men joined some Croix de Feu marchers and returned to the Concorde.¹⁵⁸ Bystander Lionel Basta de Cambernon found himself in the middle of the veterans' column as it returned to the Concorde, surrounded by ex-servicemen and young leaguers. Soon after, violence resumed.¹⁵⁹ Enraged by the treatment of their comrades on the faubourg Saint-Honoré, the returning veterans, mixed with rioters, exerted

¹⁵² Philippet, *Le Temps des Liges*, V, annex I-A, p. 54.

¹⁵³ Chavardès, 6 février, p. 250.

¹⁵⁴ Philippet, *Le Temps des Liges*, III, p. 1519.

¹⁵⁵ AN C 15092, February 1934 enquiry: 'Paris 17 mars 1934, L'inspecteur général des Services de la Préfecture de Police à Monsieur le Préfet de Police'.

¹⁵⁶ APP, BA 1853: folder *manifestations sous le ministère Daladier*.

¹⁵⁷ APP, BA 1852/B1, 7 February 1934.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Alexandre d'Aste, 'L'histoire d'une émeute', *Le Matin*, 27 February 1934.

¹⁵⁹ Witness statement of Lionel Basta de Cambernon in 'Après les fusillades: Nouveaux témoignages', *Action française*, 25 February 1934.

pressure on the bridge over the Seine. Camille Marchand, *directeur adjoint* of the municipal police, claimed that this was the most critical moment of the night.¹⁶⁰

At 10.20pm, 3000 UNC members purportedly paraded in front of the Clemenceau statue and then proceeded in the direction of the riot. At 11pm, a reportedly 5000 strong mixed group of UNC and Croix de Feu members descended the Champs Elysées to cries of “A la Chambre, Daladier assassin!”.¹⁶¹ At 11.15pm, a group of veterans left the Concorde and made their way down the Champs-Elysées to the Unknown Soldier. However, upon passing the gates to the Elysée gardens they halted and only a cavalry charge dispersed them.¹⁶² At 12.35am, police reported murmurings among the small groups of veterans and *camelots du roi* roaming the streets: the next day they would bring down the prime minister and the minister of the interior.¹⁶³

The evidence above suggests that no clear picture of the association’s actions and involvement in the riot can be drawn. While the leadership attempted to exercise control over the column and its members, agreeing on a specific meeting point and time, it could not control everyone. The UNC’s was not a ‘protest within a protest’. It did not exist within a bubble, through which leaguers entered to corrupt the veterans but out of which the veterans could not exit. Political groups infiltrated the ranks of the cortege and incited some to militant action. Some UNC members sought out violent action among the political leagues present. Others broke police barricades and attacked officers out of anger. Similarly, the fact that no UNC members were shot does not prove their separateness to the riot. Some UNC veterans did put pressure on the police barricades on the Pont de la Concorde and were involved in the ensuing violence. The commission of enquiry into the riot found that truncheon blows, sabre cuts and pistol whippings had injured 53 members of the UNC.¹⁶⁴

Reaction from local UNC sections

An examination of the reaction of the UNC’s many provincial sections is important because the decision to protest was one made by the small group of Parisian leaders. Were they out of touch with the concerns of the mass membership? Did grass-roots UNC members only support their leaders out of esteem and friendship, unwitting pawns in the grander designs of

¹⁶⁰ Pellissier, 6 février, p. 177.

¹⁶¹ APP, BA 1853: folder *manifestations sous le ministère Daladier*.

¹⁶² Pellissier, 6 février, p. 179.

¹⁶³ APP, BA 1854, 12.35am, 7 February 1934.

¹⁶⁴ Report from the commission of enquiry into 6 February 1934 in *L’UNC de Normandie*, August 1934.

reactionary section presidents as Prost claims? For Prost, the fact that no provincial section called into question the legitimacy of the regime demonstrates an implicit disavowal of the GRP's march and the violence that took place. Instead, the expressions of support from provincial sections praised the decision to turn away from the Chamber and commended the dignity with which UNC members conducted themselves. Provincial sections backed the ideas of *propreté* and *réforme* demanded on the night.

However, evidence suggests that political militancy in the provincial sections has been underestimated. Several points must be made. The UNC reaffirmed its loyalty to the Republic in the pages of *La Voix du combattant*. What did this mean? According to Dobry, one must take into account a group's relation to others in French society and not in isolation.¹⁶⁵ Consequently, when the UNC claimed it had saved the Republic one must consider this declaration in relation to the association's claim that the Daladier government was *not* the Republic. It did not mean that the association had embraced the democratic and parliamentary regime. Indeed, the UNC had not mentioned its loyalty to the regime before the riot. On the contrary, as shown above, the UNC had claimed that the Republic no longer existed. Moreover, in the climate of recrimination that followed 6 February, to call for the toppling of the regime would have drawn attacks from the left and possible legal sanctions for the UNC. Even La Rocque revealed his ostensibly Republican colours, when the left called for the outlawing of his group. The UNC would not have wanted to find itself in the same position.

Not all messages of support affirmed loyalty to the Republic. Where statements congratulated the UNC on saving the Republic one must bear in mind what this implied. For example, the departmental congress of the UNC at Ernée congratulated Lebecq and the GRP for the results they had achieved. These 'results' amounted to the fall of an elected government and the arrival in power of a conservative administration. The group did not express loyalty to the Republic.¹⁶⁶

The UNC did suffer a loss of membership in the months following February. Lebecq claimed to have received letters of support and congratulations 'par des milliers', but he also acknowledged that there had been losses too.¹⁶⁷ The Vaucluse group alone lost a third of its members. Its president promised to remain at the head of the section but only if political action

¹⁶⁵ Dobry, 'La thèse immunitaire', pp. 47-48.

¹⁶⁶ AN F⁷ 13027, weekly report from Mayenne, 18 June 1934.

¹⁶⁷ Roux-Desbreaux, 'Après', *L'UNC de Paris*, 22 February 1934.

was henceforth ruled out.¹⁶⁸ The Nord group lost an ‘influential member’ in Lille but gained the support of ‘une notabilité’, M. Lauweruyns de Rosenadele, accompanied by a cheque for 300 francs.¹⁶⁹ This group had witnessed isolated resignations but these were allegedly counterbalanced by the subscription of 70 ‘intellectuals’ to the group.¹⁷⁰ Opposition came from the sections of Villeneuve-sur-Lot, the Corrèze, Pompadour, the Ardennes, Touraine, the Haute-Garonne, the Dordogne, the Landes, the Oise and the Somme.¹⁷¹ Endorsements of the GRP’s actions came from the Nord, the Pas-de-Calais and Brittany, yet according to Prost these were not enough to ‘cover up the dissent (*la voix discordante*)’.¹⁷² He explains the approval of the sections from the Deux-Sèvres, Anjou and the Ille-et-Vilaine in reference to their traditionally right-wing clientele. Yet the Nord group, in which “...l’impression a été excellente à l’UNC le 6 février....” was recognised to have a significant socialist and communist membership in 1936, seemingly undeterred by the group’s previous approval of the riots.¹⁷³

The mixed reaction of provincial sections demonstrates the plurality of opinion in the UNC. What were the reasons behind the opposition of some members? Some clue is provided by a group of former UNC members. In April 1934, they produced a poster that outlined their motives for resigning from the association in the aftermath of the riot. Police reported that the posters appeared in the Haute-Marne, the Manche, the Mayenne, the Meuse, Nièvre and the Haute-Saône.¹⁷⁴ These veterans linked their decision to resign not only to the association’s political action but also specifically to the UNC’s collaboration with the anti-Republican extreme right. They denounced the Croix de Feu as fascist and called on all true Republicans within the association to follow their example and resign.¹⁷⁵ At the most this statement demonstrated that support for the parliamentary and democratic Republic was still strong in sections of the UNC.

¹⁶⁸ AN F⁷ 13029, weekly report from the Vaucluse, 24 September 1934.

¹⁶⁹ Meeting of Comité de Direction, ‘Réunion du 11 mars 1934’, *Le Trait d’Union*, April 1934.

¹⁷⁰ E. Marchand, ‘Groupe départemental de l’Eure: Communication du Président’, *L’UNC de Normandie*, March 1934.

¹⁷¹ Prost, I, pp. 161-162.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁷³ Meeting of Comité de Direction, ‘UNC Zone du Nord, réunion du 18 février 1934’, *Le Trait d’Union*, April 1934; UNC/EC, 29 February 1936.

¹⁷⁴ AN F⁷ 13024, weekly report from the Calvados, 16 April 1934. AN F⁷ 13025, weekly reports from the Hérault, 6-16 April 1934; the Gard, 9 April 1934; the Drôme, 9 April 1934. AN F⁷ 13026, weekly report from the Indre-et-Loire, 9 April 1934. AN F⁷ 13027, weekly reports from the Haute Marne, 3 April 1934; the Manche, 9 April 1934; the Mayenne, 9 April 1934; the Meuse, 16 April 1934 and Nièvre, 3 April 1934. F⁷ 13028, weekly report from the Haute-Saône, 9 April 1934.

¹⁷⁵ F⁷ 13028, copy of the poster ‘La vérité sur l’Union nationale des combattants’, in the weekly report from the Haute-Saône, 9 April 1934.

At the least it showed distaste among some UNC veterans for political intervention and the extreme right. The action of these veterans reveals the moderation of sections of the movement better than ambiguous public statements.

Provincial groups were not united in their opposition to the protest. In fact, the Rouen group demanded the resignation of André Marie, a member of its *comité de direction* and secretary general of the departmental group. The group did not demand his resignation for having taken part in the riot but for having been part of the *government*. Marie had been an under-secretary of state in the cabinet on 6 February.¹⁷⁶ In the Somme, where Prost cites opposition, the Fort-Mahon group was the only one to raise a protest. In the Deux-Sèvres, the Nueil-les-Aubiers group expressed regret that its members were too far from Paris to march with the GRP. One must bear in mind that this statement was made *after* the events of the riot were known.¹⁷⁷ On 25 February the policy-making committee of the regional group of the Poilus de Touraine met and “...votait une motion de méfiance contre le groupe UNC de la région parisienne”. However, this brought protests from members and sections who subsequently formed a protest committee. The committee used press and posters to dispute the section president’s decision. On 19 March the committee voted a motion backing the UNC and declared it was not up to the policy-making committee of the regional group to prejudge the attitude of the whole group.¹⁷⁸

The utility of citing examples of those sections who declared themselves ‘for’ and ‘against’ the GRP’s action is questionable. The leadership of UNC sections formulated public statements. They were a minority within the general membership of the group and so perhaps not representative of ordinary members’ opinions. In the absence of the opinion of every UNC section, which would facilitate a definitive tally, one is left with only a partial picture. The reality is more complicated. Moreover, one cannot say for sure that all resignations were made in protest at the new political line taken by the Parisian leadership. Overall, provincial sections were divided. It is important to maintain this balance rather than state that one attitude outweighed another.

One can examine provincial reaction from a different perspective: the formation and dissolution of sections after the riot. To create a section, veterans often responded to a notice in

¹⁷⁶ ‘L’histoire d’une émeute: Sa radiation étant demandée M. André Marie quitte l’UNC’, *Le Matin*, 15 March 1934.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Vie des sections: Nueil-les-Aubiers’, *Le Combattant des Deux-Sèvres*, March 1934.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Les Poilus de Touraine approuvent l’UNC de Paris’, *Le Poilu*, March–April 1934.

the local area. After 6 February 1934, those joining a new group would have been aware of the UNC's role on the night. For example, the decision of 40 veterans in Guingamp to constitute a group after 6 February perhaps shows that many if not all of them supported (or at least did not disapprove of) UNC action in the protest.¹⁷⁹ This may provide a better measure of support across members of a whole section.

New provincial sections were founded soon after the riot, some as a response to and in solidarity with the GRP's protest. A new section was created in Villegenon in March 1934.¹⁸⁰ In April 1934, veterans founded a UNC section in Tarbes and linked their decision to the UNC's role in the 'organisation and realisation' of the protest on 6 February.¹⁸¹ By July 1934, 30 new sections existed.¹⁸² New memberships allegedly counterbalanced the losses suffered. Désiré Tritsch, vice-president of the Oise group, reported that the GRP had welcomed 3000 new members in the fortnight since the riot.¹⁸³ The Pontivy group saw an increase of 230 members from January 1934 to February 1935.¹⁸⁴ The Montmartrois section of the UNC received 154 new members up to May 1934.¹⁸⁵ The UNC section in the second district of Lyon welcomed 1000 new members between the riot and the end of the month.¹⁸⁶ Between February and June 1934, the *landais* group gained 250 members and 7 new sections.¹⁸⁷

The JUNC cited UNC participation on the night as the reason for an increase in its membership. Their parent organisation had shown a willingness to fight the 'gangrene' exposed by the Stavisky affair.¹⁸⁸ The veterans' march had impressed new members. Raymond Schmitt, president of the *jeunes* in 1934, stated that if the UNC had not launched into political action via on 6 February, the *jeunes* would not have followed the UNC veterans. Now that the UNC had a doctrine, he could offer his members more than social engagements and sporting gatherings.¹⁸⁹

¹⁷⁹ AN F⁷ 13024, weekly report from the Côtes-du-Nord, 7 May 1934.

¹⁸⁰ 'Chronique de Berry: Nouvelle Section', *L'Ancien combattant du Berry*, March 1934.

¹⁸¹ AN F⁷ 13027, weekly report from the Hautes-Pyrénées, 9 April 1934.

¹⁸² Meeting report, 'Conseil d'Administration: Séance du 30 juin', *La Vdc*, 7 July 1934.

¹⁸³ D. Tritsch, 'Réponse à des Histoires', *Le Trait d'Union*, March 1934.

¹⁸⁴ 'Dans nos sections. Pontivy', *Le Cri du Poilu*, March 1935.

¹⁸⁵ Reported in *L'Echo montmartrois de l'Union Nationale des Combattants*, May 1934.

¹⁸⁶ 'La vie des sections. Lyon: Sous-section du 2^e arrondissement et 5^e (Saint-Jean)', *Le Combattant du Sud-Est*, March 1934.

¹⁸⁷ Compare the figures on membership in R. Dorlanne, 'La répercussion au Groupe landais des événements du 6 février' and R. Dorlanne, 'Organisation et Propagande', *Le Combattant landais*, April and May-June 1934; P. Monredon, 'Le Rapport Moral', *Le Combattant landais*, June-July 1934.

¹⁸⁸ Meeting report, 'Groupement de Lagny', *La Vdc*, 31 March 1934.

¹⁸⁹ R. Schmitt, 'Au travail de Suite!', *La Vdc*, 21 July 1934.

Provincial sections supported this view.¹⁹⁰ In particular, Franck d'Hennezel, president of the Saint-Quentin youth section, claimed that the 6 February marked a watershed in the development of the youth movement. It was now clear that the youth groups should expand their action beyond social and sporting activities. Inspired by the perceived co-operation of wartime and post-war generations in the Croix de Feu, d'Hennezel claimed the time had come for the *jeunes* to join the *anciens* of the UNC and work towards national, social and moral renovation.¹⁹¹

Within the ex-servicemen community, ARAC and the Fédération nationale des combattants républicains (FNCR) condemned the UNC's action. In the Dordogne, UNC activist Boucher requested help from the national executive committee in fending off the attacks of the FOP.¹⁹² Even the AGMG, usually close to the UNC, did not wholeheartedly back the action. The Confederation expressed reservations. It had warned its members against rowdy demonstrations prior to 6 February. The UF issued a statement distancing itself from street battles led by groups 'outside of the *mouvement* and the *esprit combattant*'. The UF would later claim that the rioters had launched an attack against the Republic in an attempt to 'shake the legal order'.¹⁹³ This disavowal of the UNC's involvement found reflection among provincial UF sections. In the Pas-de-Calais UF veterans put pressure on their comrades in the UNC to resign.¹⁹⁴ In the Landes, UF section president Dupouey declared that the the federation would never make rioters of its members.¹⁹⁵ A UF section at Taillan in the Gironde echoed the motion of the departmental FOP in its opposition to fascism and the 'bellicose action' of the UNC.¹⁹⁶

Not all UF sections disassociated themselves from the UNC. The *comité d'entente* of Saint-Quentin declared its willingness to undertake necessary action to bring 'cleanliness' back to government. It is unclear what this statement meant yet the fact that both local UNC and UF presidents signed the statement on 7 February demonstrated at least that relations between the two groups were not hostile.¹⁹⁷ The UF's Association des mutilés et anciens combattants de la grande guerre in Nancy regretted the federation's statement distancing it from the UNC. Vice-president James Robert congratulated the UNC for having saved the Republic and instigated a

¹⁹⁰ J. Audin, 'Donnons l'exemple', *La Vdc*, 30 July 1934.

¹⁹¹ F. D'Hennezel, 'L'heure des Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 3 March 1934.

¹⁹² UNC/EC, 24 February 1934.

¹⁹³ René Cassin, 'Contre la violence et l'anarchie', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 January 1938.

¹⁹⁴ UNC/EC, 24 February 1934.

¹⁹⁵ AN F⁷ 13026, weekly report from the Landes, 14 May 1934.

¹⁹⁶ AN F⁷ 13025, weekly report from the Gironde, 29 March 1934.

¹⁹⁷ AN F⁷ 13308, report from St Quentin, 7 February 1934.

revolution that would see the return of justice and liberty to France.¹⁹⁸ Several veterans' associations used language that hinted at various courses of action. In April 1934, for example, a motion of the 17th departmental congress of the Association ariégoise promised to resort to all means of action if the government continued to victimise veterans financially.¹⁹⁹ The veterans' associations of Toulouse met in May 1934 and promised to "...lutter par tous les moyens en leur pouvoir et avec persévérance pour que la génération du Feu...soit enfin entendue et comprise des Gouvernements et de l'opinion publique".²⁰⁰ Though the meaning of these statements is unclear, coming as they did in the heated post-riot atmosphere one cannot rule out the possibility that they hinted at an action similar to that of 6 February.

Far from isolating the UNC, the association's participation drew a wider audience to its Wagram manifesto. Direct action had brought some success. Indeed, while other veterans' associations may have disagreed with the method of street action, they had few qualms about the ideas behind it. The UNC suffered a loss of members after the riot. Table 1 shows the number of sections created and dissolved according to the reports of UNC treasurer Alfred de Pontalba to the executive committee. Without knowing the motives of veterans, one can say that though the number of dissolved sections increased greatly after the Wagram meeting and the February 1934 riots, the UNC was consistently able to found new sections and attract new members.

Date	Sections created	Sections dissolved
6 May 1933	57	8
14 October 1933	55	8
9 December 1933	61	23
24 November 1934	52	34
12 January 1935	39	14

Table 1: UNC sections created and dissolved 6 May 1933-12 January 1935

¹⁹⁸ 'L'UNC approuvée par d'autres associations', *L'Ancien combattant du Berry*, March 1934.

¹⁹⁹ AN F⁷ 13024, weekly report from the Ariège, 9 April 1934.

²⁰⁰ AN F⁷ 13025, motion voted May 1934.

The aftermath of the riot

The UNC's interpretation

The press, in words and pictures, portrayed the night as a massacre of innocent veterans. The right propagated a somewhat contradictory depiction of peaceful veterans advancing to battle. Satirical cartoons furthered the myth that the veterans had fallen victim to a government ambush, a pre-meditated massacre of France's bravest sons. One cartoon pictured a tribunal of dead veterans passing sentence, skeletons carrying tombstones engraved with the names of ministers: Pressard, Sarraut, Cot, Chautemps, Frot and Daladier.²⁰¹ Posters pictured dead veterans on the Concorde with the description: "Ils ont échappé aux balles allemandes, les balles du Cartel ne les ont pas épargnés".²⁰² *L'Ami du peuple*, the organ of the SF, reported that the men of the 6 February advanced on the Place de la Concorde with the same enthusiasm as their elders had entered the woods of Verdun.²⁰³ P. Croizier wrote in *Le Combattant landais*: "Dans mes souvenirs de Lorette et de Verdun, rien ne m'a autant bouleversé que d'entendre ces matraques s'abattre comme des masses sur la tête de ces anciens combattants et de les voir en grand nombre s'écrouler ensanglantés sur la chaussée".²⁰⁴

Police reports show a variety of opinions among the French public. Some felt that the Republic was not under threat. Others feared that another attempt to replace the regime would soon be made, this time via a bloody revolution. The veterans' participation drew public attention to the movement as never before, especially regarding the UNC's national congress in Metz and the UF's meeting in Vichy. Press opinion differed on the consequences of the night for the veterans' movement. *Victoire* expressed a desire to see the veterans united behind a political programme and electoral participation. *Le Figaro* warned against this action, desired by a minority of the *monde ancien combattant*.²⁰⁵

The day after the riot, a number of senators, deputies and councillors issued a statement that urged the President to form a government of public safety (*salut public*) and punish corruption in the government. Goy and Lebecq figured among the authors of this statement.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ AN F⁷ 13320, report, 'Le Vernissage du Salon des Dessinateurs de Journaux', 7 April 1935.

²⁰² AN F⁷ 13027, weekly report from the *Manche*, 26 March 1934.

²⁰³ Jessica Wardhaugh, 'Fighting for the Unknown Soldier: The contested territory of the French nation, 1934-1938', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 15 (2007), p. 190.

²⁰⁴ P. Croizier, 'Le récit de la nuit tragique par un ancien combattant', *Le Combattant landais*, March 1934.

²⁰⁵ G. Hervé, 'L'heure des anciens combattants', *Victoire*, 23 March 1934; 'Editorial: Les Anciens Combattants et l'action politique', *Le Figaro*, 24 March 1934.

²⁰⁶ APP, BA 1854, 'Au peuple de Paris'.

Georges Scapini, a deputy and a member of the UNC, accused the government of ruling in opposition to Paris. Scapini, with the backing of Goy, warned that if Gaston Doumergue's new government failed, the people would once again take to the streets. In this eventuality, they would not stop at the resignation of the government.²⁰⁷ The UNC professed loyalty to the Republic but a measure of ambiguity remained. A group in the Côtes-du-Nord warned its members to remain alert and ready to intervene directly in the affairs of the country if they were needed.²⁰⁸ *Le Poilu* advised the veterans not to rest on the laurels of their victory.²⁰⁹ *Le Combattant du Centre* asked readers to choose between the honest Republic of the veterans and that of the *métèques* and international finance.²¹⁰ Once again, though these statements did not call for an attack on the Republic, their meaning was ambiguous.

The UNC presented a contradictory picture of its role in the riot. Firstly, the association emphasised the fact that it turned away from the Chamber, did not have any political aims and was not involved in the rioting. Goy publicly denied Frot's charge that professional rioters had entered the ranks of the UNC column. He claimed that the police savagely charged the veterans without warning.²¹¹ Secondly, the UNC claimed to have been on the Concorde with the aim of chasing politicians from government and rescuing the Republic. In fact, if it had not been for the UNC's participation, the Republic 'would have had its day'.²¹² Goy boasted that it was the UNC that had forced Daladier to resign.²¹³ The *UNC de Normandie* condemned those in government, such as Daladier, for effacing the role of the veterans in the riot.²¹⁴ Lebecq claimed responsibility for the UNC in the events that had followed the riot, which included the downfall of the government.²¹⁵ At the GRP's general assembly in April 1935, Roux-Desbreaux declared that it was thanks to the UNC that Doumergue now led the government.

²⁰⁷ A. Laphin, 'Les combattants disent', *L'Intransigeant*, 9 February 1934.

²⁰⁸ AN F⁷ 13024, weekly report from the Côtes-du-Nord, 4 June 1934.

²⁰⁹ 'Garde à vous!', *Le Poilu*, March 1934.

²¹⁰ G. De Cromières, 'Vérité', *Le Combattant du Centre*, March 1934.

²¹¹ 'M. Frot, vous ne dites pas la vérité', *Le Jour*, 13 February 1934; 'Une lettre ouverte...', *Le Journal*, 13 February 1934; 'Une lettre ouverte à M. Frot', *Le Figaro*, 14 February 1934.

²¹² H. Aubert, 'Le Bilan d'un soir tragique', *La Vdc*, 10 March 1934.

²¹³ UNC/EC, 24 February 1934.

²¹⁴ 'Le Traité', *L'UNC de Normandie*, March 1934.

²¹⁵ 'Dans nos sections: Vannes', *Le Cri du Poilu*, March 1934.

The UNC feted 6 February as a historic date when the veterans rose up against parliamentary corruption.²¹⁶ However, to claim sole responsibility for the investment in power of an administration at the expense of an elected government, implicated the UNC as the main factor in the downfall of the latter. Perhaps to avoid such an accusation, the UNC couched its claim in populist terms. It was not alone in its claim to the popular will. With the fall of the government on 6 February, the street became an important territory in which the ‘people’, or rather the self-appointed representatives of the people, could air their views.²¹⁷ In parliament and press, discussion intensified on the location of popular sovereignty. Did it lie with the elected men of the Chamber or the man in the street?²¹⁸

Galland boasted that the UNC’s Seine group’s manifesto perfectly translated the wishes of all French citizens.²¹⁹ Lebecq wrote in *Le Temps*, “...nous avons exprimé le sentiment général d’une opinion excédée et écoeurée par le spectacle déconcertant que lui a donné, depuis des mois, un Parlement incapable de toute discipline et de tout travail utile...”.²²⁰ Jean Ybarnégaray, a deputy and honorary president of the UNC’s Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port section, claimed that the protest was the ‘cry of anger and indignation of a whole people’.²²¹ In late February 1934, Goy condemned those who had manoeuvred behind the scenes to try and install Daladier as a dictator, disregarding of popular French indignation. He urged the French to support Doumergue’s ‘true antirevolutionary front’.²²² The UNC also depicted the action as a popular uprising by the people of Paris. Yet even in this case, it was a Parisian action on behalf of the nation: “...une explosion à la Parisienne, de tout un peuple à bout d’indignation et de contrainte”.²²³ Reporting on the preliminary results of the municipal elections in May 1935, Galland observed that nearly all the councillors who took part on 6 February had been returned to office. Paris had “...voté sous le signe du 6 février...” and so given its approval to the veterans’ action.²²⁴

²¹⁶ J. De Rufz, ‘Tribune des Militants: Préface à l’Action Combattante’, *La Vdc*, 16 March 1935; G. Lebecq, ‘Les anciens combattants dans la Nation’, *La Vdc*, 20 April 1935.

²¹⁷ Jessica Wardhaugh, ‘Between parliament and the people: The problem of representation in France, 1934-1939’, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 27 (2007), p. 215.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 214. See Chapter Two for a discussion of popular sovereignty and the UNC.

²¹⁹ P. Galland, ‘Le vent d’orage’, *La Vdc*, 10 February 1934.

²²⁰ Quoted in Roux-Desbreaux, ‘Après’, *L’UNC de Paris*, 22 February 1934.

²²¹ AN F⁷ 12963, daily report, ‘Conférence de M. Ybarnégaray, donnée le 23 février au Théâtre des Ambassadeurs’, 24 February 1934.

²²² AN F⁷ 12963, daily report concerning a poster produced by Jean Goy, 26 February 1934.

²²³ P. Galland, ‘Confusion’, *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934.

²²⁴ P. Galland, ‘La bataille continue sur l’ensemble du front’, *La Vdc*, 11 May 1935.

The newspapers of provincial UNC sections concurred with the interpretation of the riot as a popular protest. In the Cantal, the UNC described the riot as the ‘explosion of a legitimate popular indignation involving the population of Paris’.²²⁵ *Le Créneau* emphasised the national character of the demonstration: “La manifestation de l’UNC, le 6 février dernier, n’a été que la consécration de l’indignation et du dégoût qui soulèvent le Pays entier”.²²⁶ At the congress of Andelys, held by the Seine-Inférieure and the Eure groups in June 1934, Victor, president of the departmental commission on civic action, explained 6 February as the work of the people of France against the self-interest of parties and politicians.²²⁷

It was not the first time that the *ex-poilus* had represented the people of France. Veterans claimed that trench life had created a classless society where all social differences took second place to the wider conflict. The front soldier represented the whole of France, from the peasant to the industrialist. Veterans asserted the conviction that they were acting on behalf of the French nation and people. The front had been a microcosm of both. According to Roux-Desbreaux, such a levelling of social differences during the war meant that the veterans truly represented the people of France during the riot: “Nous sommes, comme autrefois, aux tranchées, tout le peuple Français”.²²⁸ Lebecq wrote that the protest involved the whole population of Paris, indiscriminate of social class:

Je tremble de sainte colère qui secouait Paris tout entier, ce mardi soir, quand je pense que, d’un côté il y avait le peuple parisien, fin, élégant, courageux, *fait d’ouvriers, d’employés de commerçants, de petit bourgeois*, et puis nos camarades, anciens combattants de l’UNC, des Croix de Feu et d’autres associations, tous en bronze par leur inébranlable fermeté, tous en or pur par la noblesse de leurs sentiments et la dignité de leur attitude et, de l’autre côté, vous Eugène Frot, un déchet de poubelle!²²⁹

UNC veterans did not unanimously support the association’s action yet their condemnation of it was no less unanimous. The UNC attempted to legitimise its role through the claim to represent the people of France against anti-national politicians. One must bear in mind that the conflict between veterans and politicians contained a contradiction. The UNC could not

²²⁵ D. Audollent, ‘Réformes nécessaires’, *Le Combattant du Cantal*, March 1935.

²²⁶ L. Vandewalle, ‘Le Sang a coulé’, *Le Créneau*, February 1934.

²²⁷ Report from the Congress of the Seine-Inférieure and the Eure groups, M. J. Victor, ‘Troisième commission: Les Combattants dans la Nation’, *L’UNC de Normandie*, June 1934.

²²⁸ Roux-Desbreaux, ‘Après’, *L’UNC de Paris*, 22 February 1934.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, (my italics).

deny that some politicians had served in the war. Goy, for example, was a deputy. Daladier, head of the ‘government of assassins’, was a veteran. In order to resolve this conflict of terms, the title *ancien combattant* was granted and withdrawn at will. The UNC could not erase the fact of war service but the quality of *ancien combattant* depended almost as much on one’s post-war conduct. After the riot, Daladier and Frot underlined their status as veterans perhaps in an attempt to regain some legitimacy. However, Lebecq ‘withdrew’ Frot’s veteran status.²³⁰ Condemning the veterans who had given the order to fire, Louis Vandewalle, president of the Calais section, wrote: “Nous, Anciens Combattants, nous renions, nous chassons à jamais de notre grande famille, ceux qui ont fait massacrer leurs frères”.²³¹ The Normandy group requested that those veterans who had not prevented the murder of their comrades be excluded from the association’s ranks.²³²

The UNC presented the government as an anti-national force. It did this through framing the riot as a premeditated massacre of French heroes. *Le Combattant d’Ille-et-Vilaine* published an elegy on the riot. The poet, Jean Douarre of the Courbevoie section, compared the march on the Concorde to a wartime advance into battle. Their torsos shining with medals hard-won in battle they marched, unarmed, only to be greeted by a salvo as they arrived at the Concorde. He claimed that the police attacked them without warning and so confirmed suspicions of a government ambush (*guet-apens*).²³³ Goy supported the explanation that the attack had been an ambush to massacre veterans.²³⁴ In Creil, the local executive committee also made reference to the government ‘ambush’, as did the Normandy group.²³⁵

Furthermore, crimes committed against French national symbols reinforced the argument that the Daladier government was ‘anti-French’. For the right and the veterans, the tricolour represented a quasi-religious symbol. *Le Matin* reported a confrontation between veterans and police in which the tricolour flags of the UNC were forced down, broken and torn, and their bearers beaten.²³⁶ UNC official Croizier saw blows rain down on one flag-bearer. His flag thrown to the ground and his medals stamped upon, the veteran cried out as a police officer

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ L. Vandewalle, ‘Le Sang a coulé’, *Le Créneau*, February 1934.

²³² Motion voted by the Gonneville-sur-Scie section of the Seine-Inférieure departmental group, *L’UNC de Normandie*, March 1934.

²³³ J. Douarre, ‘6 février 1934’, *Le Combattant d’Ille-et-Vilaine*, April 1934.

²³⁴ Report from conference in Arras at which Jean Goy spoke, *Le Créneau*, May 1934.

²³⁵ Report from meeting of the Creil group, ‘Vie des Sections’, *Le Trait d’Union*, June 1934.

²³⁶ ‘Les bagarres dans la rue’, *Le Matin*, 7 February 1934.

shouted, “Tiens salaud, voilà ce que j’en fais de tes décorations!”.²³⁷ In a symbolic affront to the war generation, a policeman was reported to have torn off Lebecq’s medals with a contemptuous “Sale ferraille!”.²³⁸ According to UNC section vice-president Georges Bonne, mounted police reacted most brutally to flag-bearers and those wearing their war medals, both sacred symbols of the war.²³⁹

War culture influenced the UNC’s treatment of the victims of the riot in several ways.²⁴⁰ Firstly, the men who had taken part in the riot were referred to as ‘camarades’ whether they were members of the UNC or not. Secondly, veterans of the GRP were awarded a diploma and a medal for their services on the night.²⁴¹ Soldiers who fought in the war also received these symbols of heroism. Finally, victims who died, whether they were participants or innocent bystanders, were elevated to a similar level as the men who had died in the war. Although the association lost no members, a UNC delegation attended the funerals of some of the deceased, even when the victim in question was too young to have fought in the war. Lucien-François Garniel, for example, was 15 when he died, yet approximately 5000 veterans of the Croix de Feu and UNC reportedly attended his funeral.²⁴² Jean Mopin, 24, was a simple bystander on the night yet the leagues and the UNC were present at his funeral.²⁴³

The UNC and nationalist leagues used commemorative devices usually reserved for the war dead to link the fallen of the Place de la Concorde to the fallen of the Great War. Referring to the dead as ‘nos morts’, the UNC and other nationalist groups observed a minute’s silence in memory of those ‘fallen heroes’ at several memorial services.²⁴⁴ Nationalist groups acted similarly. Degirard, president of the Neuilly-sur-Seine Croix de Feu, compared the victims to all those who had given their life for the defence and grandeur of France.²⁴⁵ In May 1934, the Association Marius Plateau, the veterans’ wing of AF, laid a wreath at the Place de la Concorde

²³⁷ Pellissier, 6 février, p. 169.

²³⁸ A. Soubiran, ‘La vérité’, *L’Ancien combattant du Berry*, March 1934.

²³⁹ Letter from Georges Bonne, ‘L’histoire d’une émeute’, *Le Matin*, 4 March 1934.

²⁴⁰ Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, examines the similarities between the memorialisation of Nazis killed in street violence and the war dead: “... the martyrs of the Nazi movement were identified with the dead of the First World War, and identical symbols were used to honour their memory.... Such men ‘fell in the same spirit as the unforgettable dead of the world war’...”, p. 183.

²⁴¹ AN F⁷ 13320, report from GRP congress, 8 April 1935.

²⁴² AN F⁷ 12963, daily report, ‘Des obsèques de M. Garniel, blessé mortellement le 6 février et décédé le 1^{er} novembre’, 2 November 1934.

²⁴³ AN F⁷ 12963, daily report concerning the funeral of Jean Mopin, 8 December 1934.

²⁴⁴ AN F⁷ 12963, report 15 March 1934, ‘Réunion publique organisée par les ‘Grandes Conférences Politiques’, Salle Bullier, le 14 mars’.

²⁴⁵ AN F⁷ 12963, daily report concerning a religious ceremony, 4 November 1934.

for the victims of the riot. They were joined by delegations from the JP, the SF and the Phalanges Universitaires. As the latter passed the wreath, their leader read a roll call of those in the organisation who fell on 6 February to which the response ‘Mort au champ d’honneur’ was given.²⁴⁶ A group of municipal councillors, including Lebecq, submitted the proposition for a commemorative stone in honour of the victims, that would stand on the Place de la Concorde where the blood of the martyrs had flowed that night, ‘piously conserving’, “...la mémoire, toujours vivante, de ceux de ses enfants qui sont morts pour un idéal de justice, de morale public et de vertu”.²⁴⁷

In tandem, the veterans portrayed the actions of the police in a similar way to wartime atrocities. UNC veterans emphasised their own nature as defenceless pacifists, *mutilés* and *aveugles*, savagely knocked unconscious by police.²⁴⁸ A. Godon, president of the UNC’s section in Montmartre, reported that mounted police slashed women, the blind and the elderly with their sabres while officers on foot beat veterans with their bloodied truncheons.²⁴⁹ A witness in *Le Matin* compared the government’s actions to the wartime massacre of the *dinantais* in 1914, which the German authorities had blamed on the provocation of ‘imaginary snipers’.²⁵⁰

Photographs of injured veterans illustrated reports from the night. Lebecq was pictured with blood pouring down his face. *La Voix du combattant* showed a veteran lying prone on the pavement, allegedly having suffered three truncheon blows to the head, a kick in the face, and four kicks to his body.²⁵¹ The UNC issued a statement to the press, emphasising the brutality shown towards veterans with ‘wooden legs’ and ‘empty sleeves’. The press used attacks on women to further demonstrate the brutal behaviour of the police: “On emmène une femme blessée dans la bagarre, où elle accompagnait son mari aveugle de guerre”.²⁵² Mlle Ogé, beaten on the head with a truncheon, headed the list of victims published in *L’Echo Montmartrois de l’UNC*.²⁵³ Aubert asked: “...matraquer et sabrer des mutilés, des femmes des combattants sans

²⁴⁶ AN F⁷ 13306, report, ‘Manifestation organisée à l’occasion de la Fête Nationale de Jeanne d’Arc (Paris), 13 May 1934.

²⁴⁷ ‘Une dalle commémorative place de la Concorde’, *L’Echo de Paris*, 10 February 1934.

²⁴⁸ H. Aubert, ‘Le Bilan d’un soir tragique’, *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934.

²⁴⁹ A. Godon, ‘Menteur, Lâche, Assassin’, *L’Echo montmartrois*, February 1934.

²⁵⁰ Letter from Alexandre d’Aste, ‘L’histoire d’une émeute’, *Le Matin*, 27 February 1934.

²⁵¹ Photographs of the riot can be found in *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934.

²⁵² ‘Une soirée d’émeute à Paris: Les manifestations sanglantes’, *Le Journal*, 7 February 1934.

²⁵³ List of section members injured in the riot, *L’Echo montmartrois*, March 1934.

armes, des porteurs de drapeau qui ne pouvaient se défendre, sont-ce là procédés habituels de police?”.²⁵⁴

The UNC's interpretation of the riot sought to undermine the institutions of the Republic in several ways. Firstly, it located popular sovereignty in the streets and not in the Chamber. The veterans claimed the right to represent the people of France and they denied this right to elected politicians. It used the quality of being a veteran to further support its claim to legitimacy. Secondly, the UNC portrayed parliament and the government as anti-national in its affront to all that was French. The government had ordered police to ambush the heroes of the Great War. Officers had degraded French national symbols and war decorations. Furthermore, reports concerning victims of the riot centred on the most vulnerable and were similar to atrocity propaganda during the war. UNC veterans received decorations for their role in the service of France *against* the government.

Speaking at the Sorbonne in February 1934, Lebecq denied that the UNC's action was political on 6 February. It had simply fulfilled its duty and served the country. He argued that during the war those who had committed crimes against French honour and the nation had been punished and: “Certains parmi nous ont même fait partie de pelotons d'exécution”.²⁵⁵ Those who had neglected their national duty were executed. The UNC treated the Daladier government in the same way. Should politicians face the firing squad too? Ultimately, the UNC endorsed illegality when it considered the government's action detrimental to a single national interest.

Conclusion

One can be clear on several points. Throughout the interwar period, the UNC did not advocate violent action against its adversaries or the regime. It was not a paramilitary organisation like some of the leagues. Consequently, the UNC neither called for a coup against the government nor was it the driving force behind the violence on the Place de la Concorde. Its members were not involved in the worst of the rioting when the police opened fire. Yet the UNC's violent discourse suggested a potentially violent course of action. This was not compatible with the practices of the Third Republic, that is, electoral participation and parliamentary democracy. Its use of military language advocated an extra-parliamentary route to power in which violence was

²⁵⁴ H. Aubert, 'Le Bilan d'un soir tragique', *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934.

²⁵⁵ Speech by Georges Lebecq, 'La Commémoration de Verdun: La belle manifestation de la Sorbonne, 21 février 1934', *La Vdc*, 7 April 1934.

at least framed as a viable option. The UNC did not recognise the Daladier government as the sovereign power in France. In fact, the government was akin to an anti-national force. The true Republic lay with the people and the veterans in the streets of Paris. Some members, therefore, were prepared to be violent when the situation called for a Republican action (as defined by the UNC) against a government that was not.

The UNC's demonstration was not a protest within a protest. No single group remained separate to the others. As individuals, UNC veterans took part in violent acts against the police. However, in the confusion and fluidity of the riot one cannot be sure what members of each group did. Reaction from provincial sections was mixed. A significant number of members left the movement. Compared to pre-riot figures, a great number of sections were dissolved. New sections were founded and new memberships arrived, some in response to the February action. With the political right in power, the UNC anticipated change would come through legal means. This in no way diminishes the authoritarianism of their plans. The riot should be considered as an event in the slide towards authoritarianism of certain sections of the *mouvement ancien combattant*.

I am in agreement with Dobry and Jenkins that one cannot discount the threat of the extreme right based on their failure on 6 February 1934, if indeed they did fail. Even if their action was apparently uncoordinated the organisations nevertheless secured the eviction from power of an elected left-wing government. They hoped Doumergue would implement constitutional reform along authoritarian lines. The February riot would leave some UNC sections with a taste for militant action. After all, the GRP had been successful in bringing about the downfall of a left-wing government and the installation of a more palatable conservative administration. In June 1937, the Antibes section of the UNC suggested similar action to remove the Popular Front government.²⁵⁶ A year after the riot, in February 1935, Aubert lamented the fact that despite the passing of 12 months the same men remained in power. The criminals and corruption had not been punished. Now the time had come to 'put everyone in their place'.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ FM, 19 940 500: 229, telegram from the UNC's Antibes section to Jacques Doriot, 20 June 1937.

²⁵⁷ H. Aubert, 'Pour que ça aille bien', *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935.

Chapter Two

The Combatants' Republic

D'une façon générale, la 'température' de l'état d'esprit serait bonne et favorable à l'activité gouvernementale actuelle s'il n'y avait encore quelques appréhensions quant au maintien de l'ordre et de la tranquillité publiques. C'est ainsi qu'on fait courir le bruit un peu partout, en ce moment, que "le 8 juillet, il y aura une révolution!". Cette rumeur, qui a sa source dans les décisions que doivent prendre, à cette date, les anciens combattants, ne manque pas d'inquiéter beaucoup de personnes... L'atmosphère de 'bataille' n'est pas encore disparue.²⁵⁸

Chief superintendent of police in Lille, 2 June 1934

As the chief superintendent's report suggests, after the events of February 1934, a veteran-led attempt on power appeared more likely than it had ever been up to that point. On 8 July the Confederation was due to meet. Many believed that the veterans would then decide the fate of France. After the riot, the veterans were no longer alone in judging unsatisfactory the present state of affairs. Sections of French civil and political society came to accept that the Republic, now covered as much in blood as in the 'mud' of corruption, was in need of change. Political parties weighed into the reformist debate.²⁵⁹

Reformist thinking had a long heritage under the Third Republic.²⁶⁰ In the decades before the First World War, social elites expressed concern for the perceived competence and quality of parliamentarians entering the Palais-Bourbon. The solution, they claimed, lay in the organisation

²⁵⁸ AN F⁷ 13038, monthly reports from the Nord, 1 and 2 June 1934.

²⁵⁹ The amount of attention devoted to state reform programmes of specific groups varies. William Irvine's *French Conservatism in Crisis: The Republican Federation in the 1930s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) contains little on the subject within the FR – see pp. 100-102. Kalman's *Extreme Right*, pp. 13-61, examines in detail the plans of the Faisceau and the Croix de Feu/Parti social français. On the plans of La Rocque's movements see also Kéchichian, *Les Croix de Feu*, pp. 235-257; Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, pp. 112-119 and pp. 157-189; Passmore, *From Liberalism*, pp. 117-123 and pp. 226-229. Passmore also devotes attention to state reform in 'The construction of crisis', especially pp. 177-186. Monnet offers the best overall account of reform projects in *Refaire la République*. Gilles Le Béguec provides an excellent study of parliamentary recruitment in 'L'entrée au Palais Bourbon: Les filières privilégiées d'accès à la fonction parlementaire 1919-1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, Lille, 1989). A brief examination of state reform projects and the reasons for their defeat can be found in volume five of Edouard & Georges Bonnefous, *Histoire politique de la Troisième République*, 7 vols, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), p. 313, and volume six of Jacques Chastenot, *Histoire de la Troisième République*, 7 vols, (Paris: Hachette, 1962), p. 105. For the cases of individuals see Gilles Martinez, 'Joseph Barthélemy et la crise de la démocratie libérale', *Vingtième Siècle*, 59 (1998), pp. 28-47 and Thibaut Tellier, 'Paul Reynaud et la réforme de l'Etat en 1933-1934', *Vingtième Siècle*, 78 (2004), pp. 59-73.

²⁶⁰ Specifically see Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 21 and pp. 179-190; Le Béguec, 'L'entrée au Palais Bourbon', pp. 156-276 examines reformism prior to the First World War.

of democracy, the structural alteration of Republican institutions and electoral reform in the form of proportional representation (PR). Some revisionists recommended a strengthening of the executive and a more frequent recruitment of ministers from outside parliament in order to raise levels of competence.²⁶¹ Anti-parliamentarianism was common but groups differed in the strength of their condemnation and the proposed solution. While reform programmes sometimes contained similar points, the difference between a genuine concern for the improvement of parliamentary mores and the desire for a more radical overhaul (or destruction) of the Republic split conservatives.

The centre right criticised the lack of quality among parliamentarians and recommended reform within the system to correct the decline. In 1896, certain *progressistes*, including Raymond Poincaré, Louis Barthou and Paul Deschanel, while accepting to work within the democratic and Republican system, envisaged a change in the *esprit* of the regime through the modification of parliamentary rules, conduct and suffrage in order to restore efficiency and authority.²⁶² The right and extreme right condemned parliamentarianism *tout court*. Intellectuals such as Barrès, who described the ‘rootedness’ of all French in the land’s ‘blood and soil’, and Maurras, leader of the most energetic exponents of anti-Republicanism, the AF, denounced the divorce of the *pays légal* or parliament from the *pays réel* or the people. However, as the parliamentary right entered the Republican fold soon after the turn of the century, extremists would have to wait for success in the crisis of the interwar years.

After the elections of November 1919, in which the right-wing Bloc national triumphed, numerous groups and publications sprung up. They drew inspiration from the desire for post-war change and the reformist ‘spirit of 1919’. Most were concerned with a modification of the parliamentary regime. In the decade to come, the major political parties would include state reform policies in their manifestoes. But Republicans would continue to regard the notion of reforming the regime, and so straying from the Republican model, as suspect. Reform without constitutional revision was possible, yet few projects, if put into practice, would have left it completely untouched.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 158, 160-176, 206-214.

²⁶² Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 186; Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 14.

²⁶³ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 317.

The elections to the so-called sky blue (*bleu horizon*) chamber of 1919 saw 23 *mutilés* and 220 holders of the *Croix de Guerre* elected.²⁶⁴ Of all the veterans' associations, the UNC contributed most to this renewal of the parliamentary elite. *La Voix du combattant* boasted of 46 elected candidates of which 36 became deputies for the first time.²⁶⁵ Important actors in the new veterans' associations were often members of several reformist groups at once. Ernest Pezet, president of the UNC's Parisian section immediately after the war and a member of the association's policy-making committee, contributed to the pages of *Quatrième République*. This weekly publication, founded in August 1919, drew on the *esprit combattant* and demanded a modification in the rules of the Chamber while supporting Millerand's revisionist projects. Its long list of contributors included Joseph Barthélemy, Jacques Bardoux and Pierre Taittinger.²⁶⁶ While Pezet's Christian democratic values would distinguish him from the UNC's programme in the 1930s, his case nevertheless demonstrates the early immersion of UNC veterans in state reform projects. He was not alone. Pezet had been a member of the national council of the Jeune République group, to which Hubert Aubert also belonged before the war. Jeune République, revived by UNC member Marc Sangnier after the war, demanded reform that included the institution of the referendum, the suppression of the Senate, a 'social suffrage' of all intellectual and manual workers (who would be represented in an assembly elected on a regional basis), PR and the feminine vote.²⁶⁷

By the mid-1920s, more drastic conceptions of reform gained favour. Left-wing agitation in the strikes of 1919-1920 and the electoral victory of the Cartel des gauches in 1924 spread the fear of communist revolution. With the subsequent appearance of extreme-right extra-parliamentary formations in response to this, a growing number of groups came to express dissatisfaction with the regime. Doubly alarmed at the victory of the left and France's nascent economic difficulties, the right perceived the crisis as institutional; the Republic itself was failing. This concern ran parallel to a crisis of political programmes among the parties, who appeared unable to adapt to the problems of the time. Compared to the youthful and dynamic doctrines of fascism and communism, the French system seemed old and rusty to some as it

²⁶⁴ Le Béguec, 'L'entrée au Palais Bourbon', p. 333.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 355.

²⁶⁶ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 27. In 1923, Pezet's report on the civic role of veterans' associations to the UNC's national Vichy conference drew attention from the wider combatant movement. His proposals advocated the eventual electoral participation of the veterans.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., note 44, p. 556.

clunked from one crisis to another.²⁶⁸ Extra-parliamentary leagues attracted an ever-increasing membership and the growth of Mercier's Redressement Français showed a concern for the future of French government among the business and industrial elites too.²⁶⁹ Set against a background of the rising cost of living, the declining value of the Franc and growing political confrontation, the government's recourse to decree laws did little to remedy the image of parliamentary incompetence.

The fading of the left after the 1928 elections effectively relegated the reformist campaign to a secondary concern, though intellectuals and certain political figures such as Alexandre Millerand would continue to espouse reformist doctrines. The onset of the worldwide economic depression in France and the return of a centre-left Radical government in 1932 revived rightist dissatisfaction expressed in the mid-1920s. Allegations of political corruption and the accompanying press hysteria amplified discontent to an unprecedented level.

In 1934, no longer the domain of extremist groups, isolated thinkers or politically impotent veterans, reformist projects garnered close attention because of a combination of factors. Across the Rhine, Hitler's first year in power signalled that further challenges were to come to the Versailles treaty. Governmental stability was considered to be the key to confronting a resurgent Germany and the menace to French security that this entailed. In domestic politics, the persistence of the economic crisis, parliamentary scandals and the events of 6 February appeared to show that something was indeed wrong with the regime. For the leagues, the murder of their comrades in the riot compounded the perceived bankruptcy and illegality of the regime. As the press took up the reformist campaign, the previously ignorant and those who had simply paid lip service to reform now became convinced proponents, at least in the heated post-riot atmosphere.²⁷⁰ The Chamber and the hitherto reluctant Senate both founded commissions to examine reform projects. It appeared that, especially to the veterans who had developed reform ideas over the past decade, the time had finally come for reform.

Within the wider veterans' movement discussion of state reform gathered pace. The UF was traditionally reticent on matters of state reform. It opposed the discussion of the issue at the Confederation's congress of March 1933. The association was no less anti-parliamentarian than the rest of the combatants' movement but it feared that the issue of state reform was too bound

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 199.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 201-202.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 309.

up in politics and that constitutional revision would threaten the Republican regime. At this time, the UF chose a different tactic. It favoured the collaboration of the veterans' associations with the public powers.²⁷¹

A year later, the UF's position had changed dramatically. No longer would the association shun plans for state reform. The UF planned that the veterans would form the 'nucleus and the pivot' of a coalition of French forces charged with reform. The February riot played a significant role in this volte-face. It is important to note that the UF did not support Gaston Doumergue's government. Unlike the UNC, Pichot claimed that it was not on 6 February 1934 that the people of France had defended the regime, but on 12 February when the left mobilised its activists throughout the country.²⁷² Close to the Radical party, the association could not accept the extra-parliamentary manner in which Doumergue and the *gouvernement des vieux* (according to the UF) had come to power. If this was now the means by which governments were formed there was indeed something wrong with the functioning of the regime. In March 1934, Pichot saw but two alternatives for France: either reform would come from within the Republican system, or Doumergue's 'truce' would fail and revolutionary reform, through violence or a national assembly, would see a dictatorship installed in France.²⁷³

A meeting of the Confederation in April 1934 announced that on 8 July, the movement would pass judgement on Doumergue's government and its actions to that date. Some expressed fear for the fate of the Republic should this verdict be unfavourable. This chapter considers the UNC's plans for state reform and repositions the association in the reformist debate. It will be argued that the reform plans of the UNC were not moderate. Contrary to the conclusions of previous scholarship, when considered on its own merits the UNC's programme was closer to the right than the Republican centre.²⁷⁴ However, within the UNC, a single view on state reform did not exist. The UNC's plans may have had points in common with the right, but one must bear in mind that an association of nearly 900,000 members could not have possessed a single mentality. Moderates, conservatives and authoritarians co-existed.

²⁷¹ G. Rogé, 'La réforme de la constitution ou le voyage inutile', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 July 1933. A complete collection of the *Cahiers de l'UF* is available at the Archives Nationales under AS 43 Fonds Henri Pichot: 6 (years 1933-1936) and AS 43: 7 (years 1937-1939).

²⁷² H. Pichot, *Pour le rajeunissement français* (Vichy, 1934), p. 1.

²⁷³ AS 43 1: H. Pichot, 'L'Union fédérale au service du pays: Les délibérations du 11 mars 1934'; H. Pichot, 'Pour une autorité républicaine: Que fera l'Union fédérale?', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 1 March 1934.

²⁷⁴ Prost examines the state reform projects of the combatant movement in III, pp. 188-225.

Firstly, this chapter looks at the reformist fervour of 1934. Various political groups adopted reform programmes in the post-riot tumult. Apparent consensus seemed to herald constitutional revision but as tempers cooled reformists would be disappointed. Secondly, the chapter examines the events leading to the July ultimatum. Exasperated with alleged parliamentary dishonesty and deadlock, the veterans of the Confederation united to demand that their concerns be heard and acted upon. Thirdly, the chapter analyses the methods of the UNC's reform. The association favoured constitutional revision through a constituent assembly, a tenet of the right's programme. Moreover, in claiming to represent the people of France, the UNC appropriated the sole right to reform the regime. Finally, the chapter concludes with the reform campaign after 1938. As the Daladier government took France in an authoritarian direction, the UNC and UF's call for a public safety government signalled their willingness to abandon, perhaps permanently, parliamentary democracy and political pluralism. If this period did indeed prefigure Vichy, then the UNC's actions perhaps both illustrated and contributed to a more general *dérive autoritaire*.

The fever of 1934: Reforming the Republic

After 6 February 1934, the veterans, previously the vanguards of the reform agenda, now faced a field of competitors. During spring and summer of 1934, the theme of 'réforme de l'Etat' became a panacea for France's political and economic crisis. The parties could no longer ignore the apparent failings of the system. Each one tried to present its reform programme as unique yet different groups had similar points to their programme. Common to most were the desires to grant the prime minister the right to dissolution without the prior agreement of the Senate, enforce limitations on parliament's financial initiative and reorganise the premier's office. The majority of groups advocated the involvement of economic forces in the state. Parties across the political divide proposed the introduction of proportional representation, albeit for different reasons. The centre-right Alliance démocratique (AD) and the right-wing Fédération républicaine (FR) hoped that electoral reform would break the *cartelliste* majority in the Chamber. Paul Reynaud, head of former French premier André Tardieu's parliamentary group, urged a vote on a new electoral law in May. General elections would follow in June and

constitutional revision in July.²⁷⁵ On the left, the socialist and communist parties saw PR as a means to increase their representation in parliament.²⁷⁶

Right-wing plans for state reform generally targeted the left. After the removal of the Daladier government, the AD and the FR endeavoured to push home their advantage and break the *cartelliste* chamber.²⁷⁷ The FR's support for proportional representation and the women's and family vote stemmed too from a belief that these reforms would increase the conservative share in the Chamber.²⁷⁸ Tardieu's high-profile campaign, devised to the detriment of the left, identified deficiencies in the function and spirit of the regime that originated in the subordination of the executive to the legislature, the influence of interest groups on politicians and the outdated political practices and ideologies in place.²⁷⁹ Denouncing the left-wing menace at the heart of parliament, Tardieu claimed that socialism threatened the existence of the French state and undermined the nation through the spread of division and atheism. Each element of his programme aimed to erode socialist power. Tardieu took up a long-established argument of the right when he claimed that left-wing deputies needed spending powers more than their right-wing counterparts, in order to satisfy the demands of the interest groups that controlled them. The enfranchisement of women, believed to be conservative, would strengthen the right's share of the vote. Granting the government the right to dissolve the Chamber without the prior consent of the Senate would bypass this left-wing stronghold.²⁸⁰

The UNC's programme shared these points and given the association's anti-socialism one may speculate that these concerns informed its campaign. In October 1937, *La Voix du combattant* featured an interview in which Georges Barthelemy, deputy mayor of Puteaux, which stated that PR was the best way to 'barrer la route' to communism, extremist parties and prevent revolution.²⁸¹ With the *cartelliste* tactics of the left in mind, the UNC's *programme d'action civique* stated:

On ne verra plus avec le R[épresentation] P[roportionnelle] le spectacle d'impuissance que depuis les élections de 1932 la parti radical-socialiste, le plus nombreux de la Chambre,

²⁷⁵ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 339.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 320.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 320.

²⁷⁸ Irvine, *French Conservatism*, p. 101.

²⁷⁹ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, pp. 276-277.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 300-301.

²⁸¹ 'Faut-il instituer la représentation proportionnelle ? Interview de Georges Barthelemy', *La Vdc*, 2 October 1937.

donne au pays: essayant en vain de transposer à la Chambre le Cartel conclu, pour les élections, avec les socialistes SFIO, il n'a abouti pratiquement qu'à des impasses; et la paralysie qui a, de ce fait, frappé les Gouvernements quand ils voulaient réaliser un indispensable redressement financier, a évidemment contribué au discrédit des méthodes parlementaires.²⁸²

Reform programmes were ostensibly similar but the illusion of consensus hid conflict. Differences lay in the method of reform and who would be called on to carry it out. Historically, both left and right had focused on the return of 'competence' to government. However, depending on the political colours of the incumbent regime, all groups laid claim to competence in government or alleged a lack thereof.²⁸³ Even extra-parliamentary groups showed the influence of the competence debate. The Croix de Feu desired to see its own men (veterans and youth) in power. Whether precipitating a national crisis in which La Rocque would be called into government, or via electoral politics as the PSF attempted after 1936, the movement itself would rule. These men were the competent.²⁸⁴

The centre and the right both claimed that their plans would return talented, honest, sincere and competent men to power. The method of each camp differed. The centre-right AD and the centrist Radical party sought to effect change within the confines of the existing regime. This method of reform differed from the UNC's. Reform would progressively improve the efficiency and competence of the system without straying from the Republican ideal. To grant the prime minister the right to dissolve the Chamber was too great a threat to parliamentary sovereignty.²⁸⁵ PR would give the public a fair means by which to express itself and simultaneously improve the quality of men entering parliamentary posts. For supporters of this idea, there would be no trip to Versailles to design a new constitution.

Nevertheless, the reformist fervour of spring 1934 caused policy shifts, if only temporary, in the parties of the centre. The AD's manifesto of May 1934 adopted Tardieu's ideas on dissolution, the financial initiative and followed the FR in supporting PR and the family vote. This conversion to the reformist cause did not survive the cooling of passions as 1934 progressed. The Radical party harboured revisionists in its right wing including some who were

²⁸² J. Goy, V. Beauregard, L. Berthier & Action combattante, *Le programme d'action civique des anciens combattants* (Paris, 1935), pp. 35-36.

²⁸³ Le Béguec, 'L'entrée au Palais Bourbon', p. 313.

²⁸⁴ Passmore, 'The construction of crisis', p. 181.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

prepared to call a constituent assembly to reform the Republic.²⁸⁶ On the surface, the programme of the *jeunes radicaux* was similar to that of the UNC. On 5 May 1934, *L'Oeuvre* published the programme of the *jeunes radicaux*, namely Jacques Kayser, André Sauger and several collaborators. This youthful team hoped to install an 'ordered economy'. They prescribed several changes. To restore executive power, the prime minister's office would be reorganised, the number of ministers reduced and the right of dissolution granted to the government. PR and the removal of financial initiative from deputies would ensure that elected representatives were no longer the puppets of interest groups. An economic assembly based on organised corporations would allow the Republic to make best use of the professions in the running of the economy.²⁸⁷ However, in contrast to the UNC, the *jeunes radicaux* already enjoyed access to power. As part of a parliamentary party called to take part in left- and right-wing administrations, the Radical party reaped the rewards of the Republican arrangement. With a stake in the party system, the *jeunes radicaux* did not recommend a reduction in the number of deputies or the curtailment of political parties. Their concern lay in remaining within a parliamentary regime, not its distortion.

The competency debate influenced the *anciens combattants*. For the veterans' movement, service in the war rendered one competent. According to the UNC, 'bad' or incompetent politics was the practice of politicians while the 'civil action' of the veterans' movement was 'good' or competent: "Nos groupements de l'UNC sont constitués en dehors de toute préoccupation politique, économique ou sociale. Ni l'esprit de parti, ni l'esprit de classe ne nous aveuglent. Nous n'avons d'autre passion que celle du bien public. Nous nous sommes battus pour la France..."²⁸⁸ The degree of competency designated to particular politics rested on whether the veterans were involved in it or not.²⁸⁹

The leaders of neither the UNC nor the UF expressed the desire to lead France whether in a democratic framework or not. To do this would require political action whether through elections or a coup. The veterans rejected (at least publicly) electoral involvement. The UNC's plans were not fascist but this did not prevent some of the association's members expressing admiration for fascist regimes. In May 1936, René Villard of the Côtes du Nord group praised

²⁸⁶ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 319.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 310.

²⁸⁸ Goy et al, *Le programme d'action civique*, pp. 71-72.

²⁸⁹ Prost, III, p. 130.

Mussolini's 'paix romaine' in comparison to the 'paix espagnole' of Spanish revolutionaries. Indeed, he prescribed fascism as the antidote to communism.²⁹⁰

As we have seen in chapter one, admiration for and experience of the military informed the UNC's conception of society. The association claimed to embrace the egalitarianism of the trench community but aspects of military life, namely duty and hierarchy, remained appealing. Paul Galland wrote: "Une armée ne peut vaincre que si, du haut en bas de la hiérarchie, du généralissime au soldat de deuxième classe, chacun fait son «boulot», à sa place, et du mieux qu'il peut".²⁹¹ He saw no contradiction in remaining a free man who consented to his 'servitudes' and put his duty before his rights.²⁹² Aubert also concluded that the nation would function more efficiently if everyone was 'put in their place'.²⁹³ The government should function as an army's general staff. In 1939, following the UNC and UF's campaign for a public safety government, Pichot proposed this solution to the UNC's national congress:

La démocratie plus qu'aucun autre régime a besoin d'autorité car la démocratie est un régime dangereux....Nous avons vu se succéder nombre de ministères composés de 25 à 30 ministres. Il n'est pas besoin de tant de gens pour gouverner. Un gouvernement c'est d'abord un chef...il commande et il contrôle. Pourquoi un ministère ne serait-il pas composé à l'image des états-majors d'armée tels qu'ils fonctionnaient pendant la guerre?²⁹⁴

Given their emphasis on military service as the ultimate qualification of competence, it is likely that a prominent figure from within the army, perhaps Marshal Pétain (whose name was raised occasionally in the veterans' plans), would have assumed the role of national leader. Deemed to be above partisan politics and therefore incorruptible, some believed that the Marshal would be a leader with France's interests at heart. Jean Goy supported this choice as Pétain's alleged distance from party politics heightened his prestige.²⁹⁵ The UNC was not alone in its admiration for Pétain. In 1935, the results of a poll in *Le Petit Journal* declared Pétain the most popular choice of dictator in France.²⁹⁶ In March 1938, Pichot suggested to President Lebrun that Pétain be called to lead France. The same month, Goy wrote that in the event of Pétain's refusal,

²⁹⁰ R. Villard, 'Fascisme!', *Le Combattant des Côtes du Nord*, May 1936.

²⁹¹ P. Galland, 'Etrennes 1938'. *La Vdc*, 1 January 1938.

²⁹² P. Galland, 'Les Droits et le Devoir', *La Vdc*, 23 January 1937.

²⁹³ H. Aubert, 'Pour que ça aille bien', *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935.

²⁹⁴ Speech by Henri Pichot, printed in 'Un Nouveau et Magnifique Succès: Arcachon réserve aux participants du XX Congrès un inoubliable accueil', *La Vdc*, 20-27 May 1939.

²⁹⁵ Action combattante, *Les Anciens Combattants et la Confédération Générale du Travail*, (Paris, 1934), p. 16.

²⁹⁶ Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 124.

“...vous ne nous ferez pas croire qu’il n’y a pas, à la tête de notre armée, de notre marine, des chefs capables de prendre leurs responsabilités”.²⁹⁷

The team around the new head of government would contain veterans and it was these men who would restore order to France. The *Cahiers de l’UF* planned that: “Le chef du gouvernement de salut public... appelle à lui les hommes de son choix qui, ayant donné leur mesure dans l’oeuvre combattante, lui paraissent susceptibles de devenir des hommes de gouvernement”.²⁹⁸ Pichot insisted that if parliament refused the plan for the government of public safety then it should be dissolved, at which point the veterans would ‘throw themselves into the fight’.²⁹⁹ Described as competent, sincere and honest, these qualities appeared to qualify the veterans for the task at hand. Aubert wrote that salvation lay in the veterans alone.³⁰⁰

The association had long espoused such a plan. In January 1934, president of the UNC’s Ardennes group Schmitt warned that the electorate was sick and tired of the profiteers and buffoons in power. Political debauchery may well cause a crisis of regime and in this event the veterans would be ready to ‘sweep’ the house.³⁰¹ Hoffmann, secretary general of the UNC’s Action combattante in the Pyrénées-Orientales, was unambiguous in his endorsement of the veterans’ historical claim to power:

«Peut-on sans crainte confier les destinées politiques du pays aux anciens combattants, à ceux qui, pendant plus de quatre ans, ont enduré les souffrances physiques et morales pour lutter contre l’envahisseur, conserver à notre pays l’intégrité de son territoire et la liberté à laquelle nous sommes si profondément attachés?» Quant à nous, nous répondons catégoriquement par l’affirmative, car le combattant qui a su se battre et mener le Pays à la victoire saura aussi, sans nul doute, diriger la vie politique de la France Républicaine.³⁰²

Around this national saviour, the competent men of the veterans’ Republic would almost certainly have been drawn from outside the parliamentary milieu from men assumed to have proved their ‘national’ credentials. The UNC never stated that it would take power whether through force or via elections. It is unclear, therefore, what the association meant when it said it

²⁹⁷ ‘Réunis à la Salle Wagram les anciens combattants réclament un gouvernement de salut public’, *Le Figaro*, 27 March 1938.

²⁹⁸ H. Pichot, ‘Salut Public. Combattants au gouvernement’, *Cahiers de l’UF*, 20 April 1938.

²⁹⁹ ‘L’heure des combinaisons est finie déclare M. Pichot qui, au nom des anciens combattants demande la constitution d’un gouvernement de salut public’, *Le Figaro*, 12 October 1938.

³⁰⁰ H. Aubert, ‘Pour que ça aille bien’, *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935.

³⁰¹ M. Schmitt, ‘L’orage gronde’, *La Vdc*, 6 January 1934.

³⁰² Hoffmann, ‘Les Anciens Combattants et la politique’, *La Vdc*, 2 March 1935.

would 'sweep' the politicians from power or 'cleanse' France of the party spirit. Perhaps the UNC meant it would attempt to change gradually the morality of parliament via a public campaign. This was probably the choice of moderates in the movement. Or, conversely, maybe the association (and its extremist tendency) did desire to enter government and evict democratically elected representatives. Whatever the association's intentions, one can say that given the tense atmosphere in France at the time, its statements were ambiguous.

Not only did the UNC believe that its veterans were qualified to lead France but also that the mass of the movement represented a support base for the new government. Prost writes that the UNC and the UF supported the Daladier government in 1938. The plan for the government of public safety was designed to allow his administration to work. The associations hoped to fulfil the role of a supportive moral force upon which the government could rely. In some ways this role would be analogous to that of the single party in authoritarian regimes.³⁰³ When their plans for the disbandment of political parties are taken into account with this envisaged role, concern for political pluralism in the associations seems slight. Indeed, Goy made it clear that the public safety government, although 'national' in character, would not include representatives of every party.³⁰⁴

Additionally, both the UNC and the UF saw a role for themselves in the state apparatus. In October 1938, Aubert, under the pseudonym François Malval, described a new role for the veterans in the event of war. With the army and the police otherwise occupied, the veterans would keep a watchful eye on the three million foreigners resident in France. In particular, he singled out factory workers for intensive surveillance, as they would earn a good deal more than front soldiers.³⁰⁵ This idea was not unique to the UNC. An undated and unsigned document in the archives of the UF's René Cassin specified that police and security service auxiliaries would be recruited among those who were not mobilised. The author counted upon collaboration between the UF and the authorities for the maintenance of internal security.³⁰⁶ *Les Cahiers de*

³⁰³ Prost, I, pp. 197-198.

³⁰⁴ Réunis à la Salle Wagram les anciens combattants réclament un gouvernement de salut public', *Le Figaro*, 27 March 1938.

³⁰⁵ F. Malval, 'Pour la défense intérieur du Pays afin que ceux de l'avant aient toute tranquillité', *La Vdc*, 1 October 1938.

³⁰⁶ AN 382 A[rchives] P[rivées] Fonds René Cassin: 11, anonymous and undated document in Cassin's dossiers on the UF.

l'UF echoed these sentiments in May 1939.³⁰⁷ However, though these plans appeared to outline a French-style Home Guard, they were not limited to times of war. In fact, Aubert wrote: “Déjà dans quelques communes où des éléments étrangers commençaient à s’exciter au cours des derniers jours, il a suffi que quelques anciens combattants fassent la police pour que tout rentre dans l’ordre”.³⁰⁸

The UNC believed that reform could neither come from within parliament nor without revision of the constitution. Doumergue’s failure to initiate a reform programme appeared to confirm parliament’s inability to reform. The premier would not allow reformists to force his hand. He allowed the crisis to pass and failed to profit from the high confidence he enjoyed from the people and parties, which would have forced the senate to accept dissolution.³⁰⁹ In May, the Doumergue government abstained from the vote on electoral reform (the first condition of reform in most parties’ programmes). The partisans of PR lost by 11 votes.³¹⁰

If electoral reform enjoyed cross party support, why did it fail to pass? For the socialists and communists, Doumergue had come to power through the action of leaguers and fascists, a fact that undermined the perceived legitimacy of his government. Although hailed by some as a national saviour, for the left he was still a man of the right. Léon Blum led a concerted campaign against Doumergue’s plans, behind which he saw the threat of Tardieu.³¹¹ Denouncing the autocratic designs of the Doumergue-Tardieu partnership, Blum found support in the Radical party.³¹² On the right, supporters of the FR and the AD were not unanimous in their support for dissolution and revision. The question of constitutional revision was still the *bête noire* of the conservative camp.³¹³ After the Chamber voted to suspend discussion of electoral reform, Aubert remarked bitterly that this should come as no surprise. Politicians were not in the habit of committing political suicide. The men of the Chamber were concerned only with remaining in office until the end of their mandate whether this was in accordance with the will of the nation or

³⁰⁷ M. Randoux, ‘Suggestions sur le rôle des Anciens Combattants si une guerre était imposée à la France’, *Cahiers de l’UF*, 10 May 1939.

³⁰⁸ F. Malval, ‘Pour la défense intérieur du Pays afin que ceux de l’avant aient toute tranquillité’, *La Vdc*, 1 October 1938. See also C. Inargues, ‘En cas de mobilisation, chacun à sa place’, *La Vdc*, 15 April 1939.

³⁰⁹ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 339.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 348.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

not. Deputies would not enact any serious reform of the state because, Aubert concluded, "...they are the State".³¹⁴

8 July 1934: The veterans' ultimatum

Having posed itself as the self-appointed agent of national renovation since the 1920s, in spring 1934 the *mouvement combattant* reasserted its moral monopoly. Some observers saw the 6 February protest as the eruption of the veterans onto the political scene.³¹⁵ After the riot, pre-existing political allegiances still split the two largest associations yet the UF's conversion to a reformist mentality at least brought it onto common ground with the UNC. Significantly, though the UNC initially backed the Doumergue government while the UF did not, both now agreed on the necessity of state reform. Even during times of conflict between the organisations, both pursued reformist policies and would come together again in 1938 in the campaign for a government of public safety. The seriousness of thought now devoted to state reform ideas caused excitement in the ranks of the veterans' movement. Some veterans believed that the era of the parties was truly in its death throes. It appeared that finally their programme would come to the attention of a wider audience.

The Confederation's own commission on state reform, the so-called *commission des 19*, gained new impetus. At a meeting of its national council on 23-25 March 1934, the associations met to discuss the findings of this commission. The principle of political action within the remit of the Confederation was agreed with a large majority as were the other recommendations of the commission: a programme of reform similar to the UNC's that supported proportional representation, female suffrage and the dissolution of the legislature after electoral reform.³¹⁶

The following month, in response to a threat to pensions provision, the veterans' movement made its most audacious public demand, spurred on by the new found consensus and enthusiasm that permeated the Confederation. In an attempt to economise, Doumergue requested that the veterans accept a 3% reduction on all pensions. If the veterans refused, the premier would resign. On 12 April 1934, an extraordinary meeting of the Confederation's council met to discuss the government's offer. Split between those who wanted to reject the offer and those who were concerned that the veterans would be blamed for the fall of the government, the

³¹⁴ H. Aubert, 'Celle sans laquelle on ne pourra rien faire', *La Vdc*, 9 June 1934.

³¹⁵ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 315.

³¹⁶ Prost, I, p. 167.

Confederation accepted the reduction under the proviso that the government begin the process of national recovery defined according to the veterans' reform programme of March, with a deadline of 1 July. The associations would review the government's progress at the meeting of the Confederation on 7-8 July 1934 and pass judgement on whether or not the government had acted upon the good faith of the veterans. Speaking to the veterans in attendance, Goy sent out a warning to the government: "Donnons un rendez-vous au Gouvernement et qu'il fasse appliquer son programme contrôlé par nous. C'est l'avant-dernière carte du régime qui se joue. Vous, vous représentez la dernière carte. Gardons la nôtre en réserve, car nous n'aurons pas le droit de ne pas réussir".³¹⁷ If the Confederation decided that the government had not acted in a satisfactory manner, they would topple the government by forcing Rivollet, minister for pensions and head of the Confederation, to resign his portfolio.

In May 1934, the UNC held its annual national congress at Metz. Following the veterans' demonstration in February and the meetings of the Confederation in March and April, the national press devoted more attention than usual to the national veterans' congresses that year. *Le Matin* recognised the significance of the UNC's meeting. Articles emphasised the strength of the association and described it as 'powerful' and a 'formidable army' similar to that which had entered Metz after the Great War.³¹⁸ Moving beyond the concerns of a single association, the veterans were meeting to decide once again whether to respond to the call of the country. *Le Matin* reported: "Ce sont des assises graves, dramatiques presque où devront dire s'ils doivent abdiquer ou, au contraire, faire acte de salut public ceux qui, au prix du plus lourd sacrifice, ont jadis sauvé un pays qui tombait".³¹⁹ Reports devoted special attention to Goy's statements on electoral and state reform.³²⁰ The left-wing press saw more sinister motives behind the UNC's congress. *L'Humanité* warned that the fascists in the UNC were using the congress to prepare another assault in the style of the February troubles.³²¹

³¹⁷ 'Les anciens combattants et les décrets-lois: Le Conseil national s'est réuni hier pour étudier la réponse à faire aux propositions gouvernementales', *L'Ouest-Eclair*, 13 April 1934.

³¹⁸ 'Le congrès de l'UNC à Metz: M. Lebecq parle du rôle des anciens combattants', *Le Matin*, 12 May 1934; 'Le congrès de l'UNC a traité hier de la politique franco-allemande et de la réforme de l'Etat', *Le Matin*, 13 May 1934; 'Le congrès de l'UNC à Metz', *Le Matin*, 14 May 1934.

³¹⁹ 'Le congrès de l'UNC à Metz: M. Lebecq parle du rôle des anciens combattants', *Le Matin*, 12 May 1934.

³²⁰ Ibid. ; 'Le congrès de l'UNC a traité hier de la politique franco-allemande et de la réforme de l'Etat', 13 May 1934.

³²¹ 'Le Congrès des anciens combattants: A Metz, l'UNC élabore un programme nettement fasciste', *L'Humanité*, 12 May 1934.

For Lebecq and the UNC, the Metz congress marked the association's re-orientation towards civic action and national politics. The arrival in power of the 'national' Doumergue government was but the first step on the road to French salvation. In his report on state reform, Goy explained that 6 February had witnessed the initial stage of a revolution.³²² It was not intended to be the end of the UNC's political action. The UNC had not prepared a team to take power by force and so, Goy claimed, the revolutionary period continued even after the arrival of the Doumergue government. The next step would be constitutional and state reform, specified as the right for the president to dissolve parliament without the Senate's agreement, a reduction in the number of ministers, the appointment of some ministers from outside parliament, the removal of spending initiative from the legislature and the strict separation of powers.³²³ Responsible for the installation in power of a new government, the veterans were now accountable to the people of France.

The UF's congress at Vichy fell under the spotlight later that month. Pichot was convinced of the necessity of reform to the survival of the Republic. Discussion of politics was useless if the means by which to pursue this politics – parliament – was faulty. The congress unanimously accepted Pichot's report on 22 May 1934 and on the strength of it returned him to the presidency of the organisation. Having previously condemned the 6 February riot, Pichot issued a warning to the Doumergue government: "Quel a été le premier résultat de cette intervention violente?...un gouvernement de «vieux» au pouvoir, une trêve qui n'est ni l'équilibre, ni l'ordre, ni la sécurité; un apaisement qui n'est que de l'inertie et n'a même pas fait revenir la confiance".³²⁴ *Le Matin* reported Pichot's statement to the congress. His stance hardened further:

M. Pichot fixe la date, le 8 juillet. Si le gouvernement, à cette date, n'a ni réprimé la fraude, ni clos les affaires judiciaires, ni fait reculer le prix de la vie, ni engagé la réforme fiscale, c'est la rupture. L'équipe de coalition, dont M. Pichot a parlé nettement, se met à l'oeuvre et prend le gouvernail. L'assemblée, éberluée sans doute, mais dominée, applaudit.³²⁵

³²² J. Goy, 'La réforme de l'Etat', *XV Congrès National de l'UNC: Rapports, Discussions, Discours* (Paris, 1934), p. 283.

³²³ Motion on state reform, *XV Congrès National de l'UNC: Rapports, Discussions, Discours* (Paris, 1934), p. 498.

³²⁴ 'Le Congrès à Vichy de l'Union fédérale des anciens combattants', *Le Matin*, 22 May 1934.

³²⁵ Ibid.

Similar threats appeared in the UNC's press. Désiré Tritsch compared the 8 July deadline to the decision in 1791 to build the Republic on the 'burning walls of a tired and impotent regime'.³²⁶ Aubert warned of government dupery if the deadline was postponed, yet he was aware of the consequences if the veterans decided to break with the government:

En d'autres termes, l'expérience se poursuit. Convient-il d'y mettre fin? Si l'on dit oui, je demande à connaître celle qu'on veut entreprendre: d'autant que le Ministère a une majorité à la Chambre et au Sénat et que l'opinion publique lui est encore sympathique. En brisant brutalement, nous ferions acte révolutionnaire. Est-ce bien le moment?³²⁷

Attention remained fixed on state reform and the 8 July deadline. Meetings of the *commission des 19* became more frequent as the veterans planned for the failure of the government. Heightening public anticipation of the day, the left-wing coalition, the Front commun, announced its decision to convene at Place de la Nation. That same evening, the Croix de Feu was to march to the Arc de Triomphe. A UNC ceremony at the inauguration of a war memorial in the fourth *arrondissement* would be preceded by a parade at Place de la Bastille. With the forces of the left and right taking to the streets, a revolution appeared likely to some. *La Croix* reported that the deadline had caused some amount of fear in 'high places'.³²⁸ Yet this was not only true of those in government. The UNC recognised that the Confederation's apparent ultimatum had caused fear among certain sectors of public opinion, as did the police. In Quimper (Finistère), the police superintendent reported that the public feared that if the veterans pronounced themselves dissatisfied then violence would follow.³²⁹ Similar anxiety was expressed in Lille and Lens.³³⁰ *Le Populaire* reported: "Tout le monde parle du 8 juillet".³³¹ Paul Vaillant-Couturier offered the hand of the communist party to veterans. He feared that the veteran movement's leaders would dupe their former comrades-in-arms.³³² La Rocque warned his followers to maintain their sang-froid, amid stories of 'mysterious meetings' and

³²⁶ D. Tritsch, 'Un programme à réaliser', *La Vdc*, 7 July 1934.

³²⁷ H. Aubert, 'Examen de conscience', *La Vdc*, 7 July 1934.

³²⁸ 'A la veille du 8 juillet', *La Croix*, 6 July 1934.

³²⁹ AN F⁷ 13033, monthly report from Finistère, 7 February 1934.

³³⁰ AN F⁷ 13038, monthly reports from the Nord, 1 and 2 June 1934.

³³¹ C. Planche, 'Chez les anciens combattants: L'échéance du 8 juillet', *Le Populaire*, 28 May 1934.

³³² P. Vaillant-Couturier, 'Aujourd'hui: Anciens combattants nous vous tendons la main', *L'Humanité*, 27 June 1934.

‘interchangeable and sensational alliances’ that threatened bloodshed in the capital.³³³ Referring to the recent congresses, *Le Matin* concluded that the policies outlined at these meetings demonstrated that the veterans were not just ‘talking hot air’.³³⁴ Gustave Hervé of *Victoire* was more sceptical: “Une Assemblée Constituante nommée par les organisations d’Anciens Combattants? On ne voit pas cela sans effroi. Quelle pagaille! Quelle Tour de Babel! Une nouvelle Chambre de députés, quoi!”.³³⁵ Revolutions, Hervé wrote, did not occur on fixed dates. *Le Temps* warned that the veterans would become simply another political formation if they took up politics. They had defended the entire nation during the war and not their individual conception of this nation that now threatened to split the movement.³³⁶

Ultimately, the UNC’s announcement on its decision *not* to vote in favour of toppling the government allayed some fears. In the national press, Goy made it clear that the UNC did not want to cause another ministerial crisis. The association did not believe that Doumergue had satisfied the veterans’ demands but it favoured the postponement of the deadline.³³⁷ In spite of the apparent growing unity within the combatant movement, at the meeting of 7-8 July the veterans could agree upon little else but the failure of the government. A motion intended to oblige Rivollet to resign was defeated, 292 votes to 290.³³⁸ The Confederation split along established political lines. Groups on the right, such as the AGMG supported Doumergue; the UF, FNCR and FOP on the left did not.

The UF’s reaction when the July deadline arrived indicated just how far it had moved into the reformist camp. The UF delivered a stinging criticism of the Confederation for failing to follow through with the veterans’ threat to topple the government. Whereas the UNC favoured a postponement of the deadline, the UF judged that the government had failed to institute reform. Moreover, as we will see below, the UF was now prepared to accept an extra-parliamentary method of reform through a constituent assembly. This was a remarkable turnaround for an association that had once shunned all discussion of reform. It appeared that following the

³³³ Colonel F. de La Rocque, ‘Sang-froid’, *Le Flambeau*, 1 July 1934.

³³⁴ ‘Ce qu’est l’échéance du 8 juillet’, *Le Matin*, 29 May 1934.

³³⁵ G. Hervé, ‘L’échéance du 8 juillet ?’, *Victoire*, 27 June 1934.

³³⁶ Excerpt from *Le Temps*, reproduced in H. Aubert, ‘La voix des sirènes’, *La Vdc*, 2 June 1934.

³³⁷ C. de Rollepote, ‘Que se passera-t-il le 8 juillet prochain ?’, *Excelsior*, 29 June 1934; H. de Kérillis, ‘M. Déat n’aura pas sa «révolution» du 8 juillet’, *Echo de Paris*, 7 July 1934; ‘A la veille du 8 juillet’, *La Croix*, 6 July 1934; G. Sanvoisin, ‘Le congrès des anciens combattants commence cet après-midi’, *Le Figaro*, 7 July 1934; ‘Editorial: 8 juillet ?’, *Le Peuple*, 29 June 1934.

³³⁸ Prost puts the vote at 291 versus 291, suggesting that the figures were doctored. See Prost, I, p. 170.

manner in which Doumergue had come to power and his failure to bring about reform, the UF had lost faith in the ability of parliament to change the regime.³³⁹

For the UNC, the postponement of the deadline would be the best course of action, but the group reassured members that it would not be duped.³⁴⁰ Provincial UNC groups did not unanimously support the national association's decision. On 8 July, the Limousin group voted against granting the government an extension, in opposition to the vote of the national UNC.³⁴¹ Gérard de Cromières, the section president, criticised the Parisian leadership for its ignorance of provincial opinion and its vulnerability to government intrigue.

Henry de Kérillis congratulated UNC members Goy, Lebecq and Beauregard for defeating a politically motivated motion against the government.³⁴² *Le Figaro* expressed relief at the veterans' decision, as did *La Croix*, which claimed that the veterans had avoided being drawn into the revolutionary plans of the neo-socialists and *syndicalistes*.³⁴³ While affording the veterans the right to judge the acts of the national government, *Le Temps* nevertheless required that this judgment be moral and not political.³⁴⁴

One should not regard the UNC's action as supportive of parliamentary democracy. The UNC reacted to successive administrations in different ways despite the fact that the constitutional regime remained the same. The perceived undesirability of left-wing governments meant that when administrations of this political allegiance gained power, the UNC framed the change in composition of the government as a change of *regime*. In brief, at times the value and legitimacy of the Republic in the eyes of the UNC was dependent upon the political colours of the incumbent government. A right-wing administration was more acceptable than one of the left. The advent of the right-wing Doumergue administration gave the UNC a renewed sense of optimism. The association claimed the credit for the fall of a corrupt government. It would appear that the UNC found more palatable a right-wing government installed by street action, than the left-wing *cartelliste* rule. With the association declaring its confidence in the government, Galland wrote that at last the 'abscess had been lanced' and that the new

³³⁹ 'Ordre du jour de l'UF, 7 juillet 1934'; Léon Viala, 'Après le 8 juillet', *Les Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 July 1934.

³⁴⁰ H. Aubert, 'La voix des sirènes', *La Vdc*, 7 July 1934.

³⁴¹ 'Assemblée générale du 21 octobre 1934', *Le Combattant du Centre*, December 1934.

³⁴² H. de Kérillis, 'Par 294 voix contre 288 l'Assemblée écarte une motion qui signifiait, pratiquement, la défiance au gouvernement', *Echo de Paris*, 9 July 1934.

³⁴³ G. Sanvoisin, 'L'action gouvernementale et le conseil national des anciens combattants', *Le Figaro*, 9 July 1934; 'Le Conseil extraordinaire de la Confédération nationale des anciens combattants', *La Croix*, 10 July 1934.

³⁴⁴ 'L'Etat et les anciens combattants', *Le Temps*, 9 July 1934.

government imposed by the veterans could now begin the purification of parliamentary mores.³⁴⁵ In contrast, the UNC's reaction to the Popular Front government, an elected left-wing combination, was one of concern for the nature of the regime at large. Amid accusations of treachery and fear of communist revolution, the UNC questioned the continued existence of the Republic in France: "Ce sont des méthodes bolchevistes qui sont ainsi instaurées en France... Et l'on prétend que nous sommes en République!".³⁴⁶

However, the UNC's opposition to the parliamentary regime ran deeper than partisan politics. During the Doumergue's reign, the UNC placed its confidence in the government but still expressed 'some anguish in this confidence'.³⁴⁷ In June 1935, Galland, claimed that all politicians whether 'good' or 'bad' should be thrown together 'in the same sack'.³⁴⁸ Aubert warned that the 'gangsters are still the masters' of the Third Republic.³⁴⁹ As the July deadline approached and the long-awaited reforms failed to materialise, the UNC's faith in the Doumergue government began to falter. Perhaps even the saviour from Tournefeuille could not remedy the situation. According to Galland, the UNC would only be satisfied once the politicians and the population understood that its veterans intended to be at the heart of and to direct state reform.³⁵⁰

In October, Doumergue took up the revisionist cause once again in an attempt to shore up his failing popularity. Though he proposed measures that were accepted as necessary in spring, Doumergue's plan now scared deputies who feared constitutional revision and its implications for the parliamentary regime. The fever of February 1934 had passed and cool heads reasserted themselves.³⁵¹ The Radicals, searching for allies on the right to oppose Doumergue, found support in Pierre-Etienne Flandin's AD and his centre-right allies. The AD renounced reformism and opted to effect improvement through a concerted bi-partisan effort.³⁵² In November 1934, Flandin succeeded Doumergue to the premiership and the following January expressed his opposition to constitutional revision. The centre right reaffirmed its conservatism in matters of

³⁴⁵ P. Galland, 'Ambassadeurs de la justice', *La Vdc*, 10 March 1934; P. Galland, 'Raisons de la crise', 24 March 1934.

³⁴⁶ 'La dictature de la CGT', *La Vdc*, 18 December 1937.

³⁴⁷ P. Galland, 'Raisons de la crise', *La Vdc*, 24 March 1934.

³⁴⁸ P. Galland, 'Le Divorce', *La Vdc*, 22 June 1935.

³⁴⁹ H. Aubert, 'Lettre ouverte au Président Doumergue', *La Vdc*, 7 April 1934.

³⁵⁰ P. Galland, 'La Révolution dans l'ordre', *La Vdc*, 21 April 1934.

³⁵¹ Chastenot, *Histoire de la Troisième République*, VI, p. 105.

³⁵² Monnet, *Refaire la République*, pp. 342-343.

reform and its adherence to the Republican ideal. Reliant on the support of Radicals, Flandin did not wish to jeopardise his position.³⁵³

Ten days after the Doumergue government came to an end, Lebecq spoke at a meeting of the Lyonnais UNC. Expressing the discontent within the UNC, he claimed that ultimately the state of France before and after the 6 February had remained the same.³⁵⁴ The UF was now satisfied to see the Radicals back in government. As the Doumergue administration entered what would be its final months, the UF's language on state reform had come to resemble that of the UNC. It spoke of prioritising one's duty over one's rights and discerned a divorce between the present parliament and public opinion.³⁵⁵ However, in spite of Pichot's warning to Flandin that it was the last chance for parliament, the UF's more extreme demands now faded. Tellingly, no motion on state reform was published in the motions of the national congress in 1935. There was no renewed call for a constituent. Indeed the UF now criticised parliament for placing too much power in the hands of the executive, the reverse of the UNC's argument.³⁵⁶

The veterans had long decried the defects of the parliamentary regime and presented themselves as the only men qualified to restore France to her former self. The 8 July deadline marked an escalation in veteran tactics. An unelected body, the Confederation now formally attempted to act as a self-appointed auditor. The movement showed signs of an increasing authoritarianism as it threatened the government and held Doumergue to ransom. The demands of the veterans stemmed from a belief in their own moral and ideological superiority and do not give cause for surprise. After all, the UNC's ideas, as expressed in the Wagram manifesto, gained new impetus after the association's participation in the direct action of the February riots. Expressions in favour of more extreme tactics provide evidence of a move to authoritarianism within the combatant movement at this time.

Wedded to particular ideologies, political groups chose absolute and definitive solutions instead of following formulas that would allow interaction and negotiation.³⁵⁷ The right's distrust of the socialist-communist alliance and the left's suspicion of fascism precluded any unified attempt to solve problems. Ultimately, reformers could not escape the fact that their

³⁵³ Bonnefous, *Histoire politique*, V, p. 313.

³⁵⁴ Archives départementales du Rhône (ADR), 4M police politique, 33:1, 19 November 1934.

³⁵⁵ G. Rogé, 'La réforme de l'état: Une trouble tâche', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 September 1934.

³⁵⁶ L. Viala, 'Abdication', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 July 1935.

³⁵⁷ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 357.

campaign began on the night of 6 February. Of course, the veterans' revolution did not materialise yet this should in no way diminish the seriousness of the UNC's plans. With the apparent failure of Doumergue, it seemed that reform would not come from within the Chamber. Would reform, then, be imposed by extra-parliamentary means? Aubert mused upon this option on 7 July, the day before the veterans' meeting. While the government had improved in some areas, the experience of this parliament mirrored that of its predecessors.³⁵⁸

'Une Constituante! Ou le pays est f...!'

As the Doumergue administration entered its final weeks, the UNC's disillusion seemed complete. Confronted with a regime that could not reform itself, Aubert suggested a more radical treatment: "Le temps est passé où les pilules oratoires pouvaient faire effet. Aujourd'hui, c'est un traitement sévère qu'il convient d'administrer au pays malade, quelques coups de bistouri qu'il faut avoir le courage de donner ici et là pour éviter que ne gagne plus largement la gangrène".³⁵⁹ A week later, Etienne Bourrut-Lacouture of the UNC wrote: "Si la réforme électorale... ne se fait pas avec le Parlement, elle se fera sans lui".³⁶⁰ The UNC's calls for a constituent assembly placed it in the sphere of the right and extreme right rather than the centre. Unconcerned with solely improving the quality of parliamentarians, the right and extreme right attacked parliamentarianism itself. The FR advocated PR, female suffrage, the family and obligatory vote, limitations on parliamentary spending initiative, a reduction in the number of parliamentarians and the introduction of a supreme court.³⁶¹ In January 1934 party chief Louis Marin demanded a 'true' constitution and the FR aligned with Tardieu's views on reform in June 1934.³⁶² The UNC's programme included the features of the FR's campaign, although the veterans' association did not intend to make voting obligatory. Both the UNC and the FR required constitutional revision after dissolution of the Chamber.

Plans for a constituent assembly were not unique to the UNC. On the initiative of the Semaine du combattant (SDC) an inter-associational meeting took place in February 1932.

³⁵⁸ H. Aubert, 'Examen de conscience', *La Vdc*, 7 July 1934.

³⁵⁹ H. Aubert, 'En écoutant le Président Doumergue', *La Vdc*, 29 September 1934.

³⁶⁰ E. Bourrut-Lacouture, 'Pour la salutaire réforme nous arracherons l'Etat à sa routine', *La Vdc*, 6 October 1934.

³⁶¹ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, pp. 317-318.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 318.

Members reached a decision on four changes to the constitution: a strengthening of the executive, an independent and reorganised legislature, the representation of economic and social forces in the state and the creation of a supreme court. The motion ended with a call to form a constituent assembly. While the discussion of a constituent worried orthodox Republicans within the movement, the argument of the SDC's Maurice de Barral persuaded attendees at the meeting to back the idea. De Barral argued that the most serious circumstances demanded exceptional remedies.³⁶³ The meeting created a permanent executive commission charged with making the French understand that, in the present situation, constitutional reform was the first condition of any recovery.³⁶⁴

A year later, veteran Robert Monnier's report of 27 January 1933 on constitutional change concluded that the present parliament was unable to reform itself. The report repeated the call for the formation of a constituent assembly composed of about 100 elected representatives and extra-parliamentary elements, specifically 50 'great personalities' chosen by their peers.³⁶⁵ Reported in *La Voix du combattant*, the article concluded with a desperate call for reform, legal or otherwise: "Quel que soit l'homme qui, demain, prendra légalement ou illégalement les rênes du pouvoir, nous lui soumettrons la motion d'avoir à réunir une Constituante réclamée par la Confédération des AC. Il faut que s'exprime, souverainement, la volonté nationale. Une Constituante!... ou le Pays est f.....".³⁶⁶ Several days earlier, Henry Rossignol, at the time president of the UNC, had taken part in a conference on state reform at the Sorbonne. He diagnosed problems in the legislature, which had slowly been taken over by syndicalism and was now more powerful than the executive.³⁶⁷ This meeting also ended with the condition that state reform would come from within a national constituent assembly.³⁶⁸

The idea persisted into 1934. The meeting of the Confederation in late March 1934 heard secretary general of the FNCR Jean Sennac's report on direct action in which he spoke of 'the coming Constituent assembly as if its meeting was only a matter of days away'.³⁶⁹ In the UNC's pre-congress reports of April 1934, Goy, Léon Berthier and Victor Beauregard envisaged the

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 223.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 224.

³⁶⁵ A. Colleau, 'L'Action civique des AC: De quoi demain sera-t-il fait?', *La Vdc*, 4 February 1933.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Report from a conference on state reform, 'A la Sorbonne: La réforme de la constitution', *La Vdc*, 28 January 1933.

³⁶⁸ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 247.

³⁶⁹ Prost, I, p. 167.

eventual creation of a constituent assembly to modify the constitution.³⁷⁰ The following month, the UNC section in the Deux-Sèvres called for the convocation of a National Assembly to 'correct' the constitution.³⁷¹ Similarly, the UF, in its *ordre du jour* of 7 July 1934, specified that if parliament could not enact the necessary reforms then a constituent assembly should do so.³⁷² The date of this declaration was not insignificant. Immediately prior to the Confederation's July deadline, it appeared at a time when a veteran attempt on power seemed possible.

The UNC's own youth movement, the JUNC presented a somewhat contradictory plan for the state. French youth organisations had shown their interest in state reform at the Etats généraux de la jeunesse in June 1934. Hopeful of an accord based upon a perceived shared generational identification, the youth groups unanimously condemned the capitalist regime and affirmed the revolutionary nature of French youth.³⁷³ The following month, the 9 July Plan represented another attempt by youth groups of various affiliations to demonstrate their will to unite across political cleavages.³⁷⁴ The plan detailed reforms common to most groups including the UNC: a reinforcement of the executive through the granting of the right to dissolution and control over financial initiative, the use of technical bodies in legislative work and the intervention of the National Economic Council and the Council of State in the economy. With parliament unable to reform itself, change would come about through a constituent assembly.³⁷⁵

JUNC doctrine developed under the influence of young intellectual thinking at the time.³⁷⁶ Rejecting the established order, conventional politics, Marxism and fascism, the JUNC campaigned for a revolutionary renovation of human civilisation. It is in JUNC discourse on the state that the contradiction lays. The youth group moved from a position that advocated an almost anarchic revolutionary destruction of French institutions with little idea of what would follow, to a stance that endorsed order and authority. The movement qualified itself as revolutionary, not in the Marxist sense of the term, but as a youthful force ready for action. In May 1934, the JUNC was clear on the need for the destruction of contemporary Republican and democratic institutions. A simple modification would be insufficient.³⁷⁷ It was vague on what

³⁷⁰ J. Goy, V. Beauregard & L. Berthier, 'La Réforme de l'Etat', *La Vdc*, 28 April 1934.

³⁷¹ R. B., 'La Réforme de l'Etat', *Le Combattant des Deux-Sèvres*, May 1934.

³⁷² 'Ordre du jour de l'UF, 7 juillet 1934', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 July 1934.

³⁷³ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 311.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

³⁷⁶ Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années 30* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969).

³⁷⁷ A. Guyot, 'Notre mystique', *La Vdc*, 5 May 1934.

would be created after this destructive action. But the movement's support for the veterans' public safety government in 1938 contains some clues. The new regime would not include parliamentarians. Political pluralism would be severely curtailed if not suppressed altogether.³⁷⁸ In December 1938, René Franconi of the JUNC prescribed a dose of 'healthy and hard' authority for which the French were 'ripe'. National demands would dictate the extent and absoluteness of this authority.³⁷⁹ The evolution of JUNC doctrine perhaps reflected the spirit of the time. Its 'revolutionary action' plan developed in the enthusiasm of spring 1934, while the demand for authority came in 1938 against the background of a failed general strike and the Daladier government's use of decree powers.

Prost does not take seriously the veterans' calls for a constituent assembly.³⁸⁰ He claims pronouncements on extra-parliamentary reform came from hotheads and utopian thinkers. These outlandish ideas, Prost alleges, perhaps lay behind the lack of attention given to veteran doctrine. As with other points of the veterans' programme one should neither discount ideas nor dismiss their seriousness because they did not come to fruition. Reforms may not have been anti-republican in themselves but an extra-parliamentary method of reform had scope for authoritarianism. Furthermore, the fact that the right favoured such a method means that one cannot locate the UNC at the Republican centre of the Third Republic.

State and Economic Reform: The Organised Profession

As groups searched for a solution to the economic crisis corporatism appeared increasingly attractive to business leaders and the right. Corporatists drew on the work of René de La Tour du Pin and Social Catholics at the turn of the century.³⁸¹ The Estates-General reformist campaign of 1923-24 attracted businessmen, wealthy farmers, professionals and not a few AF activists to its cause. Followers of the campaign favoured a corporatist state based on two assemblies, one for fathers and one for producers. Parties would not be represented. Both assemblies would come together in a superior body through which they would advise an

³⁷⁸ J. Raudot, 'Les Jeunes avec les Combattants', *La Vdc*, 22 October 1938.

³⁷⁹ R. Franconi, 'Obéir', *La Vdc*, 24 December 1938.

³⁸⁰ Prost, III, p. 204.

³⁸¹ Suzanne Berger, *Peasants against Politics: Rural Organization in Brittany, 1911-1967* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 122.

authoritarian leader and his colleagues.³⁸² Though Georges Valois, a participant in the Estates-General campaign, ensured that these ideas survived, the relative prosperity of the decade diminished the urgency of economic reform.

The following decade, class and industrial conflict brought a new significance to corporatism.³⁸³ While various advocates of corporatism contested its content, with no single project agreed upon, all recognised that outside intervention alone could restore harmony to the economy.³⁸⁴ The right took up the cause once again. The FR formulated the fundamental precepts of its own corporatism in which French employers and workers would collaborate. Bosses would act responsibly and workers would abandon industrial action. Yet far from infringing on employers' rights and benefits, the FR sought to curb the freedom of labour unions, which they considered foreign-funded and dangerous to the social order.³⁸⁵

The new enthusiasm for corporatism went hand in hand with antiparlamentarianism and the well-worn debate over competence in government. Business leaders hoped that the Marchandreau law of January 1935 would establish corporations in professions where a majority of producers agreed to a 'legally enforceable entente'. However, their hopes would be dashed and their suspicions of parliament confirmed when the law was first amended by the left and subsequently sidelined in the Senate.³⁸⁶ Corporatists claimed that the pandering of deputies to a variety of interests in order to secure their re-election meant they could not fully represent the interests of a profession.³⁸⁷ Moreover, politicians did not possess the requisite competence for economic and social intervention.³⁸⁸ As a solution, corporatists recommended the organisation of professions that would represent the interests of 'natural' social groups, namely the profession and the family.³⁸⁹ Regional professional federations would regulate their profession, implement laws for local syndicates to follow and send representatives to a national consultative body. Membership of syndicates would be voluntary but the decisions and laws of the regional bodies would affect members and non-members alike.

³⁸² Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 27.

³⁸³ Berger, *Peasants*, p. 120.

³⁸⁴ Kevin Passmore, 'Business, corporatism and the crisis of the French Third Republic: the example of the silk industry in Lyon', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), p. 982.

³⁸⁵ Irvine, *French Conservatism*, pp. 75-77.

³⁸⁶ Passmore, 'Business, corporatism', p. 978.

³⁸⁷ Berger, *Peasants*, p. 123.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

The political context of the 1930s often meant that corporatism was a move towards fascism or authoritarianism.³⁹⁰ The assumption of a common interest among all members of a profession allowed corporatists to evade discussion of coercion.³⁹¹ However, the authoritarianism of the corporative system lay in the very claim to the existence of a single professional and national interest. Of course this national interest depended on the person, but it was always perceived as identical to the individual's self-interest.³⁹² Enemies of the professional interest such as communists, trade unions and foreign elements were therefore deemed enemies of the *national* interest and to be eliminated.

The UNC favoured a corporative organisation of the economy. A man's profession was his second family. Employers and workers would work together for the good of the nation. In economic matters, UNC veterans once again depicted themselves as the most competent: "*Députés ou Sénateurs n'ont évidemment pas la compétence approfondie qui serait nécessaire dans tous les domaines de l'économie. Leurs méthodes de discussion sont d'ailleurs peu propres à traiter des problèmes techniques*".³⁹³ Corporations would put an end to industrial conflict, favour French nationals in the job market and remove the welfare burden from the State.³⁹⁴

Isaac formulated the UNC's plans for the organised profession. At the most basic level, workers and employers would form *comités communs* to rule on disputes and the interests of the profession in the locality. The *comités* would manage labour hours and regulate working conditions, such as hygiene and safety, in order to end the 'proletarian condition'.³⁹⁵ Membership of trade unions within the *comités* would remain voluntary yet while non-unionised workers could gain representation on the *comités* through an electoral process, they would be afforded a lower proportional share of members than those workers who had showed 'a sense of solidarity' and joined a union.³⁹⁶ Superior to the *comités*, regional professional councils would establish regulations regarding their profession after careful study and a vote or referendum if necessary. Selected delegates from each regional council would form a departmental federation

³⁹⁰ Passmore, *From Liberalism*, p. 169; 'Business, corporatism', p. 961; Kéchichian, *Les Croix de Feu*, pp. 278 and pp. 318-333.

³⁹¹ Berger, *Peasants*, p. 129.

³⁹² Passmore, 'Business, corporatism', p. 982.

³⁹³ Goy et al, *Le programme d'action civique*, p. 88. Italics in the original.

³⁹⁴ 'Rôle et fonctionnement de la Corporation', *La Vdc*, 17 September 1938; Joublin, 'La corporation, c'est l'union organique des classes', *La Vdc*, 24 September 1938.

³⁹⁵ H. Isaac, 'La Profession dans la Nation', in *XV Congrès National de l'UNC: Rapports, Discussions, Discours* (Paris, 1934), p. 244.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

with the power to rule on disputes between professions and extra-professional bodies. Nationally, Isaac prescribed a reinvigoration of the Conseil national économique (CNE). The government would be obliged to consult the CNE on all matters relating to economic and social (especially family) legislation, whether this was in the object of a law or its implications. In addition, amendments made in the Chamber would return to the CNE for further consultation.³⁹⁷

The plan for the organised profession did not require immediate reform of the constitution. It reflected the moderate wing of the UNC to which Isaac belonged. The UNC planned to spread the corporative message and nurture a 'corporative conscience' that it recognised may take generations to achieve its goal. Nevertheless, the association determined that the partiality of the state in a democratic society meant that it could not fulfil its role as arbiter in industrial and social matters.³⁹⁸ Isaac admitted that his plans did not go far enough for those elements in the UNC who desired that a 'mixed assembly' of elected political and economic figures replace the Chamber. UNC executive committee member Taudière argued that the CNE's powers should stretch 'to the heart of parliament' and be integrated into national sovereignty. This seemed logical to him as, according to Isaac, the UNC's vision was for a society that rested upon the two fundamentals of the profession and the family. Though it would act initially as a consultative body, Isaac did envisage further powers for the CNE if this role proved successful. It would perhaps hold a type of veto power to force parliament to vote on a law after the second reading of a bill.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, Isaac saw 'nothing to prevent reflection' upon the CNE replacing the Senate in the future. The CNE would be better qualified to represent the social and economic forces of France than the upper chamber. At this point the French regime would function like a business, with the government as management, parliament as the executive committee and members of the CNE as technical advisers.⁴⁰⁰

The UNC's programme contained the potential for authoritarianism of other corporatist reform projects. In comparison to the FR's corporatism, the UNC also encouraged class harmony yet this would certainly work to the detriment of the unions. Considering the plans of the Faisceau and the Estates-General, the UNC did not go as far as to suggest replacing parliament with an assembly of families or producers. The CNE would act in an advisory

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 248.

³⁹⁸ Joublin, 'La corporation, c'est l'union organique des classes', *La Vdc*, 24 September 1938.

³⁹⁹ H. Isaac, 'La Profession dans la Nation', p. 248.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 248.

capacity at first. Though it would have the power to vet legislation and force elected representatives to vote on a bill, moderates in the UNC resisted the calls for a more authoritarian plan for corporate assemblies.

Representing the people

At a time when only two conceptions of action existed, that of reform through parliament, and reform from the people, elements of the UNC's plan situated itself in the anti-parliamentarian camp.⁴⁰¹ The association's exclusion from political power meant that a populist appeal to the *pays réel* for a veteran-led reform was its only means to pursue reform. The veterans' campaign used press and propaganda to establish a direct contact with the people.⁴⁰² Though the UNC did not make the need for a constituent assembly a defining point of its doctrine, the association came to believe that the power to reform the French regime lay within the people.

The conception of popular sovereignty was not unique to the UNC within the veterans' movement. After February 1934, the streets of France became an important staging ground for political expression where left and right respectively claimed to give voice to the will of the people.⁴⁰³ What followed was a conflict between popular sovereignty as expressed in street demonstrations and the legal representation of this sovereignty in the Chamber of Deputies.⁴⁰⁴ To cite several examples, Maurras stated: "Devant les scandales de l'heure, tout citoyen est magistrat".⁴⁰⁵ Introducing an interview with Philippe Henriot in *Le Figaro*, Gaétan Sanvoisin wrote: "Le pays vous approuve parce que vous ne jouez pas le rôle du jeu parlementaire".⁴⁰⁶ From 13 February 1934 to 5 May 1936, 1063 street demonstrations took place throughout France. Danielle Tartakowsky calculates that in the provinces 45% of these demonstrations had political aims, with 85% of this number originating from the left and 17% from the right. Paris differed to the provinces in that 67% of street action was in the pursuit of political goals. But in the capital, the right's share was higher, claiming 45% of demonstrations.⁴⁰⁷ Street action often resulted in clashes between rival groups or the forces of order.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰¹ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 253.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁰³ Wardhaugh, 'Between parliament and the people', p. 215.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 211.

⁴⁰⁵ Chavardès, *Une campagne*, p. 38.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁰⁷ Tartakowsky, 'Stratégies de la rue', p. 32.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

One can perceive a watershed in the UNC's treatment of the 'people' between the pre- and post-riot periods. In February 1930, for example, Rossignol spoke to a meeting of the Limoges groups in which he stated that due to their service in the war the *état d'esprit* of the veterans was different to that of the general population.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, in January 1934, de Cromières denounced the ingratitude of the French masses in regard to the wartime sacrifice of the veterans, an ingratitude also common to politicians and army chiefs.⁴¹⁰ That same month, Aubert questioned whether the realm of the street would establish itself as 'the righter of wrongs'. However, at this point he described the streets as being in the grip of the party spirit and violence.⁴¹¹

The UNC's conception of the people changed after the riot. As we have seen in chapter one, following the bloody night on the Place de la Concorde, the veterans of the UNC depicted themselves as in perfect communion with the will of the people. It was now on the streets of Paris and France, no longer in the grip of the party, that the true will of the sovereign people found expression.⁴¹² The UNC's participation in a protest allegedly sanctioned by the people of France had legitimised the street as a valid political arena in stark contrast to the failing legal process in the Chamber. In February 1934, *La Voix du combattant* printed a picture that depicted deputies surrounded by soldiers. The caption read: "Nous sommes ici contre la volonté du peuple et nous nous y maintiendrons par la force des baïonnettes".⁴¹³ It is interesting that the bayonet was chosen as the weapon behind which the deputies were shown to be taking refuge. Reports of the night mention the use of machine guns, revolvers, pistols and sabers but not the close-combat weapon so iconic of trench warfare. Whether used to emphasise the desperation of the politicians' situation or the brutal lengths to which they would go in order to stay in power, the significance of using this weapon of last resort against former trench soldiers would not be lost on the veterans.

In their newfound role as 'interprètes fidèles de l'opinion publique', the UNC spoke of a divorce between parliament and the nation.⁴¹⁴ The association's letter to the President of the

⁴⁰⁹ Speech by H. Rossignol on 9 February 1930, at a meeting of the Limousin group, reproduced in 'Henry Rossignol à Limoges', *Le Combattant du Centre*, 15 February 1930.

⁴¹⁰ G. De Cromières, 'Bonne année', *Le Combattant du Centre*, January 1934.

⁴¹¹ H. Aubert, 'L'ordre dans la maison', *La Vdc*, 27 January 1934.

⁴¹² See chapter one for a discussion of this issue immediately after the riot.

⁴¹³ Cartoon on page one, 'Les mots historiques', *La Vdc*, 10 February 1934.

⁴¹⁴ 'Lettre au Président de la République', *La Vdc*, 10 February 1934; Action combattante notice, 'Entre le Parlement et le Pays le divorce s'accroît', *La Vdc*, 16 June 1934.

Republic in the days following the February violence claimed that a discrepancy existed between the political conduct of ministers and the wishes of the nation. It alleged that the constitutional agreement between the two no longer existed.⁴¹⁵ Roux-Desbreaux wrote: "...le divorce entre le Parlement et la nation a-t-il jamais été plus flagrant qu'en cette journée du 7 février? Le Parlement ne peut plus dire qu'il reflète l'opinion du pays, puisqu'il accordait la veille une majorité à un Gouvernement que l'opinion publique chassait le lendemain".⁴¹⁶ Francisque Gauthier stated in *Le Combattant du Sud-Est* that the veterans *were* the masses. If like before February 1934 the government had not enacted reform then the veterans would once again protest peacefully in harmony with the will of the masses.⁴¹⁷ Roger Dorlanne of the *landais* group placed 6 February 1934 alongside other expressions of French popular will: "Le 6 Février reste et restera dans l'histoire, une révolte du peuple de France, comparable aux journées de 1830 et 1848".⁴¹⁸ Jacques Péricard, writing in *L'Ouest-Eclair*, congratulated the UNC for truly having "...le génie des masses", in evidence during the closing parade at the Metz congress in 1934.⁴¹⁹ By mid-1934, the UNC believed that sovereignty lay with the people and not with the Chamber.

In June 1935 the UNC attributed to the masses a common spirit and the power to express it. Hubert Aubert's son, François, who was JUNC secretary general, urged the masses to 'dictate its will' and control the elected representatives.⁴²⁰ However, in November 1935, Emile Veysset, responsible for propaganda in the JUNC, claimed that the youth groups needed to infiltrate and guide the French masses: "...nous aurons la masse, nous la guiderons, nous irons la chercher partout, dans des milieux où l'accès des autres mouvements s'avère difficile, certains milieux paysans notamment....".⁴²¹ François Aubert restated this aim in 1936 when he urged a new recruitment effort in order to "...conquérir chaque jour davantage la masse".⁴²² Perhaps a reaction to the success of Popular Front recruitment, the masses now needed guidance and persuasion.

Public space became a contested territory in the struggle to win over the masses. According to Jacques de Rufz of Action combattante, after the February riots the UNC's

⁴¹⁵ 'Lettre au Président de la République', *La Vdc*, 10 February 1934.

⁴¹⁶ Roux-Desbreaux, 'Il faut sauver la République et la France: deux entités qui ne font qu'un', *L'UNC de Paris*, March 1934.

⁴¹⁷ F. Gauthier, 'Les Fascistes du 6 Février !...', *Le Combattant du Sud-Est*, March 1934.

⁴¹⁸ R. Dorlanne, '6 février – 8 juillet', *Le Combattant landais*, August 1934.

⁴¹⁹ J. Péricard, 'La clôture du congrès de l'UNC', *L'Ouest-Eclair*, 14 May 1934.

⁴²⁰ F. Aubert, 'Fascisme', *La Vdc*, 29 June 1935.

⁴²¹ E. Veysset, 'Les sens profond de notre mouvement', *La Vdc*, 2 November 1935.

⁴²² F. Aubert, 'Campagne d'hiver', *La Vdc*, 4 January 1936.

veterans had remained in the streets as an invisible presence that guaranteed the stability and function of the regime. These men were still driven by the spirit of the demonstration. They continued to express the will of the free people.⁴²³ Francis Sagnat, president of the Fédération de la Haute-Vienne des Mutilés et Anciens Combattants, also claimed the streets for the veterans:

Prenez garde, messieurs les responsables, s'il en est temps encore, les Combattants en ont assez.... Ce ou ces responsables doivent être impitoyablement punis... Plus que jamais, pour l'ordre, la justice et la paix, entre les Français d'abord, entre tous les peuples ensuite, dans le cadre que sauront se choisir nos groupements, nous voulons avoir le droit absolu de dire ce que nous voulons, de le dire dans la rue s'il est nécessaire. La rue est à nous!⁴²⁴

The JUNC asked its sections to organise street marches: "Un des moyens de propagande les plus remarquables est la propagande de masse. Elle frappe l'opinion, par son ampleur et montre la vitalité et la force de notre mouvement".⁴²⁵ The leadership advised that JUNC members attend national commemorations and festivals.

The success of the Popular Front, first as a mass movement and then as an electoral force, prompted a change in the UNC's relationship with the people. Unable to prevent the left-wing coalition's victory, it appeared that the French had rejected the UNC's policies. The masses, no longer regarded as the repository of legitimate popular sovereignty, were now *dupées*, *inconscientes* and something to be feared.⁴²⁶ The strikes that followed the election of the Popular Front prompted the UNC to attempt to reclaim the streets of France. In a supplication to the French people, the association denounced left-wing agitation expressed, it claimed, through public demonstrations under the red flag. Strikers undermined the freedom to work while agitators had practically abolished the 'freedom of the street'.⁴²⁷ The UNC's answer was to ask the people of France to display the tricolour in every window in France. With each town and village decorated in the national colours, the UNC hoped to take back French public space.

⁴²³ J. De Rufz, 'Préface à l'Action Combattante', *La Vdc*, 16 March 1935.

⁴²⁴ 'Les combattants exigent', in C. Vilain *Les Combattants exigent....Du manifeste de la salle Wagram au Congrès de l'UNC à Metz: Préface de Georges Lebecq* (Rouen, 1934).

⁴²⁵ J. Mafaraud, 'La propagande', *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

⁴²⁶ A. Partiot, 'La nécessité de l'action sociale', *La Vdc*, 11 January 1936.

⁴²⁷ Notice, 'Au Peuple Français!', *La Vdc*, 4 July 1936.

Other options remained available. In July 1936, Lebecq asked members to begin immediately their counter-revolutionary propaganda through large street demonstrations.⁴²⁸

When in February 1937 Blum announced a pause in reform, the CGT condemned the government. This prompted the UNC to declare that the CGT, which it now termed the *gouvernement des masses*, was attempting to rule against the legal government. Aubert claimed that CGT leader Léon Jouhaux was using his organisation to impose the people's will onto the elected government.⁴²⁹ The violence at Clichy in 1937, in which supporters of the left clashed with the police after a legally sanctioned PSF film screening, starkly exposed this 'dictatorship of the masses': "Le quatrième pouvoir, celui des masses, s'exerce dans l'incohérence, à la dictature..... il rend difficile la recherche des responsables et impossible l'exercice de l'autorité".⁴³⁰ The association's reaction revealed a fear of the irrational masses under the direction of Jouhaux.

Already unhappy with the Popular Front, the clashes between demonstrators and the police appeared to herald a coming revolution backed by the forces of unionised labour. The UNC could not claim to represent the will of the rioters at Clichy. In the final analysis, this 'people' was different to the 'people' for which the UNC had claimed to speak. The association thus chose to remove popular sovereignty from the masses. Yet its discourse at the time expressed little confidence in the rule of the Chamber. By 1938, neither the people nor parliament could be trusted with the future of France. This task fell to the veterans.

1938: Authority returns to France

The victory of the Popular Front deepened the political division of France. The parliamentary right moved closer to the extremes as anti-communism came to dominate political concerns. The FR, once a party of conservative republicanism, now counted Xavier Vallat and Henriot amongst its leading activists. Anti-communism was not unique to the right. From the outset, neither right-wing Radical deputies nor the party's supporters were unanimously in favour of a left-wing coalition. Furthermore, among sectors of the left the industrial unrest of summer 1936 planted

⁴²⁸ Speech by G. Lebecq, 'Au Meeting de Wagram organisé par l'UNC, le rassemblement des Français est réclamé par tous', *La Vdc*, 25 July 1936.

⁴²⁹ H. Aubert, 'Pause ou catastrophe', *La Vdc*, 27 February 1937.

⁴³⁰ See H. Aubert, 'Le Deuil de la Liberté', *La Vdc*, 27 March 1937. The quotation in the text comes from P. Galland, 'La dictature de l'anonymat', *La Vdc*, 8 May 1937.

the seeds of disquiet. Certain members of the radicals, socialists and trade unions began to question the alliance with communism.⁴³¹

As discontent simmered beneath the surface, the government faced challenges that would prove insurmountable. In foreign policy, Blum refused to engage France in the Spanish Civil War, much to the anger of the communists. Domestically, capital continued to leave France. Blum devalued the Franc in September 1936. Able to satisfy neither the left nor the right in his attempts to shore up the French economy, Blum announced a pause in reform in February 1937 and requested decree powers in June. Refused by the Radical-controlled Senate, he resigned. By 1938, after the unsuccessful attempts of two governments to regain some momentum, divisions in the alliance seemed irreconcilable. Dissenting Radical deputies found support among the largely conservative body of Radical senators and the *jeunesses radicales-socialistes*. Sensitive to the concerns of the mass of the party's supporters (the *petits propriétaires*) the right of the party feared further social disorder and labour legislation as the Popular Front neared two years in office.⁴³²

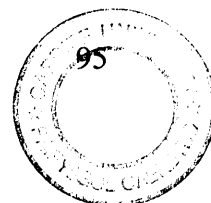
The concerns of conservative Radicals influenced the veterans' movement. The UF's rapprochement with the UNC reflected a shift to the right of the middle classes and the Radical party. The Radicals had renounced their claim to represent the people in founding the Confédération générale des syndicats des classes moyennes (CGSCM).⁴³³ Middle class groups supported the veterans' second plan for a public safety government. Pichot and some provincial UF veterans certainly moved closer to the UNC. In one instance in early 1937, a group of UF veterans (who incidentally were also members of the PSF) expressed a desire to defect to the UNC.⁴³⁴ During the course of 1938, members of the UNC's executive committee disagreed over the extent of support in the UF for the associations' joint action. The UNC perceived a split in the UF. Pichot's politics now resembled that of the UNC yet it was unclear whether this was a personal move or one that reflected the opinion of his association. President of the UNC's Corrèze group Lacoste informed his colleagues that the vast majority of UF 'troops' were 'UNC

⁴³¹ Jackson, *Dark Years*, pp. 79-80; Kevin Passmore, 'Catholicism and nationalism: The Fédération républicaine, 1927-1939' in *Catholicism, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century France*, ed. by Kay Chadwick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 52.

⁴³² Serge Berstein, 'Le Parti radical, enjeu des affrontements politiques, et les incertitudes d'Edouard Daladier' in *La France et les Français, 1938 en 1939*, ed. by René Rémond & Janine Bourdin (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1978), p. 278.

⁴³³ Serge Berstein, *Histoire du Parti radical*, 2 vols, (Paris : Seuil, 1980-1), II, pp. 460-3 and pp. 491-3.

⁴³⁴ UNC/EC, 16 January 1937.



100%' yet he had encountered opposition from the association's leadership. This was not the case in the Nord, Goudaert explained, where he had made every effort to co-operate with the UF without success. Moreover, certain UF members had attempted to entice UNC veterans away from their sections. By February 1939, the UNC's wariness of the UF had dissipated. In fact, Pichot's association had consulted the UNC on everything since the public safety campaign. Isaac recognised that there was now no divergence between the two groups' doctrines.⁴³⁵ To sum up, the UF's relationship with the UNC was closer than it had ever been. The UNC had neither softened its stance nor its rhetoric. It had not moved towards the centre. The UF had moved towards the right.

Blum's second tenure as prime minister, which began on 9 March 1938, lasted barely a month and sealed the coalition's failure.⁴³⁶ The Daladier government, formed on 10 April 1938, would eventually allay the fears of conservative radicals. Initially, Daladier appeared ready to leave intact the coalition's legislation. However, in August, the premier announced the end of the forty hour week. France would be put back to work. This measure signalled the beginning of a move to the right for the Radical party. In October, the communist party voted against the government, angry at the Munich agreement and the Radicals' increasingly conservative policies. Daladier promptly wound up the Popular Front. Some Radicals called for the dissolution of the Chamber and electoral reform. After he crushed the CGT's general strike on 30 November, the course that Daladier took resulted in the complete defeat of the left. Framing his actions as in the interest of national and moral renovation, Daladier profited from the widespread feeling that France needed a return to authority. Where Blum had attempted to strengthen the *présidence du conseil* in co-operation with parliament, Daladier conceived the office as in opposition to the Chamber. He ruled largely with decree powers and used the radio to establish a direct link with the people. The approval of parliament became a largely symbolic gesture. In July 1939, Daladier postponed the parliamentary session until 1942.⁴³⁷

There was little opposition to Daladier's increasing authoritarianism. For the UNC, Daladier was once again worthy of the title *homme du front*, his role in February 1934 apparently

⁴³⁵ Ibid.; UNC/EC, 23 May 1938; 15 October 1938.

⁴³⁶ For a narrative of the Popular Front see Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1978), pp. 1-17.

⁴³⁷ Sandro Guerrieri, 'L'affaiblissement du Parlement français dans la dernière législature de la Troisième République (1936-1940)', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 23 (2003), pp. 200-203.

forgotten.⁴³⁸ With war looming, the socialists were factionalised between Blum's policy of anti-fascist resistance and pacifists around Paul Faure. Soon after the failed general strike the AD rallied to the government.⁴³⁹ Joseph Barthélemy's evolution from liberal Republican to architect of Vichy's 1941 constitution exemplified the drift of the centre right to an authoritarian style of government.⁴⁴⁰ The FR and Jacques Doriot's Parti Populaire Français (PPF) launched a campaign to ban the communist party entirely. Though the PSF opposed Daladier, its opposition stemmed from a fear that the premier's rightward shift would trump La Rocque's policies.⁴⁴¹ Indeed the PSF's poor showing in the elections of 1937 seemed to confirm this. The Radicals and the PSF now came into competition for the same political constituency.⁴⁴²

The veterans' associations could not escape the climate of authoritarianism. On 11 March 1938, a meeting of the Confederation demanded a strengthening of the executive by way of a government of national safety. Similarly, the UF's plan for a government of public safety, which the UNC publicly endorsed in March 1938, sought to return authority to France. So began a period of unprecedented co-operation between the two organisations that would last until the founding of Vichy's Légion française des combattants. This represented a turnaround for relations between the UNC and the UF. In summer 1936, their relationship had hit a new low. At this time, Pichot demanded that the UNC leave the Confederation. He argued that the UNC should declare itself a political association, a political league even, as its actions in the recent elections had shown this to be the case.⁴⁴³ He repeated the accusation a month later despite Goy's response in defence of the UNC.⁴⁴⁴ Yet after March 1938, united in the campaign for a new government, the associations decried dishonesty and inequality in fiscal matters, called for measures to absorb unemployment, re-establish discipline in work and increase industrial production.⁴⁴⁵ The UNC and UF's dissatisfaction with the government meant that both were happy to see the end of the Popular Front in late 1938.⁴⁴⁶

⁴³⁸ P. Galland, 'Le levain dans la pâte', *La Vdc*, 14 January 1939.

⁴³⁹ Rosemonde Sanson, 'L'Alliance démocratique', in *La France et les Français*, p. 331.

⁴⁴⁰ Martinez, 'Joseph Barthélemy', p. 46.

⁴⁴¹ Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 103.

⁴⁴² Passmore, *From Liberalism*, p. 261.

⁴⁴³ H. Pichot, 'Etre ce qu'on est.... L'UNC doit quitter la Confédération', *Cahier de l'UF*, 20 July 1936.

⁴⁴⁴ 'Etre ce qu'on est et dire ce qu'on veut. UNC et mouvement combattant. La réponse de Jean Goy', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 August 1936.

⁴⁴⁵ Janine Bourdin, 'Les anciens combattants et la célébration du 11 novembre 1938', in *La France et les Français*, p. 101.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

The UF had not always opposed the Popular Front. It certainly did not react to Blum's government in as violent a manner as the UNC. Though it repeated the call for veterans to replace the 'old men' of politics, it welcomed the inclusion of the CGT in the government's plans.⁴⁴⁷ Pichot reaffirmed his support for democracy in rejecting an Italian-style dictatorship.⁴⁴⁸ The UF's anti-parliamentarianism remained intact but it recognised that the parliamentary regime had found some stability under the Popular Front.⁴⁴⁹ Yet for the UF, the Anschluss appears to have had a direct relation to the call for the public safety government. Once Germany's designs on Austria became clear Cassin wrote that France had capitulated in the face of the dictators. Pichot named the date February 1938 alongside those of 1815, 1843 and 1871.⁴⁵⁰ The following month, the UF printed its plan for the public safety government.

Writing in the *Cahiers de l'UF*, Pichot and Cassin specified that France needed a strong and just government. Cassin called on the French to 'temper' their liberties in favour of a 'necessary discipline'.⁴⁵¹ The UF presented an *ordre du jour* of 17 March 1938 to the President, the Chamber and the Senate, which outlined the new government:

L'heure a sonné d'un gouvernement de salut national, attendu par le pays, composé d'un nombre restreint d'hommes, parlementaires et non parlementaires, volontaires et désintéressés, d'un républicanisme sûr, large et sans compromissions, offrant au pays la garantie morale et technique nécessaire, auquel le Parlement confiera le mandat exprès de prendre les mesures d'urgence exigées par la situation.⁴⁵²

Jacques Raudot, president of the JUNC in 1938, did not see an answer in parliamentary democracy. His plea saw a return to the idea of popular sovereignty in the UNC. However, the UNC no longer relied on the people's natural national sentiment; they should follow the UNC's ideas:

⁴⁴⁷ Camille Héline, 'Du problème d'aujourd'hui à celui de demain', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 May 1936; 'Emploi des forces morales de ce pays', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 10 June 1936.

⁴⁴⁸ H. Pichot, 'Démocratie', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 January 1937.

⁴⁴⁹ Camille Héline, 'Oui, l'expérience est à faire', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 10 October 1937; Léon Viala, 'Quelques rayons sur le proche avenir', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 10 January 1938.

⁴⁵⁰ H. Pichot, 'Austerlitz, Iéna. 1815-1843-1871. Février 1938'; R. Cassin, 'Nouveaux pas vers l'abîme', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 February 1938.

⁴⁵¹ R. Cassin, 'Pour sauver la liberté', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 10 March 1938.

⁴⁵² 'Ordre du jour remis le 17 mars au Président de la République, aux Présidents du Sénat et de la Chambre', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 March 1938.

C'est illégal, (le gouvernement de salut public) direz-vous mais la légalité, c'est vous qui la faites... Ne suis pas nos idées, Français moyen, et tu paieras...nous, les Jeunes, nous ne serons jamais les dupes de ce mensonge qu'on tente de tous côtés de te faire avaler: Le salut du pays par un ministère d'union des partis parlementaires!⁴⁵³

The UF also located the power to effect change within the people of France. Pichot warned that if the parties refused to accept the truce outlined in his plan then they would find the country ranged against them, with parliament as a 'Bastille' and a 'feudal tower'.⁴⁵⁴ The UF's Paul Patou argued that parliamentary democracy had momentarily 'exhausted its virtue' and would need to 'take its medicine' if it was not to become defunct.⁴⁵⁵ A year later, Pichot continued to make the distinction between the sovereignty of the people (and the veterans) and that of parliament: "...il y a la France élue, la France électorale, la France officielle, qui n'accorde à la France non partisane qu'une audience distante et condescendante: le souverain par délégation, hissé sur le pavois, oublie de qui il tient son titre et son pouvoir".⁴⁵⁶

Initially, the veterans' first plan for the government of public safety relied upon the willingness of President Lebrun to appoint a new government. The plan of March 1938 involved a campaign intended to arouse public pressure to this end. The UNC circulated petitions of support for the veterans' plan, which would be presented to President Lebrun. Accordingly, Lebrun, as the *pouvoir constitué*, would then call honest men to form a government.⁴⁵⁷ Outside of direct action this was the only means available to the UNC and the UF. The veterans' associations were not political parties and so could not undertake change from within the Chamber. Unlike parliamentary parties, their only course of action was extra-parliamentary.

In October 1938, the UF's second call specified that the government should be given full powers for one year or even until the elections in 1940.⁴⁵⁸ It found support from within and without the veterans' movement. In *La Voix du combattant*, André Gervais, a prolific author

⁴⁵³ J. Raudot, 'Gargarisme à l'usage du Français moyen', *La Vdc*, 26 March 1938.

⁴⁵⁴ H. Pichot, 'Salut Public. Combattants au gouvernement', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 April 1938.

⁴⁵⁵ P. Patou., 'Le noyau d'une solide équipe', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 10 April 1938; H. Pichot, 'Salut Public. Combattants au gouvernement', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 April 1938.

⁴⁵⁶ H. Pichot, 'Juillet 1914-mars 1939', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 25 March 1939.

⁴⁵⁷ George Schwab, *The Challenge of the Exception: An Introduction to the Political Ideas of Carl Schmitt between 1921 and 1936* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 30-37. According to German political theorist Carl Schmitt, a commissarial dictatorship is established when the national state of affairs is sufficiently threatened to prompt the sovereign (*pouvoir constitué*) to appoint a commissarial dictator. The dictator will be required to accomplish a specific mission. The constitution is suspended and may be amended but will be eventually reinstated once the period of crisis is over or the appointed mission is accomplished.

⁴⁵⁸ H. Pichot, 'L'Union fédérale et l'avenir français', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 10 October 1938.

within the veterans' movement, listed as in support of the UNC and the UF: the AGMG, the UNMR, the Association des écrivains combattants, the Ligue des droits du religieux ancien combattant (DRAC), and the Association des prisonniers de guerre. Support in the non-combatant world came from the Confédération générale des classes moyennes, the Confédération nationale des syndicats agricoles and the Comité du plan. Gervais claimed that six million men were willing to join the 'last battle' of the veterans.⁴⁵⁹

The second plan did not involve a petition campaign. The veterans had long claimed both to represent the people and, by virtue of the trench melting pot, 'to be' the people of France. Deriving their legitimacy from these self-appointed posts, the UNC and the UF, appropriated the right to reform the French regime. The associations would undertake this reform through the government of public safety, a sovereign dictatorship akin to a constituent assembly.⁴⁶⁰ A reason for this change of tactic may have been Pichot's failure to persuade President Lebrun to appoint an extra-parliamentary leader, in the form of Marshal Pétain. The UNC backed this new action.⁴⁶¹ Among provincial sections some veterans supported the associations' plan. In March 1939, Henri Tessier of the Drôme UNC recommended a 'surgical operation' on the 'heart' and the 'brain' of the regime (the constitution and the government respectively). Tessier stated that in addition to a legislature and a professional chamber, a third chamber (the Senate) elected by 'suffrage restreint' would control the actions of the other two.⁴⁶²

The UNC and UF's second plan did not allow for the political pluralism familiar to the Third Republic. Raudot stated that all parties should disband and if they refused, the government should forcibly dissolve them. He wrote that during the period of reform, parties should not be allowed to operate. The government would 'adopt parliamentary methods, without parliament'. 'Liberated' from the encumbrance of elections the government would be able to act with complete independence. In the same issue of *La Voix du combattant*, UNC activist Gabriel

⁴⁵⁹ A. Gervais, 'Notre dernière bataille', *La Vdc*, 29 October 1938.

⁴⁶⁰ Schwab, *Challenge of the Exception*, pp. 32-35. In a sovereign dictatorship, self-appointed representatives of the nebulous mass or the *pouvoir constituant*, conduct all affairs and take executive power into their own hands. In situations where perceived corruption becomes so great that the apparent validity of laws is eroded, the dictator, as a 'type of reform commissioner with unlimited power', will appeal to the people, from whom he derives authority in his eyes. A sovereign dictatorship abrogates the existing constitution and draws up its own 'true' constitution within a limited period in an attempt to restore order. In theory, the sovereign dictatorship eventually abdicates power, its remit fulfilled once it has created a condition in which a new constitution may be drawn up.

⁴⁶¹ 'Refaire un pays fort: Un interview d'Alexis Thomas, Président du Groupe de Lorraine', *La Vdc*, 5 November 1938.

⁴⁶² Colonel H. Tessier, 'Point de Départ', *Le Combattant de la Drôme*, March 1939.

Berthau supported the idea that no one in the new government should come from a party.⁴⁶³ According to the rhetoric of the UNC's anti-communist campaign after 1936, it is likely that the communist party would be banned. In fact, this measure was listed on the youth page in February 1939 as part of a plan for national salvation.⁴⁶⁴ Would the political parties continue to exist? If one takes into account the sometimes violent discourse against politicians and parties throughout the UNC's existence it is possible that political parties would disband too: "....nous condamnons," claimed Galland in 1933, "...dans leur formation et leur action passée, présente et future, les partis politiques".⁴⁶⁵ In October 1939, Dr. Patay, president of the UNC in the Ille-et-Vilaine, wrote that while he applauded the dissolution of the communist party he would liked to have seen the voluntary suspension of all parties.⁴⁶⁶ Indeed, Pichot's initial plan for the government insisted that the parties 'se mettre en vacances'. Parliament should resign.⁴⁶⁷ Patou advocated the 'mise en sommeil' of the parties as the only way to get to the root of the evil in parliament.⁴⁶⁸

Conclusion

The UNC's state reform programme placed it close to the right of French politics. The association's proposals were neither modest nor limited. They were not merely technical responses to objective malfunctions, intended to improve the efficiency of the parliamentary regime. Prost concludes that it is only when placed in comparison to the Fourth and Fifth Republics, and not the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s, that the veterans' plans can be seen for what they truly were: an attempt to make the regime more efficient. This teleological approach is problematic as it obscures the ignorance of historical actors of their role in the seemingly inevitable route to the present day French regime. If one judges liberal democracy, a market economy and 'modernity' as the goal to which all societies are (and should be) striving, then digressions from this course become 'dysfunctional and morally reprehensible'.⁴⁶⁹ Conversely, anti-parliamentarianism becomes a reaction to objective systemic problems with state reform projects seeking to adapt the 'archaic' regime to the challenges of modernity. They become,

⁴⁶³ G. Berthau, 'Ah non, pas seulement une étiquette', *La Vdc*, 29 October 1938.

⁴⁶⁴ 'La voie de salut', *La Vdc*, 4 february 1939.

⁴⁶⁵ P. Galland, 'Au-dessus des partis', *La Vdc*, 4 November 1933.

⁴⁶⁶ Patay, 'Faisons la guerre!', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, October 1939.

⁴⁶⁷ H. Pichot, 'Salut Public. Combattants au gouvernement', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 April 1938.

⁴⁶⁸ P. Patou, 'Le noyau d'une solide équipe', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 10 April 1939.

⁴⁶⁹ Passmore, 'The construction of crisis', p. 162.

therefore, a 'neutral' and 'technical' matter.⁴⁷⁰ This argument legitimates the Fifth Republic as the supreme goal toward which the French (as conscientious citizens) endeavoured. As Kevin Passmore has argued, historians should seek to explain the 'how and why' in history rather than measuring particular histories against a dubious historical norm.⁴⁷¹

One *can* argue that the UNC's plans were more moderate than other groups. The UNC, for example, did not support the establishment of a dictatorship like some of the leagues did.⁴⁷² It did not envisage taking power for itself under a providential leader as fascist groups desired. Nevertheless, to disprove the fascist attributes of a reform plan does not prove its democratic nature. To show that particular features of the UNC's programme were common to other groups and personalities does not prove its Republican quality, even if other plans went further in their demands. While one should not class all revisionist campaigns as fascist, one should no more ignore the potential for authoritarianism within the combatants' movement by claiming that their plans were moderate and democratic across the board. In instances where the veterans' campaign contained elements of more extreme programmes, these should not be ignored. Why should certain points of the UNC's reform programme be given precedence over others? Such an essentialist approach is always proved right.

Whether the UNC's plans are interpreted as authoritarian or for an authoritarian Republic depends on definition. Taking into account the points of UNC policy, one can say that their plans were not democratic. The UNC believed that sovereignty lay with the veterans and conservative veterans at that. It opposed party competition and once in government planned to curtail political pluralism. The association sought to punish the enemies of France, including communists, deputies and other anti-national elements. The government of public safety would act as a temporary dictatorship of competent men, the choice of whom would not be based on the elective principle. The government would rely upon the natural elite of the veterans in two ways. Firstly, veterans would join the governing committee of the public safety government, their morality and work in the combatant movement being qualification enough to restore French fortunes. There would be a reduced number of parliamentarians and ministers. In March 1934, UNC section vice-president Roux-Desbreaux suggested the number be limited to as low as 200

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 162.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p. 162.

⁴⁷² Prost, III, pp. 204-210.

deputies and 100 senators.⁴⁷³ Secondly, the mass of the movement would function as a reservoir of support for the new regime and, as discussed above, perhaps be responsible for the maintenance of order. If normal parliamentary government were to be restored, the left's hope of re-election would be damaged with the introduction of proportional representation. However, limited pluralism would possibly see parties greatly reduced in their power and function. Authoritarianism allows for some institutional pluralism but not of a democratic kind.⁴⁷⁴ While ostensibly concerned for the well-being of the Republic, this concern stemmed from the UNC's definition of effective government: a strong right-wing government of military figures and veterans that would restore order, break the means of the left, limit political pluralism and reduce the role of parliament.

Between February 1934 and May 1936, groups from the Croix de Feu to the Popular Front sought to establish a dense network of local organisations. An expansion of associational and grass-roots activity lay at the heart of these attempts to assume the mantle of 'people's representative'.⁴⁷⁵ The UNC itself widened its activities through the foundation of Action combattante and the JUNC. The programme of Action combattante, used as a basis for electoral action, centred on the UNC's plans for state reform. Action combattante propaganda reflected the views of its parent organisation. This action was part of a wider plan to penetrate non-veteran sections of society and create "...un large courant populaire..." in favour of the veterans' ideas.⁴⁷⁶ The UNC no longer rejected militant political action. Drawing inspiration from the Croix de Feu's success, the veterans of the UNC attempted to establish themselves as a political force as never before.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., p. 192.

⁴⁷⁴ Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, p. 118.

⁴⁷⁵ Wardhaugh, 'Between parliament and the people', p. 216.

⁴⁷⁶ H. Aubert, 'On parle sérieusement des élections', *La Vdc*, 18 January 1936.

Chapter Three

The UNC and the extreme right

Nos camarades sont prêts à suivre leurs dirigeants, mais ils attendent les ordres, les directives, la doctrine. Ils sentent que si une force morale de l'importance de l'UNC ne sait pas ou n'a pas le courage, dans ces temps difficiles de dire au pays la vérité et de construire une doctrine, la désagrégation continuera ses ravages... Nous apporterons notre collaboration ardente à tous ceux, quels qu'ils soient, d'où qu'ils viennent, et où qu'ils militent, qui conscient de leurs devoirs, auront le courage de les remplir.⁴⁷⁷

Henry Rossignol, UNC national president, 1926-1934

Rossignol's endorsement of collaboration with other groups immediately preceded the ratification of the Wagram manifesto in October 1933. The manifesto expressed the UNC's desire to take a more active role in national affairs. The events of February 1934 further engaged the UNC in political action. The association was not alone. The mobilisations of the left and right during February 1934 alerted each side to the threat of their opponents. Fearful of a 'French fascism' that had narrowly failed to take power in February, the socialists and communists agreed a Unity Pact on 27 July 1934 and formed the 'Front commun'. In response to this nascent coalition, the right founded its own alliance. The JP and the SF created the 'Front national' in May 1934. Through *L'Ami du peuple*, its official organ, the Front national appealed to diverse nationalist movements in the name of counter-revolution.⁴⁷⁸ As left-wing co-operation continued through the elections of October 1934, the socialists and communists sought to include the Radicals in the alliance. Initially reluctant but frustrated at the persistence of the right in power under Laval, the party joined the renamed 'Front populaire' alliance on 14 July 1935. The combined forces of the left seemed stronger than ever.

The highways of France became a staging ground for extra-parliamentary politics as groups across the political divide mobilised their troops. On the streets of Paris the right appeared dominant. Patriotic processions that accompanied numerous ceremonies at the tomb of

⁴⁷⁷ H. Rossignol, 'Réflexions de Vacances', *Le Combattant du Poitou*, October 1933.

⁴⁷⁸ Tartakowsky, 'Stratégies de la rue', p. 39.

the Unknown Soldier added to this impression.⁴⁷⁹ Nationalist marches on days of national commemoration were often a cover for violent activity. On 13 May 1934, for example, the national day for Joan of Arc saw the JP and *camelots du roi* attack an ARAC protest against the decree laws. Later that month, *L'Ami du peuple* called for battle in the street against the left.⁴⁸⁰

Veterans took part in the manoeuvres of the left and right. The presence of ARAC *mutilés* at the forefront of communist processions was a deliberate choice on behalf of organisers. It allowed marchers to advance as far as possible to a politically symbolic objective such as the Hôtel de Ville without heavy-handed police intervention.⁴⁸¹ The largest involvement of veterans came in November 1934. At a time when the fall of the Doumergue government served to raise tensions, nationalist associations planned to commemorate the armistice with a large procession. In response, 28 veterans' associations decided to parade from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Nation on 11 November. This symbolic show of unity was intended to wrest the claim to the *anciens combattants* from the leagues. The two processions took place without confrontation.⁴⁸²

The UNC did not shy away from political activism in the aftermath of February 1934. The association attempted to launch a structure for activists that would facilitate local electoral action and aid in the diffusion of its ideas on state reform. The UNC founded Action combattante to this end.⁴⁸³ As we will see, Action combattante was an auxiliary group of the UNC. It had access to established UNC networks and personnel. Local UNC sections were responsible for founding Action combattante sections. Action combattante helped to create new UNC sections and aided the association's candidates in the municipal elections of 1935. In some cases UNC sections provided office space and financial resources for the new group. Its purpose was to disseminate the UNC's programme among veterans and non-veteran sympathisers. To this end, the veterans intended Action combattante to create a grass-roots movement that would be sympathetic to their association's policies on state reform.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁸² Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁴⁸³ UNC/EC, 9 December 1933. In this meeting the UNC's leaders discussed the association's future political action. Though they did not mention Action combattante it seems that the group arose out of this discussion.

The executive committee agreed that because the veterans alone could initiate national renovation, it was necessary to increase the number of *anciens combattants* in the Chamber.⁴⁸⁴ However, in at least one incidence of public mobilisation in the Ille-et-Vilaine, Action combattante used tactics that were comparable to those of the leagues. But in general, when it came to street demonstrations, the UNC proper preferred to show its presence rather than rely on Action combattante.

The existence of Action combattante shows that sections of the UNC's membership desired its political action to go further than it previously had. In April 1935, *La Voix du combattant* reported an incident in the Drôme that marked an escalation in UNC tactics. At a meeting of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, held in protest against the extension of military service, an altercation occurred between members of the Ligue and UNC activists. The speaker's pacifist declaration that he would rather be shot by French bullets than fight an invading enemy sparked the clash. Vigorously opposed to this view, the veterans in attendance prevented the adoption of an *ordre du jour*. *La Voix du combattant* did not state whether this involved violence or the simple shouting down of the opposition. In any case, as a result of the disruption the organisers abandoned the meeting. Pleased with this outcome, the UNC congratulated its loyal comrades. A new style of political confrontation had proved successful and *La Voix du combattant* urged readers to do the same.⁴⁸⁵

In the first case, this chapter examines the veterans' participation in militant political activity through Action combattante. It then discusses the UNC's co-operation with extreme right-wing leagues. The chapter begins with an investigation into the origins and recruitment of Action combattante. An examination of the methods and activities of the group reveals an action similar to that of the nationalist leagues. Penetrating the veteran and non-veteran milieus, Action combattante managed to establish itself in some *départements*. The second part of this chapter focuses on the relationship between the UNC and the extreme right. Primarily concerning relations with the Croix de Feu, the chapter argues that some UNC veterans were attracted to extreme right-wing militant political action. Consequently, one cannot claim that the veterans were integral to French democratic political culture. Some collaborated with and joined groups that were not Republican in the parliamentary and democratic sense of the word.

⁴⁸⁴ UNC/EC, 28 July 1934.

⁴⁸⁵ Report from the Action combattante page, *La Vdc*, 13 April 1935.

Action Combattante de l'UNC

Humbert Isaac's private papers first mention Action combattante in a note from Alfred Charron, president of the *poitevin* group and a national vice-president of the UNC, on 19 December 1933. Yet it was only after the events of 6 February 1934 that the movement gained real momentum. 'Quelques constatations', a document produced by Jean Goy, marks the second phase of Action combattante's development. It was perhaps produced between 7 February and 10 March 1934, the date at which an *appel* appeared in *La Voix du combattant* calling for the intensification of propaganda efforts and subscriptions.⁴⁸⁶ Two subsequent *appels* appeared on 14 and 21 April 1934. Without mentioning a specific organisation, they appeared under the heading 'L'Action Combattante'.

Goy wrote that despite the fact that the UNC possessed a membership of 900,000 veterans and a team of propagandists and orators its action was proving ineffective. As a result, the association had not been able to attract the French to its programme on state reform and moral and economic renovation. In contrast, the Croix de Feu was in the ascendancy. The stagnation of the UNC's membership amplified the urgency of the situation. In fact, Goy acknowledged that a section of the UNC membership also participated in the activities of other groups notably the Croix de Feu. The difference in tactics between the two organisations lay at the root of this unhappy situation: "D'où vient donc leur succès? De leur propagande dans tous les milieux jeunes et non-combattants! De leurs rassemblements à caractère mystérieux! De leurs grands "meetings" avec imposante mise en scène! De leur discipline! De la mystique du Chef!"⁴⁸⁷

'Quelques constatations' reveals how closely Action combattante's foundation was linked to the perceived dynamism of the Croix de Feu's political tactics.⁴⁸⁸ At this time, the Croix de Feu was changing. No longer the preserve of decorated veterans, the league was

⁴⁸⁶ Le Comité de Propagande et d'Action, 'Appel', *La Vdc*, 10 March 1934. 'Quelques constatations' mentions the February 1934 riots. The fact that Goy's document refers to the growing success of the Croix de Feu suggests that it was written in mid-1934. The Croix de Feu's membership grew from between 58,000-62,000 in January 1934 to over 100,000 after February. It is difficult to assess the size of Croix de Feu membership. Estimates for January 1934 come from Paul Chopine, former head of the dispos and Henry Coston, an extreme right-wing publicist. The figure for February 1934 is Gareth Howlett's estimation. The Bonnevey Commission into the 6 February riots estimated 125,000 members at this time. La Rocque claimed there were 140,000 members. See Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, p.37.

⁴⁸⁷ Jean Goy, 'Quelques constatations', undated document in the Rossignol folder, UNC archive, 18 rue Vézelay, Paris.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

attempting to become a mass movement that encompassed ex-servicemen, youth and women. It did this through auxiliary movements such as the Volontaires Nationaux (VN), which was founded in December 1933. It is possible that Goy desired to imitate the Croix de Feu's auxiliaries through Action combattante. Indeed, he located the key to the Croix de Feu's growth not only in their propaganda methods (*rassemblements* and *meetings*) but also in their populism, which reached beyond the veterans to "...les milieux jeunes et non-combattants".⁴⁸⁹

The only way for the UNC to regain the initiative was to adopt similar tactics and undertake, in Goy's words, 'a rapid and brutal reform'. If not, the UNC would continue to lose its members and perhaps its moral authority. Goy prescribed essential reform in a number of areas. *La Voix du combattant* would inculcate a faith in its readership. It would use simpler language to create a mystique or at least encourage enthusiasm. The president of the UNC would act like a true leader and take a greater role in the UNC's direction, propaganda and action. Finally, the dissemination of propaganda would be intensified, particularly through meetings. Four 'équipes orateurs' comprising three speakers each would be able to hold four meetings a day in large French towns. Goy concluded with the suggestion that the Seine and Paris group take the lead in this reform and thereby set an example for the rest to follow.⁴⁹⁰ Goy was not alone his appreciation of the Croix de Feu's development. Provincial sections were also aware of this. In March 1935, Jacques Toutain, president of the Seine-Inférieure group, wrote of the 'striking' and 'almost incomprehensible' advance of La Rocque's league.⁴⁹¹

In spite of the importance that some members of the leadership placed on Action combattante, others on the executive committee were ignorant of its workings. Several disputes in the executive committee over the UNC's political action demonstrate a split between a moderate section of the association and an activist tendency. Originally, the leadership had agreed to undertake civic action within the UNC, and so remain '100 % UNC', rather than establish a separate group, which would recruit non-veteran sympathisers. To found a new group, Léon Berthier alleged, would attract 'political black balls' who wished to improve their

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ J. Toutain, 'Rapport succinct sur la Question de l'UNC et des Elections Municipales du 5 mai 1935 envoyé à tous les Présidents de Section du Groupe le 22 février 1935', *L'UNC de Normandie*, March 1935.

reputation through membership of the UNC. It was decided that civic action would be taken within the structure of the UNC and would concern only veterans.⁴⁹²

Yet Action combattante functioned as a separate group, a fact that contravened the earlier decision of the leadership. Reservations were expressed in June and July 1934 that the new association had been founded without the express permission or the knowledge even of the committee.⁴⁹³ Patay, Francisque Gauthier, vice-president of the Lyon section, and Daniel Desroches, UNC president in the Finistère, feared losing control of a group that acted with apparent independence yet was funded largely by the UNC.⁴⁹⁴ Gauthier complained that the committee had not been informed from the start that the UNC was responsible for the new group.⁴⁹⁵ Citing the Croix de Feu as an example, Charron explained that it was necessary to found a separate group in order to take action as quickly as possible. Other executive members objected to the rumoured provenance of Action combattante funding, namely from industrialist Ernest Mercier. A 'ranking member' of the Paris UNC and with 'numerous friends among its leaders', Mercier was not new to the combatant world.⁴⁹⁶ During the twenties, his Redressement Français group utilised the *esprit combattant* in an attempt to unite the Redressement's industrialists with right-wing veterans' associations. This group was closely associated to the national UNC and Goy collaborated with the Redressement from its creation.⁴⁹⁷ In the end, acting in secret, the activists in the executive committee had out-manoeuvred their colleagues.

Action combattante recruited veterans and sympathisers. On 16 June 1934, a notice in *La Voix du combattant* warned of the widening divorce between parliament and the nation. It contained a statement on the UNC's aims for state and electoral reform. The notice ended with an appeal to join Action combattante. A footnote explained that this appeal was only for those French who could not for whatever reason join the UNC proper but who nevertheless desired to collaborate in its action. The only stipulation was that non-combatants be 'hommes sincères'. Patay emphasised that youths, women and 'all honest people' should be encouraged to attend Action combattante meetings.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹² UNC/EC, 9 December 1933.

⁴⁹³ UNC/EC, 10 May 1934; 30 June 1934; 28 July 1934.

⁴⁹⁴ UNC/EC, 30 June 1934.

⁴⁹⁵ UNC/EC, 28 July 1934.

⁴⁹⁶ Kuisel, *Ernest Mercier*, p. 107.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 106-108.

⁴⁹⁸ Patay, 'A tous les AC', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, September 1934.

The UNC was especially desirous that French youths become involved. The Metz congress in May 1934 decided that all young people, not just the sons and daughters of veterans, should be allowed to join Action combattante.⁴⁹⁹ These non-combatants would likely be the activists of the association as the leadership of the UNC did not believe the veterans were able to fulfil this role.⁵⁰⁰ Isaac's papers reveal that: "Dans chaque département, il faut recruter des orateurs, prendre des contacts prudents avec d'autres organisations (pas nécessairement de combattants), lancer des études techniques et recruter des commissaires pour les réunions".⁵⁰¹ Furthermore, the UNC did not possess the funds to train orators. This task was left to local sections. It is possible that local UNC section chiefs would find it hard to resist the recruitment of ready-made leaguers from within the Croix de Feu. Indeed, Prost writes that the national UNC leadership sent men, probably Croix de Feu, under the auspices of Action combattante to preside over departmental UNC meetings.⁵⁰²

An open recruitment policy did not please all members of the committee. Nérissou, president of the UNC's 15th section, was disgruntled that the advertising campaign for the group used the work of Italian artist Leonetto Cappiello, doubly unsuitable for being a foreigner and a non-combatant.⁵⁰³ In July 1934, Lebecq reassured executive committee member and vice-president of the Marne group Rasse on the veteran quality of Action combattante officials.⁵⁰⁴ The leadership of Action combattante included veterans from the UNC specifically UNC treasurer Alfred de Pontalba, and vice-presidents Charron, Goy and Paul Galland.⁵⁰⁵

At the Metz congress, Charron presented a report on the restructuring of propaganda activities. He suggested that France be divided into zones of four or five departments each, presided over by a leader and a small administrative staff. The *chef de région* would be responsible for moulding public opinion, informing local newspapers of group actions and producing posters and tracts. Each department would be responsible for training orators and conference organisers. When the time was right, the *chef's* staff would organise meetings through a 'Comité d'Action combattante'.⁵⁰⁶

⁴⁹⁹ 'Assemblée Générale Statutaire, Vendredi 11 Mai: Les Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 19 May 1934.

⁵⁰⁰ UNC/EC, 30 June 1934.

⁵⁰¹ Prost, I, note p. 156.

⁵⁰² Prost, I, p. 166.

⁵⁰³ UNC/EC, 20 June 1934.

⁵⁰⁴ UNC/EC, 28 July 1934.

⁵⁰⁵ UNC/EC, 30 June 1934.

⁵⁰⁶ A. Charron, 'Organisation, propagande et presse', *XV Congrès National*, pp. 346-348.

Two months after the first appeal, *La Voix du combattant* announced the beginning of a national subscription campaign. Powerful financial resources were needed, it claimed, to launch a vast action on a civic, moral, financial and economic front.⁵⁰⁷ From 25 August until 17 November 1934, six lists of subscriptions were published. The dramatic fall in figures between the first and last lists suggests that the published results are reliable. One must still be wary that they were published in the movement's national newspaper and so subject to distortion. The results of the appeal can be seen below.

Results of Action combattante subscription campaign⁵⁰⁸

	No. of contributors	Amount in Francs
1 st list (25/8/1934)	102	46, 985.75 F
2 nd list (1/9/1934)	32	11, 334
3 rd list (15/9/1934)	76	3, 739
4 th list (13/10/1934)	121	4, 452
5 th list (20/10/1934)	81	2, 472
6 th list (17/11/1934)	76	4, 144.25
Total	488	73, 127

The table shows that there was an initial flurry of donations. One donation of 10, 000 F accounted for a large proportion of this. The amount donated in the remaining five lists totalled 26, 141.25 F, 56 % of the original list's total. The disappointing response to the campaign did not go unnoticed. In May 1935, an article addressed to all section chiefs of the UNC demanded their efforts in support of Action combattante.⁵⁰⁹ The same article appeared four months later. The poor results of the campaign contrasted sharply with the amount received to fund a monument to King Albert I, which had raised 802, 452.80F by February 1935.⁵¹⁰

Did this disappointment result from a rejection of politics among the membership? Certainly, regional editions of *La Voix du combattant* neither published all the *appels* for Action

⁵⁰⁷ Action combattante, 'Pour l'Action combattante: Appel à tous nos camarades', *La Vdc*, 11 August 1934.

⁵⁰⁸ Lists appeared in 6 issues of *La Vdc*, from 25 August 1934 – 17 November 1934.

⁵⁰⁹ Notice in *La Vdc*, 25 May 1935.

⁵¹⁰ Results of the campaign were published in *La Vdc*, 9 February 1935.

combattante nor dedicated a whole page to the movement as the national edition did from December 1934. Found on page three of the newspaper, it published articles on all manner of political concerns.⁵¹¹ The organisation was aware of concerns among members. Patay wrote, “Oui je sais, l’action de l’UNC en faveur d’un relèvement national (ce que nous appelons l’Action Combattante) étonne et inquiète quelques-uns entre vous”.⁵¹² Nevertheless, readers were assured that this political action was the ‘good’ politics of the veterans and not the ‘bad’ politics of corrupt politicians. Some members may have rejected the new association out of their rejection of politics in general.

However, the group did find favour among some provincial sections. There was a limited implantation outside Paris. In the months following the February 1934 riots, police reported that a poster campaign took place in the Aisne, the Alpes-Maritimes, the Drôme, the Oise, the Morbihan, the Vaucluse, the Vienne, the Ille-et-Vilaine and the Pas-de-Calais.⁵¹³ Action combattante founded new UNC sections and groups affiliated to the UNC that could then be absorbed into the organisation proper.⁵¹⁴ It was successful to this end in areas where the UNC had not been, namely in the Drôme, the Var, the Alpes-Maritimes, the Hautes-Pyrénées, the Basses-Alpes and the Gard.⁵¹⁵ In 1934, each of these departments had a very small UNC membership if a section existed there at all.⁵¹⁶ At a meeting held in Rodez, in the Aveyron, and attended by the president of the Port d’Agnès UNC section, Action combattante activist de Chalain presented the programme to local residents. New members soon joined up and this marked “...le premier jalon posé dans l’Aveyron”.⁵¹⁷

Some existing provincial groups showed support for Action combattante. The UNC’s Berry group donated 100 F to the association.⁵¹⁸ In May 1934, the departmental congress of the

⁵¹¹ The articles that appeared on the first ‘L’action combattante’ page provide a clue to its diversity of subject: ‘L’Etat écartelé’; ‘Planistes et révolutionnaires’; ‘M. Benes optimiste’; ‘Le système soviétique’; ‘La filibuste’; ‘Vers le suffrage familial’; ‘Réponse à un neutre’.

⁵¹² Patay, ‘L’Action Combattante’, *La Vdc*, 20 October 1934.

⁵¹³ AN F⁷: 13024, weekly report from the Aisne, 23 July 1934 and 19 November 1934; 13025: weekly report from the Drôme, 17 September 1934; 13026: weekly report from the Loire-Inférieure, 11 June 1934 and weekly report from the Ille-et-Vilaine, 18 June 1934; 13027: weekly report from the Oise, 4 June 1934 and weekly report from the Morbihan, 13 August; 13029: weekly report from the Vaucluse, 11 June 1934 and weekly report from the Vienne 16 July 1934; 13039: weekly report from the Pas-de-Calais, 15 August 1934.

⁵¹⁴ UNC/EC, 28 July 1934.

⁵¹⁵ Report on ‘L’Action combattante’ in the pre-Brest congress issue, *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

⁵¹⁶ Prost, II, p. 63.

⁵¹⁷ ‘Chronique d’action: Aveyron’, *La Vdc*, 5 January 1935.

⁵¹⁸ ‘Groupe de Berry’, *L’Ancien Combattant du Berry*, September-October 1934.

Basque and Béarnais group voted in favour of Action combattante's state reform project.⁵¹⁹ An Action combattante group existed in the Pyrénées-Orientales.⁵²⁰ In the Seine-et-Marne, the Action combattante section counted 22 members in January 1935.⁵²¹ By March, the group had 40 members. During the months of April, May, June and August 1935, the section spread Action combattante propaganda, mainly through meetings, conferences and the sale of the Action combattante *édition mensuelle*. Commandant Thibaut of Action combattante spoke about the group's programme for civic action and national renovation at the general assembly of the Fontainebleau section of the UNC.⁵²²

UNC speakers held meetings to unveil the role and aims of the new group. The largest of these meetings took place at Rennes on 14 October 1934. Action combattante already had a presence in the area at least since June 1934, when a meeting of 40 men took place under the auspices of local UNC president Patay.⁵²³ At the October congress of Action combattante, Goy and Roger d'Avigneau, founder of the UNC's Loire-Inférieure group and secretary of the Fédération interalliée des anciens combattants (FIDAC), addressed a reported 8000-strong audience. Local police stated that the meeting demonstrated the discipline of the group and its willingness to 'enter into the struggle' if its 'demands were not satisfied'.⁵²⁴ Later in October, a similar meeting took place in Caen at which 8,000 people attended.⁵²⁵

The same month, the Eure group accepted the task of founding an Action combattante section in the department. Non-UNC members were to pay 10 F for admission while UNC members could join free. At the meeting of the Eure departmental commission on civic action, Victor, founder of Action combattante in the department, reported that the organisation was doing well. It had already recruited regional and cantonal *commissaires*. The local Action combattante shared the UNC's headquarters in Evreux. In addition, the commission agreed that

⁵¹⁹ Report from the departmental congress of the Basque and Béarnais groups held on 27 May 1934 reported in *Le Poilu Basque*, June 1934.

⁵²⁰ Hoffmann, 'Tribune des militants: Les Anciens Combattants et la politique', *La Vdc*, 2 March 1935.

⁵²¹ 'Chronique régionale', *La Vdc: Seine-et-Marne*, January 1935.

⁵²² 'Chronique régionale', *La Vdc: Seine-et-Marne*, May 1935.

⁵²³ AN F⁷ 13026, weekly report from the Ille-et-Vilaine, 'Le Mardi 26 juin, à Rennes, "l'Action Combattante" a tenu une réunion...', 2 July 1934.

⁵²⁴ AN F⁷ 13026, weekly report from the Ille-et-Vilaine, 'Les Anciens Combattants', 28 October 1934.

⁵²⁵ 'L'Action Combattante: Le meeting régional de Basse-Normandie à Caen, 28 octobre', *La Vdc*, 17 November 1934.

as both groups had identical programmes, meetings of the departmental Action combattante group and the departmental civic action group would be combined.⁵²⁶

Within the UNC, the meaning of Action combattante varied. This conflict over the aims of the new group reflected the different tendencies that co-existed in the wider UNC. In some cases, Action combattante activity was organised for street confrontation with the left. In the Ille-et-Vilaine, the local UNC designated district and cantonal Action combattante delegates. Each delegate possessed a telephone and a car. It was thanks to this organisational structure, wrote Patay, that the group had been able to mobilise an entire *arrondissement* against potential political demonstrations, probably of the left.⁵²⁷ Patay congratulated Action combattante in the department for helping the UNC sections to form the basis of the parties against the Front commun in the elections.⁵²⁸ This tactic was not dissimilar to Croix de Feu action. For example, at Tours on 27 June 1935, La Rocque declared, "From now on we are able to affirm that thirty-six hours would suffice to muzzle the red suburbs and to take power if necessary".⁵²⁹ In 'Quelques constatations', Goy had demanded that future UNC gatherings be like those of the Croix de Feu. In the Ille-et-Vilaine, Action combattante used technology to assemble members in a short space of time when left-wing action threatened.

Perhaps Action combattante could have ultimately functioned as a combat group. Indeed, Isaac described Action combattante as an auxiliary force in which a taste for action, even combat, motivated the devoted activists. Yet for Isaac and others of the more moderate trend in the UNC, street action held less appeal. The use of Action combattante in the association's broader campaign for state reform trumped its use as a combat group, for the time being at least:

Nous pouvons constater avec satisfaction le chemin parcouru par nos idées.... Nous sommes à pied d'œuvre devant une besogne bien définie, pourvus d'une doctrine, d'une organisation, d'un auxilaire précieux en la personne de «l'Action combattante», de militants convaincus et dévoués, animés du goût de l'action, voire du combat, et du sens de l'Apostolat. Dans notre mentalité à tous, dans notre action, dans les luttes à soutenir entre les deux tendances l'Apostolat doit l'emporter jusqu'à nouvel ordre sur le combat.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ 'Commission départementale d'Action civique de l'Eure', *L'UNC de Normandie*, November 1934.

⁵²⁷ Patay, 'L'organisation de l'action combattante en Ille-et-Vilaine', *La Vdc*, 22 June 1935.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Passmore, 'Boy scouting for grown ups', p. 549.

⁵³⁰ H. Isaac, 'Propos de Rentrée', *La Vdc*, 22 September 1934.

Action combattante was not a paramilitary arm of the UNC. It was neither a tool of violence nor a *service d'ordre* to be used against the UNC's adversaries. Street action was not the primary aim of Action combattante. Even Lebecq admitted that this tactic had proved fruitless.⁵³¹ The group was oriented more towards local electoral participation. It would aid the campaigns of local UNC members but also put up its own candidates for election. The UNC hoped that electoral action would prevent communist revolution and attract the peasant classes away from extremist groups.⁵³² Goy summed up this new political direction: "Ce qu'il convient plutôt d'établir, c'est une entente avec les Municipalités sympathiques... constitution de listes avec les jeunes et au titre de l'Action Combattante... [agir sur] le seul terrain ancien combattant, ce serait aboutir à un échec".⁵³³ By the elections of May 1935, the work of 23 departmental delegates and 700 communal activists had allowed Action combattante to discern the 'electoral mentality' of each area.⁵³⁴ Participation in the municipal elections would serve as preparation for the legislative elections in 1936. In Normandy, each section was charged with establishing a list of combatants 'in the UNC sense of the word'. The aim was to win all seats on the municipal council and install a UNC mayor in each area. Candidates would be listed as 'délégué de l'UNC'.⁵³⁵

Results were varied. In Gers, a mayor won office as an Action combattante candidate. During the elections to the council in Clermont in the Nord a member stood unsuccessfully as an independent republican and a delegate of Action combattante.⁵³⁶ In the Ardèche municipal elections, 812 UNC and 569 'youths and sympathisers' succeeded out of a possible 2096 seats available.⁵³⁷ A proportion of the UNC sympathisers may have been Action combattante members. In the month following the election, Toutain hailed the victories of UNC delegates in the elections. He chastised some presidents for not communicating the previous month's instructions on Action combattante to their members. In these areas, candidates had failed.⁵³⁸

⁵³¹ UNC/EC, 28 July 1934.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ UNC/EC, 24 November 1934.

⁵³⁴ Report on 'L'Action combattante' in the pre-Brest congress issue, *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

⁵³⁵ J. Toutain, 'Rapport succinct sur la Question de l'UNC et des Elections Municipales du 5 mai 1935 envoyé à tous les Présidents de Section du Groupe le 22 février 1935', *L'UNC de Normandie*, March 1935.

⁵³⁶ 'Chronique d'action: Gers, Puy-de-Dôme', *La Vdc*, 29 December 1934.

⁵³⁷ 'Chronique d'action: Ardèche', *La Vdc*, 22 June 1935.

⁵³⁸ J. Toutain, 'Après les élections des 5 et 12 mai 1935', *L'UNC de Normandie*, June 1935.

Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine published the outcome of local UNC electoral efforts in the department. In total, UNC members or candidates won 53% of council seats (701/1317), with a majority share on 68% (63/93) of councils. The organisation boasted a UNC mayor in 54% of councils (50/93). Only 4% (25/701) of elected UNC members were presidents or vice-presidents of provincial sections. Prost claims that section presidents and their deputies were the most politically active of UNC members. These results, in an area where Action combattante was well established, perhaps attest to a political militancy that extended beyond the local leadership.⁵³⁹

With the political crisis worsening, the Croix de Feu's dynamic tactics (their large meetings, public marches and populist appeal) caught the UNC off guard. In order to halt a potential loss of membership and regain the initiative, Goy hoped to emulate these tactics and hopefully their success. A more political direction for the UNC would satisfy those who were calling for just such a change of tactics. However, whereas the Croix de Feu was oriented towards street action, Action combattante was intended to support electoral participation. It was not a reserve of shock troops. The results were mixed. The response to several *appels* disappointed the leadership. This lack of enthusiasm was not characteristic of all sections of the membership. Action combattante fared well during 1934 and 1935. The evidence above shows that this came from the involvement of provincial members especially during the municipal elections of 1935.

Despite the more complete picture of Action combattante's fortunes provided above, the movement failed, a fact that the UNC accepted at the national Pau congress in 1936. Does this prove a general distaste for political action among the veterans? In some areas this was the case. In the absence of membership lists one cannot specify the proportion that was favourable to Action combattante. One can argue that the veterans' rejection of militant political action was not unanimous. The favourable reaction of some members to the UNC's new group meant that a desire for politically motivated action existed, even after the apparent failure of Action combattante. Such a desire did not pervade the association but it was perhaps greater than historians have estimated. In June 1936, when the national UNC accepted the failure of Action combattante, the general assembly of the Seine-Inférieure group decided to discontinue Action

⁵³⁹ 'L'UNC aux élections municipales', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, July and August 1935.

combattante in the department. However, at the 14th regional congress at Pont-Audemer in the on 27 and 28 June, 200 attendees representing 36,000 veterans decided to continue Action combattante in backing the idea of the UNC's new initiative, the Rassemblement français, initiated at the national Pau congress.⁵⁴⁰ Toutain explained that the Rassemblement would spread the ideas approved at Metz in 1934 and Brest in 1935. It would operate within the framework of Action combattante.⁵⁴¹ In April 1939, the Seine-Inférieure group took the apparently spontaneous initiative of creating a cantonal Action combattante group, "...un mouvement de propagande et d'action en faveur de l'UNC et ses idées".⁵⁴² This revival further attests to the political militancy and initiative of some provincial members. Moreover, Action combattante was still in existence as late as February 1939.⁵⁴³

Action combattante entered the political arena at a time when the Croix de Feu was experiencing unprecedented membership growth. Indeed, the VN came into being at largely the same time as Action combattante, and went onto absorb the Briscards and the Fils et Filles des Croix de Feu (FFCF) in mid-1934. It became the most dynamic of all the Croix de Feu's formations.⁵⁴⁴ For veterans who wished to pursue political action Action combattante did not present the best option. Even within the UNC framework itself, Action combattante faced competition for youth members with the JUNC, which outlasted its rival. With the Croix de Feu having appropriated the mystique of the veteran and 6 February, some UNC veterans may have preferred to join a group with a record of successful action. The Croix de Feu had ostensibly similar ideas to the UNC and appeared to be a veterans' association. Indeed, the UNC itself attributed the failure to the broken promises of members but also to the theft of its ideas by other groups. Action combattante was evidently not to the liking of some, but to others who welcomed the UNC's political turn, better-established alternatives existed.

The extreme right

The forces of the extreme right had long confronted the Third Republic. In the late 1880s, the emergence of Paul Déroulède's Ligue des Patriotes and the success of General Georges

⁵⁴⁰ Report from the general assembly of the Seine-Inférieure group, *L'UNC de Normandie*, June 1936. Chapter five examines further the Rassemblement français.

⁵⁴¹ J. Toutain, 'Mise au point', *L'UNC de Normandie*, January 1937.

⁵⁴² 'L'Action Combattante Cantonale', *L'UNC de Normandie*, April 1939.

⁵⁴³ UNC/EC, 18 February 1939.

⁵⁴⁴ Passmore, *From Liberalism*, p. 220.

Boulangier's opposition to the Republic saw the right combine authoritarian nationalism and populism. In 1898, the AF was founded in response to the Dreyfus Affair and the subsequent revitalisation of the left. For the next forty years, under Maurras's leadership the group relentlessly attacked the Republic, while it championed monarchism and integral nationalism. After the Great War, the extreme right once again took up the anti-Republican cause in the wake of left-wing electoral victory in 1924. Groups such as Valois's Faisceau and the JP under Taittinger often engaged in violence in their campaigns for an end to the parliamentary Republic. In the early 1930s, as the economic crisis worsened and dissatisfaction with the regime grew, La Rocque's Croix de Feu, François Coty and Jean Renaud's SF and Marcel Bucard's Francisme swelled the ranks of the Republic's enemies. In rural areas, Henry Dorgères exploited economic hardship to attract peasants to his anti-Republican Greenshirts movement.

While nationalist groups jealously guarded their independence, members could adhere to several groups at once. As we will see, UNC members were not different in this respect. The case of Yves Nicolaï is emblematic of the cross-membership of extreme right-wing groups in France. Member and 'maillon central' of the Gironde UNC, as well as of the Camarades de combat and the Légionnaires décorés au péril de leur vie, Nicolaï joined the Faisceau in 1926. He was responsible for the recruitment of veterans. The same year, Nicolaï founded a section of the JP. During the thirties, he went on to become secretary general of the Ligue des contribuables in 1934, an influential member of the Bordeaux Croix de Feu and subsequently departmental president of the PSF in 1936.⁵⁴⁵

UNC president Georges Lebecq was a familiar figure in extreme right-wing circles. A member of the JP and backed by the FR, Lebecq won a seat on the Parisian municipal council in 1929. His connection to the JP paid dividends after the loss of his seat to a Popular Front candidate in May 1935. Lebecq quickly found a post as *conseiller général* of the Seine in Neuilly, where de Kérillis forced the local JP leader in the town, de Chardon, to withdraw his own candidature.⁵⁴⁶ Within the UNC, Lebecq was not alone in his patronage of the JP. Among those members affiliated or sympathetic to the league were vice-president of the UNC Nord group André Auguste, president of the UNC in the Aisne, Parmentier, Henri Rillart de Verneuil

⁵⁴⁵ Sylvain Trussardi, 'Faisceau, Croix de Feu, PSF. Trois mouvements girondins, du milieu des années 1920 à la fin des années 1930', *Parlement[s]*, 3 Hors-série (2005), p. 59.

⁵⁴⁶ Philippet, *Le Temps des Ligues*, IV, p. 2020; V, annex III-B-3, p. 276.

and national executive committee member and deputy of the Deux-Sèvres Emile Taudière.⁵⁴⁷ Members and section leaders of the JP were present in the leadership of the JUNC.⁵⁴⁸

Concerning the Croix de Feu, the UNC's Jacques Péricard was a founding member of the league. He would remain a president of honour.⁵⁴⁹ Alexandre Loetz, president of the UNC's federation in the Deux-Sèvres, contributed to articles in *Le Flambeau*.⁵⁵⁰ Goy was a member of the Croix de Feu at least as early as April 1930.⁵⁵¹ While he was reported to have only attended one meeting, as mayor of Perreux he always invited the local section to patriotic ceremonies. Many of its members sponsored his candidacy in the elections of 1932.⁵⁵² As we will see, patronage of the Croix de Feu in the UNC was not limited to high-level members.

In rural France, Dorgères channelled rural discontent into his anti-Republican Greenshirts movement. By 1935, he had established himself as the principal right-wing activist in rural France.⁵⁵³ The experience of the peasant *poilu* was central to his appeal. Dorgères claimed that the peasants had paid the ultimate price during the war, the 'blood tax', only to be beset with financial difficulties and abandoned by the state. He founded a veterans' association, the Union des Paysans Anciens Combattants in an effort to unite disgruntled tax-payers, veterans and peasants.⁵⁵⁴ Combined with his appeal to the material difficulties of veterans, his peasant movement embraced the symbolic and commemorative sites of the *ancien combattant* world. After a peasant rally, the crowd often visited the local war memorial to lay a ceremonial sheaf of wheat at its foot. Dorgères claimed that statistical data made it certain that the Unknown Soldier had been a peasant. When the agricultural crisis hit in the mid-thirties and farmers' incomes suffered, veterans filled the ranks of Dorgères's Comités d'action paysanne. Based on departmental membership estimates for the Dorgériste movement, one may observe that where

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 189, 201 and 210.

⁵⁴⁸ E. Veysset, 'La propagande: Nous unissons, nous fédérons, nous ne démolissons pas', *La Vdc*, 7 September 1935.

⁵⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Cointet, *La Légion française des combattants: La tentation du fascisme* (Paris: A. Michel, 1995), note 65, p. 429.

⁵⁵⁰ Kéchichian, *Les Croix de Feu*, note 1, p. 48.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 147.

⁵⁵³ Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 52-62.

Dorgères attracted most sympathisers - the Seine-Inférieure, the Eure, the Orne, the Calvados and the Manche – the UNC claimed a lion's share of organised veterans.⁵⁵⁵

In December 1934, JUNC member Jean Chamant endorsed Dorgérisme in *La Voix du combattant*:

Ce que, je voudrais ici, c'est souligner l'identité de vues qui s'est manifestée entre eux et nous à la salle Wagram. Et puis – pourquoi ne pas le dire? – cet article a l'ambition légitime de poser des bases pour des contacts prochains et féconds entre le Front paysan et les jeunes de l'UNC.⁵⁵⁶

Chamant welcomed Dorgères's ambition to found a new order: "...une prophétie dont la réalisation n'est peut-être éloignée et pour laquelle nous travaillons depuis un an à l'UNC".⁵⁵⁷

Chamant compared 28 November 1934, the date of a large peasant meeting in Paris, which he termed the 'awakening' of the peasants, to the 'awakening' of the people on 6 February that year. He concluded: "L'heure de la grande réconciliation française approche: elle se fera, au moment voulu, par l'union des fils de la terre et des sauveurs de cette même terre".⁵⁵⁸

The cause of anti-communism multiplied the UNC's links with groups on the extreme right. Since February 1934, the communist party had denounced the UNC as fascist. It organised counter-demonstrations against the parades of the UNC. In turn, the UNC threatened to demonstrate against communists.⁵⁵⁹ In the Vaucluse, in response to a loss of membership since February 1934, the president of the local UNC section promised to end political action *except* for the struggle against the Front commun.⁵⁶⁰ The AF was successful in gaining the aid of some UNC veterans for its political action.⁵⁶¹ In May 1934, the leaders of the Front national, Taittinger, Renaud and Jacques Fromentin, courted the UNC in an effort to secure the veterans' membership of the anti-revolutionary alliance.⁵⁶² The UNC had reportedly already given its agreement to an 'Interligues' association that was ready to act in case of trouble from the left.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁵ Compare the figures on the UNC's departmental membership in Prost, II, pp. 63-64 to Paxton's evidence on the success of Dorgérisme in the same areas in *ibid.*, pp. 60, 96, 100, 103 and 109.

⁵⁵⁶ J. Chamant, 'Vers la réconciliation française', *La Vdc*, 8 December 1934.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁹ AN F⁷ 13029, weekly report from the Vaucluse, 7 May 1934.

⁵⁶⁰ AN F⁷ 13029, weekly report from the Vaucluse, 24 September 1934.

⁵⁶¹ AN 382 AP: 10, Comité d'entente d'anciens combattants et volontaires juifs de France to René Cassin, 10 April 1937.

⁵⁶² FM, 19 940 500: 237, 'Activité du Front National', 23 May 1934.

⁵⁶³ FM, 19 940 500: 237, untitled document, 3 May 1934.

Police reported that F. Mollin, named as Lebecq's 'grand patron électoral', advised the president of the UNC against signing a pact with the Front national. Mollin believed that this would provoke attacks from the left and could entail the resignation of some UNC members. He suggested that Lebecq encourage members to work with the Front national and attend its meetings without signing an open agreement. This tactic would obtain the desired collaboration without officially compromising the organisation.⁵⁶⁴

Collaboration with the Front national did not please all UNC veterans. In July 1934, president of the Nord group Aimé Goudaert advised his colleagues on the executive committee to avoid involvement in both the Front commun and the Front national. In the Nord, the UNC had remained neutral. This stance meant that the association could hold meetings even in 'the most socialist regions' without the threat of disruption. He recognised that the association was hostile to the former but warned that if the UNC declared this publicly it could expect to lose a third of its members. Eugène Félix of the Eastern group, Goy and Isaac agreed.⁵⁶⁵

Local UNC members and section presidents did indeed attend Front national meetings. At Metz in October 1935, Magny, president of a sub-group of the Metz UNC, presided over a meeting of 600 people, with the presidents of the local JP and AF. Magny called for the fusion of all 'national' groups in order to "...nettoyer le Pays".⁵⁶⁶ The veterans of the Association Marius Plateau, affiliated to the AF, and the Association Raymond Rossignol of the JP joined the UNC in its support for the Front national.⁵⁶⁷

After the election of the Popular Front, anti-communism continued to provide common ground for the disparate nationalist groups. In July 1936, local representatives of the AF, JP, SF and Croix de Feu met in Dijon at a Front national meeting. An unnamed speaker claimed that local Front national spokespersons would attempt to engage local UNC leaders in collaboration with the Croix de Feu.⁵⁶⁸ A meeting at Cholet in August 1936 united 25,000 attendees, including provincial UNC members. Guest of honour Philippe Henriot vigorously attacked communism.⁵⁶⁹ In October 1936, Saut, president of the Béarn UNC section, presided over a meeting with Jean Ybarnégaray, Jean Chiappe, former JP president Clapier and La Rocque in

⁵⁶⁴ FM, 19 940 500: 237, report dated 30 May 1934.

⁵⁶⁵ UNC.EC, 28 July 1934.

⁵⁶⁶ FM, 19 940 500: 237, report from the prefect of the Moselle to the Minister of the Interior, 29 October 1935.

⁵⁶⁷ FM, 19 940 500: 237, article titled 'Une lettre de M. Charles Trochu au président de l'UNC', 29 July 1936.

⁵⁶⁸ FM, 19 940 500: 237, report from the prefect of the Côte d'Or to the Minister of the Interior, 17 July 1936.

⁵⁶⁹ FM, 19 940 500: 237, meeting report in 'Le Rassemblement National de Cholet', *Le Jour*, 3 August 1936.

attendance.⁵⁷⁰ In December, the UNC's Jeunes de Somain urged members to group nationalists from the extreme right to the 'patriotic' left. Whether the head of the local group was an ex-member of the Croix de Feu, the JP, the SF or the AF was of little import as communism had to be confronted.⁵⁷¹ In January 1937, Colonel Bertin, president of the Angers UNC section, spoke at a meeting with delegates of the Parti républicain national et social (PRNS, the successor to the JP) and Renaud.⁵⁷²

In June 1936, the UNC launched the Rassemblement français, an anti-communist campaign. It attracted the support of Jacques Doriot's PPF, a party widely regarded to have been fascist.⁵⁷³ The UNC did not describe the PPF as fascist. For the association it was a 'national' group, ready to combat communism like the Croix de Feu and the PSF. The JUNC encouraged its members to liaise with the PSF and PPF within the structure of the Rassemblement.⁵⁷⁴ Was this the first instance of collaboration between Doriot and the UNC? In April 1935, Grancoin, a communist in Saint-Denis, told a meeting that if Doriot was re-elected he could thank the UNC.⁵⁷⁵ In the Côtes du Nord, UNC departmental president Rual advised members to read Doriot's *La France ne sera pas un pays d'esclaves*. After doing so they would no longer doubt that communist revolution was underway.⁵⁷⁶

Doriot launched the Front de la Liberté in March 1937. Intended to coalesce all 'national' forces, the UNC's executive committee considered joining the Front.⁵⁷⁷ Certain members reacted strongly against joining Doriot. De Pontalba declared himself hostile to both the Popular Front and the Front de la Liberté. Toutain, Isaac and Charron refused to allow the UNC to make the mistakes of the past in collaborating with political groups. The UNC did not join Doriot's alliance. Some provincial members acted differently. In June 1937, the Antibes section of the UNC sent a telegram to Doriot himself. The signatories of the telegram included Dr. Ulm, UNC vice-president and PPF member plus six other UNC veterans. They proposed a

⁵⁷⁰ FM, 19 940 500: 237, report from the prefect of the Basses-Pyrénées to the Minister of the Interior, 26 October 1936.

⁵⁷¹ Gydé, 'Rassemblement de toutes les bonnes volontés!', *Entre Nous*, December 1936.

⁵⁷² FM, 19 940 500: 237, report from the prefect of the Vienne to the Minister of the Interior, 9 January 1937.

⁵⁷³ AN F⁷ 12966, 'Réunion dite de 'Rassemblement français' organisée par les groupements nationaux du IX^e arrondissement, Salle du Petit Journal, 21 rue Cadet, le 25 février', 26 February 1937; 'Assemblée générale du 31 Janvier 1937: Compte rendu de la séance', *Le Combattant des Côtes du Nord*, February 1937.

⁵⁷⁴ 'IV Assemblée Générale des JUNC, 14 mars 1937', *La Vdc*, 20 March 1937.

⁵⁷⁵ AN F⁷ 13320, 'Meeting organisé par le Parti Communiste, Cinéma Ivry Palace rue de Paris à Ivry'.

⁵⁷⁶ Rual, 'Soyons unis....', *Le Combattant des Côtes du Nord*, September 1936.

⁵⁷⁷ UNC/EC, 8 May 1937.

new Front national, which would fuse the UNC's Rassemblement and Doriot's Front de la Liberté. The telegram ended with a call for militant and perhaps violent action against the government: "Avec bannière Jeanne d'Arc et Saint-Denis en avant pour marcher sur Paris, bouter l'étranger hors de France..."⁵⁷⁸

The UNC saw no problem in co-operating with the extreme right, which it considered an ally. Anti-communism provided common ground between groups. Their programmes too were ostensibly similar, based around a return of authority to France. If, as we will see, there is disagreement over the political categorisation of the Croix de Feu, with whom the UNC readily collaborated, the association's co-operation with the PPF demonstrates that the UNC was willing to work with a party widely regarded as fascist by both Anglo- and Francophone historians. Whether through double memberships, attendance at meetings, combined street demonstrations or the open endorsement of political programmes, UNC veterans sought allies in the anti-Republican camp.⁵⁷⁹

The Croix de Feu: Fascisme à la française

Upon its foundation in 1927, the Croix de Feu was one of a number of ex-servicemen's organisations that catered for a specific clientele, namely soldiers decorated for their bravery at the front and under fire.⁵⁸⁰ Like many other combatant associations, its discourse condemned political figures and laid claim to the heritage of the trenches. Passmore suggests that the Croix de Feu appropriated the veteran myth in order to appear "...in conservative eyes... as the incarnation of the national interest, fraternity and class collaboration".⁵⁸¹ The Croix de Feu sought to situate itself as a new force within the *mouvement ancien combattant*. It differed from 'regular' veterans' organisations in its emphasis on military-style discipline and hierarchy. In the early days of its existence, the group's elitism and its anti-Briandist foreign policy set it apart from the veterans' movement.

⁵⁷⁸ FM 19 940 500: 229, document dated 20 June.

⁵⁷⁹ See J. Chamant, 'Vers la réconciliation française', *La Vdc*, 8 December 1934.

⁵⁸⁰ In addition to those works cited above in footnote 16 of the Introduction see Philippe Machefer, 'Les Croix de Feu (1927-1936)', *L'information historique*, 34 (1972), pp. 28-34; 'Le Parti Social Français', in *La France et les Français*, pp. 307-326; Jacques Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de La Rocque (1885-1946): ou, Les pièges d'un nationalisme chrétien* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

⁵⁸¹ Passmore, *From Liberalism*, p. 223.

Although the league did not play a central role in the riot of February 1934, the movement appropriated the plaudits in its aftermath. This contributed to its rapid growth at this time. While declarations of the size of the membership are not wholly reliable, it is safe to assume that the Croix de Feu had under 100,000 members on the eve of the riot. This would increase to approximately 500,000 only two years later.⁵⁸² In November 1935, the Mouvement Social Français des Croix de Feu (MSF) was established as an umbrella group for various Croix de Feu organisations and auxiliaries, which included women's and youth sections. Aimed at addressing the concerns of the economically and socially disadvantaged, the MSF sought broad support among, for example, women, shopkeepers and peasants.⁵⁸³ After the Popular Front's victory, Prime Minister Léon Blum's government dissolved the leagues and with them the Croix de Feu. La Rocque established the PSF and ostensibly embraced electoral politics. The PSF would become the largest political party in France during the interwar years with over one million members in 1938.

In recent years, controversy surrounding the Croix de Feu has centred on its political categorisation. In short, was it fascist or not? René Rémond's *Les Droites en France de 1915 à nos jours* (1954) argued that the Croix de Feu's vague programme did not threaten the existence of the Republic. According to Rémond, fascism in France existed on the margins of politics and attracted only a small number of fellow travellers and malcontents. Moreover, La Rocque's move into electoral politics 'proved' his moderation and inherently Republican aims. For its part, this thesis has proved hugely influential on a school of thought that claims La Rocque's movement prefigured a mass democratic conservative politics in France. Emphasising La Rocque's moderation, historian Jacques Nobécourt judges the Croix de Feu as 'Christian nationalist'. Kéchichian argues that La Rocque followed a 'traditionalist authoritarian' course.⁵⁸⁴ Historians who believe that France was immune to fascism (the 'immunity thesis') usually interpret the Croix de Feu/PSF as moderate, Republican and a precursor to post-war Gaullism.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, pp. 37-52.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁸⁴ Some historians make their conclusion clear from the start. The subtitle of Nobécourt's *Le Colonel de La Rocque* gives away the author's view. Kéchichian's standpoint can be inferred from the introduction to *Les Croix de Feu*, pp. 7-10.

⁵⁸⁵ Zeev Sternhell presented the most controversial challenge to the immunity thesis in *La Droite révolutionnaire, 1885-1914: les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978) and *Ni droite ni gauche: l'idéologie fasciste en France* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983). The following works appeared largely in response to Sternhell's challenge: Serge Berstein, 'La France des années trente allergique au fascisme: à propos d'un livre de Zeev Sternhell', *Vingtième Siècle*, 2 (1984), pp. 83-94; Philippe Burrin, 'La France dans le champ magnétique des

In opposition to this orthodoxy, historians such as Soucy, Irvine, and Samuel Goodfellow judge the movement to have been fascist and a threat to the Republic. Passmore provides a middle way, deciding that the Croix de Feu was fascist in the turbulent years of 1934-1936 but came to resemble a more traditional conservative party thereafter.⁵⁸⁶

Fundamental to the disagreement over the fascist credentials of the Croix de Feu is the problem of defining the concept itself.⁵⁸⁷ The apparently irreconcilable difference of definition regarding fascism has left the debate sterile with neither pro- nor anti-immunity thesis historians able to agree.⁵⁸⁸ Sean Kennedy defines the Croix de Feu/PSF as authoritarian nationalist rather than fascist yet in his opinion this does not lessen the danger to the Republic that both movements represented.⁵⁸⁹ This caveat avoids the traditional definitions within the debate that link fascism with anti-Republicanism and non-fascism with moderation. Indeed, why should one be forced to choose between seeming opposites? This dichotomy is too constraining, as the non-fascist-ergo-moderate judgement is false.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to prove or disprove whether or not the *anciens combattants* were fascist. UNC members who joined the Croix de Feu and extreme right-wing groups cannot solely be understood as fascist. A variety of reasons governed their decisions. Yet one can no more judge the veterans of the UNC as deeply Republican. Those veterans who rejected the Croix de Feu should not be considered as unqualified moderates, where the term implies support for the parliamentary and democratic Republic. To classify the UNC or the

fascismes', *Le Débat*, 32 (1984), pp. 52-72; Michel Winock, 'Fascisme à la française ou fascisme introuvable?', *Le Débat*, 25 (1983), pp. 35-44; Pierre Milza, *Fascisme français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987). Recently, the publication of the French translation of Soucy's *Second Wave* (with a rather notable change of title), *Fascismes français? 1933-1939. Mouvements antidémocratiques* (Paris: Autrement, 2004) seems to have reignited the debate to some extent, yet consensus is still a long way off. Winock's response to Soucy, and Soucy's reply, largely rehash old arguments. Michel Winock, 'Retour sur le fascisme français: La Rocque et les Croix de Feu', *Vingtième Siècle*, 90 (2006), pp. 3-27; Robert Soucy, 'Enjeux: La Rocque et le fascisme français. Réponse à Michel Winock', *Vingtième Siècle*, 95 (2007), pp. 219-236; Michel Winock, 'En lisant Robert Soucy', *Vingtième Siècle*, 95 (2007), pp. 237-242; Serge Bernstein's conclusion, 'Pour en finir avec un dialogue des sourds. A propos du fascisme français', *Vingtième Siècle*, 95 (2007), pp. 243-246, sums up the immunity thesis historians' standpoint.

⁵⁸⁶ Samuel Goodfellow, 'Fascism in Alsace, 1918-1940', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Indiana University, 1992); Irvine, 'Fascism in France'; Passmore, *From Liberalism*, p. 258; Soucy, *Second Wave*.

⁵⁸⁷ For a lengthy discussion of fascism and its definition see Roger Griffin, 'Fascism's new faces (and new facelessness) in the 'post-fascist' epoch', *Erwägen, Wissen, Ethik*, 15 (2004), pp. 287-301 and the responses of historians in the field in *Critique 1*, pp. 301-361, and *Critique 2*, pp. 378-424. There are many works on fascism and it is impossible to cite them all here. The following sources show the different approaches that exist: Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2002); Robert O. Paxton, 'The five stages of fascism', *Journal of Modern History*, 70 (1998), pp. 1-23; Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire; Ni droite ni gauche*.

⁵⁸⁸ Jenkins, 'The six février', p. 337.

⁵⁸⁹ Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, p. 119.

veterans' movement as moderate leads one to dismiss all discourse and actions contrary to this label as either out of character or lacking conviction as Prost does.⁵⁹⁰ As the 1930s progressed and France's political civil war worsened, the attractions of the extreme right exerted a pull on the wider membership of the movement.

Important to this chapter is Dobry's idea on the *perspective relationnelle*.⁵⁹¹ Dobry doubts the validity of what he terms the *logique classificatoire* in which the study of fascism seems to be trapped.⁵⁹² He prefers to examine the political, social and cultural context within which fascism emerged. One should not consider political groups as isolated entities defined and constrained by a historically conditioned nature.⁵⁹³ Instead of classifying groups as fascist or not, (a categorisation that is then deemed to govern a group's behaviour) one should focus on how these groups operated in society. They existed in an environment in which their actions, ideology and discourse were subject to interaction, collaboration and competition with other groups in response to new and diverse situations.⁵⁹⁴ It follows then that a group's comportment is best explained by its strategies and tactics regarding rivals and allies, and how groups perceived themselves and others, rather than by an examination of its ideology.⁵⁹⁵ On the right, a 'pool of similar ideas' was common to many groups and their boundaries were therefore permeable. This fact allowed members to share or switch allegiances at will, in spite of each organisation's jealously guarded independence.⁵⁹⁶

The Croix de Feu: A veterans' association?

Should one exclude the Croix de Feu from the veterans' movement? Certainly it would be wrong to judge the mass of veterans on the practices of one group. As Prost points out, scholars must not fall into the trap of classifying the 'whole forest' (the veterans' movement) on the basis of 'one exotic tree' (the Croix de Feu).⁵⁹⁷ Furthermore, he claims that the veterans' movement itself perceived the Croix de Feu as 'a foreign body', something different and otherworldly.⁵⁹⁸ La

⁵⁹⁰ Prost, III, p. 213.

⁵⁹¹ Dobry, 'La thèse immunitaire', pp. 47-48.

⁵⁹² Dobry, 'February 1934', p. 131.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., pp. 20-21; Jenkins, 'Introduction', p. 16.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁹⁷ Prost, I, p. 119.

⁵⁹⁸ Prost, III, p. 179.

Rocque emphasised the uniqueness of his movement in the combatant world. He condemned other combatant association leaders whom he blamed for the inertia of the veterans and their failure to capitalise on the prestige they enjoyed after the war.⁵⁹⁹ He separated the Croix de Feu from the rest of the veterans' movement with the use of the terms 'Anciens vrais Combattants' and 'ACs des premières lignes'.⁶⁰⁰ In short, only members of the Croix de Feu were true to the veteran ideal.

In spite of these differences, Prost hints at an ambiguous relationship in his claim that the Croix de Feu 'seduced' the UNC.⁶⁰¹ Indeed, in the veterans' movement, the Croix de Feu had more in common with the UNC than other associations. The lack of military music and parades at veterans' marches symbolised their apparent rejection of militarism but the standard bearers at UNC national congresses *did* march in time. Active officers, although unpopular in the ranks of veterans' associations, were common in the Croix de Feu and the UNC.⁶⁰² La Rocque sought to maximise recruitment among *anciens combattants*. He carefully cultivated his image as the perfect veteran.⁶⁰³ Croix de Feu section chiefs advised members to portray their action as 'strictly Republican' in an attempt to bely the fears among provincial UNC members that the association was fascist.⁶⁰⁴ Given the UNC veterans' rejection of political violence and their association of this with fascism, one may speculate that this order implied that Croix de Feu members should refrain from violent action or at least provocation. Perhaps in this instance then, Croix de Feu activists did work to 'seduce' UNC members.

Moreover, Prost claims that whichever association a veteran chose to join, politics weighed little upon his choice. Local elites may have encouraged the founding of a particular association, such as the UNC in catholic Brittany, yet often the first group to be founded in the locality dominated throughout the interwar decades. Members thus joined the group most convenient to their location rather than the one that most accurately reflected their politics.⁶⁰⁵ Adherence to an association constituted an expression of solidarity with the *génération du feu*

⁵⁹⁹ La Rocque, 'Triptyque', *Le Flambeau*, 1 December 1933.

⁶⁰⁰ See for example La Rocque, 'Réalizations', *Le Flambeau*, 1 October 1933.

⁶⁰¹ Prost, I, p. 173.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁶⁰³ Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, pp. 108-110.

⁶⁰⁴ AN F⁷ 12990, report from the Gironde, 7 April 1934.

⁶⁰⁵ Prost, II, pp. 134-135.

and little else: “...la masse des anciens combattants viendrait grossir indifféremment les rangs de telle association ou de telle autre”.⁶⁰⁶

However, in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1930s political considerations may have counted for more in a veteran’s decision. Several questions require attention. Is it right to dismiss out of hand the Croix de Feu’s importance? If the league was so foreign to the veterans, why did it attract UNC support, from the highest to the lowest level? Why would a veteran who was already a member of the UNC join the Croix de Feu too? As we will see, some veterans of the UNC saw no contradiction in belonging to their association and the Croix de Feu/PSF, a collaboration that La Rocque encouraged. Given the collective wartime experience that their members shared, it is unsurprising, that the UNC and the Croix de Feu referred and laid claim to similar ideals, activities and styles. The Croix de Feu presented itself as a veterans’ association and participated in the events of the veteran calendar throughout France. While it did not conform to the mainstream of veterans’ associations, differences between the groups have perhaps been exaggerated.⁶⁰⁷ Steeped in the veteran mystique and using similar language and rhetoric, both the Croix de Feu and veterans’ groups targeted the same clientele in the veterans’ world. What each group offered its *ancien combattant* members was ostensibly the same: a form of national renewal through the revival of the trench brotherhood.

In order to explain why the Croix de Feu exerted an attraction on some UNC veterans one may look at the similarity in discourse between the two groups. While elements of the UNC’s antiparliamentarian discourse were common to the extreme right in general, La Rocque specifically drew on the veterans’ mystique in his discourse at least until 1936. According to Didier Leschi, no other nationalist league enjoyed the same “...travail d’accréditation...” that the veteran mystique brought to the Croix de Feu.⁶⁰⁸ Both groups spoke of a future action referred to as *heure H*. In this action, the veterans would take centre stage. Their past sufferings gave them the right to such a role. In November 1933, for example, the Croix de Feu met to discuss: ‘Comment les hommes de victoire sauveront la Paix française’. La Rocque informed the 10,000 strong audience that salvation would come from:

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶⁰⁷ For a discussion of similarities between the Croix de Feu and the veterans’ associations see chapter one of Rymell, ‘Militants and militancy’.

⁶⁰⁸ Leschi, ‘L’étrange cas La Rocque’, p. 167.

Une force à la fois morale et physique, affranchie de toute appartenance aux factions, aux hommes politiques, parlementaires et autres... une force vigoureuse et libre sera capable de coordonner, alors, les initiatives divergentes et de mettre tout le monde d'accord sur la première phase inévitable de tout relèvement: le retour à l'ordre.⁶⁰⁹

The *anciens combattants* were this new force.

Both associations used similar rhetoric. *Le Flambeau* made it clear that the emphasis was on action unlike the *agitation* and *parlottes* of politicians, "...le rendement et non le bruit" of parliament.⁶¹⁰ La Rocque condemned the parliamentary system and its preference for words over action, the deputies "...tremblant devant la magie des mots..." and playing "...le misérable jeu de l'électoratisme souverain".⁶¹¹ The UNC expressed a similar contempt for the vain words of politicians: "Assez de parlottes inutiles, assez de déclarations, de tribunes, assez de discours! assez de combines, assez de divisions! Un programme puissant. Des hommes. Des chefs. Voilà ce qu'il nous faut".⁶¹² La Rocque denounced the failure of successive governments and their "... incapacité de prévoir, de vouloir, d'organiser, de guérir".⁶¹³ Politics was "...un synonyme de démagogie, de contradiction, d'arrivisme, d'affairisme, de médiocrité".⁶¹⁴ For the UNC, Galland attacked "...ces jeux néfastes de la politique de parti que nous nous inscrivons; c'est cette action des partis, aboutissant à la manoeuvre déloyale, que stigmatise le manifeste (de Wagram), la désignant comme un des effets de la démagogie".⁶¹⁵

The Croix de Feu's anti-parliamentarian rhetoric was often bound up in the language of biological metaphor. It depicted France as an organism, whose body would decay if the infected part was not cut off. No part of the parliamentary system was spared criticism, neither the *députés* nor "...les malades permanents que sont les électeurs...".⁶¹⁶ The economic crisis would not be resolved as long as "...le pays est encore trop profondément intoxiqué par l'idéologie socialiste....".⁶¹⁷ Croix de Feu Francis Georges warned that socialism "...consiste à rechercher les maladies nationales pour les aggraver jusqu'à les rendre mortelles".⁶¹⁸ Similarly, the UNC

⁶⁰⁹ AN 451 AP Fonds La Rocque, 83: 24, La Rocque, 'Comment les hommes de la victoire sauveront la paix'.

⁶¹⁰ La Rocque, 'Méthodes d'action', *Le Flambeau*, 1 November 1933.

⁶¹¹ La Rocque, 'Controverses militaires', *Le Flambeau*, 1 January 1934.

⁶¹² Docteur Vimal, 'Demain...', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, November 1933.

⁶¹³ La Rocque, 'A la Nation', *Le Flambeau*, 1 October 1933.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ P. Galland, 'Au-dessus des partis', *La Vdc*, 4 November 1933.

⁶¹⁶ E. Anxionnat, 'Sacrifices', *Le Flambeau*, 1 December 1933.

⁶¹⁷ Le Financier dans la tranchée, 'Economie Nationale', *Le Flambeau*, 1 December 1933.

⁶¹⁸ F. Georges, 'A propos d'un manifeste', *Le Flambeau*, 1 December 1933.

referred to politics as a virus. Beset by political infighting the country had contracted a disease, 'infectiens politicus':

Ce petit bétail, d'allure si simple, possède toutefois la particularité curieuse d'être excessivement et rapidement proliféré, au point que, dans le champs visuel du microscope, je le vis d'abord seul, puis j'en vis beaucoup plus encore, des foules, des nuées, qui se superposant à elles-même, devinrent d'abord une couche, puis un mur, gagnant vivement, et de la largeur et de la hauteur.⁶¹⁹

The UNC recommended amputation, surgery and the lancing of abscesses for the various problems that beset the Republic.⁶²⁰

Given the ostensible similarity between UNC and Croix de Feu rhetoric and 'national' aims, what difference did veterans perceive between the associations? They perhaps gained something from the league that they found lacking in the UNC and other *anciens combattants* associations. Founded almost ten years after the majority of other veterans' associations, the group appealed to veterans who did not consider existing organisations up to the task.⁶²¹ This fact was recognised within the wider veterans' movement. Reflecting the growing political division in France, this trend affected associations on the left and right. André Gervais wrote:

Le combattant de la FOP qui s'inscrit au Front commun ne quitte pas la FOP; le combattant de l'UNC qui s'inscrit aux Croix de Feu ne quitte pas l'UNC; mais ils ne comptent désormais sur leurs anciennes associations que pour la défense de leurs droits matériels, parce qu'ils ont trouvé ailleurs, hors des vieux groupements, l'apaisement au moins momentané de leurs inquiétudes, l'apparente satisfaction de leur désir d'action, l'illusion d'une ardeur utilement et efficacement dirigée.⁶²²

La Rocque's movement provided an image of action and success that was attractive to many. The mid-1930s did not witness a move towards restraint within the league.⁶²³ Some members may have subscribed to conservative ideas in the past yet extreme measures began to seem attractive. Moreover, at this time it was apparent that the association was more than just a

⁶¹⁹ D. Tritzsch, 'Où il est question de microbe', *La Vdc*, 29 July 1933.

⁶²⁰ For examples of the UNC's use of medical language see D. Tritzsch, 'Où il est question de microbe', *La Vdc*, 29 July 1933; P. Galland, 'Ambassadeurs de la justice', 10 March 1934; P. Galland, 'La Révolution dans l'ordre', 21 April 1934.

⁶²¹ Rymell, 'Militants and militancy', p. 8.

⁶²² A. Gervais, 'Les Anciens Combattants pensent-ils prendre le pouvoir?', *La Vdc*, 10 August 1935.

⁶²³ Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, p.94.

mutual aid association. Although the number of veteran members declined numerically, with the deaths of ex-servicemen, and proportionally, as the group expanded to admit non-veteran members, by July 1935 perhaps one in three members were veterans.⁶²⁴ Veteran members may have joined the Croix de Feu for the relatively benign reason of showing solidarity with their former comrades-in-arms. Yet in some cases, Croix de Feu activists neither led UNC members astray nor did they deceive them. A proportion of UNC veterans were willing to join a movement that promised national and moral renovation. For some, whether this came at the expense of democracy did not present much of a concern.

It is true that the importance of the veteran both in Croix de Feu and PSF discourse declined as the thirties progressed. Indeed the 16 page final manifesto of the Croix de Feu in 1936 devoted only three lines to the veterans.⁶²⁵ Yet throughout this period the image of the Great War soldier, whether fallen or a veteran, was used to encourage the cohesion of the group. Like its predecessor, the PSF continued to recruit veterans.⁶²⁶ In late 1936, in order to better combat the Popular Front, the Senlis (Oise) section of the UNC offered to combine with the PSF. The section's members had previously rejected this course of action.⁶²⁷

The increase in activity of the Croix de Feu and its high gains in membership during 1934-1936 suggest that Action combattante faced a difficult situation from the outset. The Croix de Feu appeared to be a more dynamic wing of the UNC, the very image that Action combattante hoped to cultivate. In October 1935, executive member Desroches informed the committee that a Croix de Feu in his department had stated, "Nous sommes l'aile marchante, l'UNC est le gros du troupe".⁶²⁸ This caused consternation among executive members, particularly because this very Croix de Feu was also a member of the committee of the local UNC section. La Rocque continued to urge his followers to use the UNC as a resource of potential membership: "...si vous descendez dans la rue, ne soyez pas seuls, marchez avec l'UNC... les chefs de section [doivent] recruter parmi les membres de l'UNC... car la place de ceux qui veulent vivre, agir, faire quelque chose est chez nous".⁶²⁹ In competition for members with the Croix de Feu, a

⁶²⁴ Rymell, 'Militants and militancy', p. 20.

⁶²⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶²⁶ Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, p. 133.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

⁶²⁸ UNC/EC, 5 October 1935.

⁶²⁹ APP, BA 1901, 31 October 1935. Colonel François de La Rocque, meeting of section leaders of the Croix de Feu and Volontaires Nationaux, Salle de la Société d'Horticulture, 30-31 October 1935.

group that appeared effective in combating the left and energetic in its actions and designs, Action combattante found little room for development.

The UNC and the Croix de Feu

Having established why the Croix de Feu may have attracted UNC members, I will now turn to the scale of co-operation between the groups. A section of the UNC's membership rejected collaboration with the Croix de Feu. In the movement, Isaac was the most prominent critique of the league. In October 1935, in the article 'Camps hostiles', he set out his views regarding the Croix de Feu.⁶³⁰ Admitting that the UNC and Croix de Feu programmes were similar, Isaac warned that to follow the league would lead to violence and civil war. If an ostensible alliance had existed between the two organisations in the past, it was now time to clarify matters: this had never been the case. While he recognised that some UNC members did hold sympathies for the other 'camp', to leave the UNC and succumb to the colonel's siren call would be to betray the *génération du feu* and the country itself. His opposition therefore came from his defence of legality.

There were two parts to Isaac's hostility to the Croix de Feu. Firstly, his warning to his fellow activists represented an attempt to avoid a loss of members. In the absence of membership lists, one cannot say for sure how many UNC members were also members of the league but for a veteran to hold a membership of both organisations was not uncommon. The JUNC, which Isaac actively patronised, encouraged collaboration with political groups such as the VN and, after 1936, the Croix de Feu's successor the PSF.⁶³¹ Isaac himself had experience of cross-association membership in the Rhône department. He refused patronage to the Croix de Feu in the Ardèche, founded by a UNC Rhône member.⁶³² The Croix de Feu group in the Rhône recruited from the UNC and the war generation in general. In 1934, 31 % of members were aged 36-39, men who would have seen most action during the Great War.⁶³³

A follow up article published soon after 'Camps hostiles' in December 1935 clarified the points of his earlier article:

⁶³⁰ H. Isaac, 'Camps hostiles', *La Vdc*, 26 October 1935.

⁶³¹ E. Veyssset, 'La propagande: Nous unissons, nous fédérons, nous ne démolissons pas', *La Vdc*, 7 September 1935.

⁶³² Prost, I, p. 165.

⁶³³ Passmore, *From Liberalism*, p. 223.

Les idées doctrinales mises en avant par les Croix de Feu ne sauraient nous déplaire puisque nous les avons exprimées avant eux. Leurs préoccupations nationales cadrent largement avec les nôtres. Leurs méthodes ont différé, de plus en plus, avec des objectifs assez incertains, attirant les uns, pouvant inquiéter les autres, faisant craindre à bien des esprits réfléchis l'entraînement de beaucoup de bons Français, anciens combattants ou jeunes, dans une impasse.⁶³⁴

UNC members were not forbidden to join the Croix de Feu as some readers appeared to believe. Put simply, it would be disastrous for the UNC if its activists spent their energies on Croix de Feu action, rather than on the important tasks for which they were needed in the UNC. Some provincial members feared too that an alliance with La Rocque would ultimately see the UNC absorbed into the colonel's league. This was an obstacle to their membership of the Croix de Feu. In April 1934, eighteen months before the publication of 'Camps hostiles', a new Croix de Feu section in Amiens met with little enthusiasm. The veterans of the local UNC felt that to join the new group would be detrimental to the internal cohesion of their association.⁶³⁵

Veterans in the wider movement were aware of the Croix de Feu's advances to the UNC. In December 1935, the *Cahiers de l'UF* reported that the Croix de Feu was attempting to attract veterans into its fold. The plan was to infiltrate a veterans' association, recruit the 'best elements' but instruct them to remain in their association 'to maintain their influence'. Croix de Feu scouts had already found a UNC section president who was responsible for 150 members. The UF warned that if the Croix de Feu was successful in recruiting local veteran leaders it could gain a foothold in their associations without the knowledge of members. Ultimately, the veterans of a village or a district could wake up one day and find they were Croix de Feu.⁶³⁶ The UNC faced infiltration from the left too. Goudaert claimed that in some cases members of the FOP and the FNCR were attempting to destroy UNC sections. In these cases, the committees of local sections were re-elected only to declare themselves independent of the UNC. After a short while they joined another veterans' association.⁶³⁷

Secondly, Isaac's articles demonstrate too that it was the league's violent methods that repulsed moderates in the UNC. The rejection of political violence was common in the association and may explain why many UNC veterans were not attracted to the Croix de Feu. The UNC rejected both fascism and communism (which it termed *le fascisme rouge*). It

⁶³⁴ H. Isaac, 'A propos de "camps hostiles"', *La Vdc*, 14 December 1935.

⁶³⁵ AN F⁷ 13029, report from the Somme, 16 April 1934.

⁶³⁶ Henri Pichot, 'Halte au noyautage!', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 20 December 1935.

⁶³⁷ UNC/EC, 5 February 1938.

considered both doctrines largely the same in their violent pursuit of power and penchant for dictatorship.⁶³⁸ Though a minority suggested that fascism was the antidote to communism, a denunciation of both characterised UNC pronouncements on the matter.⁶³⁹

What did the veterans of the UNC understand by the term fascism? During the thirties, few groups claimed to be fascist. At the very least this rejection stemmed from fascism's association with foreign political movements and the desire of usually right-wing groups to be perceived as thoroughly French. Particularly after the riot of February 1934, the left used the term against its enemies and particularly the Croix de Feu. The UNC fended off too the accusation that it was fascist. It recognised the power of the word, which it claimed few who used it could even define.⁶⁴⁰ The association alleged that it was employed to discredit everything and everyone that was not part of the Popular Front.⁶⁴¹ Galland described it as the 'werewolf' that had frightened people into voting socialist in the municipal elections of May 1935.⁶⁴²

The rejection of the violence of fascism may have deterred UNC veterans from joining the Croix de Feu. The group of veterans that resigned from the UNC in the aftermath of the riot accused the Croix de Feu of being fascist in its plans to install a dictatorship under La Rocque.⁶⁴³ Certainly, some UNC members were suspicious of Croix de Feu action. The size of the UNC's membership precluded political homogeneity and political action was not to the taste of everyone. In the Côtes du Nord, the UNC's campaign against Radical deputies caused several members to resign. Some subsequently founded UF sections in the department.⁶⁴⁴ In 1937, UNC executive committee member Maillard proposed the candidature of Goy in the Mortain by-election as a means of combating the PSF in the area.⁶⁴⁵ *Le Flambeau* complained that the UNC and PSF were allies against communism and should not compete with each other.⁶⁴⁶ Though UNC member Dr. Malon claimed the patronage of the UNC president in the election, Goy used a poster campaign to disown him publicly.

⁶³⁸ H. Isaac, 'Ni communisme, ni fascisme', *La Vdc*, 10 October 1936; 'Le Rassemblement Français', *La Vdc*, 21 November 1936.

⁶³⁹ R. Villard, 'Fascisme!', *Le Combattant des Côtes-du-Nord*, May 1936.

⁶⁴⁰ G. Vanderwalle, 'Sur la Sellette', *Le Créneau*, 3 March 1934; Vilain, *Les Combattants exigent*.

⁶⁴¹ P. Galland, 'Fascistophobie', *La Vdc*, 16 June 1934; 'Le Fasciste malgré lui', *La Vdc*, 29 February 1936.

⁶⁴² P. Galland, 'En plein désordre', *La Vdc*, 18 May 1935.

⁶⁴³ See note 174 above.

⁶⁴⁴ David Bensoussan, *Combats pour une Bretagne catholique et rurale. Les droites bretonnes dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Fayard, 2006), p. 492.

⁶⁴⁵ AN 317 AP Fonds Louis Marin: 72, Guiter to Marin, 29 January 1937.

⁶⁴⁶ 'Le PSF devant les électeurs: L'élection de Mortain', *Le Flambeau*, 10 April 1937.

Indeed, while UNC members were perhaps amenable to the Croix de Feu's programme, defections did not occur *en masse*. A comparison of departmental Croix de Feu membership with that of the UNC for the year 1933-1934 draws mixed results. In some departments both groups were strong. In the Nord, where the Croix de Feu had between 15 and 20,000 members in December 1935, the UNC had approximately 44,000 members at the same time. The UNC attracted the largest number of veterans compared to other associations in the Aisne (14,609), Côte d'Or (12,721), Gironde (18,305) and Seine-et-Oise (33,374).⁶⁴⁷ Figures concerning Croix de Feu membership in these departments show that in each one the Croix de Feu experienced success and a rapid rise in membership.⁶⁴⁸ However, in the Bouches-du-Rhône, where the most conservative estimate shows that Croix de Feu membership between 1932 and April 1936 rose from 700-15,000, the UNC counted only 2200 members in 1933.⁶⁴⁹ In this department the UF claimed 24,700 members.⁶⁵⁰ Conversely, where there was a strong UNC contingent, the Croix de Feu was not always guaranteed success. In 1933, for example, the UNC had 8000 members in the Ardèche. In 1935, the Croix de Feu had only six members in this department.⁶⁵¹ The same was true in other rural areas from where veterans' associations attracted most of their members. The Croix de Feu was an urban movement.

In the UNC, the tendency to reject the Croix de Feu co-existed with a desire to collaborate with the league. Provincial co-operation and membership of the league demonstrates that some were sympathetic to its advances. From their foundation, new Croix de Feu sections relied in part on the membership and in some cases the leadership of UNC members in the locality. The combatant world was the 'compost' in which La Rocque's league grew.⁶⁵² In February 1931, the Rhône section of the Croix de Feu admitted in its press, *La Relève*, "Beaucoup de ses membres (les Croix de Feu) appartiennent à d'autres Associations. (UNC, UMAC, Gueules Cassées, etc....) et y occupent même des places importantes".⁶⁵³ New sections attempted to establish a liaison with UNC groups to varying degrees of success.⁶⁵⁴ In some cases, the UNC was willing to collaborate. The association's 9th section went as far as to open the

⁶⁴⁷ Prost, II, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁴⁸ Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, p. 87.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁵¹ Prost, II, pp. 63-64; Kéchichian, *Les Croix de Feu*, p. 201.

⁶⁵² Leschi, 'L'étrange cas La Rocque', p. 167.

⁶⁵³ AN 451 AP: 83, *La Relève*, February 1931.

⁶⁵⁴ AN 451 AP: 81, Colonel Chevassu to La Rocque, 2 August, 16 August and 22 August 1930.

pages of its bulletin to other groups, including the AGMG, the Médaillés Militaires, the Ligue des chefs de section and the Croix de Feu. It claimed that the arrangement would allow groups to 'better exchange their ideas'.⁶⁵⁵

Perhaps symptomatic of the nature of multiple loyalties among members of extreme right-wing organisations but also because of the behaviour of successive UNC presidents, UNC veterans sometimes regarded with confusion their association's external relations. In the case of La Rocque's league, an informal alliance did seem to exist between the associations. In June 1933, the Colonel announced that alliances with other groups were possible but that each opportunity should be judged on the form of collaboration and the commonality of programme between the Croix de Feu and the group in question.⁶⁵⁶ Similarly, in October 1933, Rossignol, at the time UNC national president, declared that the UNC was now willing to co-operate with any group committed to fulfilling its national duty. The associations expressed a mutual abhorrence of parliamentarians, the left, the liberal establishment and so-called anti-national forces that included communism and freemasonry. Equally, the UNC and the Croix de Feu sought to strengthen the executive and return authority to government, perhaps at the expense of pluralist democracy. Both considered state and constitutional reform as the means to do this.

Some UNC members considered the Croix de Feu a veterans' association and an ally. Invited to the first official meeting of the Rouen Croix de Feu section in November 1933, Jacques Toutain was impressed by what he saw. While the large combatant associations were formed around the basis of material demands, Toutain reported, the Croix de Feu based itself on cordial and intellectual affinities in the work of national renovation. For Toutain, a 'particularly evocative sight' was that of the Croix de Feu marching "...au pas cadencé... traversant les grandes rues de la grande ville, brusquement enrégimentés". This demonstration of discipline revealed that the Croix de Feu was a group of the highest calibre, and perhaps the 'something' that France had been waiting for since the victory. It was one of the finest *groupements de combattants* one was ever likely to meet.⁶⁵⁷

After the February 1934 riots, Croix de Feu membership increased rapidly as La Rocque presented the league as the only alternative between governmental impotence and the

⁶⁵⁵ 'La vie des groupements: UNC Par la Concorde vers la maîtrise', *Le Combattant du IXe*, December 1932-January 1933.

⁶⁵⁶ La Rocque, 'Parasitismes', *Le Flambeau*, 1 June 1933.

⁶⁵⁷ J. Toutain, 'Chez les Croix de Feu et Briscards', *L'UNC de Normandie*, December 1933.

revolutionary threat of the Popular Front. During this period new Croix de Feu sections ‘very probably’ recruited members from the veterans’ movement and especially the UNC.⁶⁵⁸ Indeed, in the Parisian suburb of Meudon, UNC activists abandoned their association and defected to the Croix de Feu.⁶⁵⁹ Certainly, even before the February riots, *Le Flambeau*, reported warm relations between sections of both organisations. On 4 February 1934, the 65th Croix de Feu section held a meeting at Choisy-le-Roi at which speakers Varin and Bernard outlined the ‘perilous terrain’ that faced the *mouches communistes*. Croix de Feu members, *dispos* and the Choisy UNC attended. All were noted to have ‘d’un même coeur unanime acclamé’ the orators.⁶⁶⁰

In March 1934, *Le Flambeau*, recognised the participation of the UNC in the February protest and gave the following praise:

Vous n’en appréciez pas moins avec une admiration méritée, la générosité valeureuse de vos camarades de l’UNC, de tous les patriotes dressés comme vous contre le régime de la boue et du sang. Vous vous êtes associés à leurs deuils, vous pleurez leurs morts, qui sont nos frères, vous criez vengeance contre les responsables d’assassinats odieux.⁶⁶¹

Co-operation between local groups persisted. In April 1934, the Croix de Feu section in the Vaucluse thanked and congratulated the Avignon UNC and especially its president for his ‘attitude’ to the Croix de Feu.⁶⁶² Two months later, the same UNC section invited Croix de Feu members to attend its departmental congress and banquet. The Croix de Feu accepted and asked that members attend in as great a number as possible.⁶⁶³

In May 1934, after a conference held by La Rocque in Bordeaux, the local Croix de Feu section welcomed 500 new members, the majority of which came from the UNC. The police report on this membership increase suggested that UNC members preferred the Croix de Feu as this association only admitted *anciens combattants réels*.⁶⁶⁴ This reflects the success of the league in presenting itself as the only association worthy of true combatants. Furthermore, it

⁶⁵⁸ Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de La Rocque*, p. 286.

⁶⁵⁹ Rymell, ‘Militants and militancy’, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁶⁰ ‘A travers les sections: 65^e section’, *Le Flambeau*, 1 March 1934.

⁶⁶¹ La Rocque, ‘Croix-de-Feu, Briscards, Volontaires Nationaux’, *Le Flambeau*, 1 March 1934

⁶⁶² ‘A travers les sections: Section de Vaucluse’, *Le Flambeau*, 1 April 1934.

⁶⁶³ ‘A travers les sections: Section de Vaucluse’, *Le Flambeau*, 1 June 1934.

⁶⁶⁴ FM, 19 940 500: 237, report from the *commissaire divisionnaire de police spéciale* (Bordeaux) to the *directeur de la sûreté générale*, 24 May 1934.

suggests that, rather than being a foreign body, some UNC veterans considered the league a respectable *ancien combattant* association.

Informal collaboration was the norm. In January 1935, for example, La Rocque held meetings at the Salle Bullier, the Salle Magic-City, the Salle Wagram and the Maison de la Mutualité in Paris, in which he spoke of co-operation with the UNC. Approximately 17,000 Croix de Feu attended across the four venues. A press communiqué was published in the following days that bore the signatures of both Lebecq and La Rocque. Without stating that an official alliance existed, it nevertheless confirmed the “...pensée commune...” and “...collaboration étroite et unie...” of both associations.⁶⁶⁵

Encouraged by their national leaders, Croix de Feu and UNC members worked together. Members of both associations attended each other's meetings and parades. In October 1934, at a meeting of 2000 UNC veterans in Caen, police noted the presence of numerous Croix de Feu and *camelots du roi*.⁶⁶⁶ In April 1935, the *montmartrois* section of the UNC reported the death of the mother-in-law of UNC comrade Lesur, president of the Croix de Feu in the 18th *arrondissement*.⁶⁶⁷ In October of that year, La Rocque advised his members to march with the UNC in the coming Armistice Day parades.⁶⁶⁸ Sometimes UNC section leaders were also Croix de Feu. This was the case in the Loiret where a local president was a ‘very active’ member of the Croix de Feu’.⁶⁶⁹

Although UNC members could belong to both associations at once, La Rocque's plan was to entice veterans away from the UNC. Regarding UNC veterans, Croix de Feu members tailored their rhetoric to maximise recruitment. The colonel ordered that new recruits from within the ranks of the UNC: “...ne doivent pas y venir en tant qu'UNC mais comme Croix de Feu”.⁶⁷⁰ In Brittany, Cdt Leclerc resigned from the UNC and founded the first Finistère section of Croix de Feu.⁶⁷¹ In a letter to Goy, La Rocque claimed that a *chef de groupement*, presumably from the UNC, had ‘offered’ his members to the Croix de Feu. La Rocque denied that he had ever sought to entice UNC members to the Croix de Feu despite the “...sorte de ‘concurrence’...”

⁶⁶⁵ AN F⁷ 13320, reports from all four meetings, 25 January 1935.

⁶⁶⁶ AN F⁷ 13032, monthly report from the Calvados, 5 November 1934.

⁶⁶⁷ ‘Conférence du 27 mars 1935’, *L’Echo montmartrois*, April 1935.

⁶⁶⁸ APP BA 1901, 31 October 1935.

⁶⁶⁹ Prost, I, p. 188.

⁶⁷⁰ APP, BA1901, 31 October 1935.

⁶⁷¹ Bensoussan, *Combats*, notes 9 and 10, p. 608.

between the associations under Goy's predecessor Lebecq.⁶⁷² Instances of co-opted membership did not always favour the Croix de Feu. In November 1936, after the PSF joined the Rassemblement français, La Rocque sent a memo to all local officials denying rumours that he had advised members to join the UNC *en masse* after the dissolution of the league. Accusing traitors, provocateurs and police officers of spreading this rumour, he feared that the influx of ex-Croix de Feu into the UNC would threaten the veteran association's existence, lest it be perceived as the league reconstituted.⁶⁷³

In January 1937, members of the executive committee, including Goy, believed that the PSF was attempting to infiltrate the UNC. Maillard of the Manche UNC and Desroches from the Finistère stated that this was the case in their departments. Worse still, Morizot claimed that a local PSF leader had advised fifty of his members against leaving the UF to join the UNC. These veterans had been told 'to wait' but it was not clear what for. Another member stated that he had had no trouble from any political party except the PSF. Some present at the meeting blamed the public accord between Goy and La Rocque for the fact that the UNC and PSF members believed the two associations were now 'marching together'. Collaboration was not to the liking of some. Patay told his colleagues that he never missed an occasion to declare that the UNC was hostile to the recruitment of veterans to political parties.⁶⁷⁴

The actions of successive UNC presidents affected members' perception of relations. Lebecq did not hide his personal endorsement of the Croix de Feu yet he was reticent on the precise nature of relations. When pressed on this issue in November 1934, Lebecq denied co-operating with the league and refuted the claim that he was in contact with La Rocque. He added that he had forbidden members of the GRP's executive committee from being members of other groups.⁶⁷⁵ However, on 10 November 1934 La Rocque and Lebecq jointly attended a ceremony under the Arc de Triomphe to pay their respects to king Alexander of Yugoslavia. In response to a telegram from La Rocque, which expressed his 'cordial feelings' for the UNC, Lebecq wrote, "J'ai été tout particulièrement heureux de notre réunion au tombeau du Soldat Inconnu: ce geste

⁶⁷² Fonds La Rocque (Sciences Po), LR 56II C3, La Rocque to Goy, 13 January 1936.

⁶⁷³ AN 451 AP: 108, circular from La Rocque to local presidents, 3 November 1936.

⁶⁷⁴ UNC/EC, 16 January 1937.

⁶⁷⁵ UNC/EC, 24 November 1934.

sera compris par nos camarades et par le pays”.⁶⁷⁶ What was to be understood from this gesture? At the very least, Lebecq appeared to endorse the compatibility of UNC and Croix de Feu goals.

A year later, certain UNC veterans were still unclear on whether the UNC and the Croix de Feu were allies. Once again the actions of Lebecq were under scrutiny. Lebecq and Charron’s presence at a Croix de Feu march on 14 July 1935 had caused confusion in the ranks of the UNC. Charron was at the time *directeur* of Action combattante and liaison to the JUNC. In a meeting of the UNC’s executive committee the week before, members had unanimously decided not to take part.⁶⁷⁷ Lebecq protested that he had attended, “...en mon nom personnel et en pleine indépendance, voulant ainsi m’associer à une manifestation patriotique”.⁶⁷⁸ If the UNC and Croix de Feu had taken similar action in the past it was coincidental as both groups acted “...dans une pensée purement nationale”.⁶⁷⁹ He stated categorically that the UNC had never colluded with the Croix de Feu and offered to resign if the leadership believed him to be sullyng the good name of the organisation.

Publicly, the Croix de Feu took great profit from the apparent entente. Maillard complained that Croix de Feu propaganda in the Manche had focused on Lebecq’s attendance at the march.⁶⁸⁰ Certain UNC sections interpreted Lebecq’s attendance as evidence that the associations were ‘solidaire du même esprit’ as the Croix de Feu.⁶⁸¹ Relatively unconcerned, de Pontalba added that once the UNC became more proactive, Croix de Feu propaganda would have no effect on UNC members. However, the UNC’s campaign for Action combattante was nearly 18 months old by this time. Goy and Rossignol profited from Lebecq’s uncomfortable situation. Police reported that they had stirred up opposition among provincial members. If the right wing of the UNC, behind Lebecq, split from the left wing, then police expected the former would join the Croix de Feu.⁶⁸²

Lebecq’s lack of forethought concerning the consequences of his attendance at a Croix de Feu march is unlikely to have simply been a matter of political naivety. A public association with the Croix de Feu may have pleased a man who had led street action on 6 February 1934 and desired political activism from his organisation. The president supported Action combattante

⁶⁷⁶ ‘Manifestations et propagande: A Paris, 10 novembre’, *Le Flambeau*, 1 December 1934.

⁶⁷⁷ UNC/EC, 5 October 1935.

⁶⁷⁸ Lebecq to UNC executive committee, Lebecq folder, UNC archive, undated.

⁶⁷⁹ UNC/EC, 5 October 1935.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ AN F⁷ 13040, monthly report from the Haut-Rhin, 18 July 1935.

⁶⁸² AN F⁷ 12960, report, ‘La situation chez les Anciens Combattants’, 22 July 1935.

from the start and was part of the select few on the executive committee who were fully aware of its existence and actions. This episode was not the end of Lebecq's collusion with La Rocque. In February 1936, La Rocque advised Croix de Feu voters in the 8th *arrondissement* to vote for his 'sympathique ami, Georges Lebecq' in the upcoming municipal elections in the Roule *quartier*.⁶⁸³ Electoral co-operation took place again in April 1937 when the PSF federation in the Falaise decided to support Goy's candidacy in the area. Endorsed by the PSF's executive committee and parliamentary group, La Rocque's party hailed this anti-communist inspired act of unity.⁶⁸⁴

With the election of the Popular Front in May 1936, the UNC's fear of communist revolution grew. A police report from June 1936 alleged that, along with Ybarnégaray, Vallat, Henriot, Chiappe and Darquier de Pellepoix among others, Lebecq and Goy attended the general constitutive assembly of La Rocque's PSF. Goy and Lebecq were both elected to the executive commission of the new movement. These men hoped that local PSF anti-soviet committees would aid the fight against the enemies of France.⁶⁸⁵ The UNC's anti-communist Rassemblement français, launched in mid-1936, attracted the collaboration of several groups on the extreme right including the PSF, the AF and the PPF.⁶⁸⁶ Goy and La Rocque released a statement outlining their plans to form, "...les ententes locales susceptibles de dénoncer l'action de Moscou et de désarmer ceux qui préparent la guerre civile et veulent nous entretenir dans un conflit général".⁶⁸⁷ Both leaders were at pains to stress that neither group would be subordinated to the other.

As the Popular Front experience wore on, solutions became extreme. In his biography of La Rocque, Nobécourt cites UNC section president Nérissou as stating that the UNC was preparing for paramilitary action. According to Nérissou, Marshal Pétain, Goy, Lebecq and Chiappe had succeeded in stockpiling weapons at secret locations below a 'Bordeaux-Lyon' line. In the case of communist revolution, these arms would be distributed to members for combat.

⁶⁸³ Fonds La Rocque (Sciences Po), LR 56II B4, letter from La Rocque to Mssrs Risacher and Brunhes, 11 February 1936.

⁶⁸⁴ *Le Flambeau*, 17 April 1937.

⁶⁸⁵ FM, 19 940 500: 238, report titled 'Création du 'Parti Social Français' et les 'Comités de Rassemblement National', 26 June 1936.

⁶⁸⁶ AN F⁷ 12966, 'Réunion dite de "Rassemblement français" organisée par les groupements nationaux du Ixe arrondissement, Salle du Petit Journal, 21 rue Cadet, le 25 février' 26 February 1937. See the report from 24 February 1937 on the scheduling of this meeting.

⁶⁸⁷ AN 451 AP: 121, undated.

Franco, Mussolini, Hitler and a French army contingent had apparently given their support to this plan. Nérissou assured his audience that this was no joke. Sections in the Midi were already waiting for the signal. He hoped that in return for the moral support that the UNC had given the Croix de Feu/PSF, La Rocque would lend his substantial manpower to this effort. A veteran member of the PPF confirmed the words of Nérissou. A police investigation turned up arms in the Var and the Alpes-Maritimes but little else.⁶⁸⁸

The UNC's relationship with the Croix de Feu/PSF bordered on an alliance that was tacitly understood but not openly agreed until the Rassemblement français. Even then, this agreement was more an expression of shared aims than a commitment to collaborate assiduously. La Rocque's movement was successful in recruiting UNC veterans. While it pursued co-operation with the association the league also attempted to encourage veterans to leave the UNC. Certainly there was opposition to the Croix de Feu in the UNC and this stemmed from an opposition to violence and fascism and the concern for lost members. Influenced by the words and behaviour of successive UNC presidents, some members joined what they perceived to be an *anciens combattants* association with a difference. It was not concerned with defending the material rights of ex-servicemen. Its mission was to restore discipline to the nation through authoritarian methods and the decimation of the left. When one takes into account the doctrine of the Croix de Feu, its political action and the polarised climate in France not a few veterans may have joined for political purposes. These men backed La Rocque's project for national renovation. A taste for political extremism was not absent among UNC veterans.

Conclusion

UNC veterans may have rejected Action combattante because of its political orientation. However, one should not attribute the group's failure exclusively to this reason. Political militancy existed within the association and so an alleged wholesale rejection of politics among veterans does not explain its failure. Rather, some veterans preferred to pursue political action through one of the many more successful alternatives than through Action combattante. Veterans were not allergic to extreme political action. They expressed this action in a variety of ways.

⁶⁸⁸ Nobécourt, *Le colonel de La Rocque*, p. 578-579.

To examine the UNC from a relational perspective reveals several points. It serves as a reminder that groups in interwar France did not operate in a vacuum. They interacted with their allies and adversaries within a political, social and cultural context. The UNC sought collaboration, officially and unofficially with groups that did not support the parliamentary Republic. Collaboration with the leagues existed from the highest to the lowest level of the UNC. Undoubtedly an admirer of La Rocque's league, Lebecq wanted to take the UNC in a new, more openly political direction. This view found echo among section members throughout France, not just the more reactionary section presidents and vice-presidents. Provincial veterans joined these groups too. The *anciens combattants* were willing to join associations whom they perceived to have common goals. In fact, they perceived the Croix de Feu to be an ex-servicemen's association with which co-operation could be pursued. In certain cases, veterans even abandoned the UNC for another group. Nevertheless, one must be cautious about the size of UNC defections to the Croix de Feu. Many members rejected political involvement. A strong UNC presence in a *département* did not hinder the success of the Croix de Feu but a weak UNC implantation did not necessarily mean that the Croix de Feu would founder.

One cannot therefore reduce the UNC to a single definition whether this be democratic, authoritarian or otherwise. To reprise the view of Gervais, the leagues and especially the Croix de Feu offered the veterans something that they had not found in their *anciens combattants* associations. The UNC had not been successful in its political action. As the perceived communist threat grew, a proportion of moderate members were pushed to extremism. They joined established organisations with a history of fighting the left.

Chapter Four

Youth versus Age: The Jeunes de l'UNC

La machine continue à tourner, trainant derrière elle ceux qui, incapables d'être nuisibles aujourd'hui peut-être, se contentent d'être inutiles et empêchent ainsi les réformes qui les effraient. Et il faut, pour qu'ils partent, qu'une broncho-pneumonie ou un accident de circulation les arrachent en même temps aux assemblées délibérantes et à la vie. Et pourtant, que de choses à faire dans cet Etat trop vieux.⁶⁸⁹

Roger Pinoteau, JUNC vice-president, February 1936

The discontent expressed in JUNC vice-president Roger Pinoteau's condemnation was not unique to the young Frenchmen in the UNC's youth group, the JUNC. The interwar period saw politically organised French youth enter national life as never before.⁶⁹⁰ Radical young intellectuals defined far-reaching solutions to the French crisis in *revues* such as *Esprit*, *Jeune Droite* and *Ordre nouveau*.⁶⁹¹ These men perceived a sharp conflict of generations. They opposed the established order, or 'disorder' as they termed it. This critique went further than a denunciation of political corruption. It not only entailed a wholesale rejection of conventional politics and contemporary values but also a redefinition of human civilisation. On the left and right, political movements attracted young recruits to their vision of society.

Certainly, youth organisations existed before the Great War. Conservative youth groups in the Association catholique de la jeunesse (ACJF) aimed to provide members with wholesome values, lifestyle advice and a sense of collective identity.⁶⁹² These groups espoused a doctrine of spiritual renewal that implied a conservative and authoritarian transformation of the Republic. In 1912, the Agathon survey of bourgeois Parisian youths claimed to have discovered a generation gap.⁶⁹³ Compared to the bookish, intellectual and liberal youth of the 1880s, Agathon found that

⁶⁸⁹ R. Pinoteau, 'La France serait-elle le pays de vieillards?', *La Vdc*, 8 February 1936.

⁶⁹⁰ On youth movements in interwar France see in particular Aline Coutrot, 'Youth movements in France in the 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (1970), pp. 23-35; Rémi Fabre, 'Les mouvements de jeunesse dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres', *Le Mouvement Social*, 168 (1994), pp. 9-31; Wilfred D. Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Kalman, *Extreme Right*, pp. 145-185; Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes*; Antoine Prost, 'Jeunesse et société dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres', *Vingtième Siècle*, 13 (1987), pp. 35-45.

⁶⁹¹ Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes*, p. 214.

⁶⁹² John Hellman, *The Knight-Monks of Vichy France: Uriage, 1940-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), pp. 6-7.

⁶⁹³ Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2007), p. 135.

contemporary young men were men of action who loved sport and technology. They rejected the corruption and perceived lethargy of the Third Republic.⁶⁹⁴ However, in pre-war France, in spite of the innate anti-democratic culture of conservative groups and Agathon's dynamic youth, only the young men of the AF's *camelots du roi* and the Institut d'Action française could claim any real success in challenging the Republic.⁶⁹⁵

The Great War exacerbated the perceived generation gap. During the war, the *génération du feu* counted millions of men from late adolescence to middle age.⁶⁹⁶ The conflict seemed to have cut all ties with the pre-1914 world. Servicemen differentiated between the war and pre-war generations. Some soldiers believed that one epoch was coming to an end and another, 'their' epoch, was about to begin.⁶⁹⁷ After the war, veterans' associations continued to use the language of generational conflict. Though the myth of the trench fraternity was largely constructed after 1918, the idea of the 'front generation' loomed large throughout Europe.⁶⁹⁸ The veteran became an important symbol of change, for veterans and non-veterans alike. He had survived mankind's greatest ordeal and this strengthened the belief in the uniqueness of his generation. In France, *anciens combattants* associations may have ostensibly shunned politics yet the claim to a shared identity made the veterans' associations a potentially potent political movement.⁶⁹⁹ The desire to break with pre-war ways saw their associations pit the dynamism, action and youth of former trench fighters with the allegedly ineffective policies of aged career politicians.

The French placed great hope in the parliamentary renewal of the elections of 1919, in which the front generation claimed many elected representatives. As a coming together of the political and social elites, for some the composition of the Chamber offered a unique opportunity. Yet the first post-war parliamentary experience proved unable to bring about the

⁶⁹⁴ Savage, *Teenage*, p. 133.

⁶⁹⁵ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 146.

⁶⁹⁶ On the concept of generations see Philippe Bénéton, 'La génération de 1912-1914: Image, mythe ou réalité?', *Revue française de science politique*, 21 (1971), pp. 981-1009; Peter Loewenberg, 'The psychoanalytical origins of the Nazi youth cohort', *American Historical Review*, 76 (1971), pp. 1457-1502; Mark Roseman, 'Introduction: Generation conflict and German history', in *Generations in Conflict*, pp. 1-47; Jean-François Sirinelli, 'Génération et histoire politique', *Vingtième Siècle*, 22 (1989), pp. 67-80; Michel Winock, 'Les générations intellectuelles', *Vingtième Siècle*, 22 (1989), pp. 17-38.

⁶⁹⁷ Winock, 'Les générations intellectuelles', p. 25.

⁶⁹⁸ Bessel, 'The 'front generation'', pp. 121-122. In his work on Germany, Richard Bessel concludes that the experiences of men at the front were diverse with the idea of a shared experience constructed after the end of the war. For Bessel, generations are 'imaginary concepts'.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

desired national renovation. Disillusioned, an important number of the 326 newly-elected deputies either did not complete their term or did not stand for re-election.⁷⁰⁰ The ensuing economic difficulties and the perceived impotence of traditional politics left frustrated elements searching for new alternatives. Some turned to the mythologised potential of French youth.

The mid-1920s witnessed a rise in organised youth activity. The youth movement gave voice to a section of society that was only just becoming aware of its distinctiveness.⁷⁰¹ Groups demonstrated the desire for action autonomous of the adult world.⁷⁰² By 1935, half a million French youths belonged to a movement.⁷⁰³ Catholic influenced movements continued to exist but they now faced competition from political formations. Unlike the moral goals of the Scouts and the ACJF groups, extremist youth wings joined the political fight against the Republic. The right aimed to inculcate the military discipline, selflessness and values of the trenches in French youth. During the 1920s, Valois's Faisceau depicted the veterans as a youthful force for change.⁷⁰⁴ Having acquired a taste for action over words during the war, Valois's vision opposed the energy and dynamism of youthful veterans to aged and decadent politicians. However, the response to the Faisceau's youth organisations, the Jeunesses fascistes and the Faisceau universitaire, was disappointing because the Faisceau did not direct propaganda specifically at youth.⁷⁰⁵ At a time when the Faisceau still considered veterans young enough to effect change themselves, Valois showed little interest in engaging with the post-war generation.

The belief in the youthful power of the veterans is an important difference between the two decades of the interwar period. During the twenties, the front generation still represented the best hope for change. By the 1930s, the situation had altered. Reformers continued to exploit the mystique of the veteran yet the advancing age and failing health of many ex-servicemen meant that, outside the veterans' associations at least, they were no longer considered the vanguards of rejuvenation. The inability of the associations themselves to renovate France compounded this failure. Now political organisations became concerned with engaging the young in their projects. From the communist left to the extreme right, groups employed a

⁷⁰⁰ Le Béguec, 'L'entrée au Palais-Bourbon', pp. 376-398.

⁷⁰¹ Coutrot, 'Youth movements', p. 26.

⁷⁰² Ibid., p. 32.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁷⁰⁴ For a discussion of the Faisceau and youth see Kalman, *Extreme Right*, pp. 148-158. Though Valois emphasised the dynamism of youth, the Faisceau's policy on youth reflected the arch-conservatism of its author, Hubert Bourgin.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

language of youth, energy and dynamism. Despite differing in ideological terms the movements all believed that their organisation would unleash the new forces needed to change the country.

The Croix de Feu/PSF demonstrated this shift in attitude. Drawing heavily on the veteran mystique, the Croix de Feu/PSF nevertheless regarded the younger generation as vital not only to the toppling of the Republican system but also to the construction of a new order.⁷⁰⁶ PSF youth doctrine in particular provided for the participation of young Frenchmen in the construction and leadership of the new state apparatus.⁷⁰⁷ However, French youth, decadent from years spent living under the Republic, required comprehensive physical and moral reform. For this reason, La Rocque and his collaborators developed wide-ranging plans on the reform of education, physical activity and youth initiatives for all ages such as the successful *colonies de vacances*. La Rocque founded several organisations to educate and train thousands of young French boys and girls in his movement's values. The FFCF alone counted approximately 30,000 members in 1938.⁷⁰⁸ Not all right-wing youth groups were as successful. The autonomy of the FR's youth group, the Jeunesse de la Fédération Républicaine, suffered from the presence of party personalities in its executive. The FR did not intend the group to attract mass support but to regenerate the cadres of the party. As a result, it became an imitation of the FR.⁷⁰⁹

The veterans themselves recognised the need to appeal to French youth. In the late 1920s, the UF and UNC founded youth movements. Though both youth groups had their own programmes, their action was intended to support the politics of their parent association. The Jeunes de l'UF (JUF), founded in 1927, sought the entry of veterans into government in order to rejuvenate governing elites. The majority of sections were established by 1930. The Vichy congress in 1934 saw the first day of debate dedicated to youth. By June 1934, the JUF counted 28,000 members and was represented in the UF's executive committee.⁷¹⁰ At first, membership was limited to those who had 'contact' with the *esprit combattant*. 'True' *jeunes* were the sons of either veterans, war disabled fathers or widowed mothers.⁷¹¹ Recruitment was later widened to include all French youth.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 145-185; Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, pp. 101-106 and 208-212.

⁷⁰⁷ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 165.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

⁷⁰⁹ Irvine, *French Conservatism*, pp. 32-33.

⁷¹⁰ 'Jeunesses de l'Union Fédérale', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 1 June 1934.

⁷¹¹ L. Fontenaille, 'Des devoirs', *Cahiers de l'UF*, March 1933.

At the Saint-Malo congress in 1928, the UNC recommended that its members participate in sporting societies. If no such societies existed within the locale members should create a youth group for this purpose.⁷¹² The earliest youth section was the Gauchy group, Saint-Quentin, founded in 1930.⁷¹³ Only after youth members first presented reports at the 1932 Lille congress did the movement gather some momentum though in January 1933 the JUNC admitted that membership was still small.⁷¹⁴ Membership increased during 1934 and in May the UNC's Metz congress ratified the decision to allow the sons of non-veterans to join. By April 1939, the JUNC claimed to have at least 100,000 members across 1100 sections.⁷¹⁵

Unlike the Croix de Feu/PSF, the UNC did not seek to prepare young members as future leaders. Its plan for national renovation required the collaboration of the young yet it would be the veterans who took the lead. Morally and physically out of shape, French youth could not compete with the images of the disciplined, enthusiastic and dynamic youth of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia. Preferring detective novels and bad cinema, young Frenchmen were sceptics and prematurely old, 'clapped out' by useless sporting competitions.⁷¹⁶ As late as 1939, the UNC still believed it was the veterans who could save France. Their job was to guide the young:

Les anciens combattants forment à l'époque actuelle, l'élite la plus saine, la plus stable, la plus sûre...c'est pour cela, que des milliers de jeunes, conscients de leurs devoirs, mais aussi confiants en la force de l'esprit salvateur des Anciens Combattants – acceptent, sous leur égide, de bâtir un idéal pour le plus grand bien de la France et celui de tous les Français.⁷¹⁷

In its attacks on the age of politicians, the JUNC challenged the ability of deputies to solve the French crisis. The JUNC endorsed the programmes of and collaborated with the leagues. Though the JUNC stated it was neither of the right nor the left, elements of its programme placed it closer to the right. It was anti-communist, supported corporatism and the organised profession, eulogised the virtuous French peasant, family life and pursued a

⁷¹² A. Le Blanc, 'Les Jeunes: Leur psychologie, leurs tendances, leurs aspirations. Comment agir sur les Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 28 April 1934.

⁷¹³ R. Schmitt, 'D'autres moyens de propagande', *La Vdc*, 23 June 1934.

⁷¹⁴ A. Lesbordes, 'Allons les jeunes !', *La Vdc*, 7 January 1933.

⁷¹⁵ For this membership figure see 'Notre Action', *La Vdc*, 6 November 1937. The group claimed to have 1100 sections in a report from the JUNC's 'Conseil National', *La Vdc* 1 April 1939.

⁷¹⁶ J. Alaterre, 'Un appel aux Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 29 April 1939.

⁷¹⁷ J. Fourcade-Chourry, 'Jeunes et Anciens ont des obligations mutuelles', *La Vdc*, 25 February 1939.

conservative policy on women. All were tenets of contemporary right-wing doctrine. In 1938, the JUNC supported the veterans' plan for a government of public safety and the suspension of the Chambers.⁷¹⁸ When considering the various tendencies in the UNC, the JUNC represents a trend that was closest to the extreme right in its doctrine and tactics.

This chapter concerns youth in the discourse and actions of the UNC. Firstly, the chapter examines the idea of a generational divide and youth as a political concept. The veterans of the UNC employed both tactics in their attacks on the Republic. I will investigate the relationship between the veterans and the *jeunes* in general, and why it was considered important. Secondly, the chapter considers the role of the JUNC. This study will include examinations of the group's development and political programme. One will see that the youth movement became a political wing that was in some ways more radical than the UNC. While its state reform programme was similar to that of the veterans, the JUNC advocated the destruction of Republican institutions. As the thirties came to an end, the group chose authority as the means of national recovery. In addition, the JUNC and the UNC differed in two areas. Firstly, the JUNC's policy on sport sought to strengthen the French race and remake youth in a way similar to the aims of the extreme right. Secondly, the youth movement admitted women members who were afforded a certain prominence in the local sections. However, this relatively progressive attitude ran parallel to a conservative policy that aimed to return women to the home as wives and mothers.

The *jeunes* and the *anciens*

The youthful veteran

In veteran discourse, to be *jeune* was not limited to age. Youth was a quality one could possess. That is not to say that qualification by age did not take place. To be a member of the JUNC, for example, one had to have been born after 1 January 1899, unless foreign occupation had prevented one from fighting in the war.⁷¹⁹ Yet youth was also an abstract principle and a spiritual value rather than one defined by age.⁷²⁰ It was equated with one's openness to new ideas and the perceived energy needed to overcome the ordeals of the crisis. Veterans across the *monde ancien combattant* held this view. De Barral of the SDC summed up the veterans' policy:

⁷¹⁸ See chapter two for a discussion of the UNC's state reform agenda.

⁷¹⁹ 'L'Assemblée générale des Jeunes de l'UNC', *La Vdc*, 9 November 1935.

⁷²⁰ Savage, *Teenage*, p. 183; Michael Ledeen, 'Italian fascism and youth', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 4 (1969), pp. 137-154.

Elle [la jeunesse] est un laboratoire où s'élabore nombre d'idées que le pouvoir doit ensuite mettre en œuvre. Donc, quand je dis «collaboration avec la jeunesse», ça ne veut pas dire avec la jeunesse tout court, mais avec les éléments jeunes de chaque force nationale. Autrement dit, avec les jeunes «intègres».⁷²¹

Scapini, founder of the Union des aveugles de guerre, argued that youth was not a problem of age but of *esprit*. Political involvement corrupted this *esprit* and turned twenty-five year olds into old men.⁷²²

The veterans regarded themselves as young for a number of reasons. Firstly, as discussed above, the ex-*poilus* were of various ages yet all experienced the same generation defining event. A *poilu* of 40 could therefore still identify with one of 18 because of this shared experience. Secondly, although some veterans spoke of having been aged by the war and, in some cases, of a lost youth, others claimed they had returned as 'new men'. Delore, for example, arrived in the trenches of Verdun aged 20 and subsequently came to believe that he had not experienced youth. Upon leaving the army aged 23, he claimed he had already lived a lifetime. However, Delore also expressed a common belief: the war had been a regenerative experience. A new life was beginning in which he had a civic duty to fulfil.⁷²³

Youth could be a mental state, an *état d'esprit*, even in those of advancing years: "A l'encontre de beaucoup d'autres, nos aînés sont très jeunes de caractère et comprennent admirablement nos aspirations... ils nous apportent une mystique jeune par excellence..."⁷²⁴ Upon Jean Goy's accession to the presidency of the UNC he was 43 years old, yet *La Voix du combattant* referred to him as a *jeune* because he had maintained the 'soul' of an activist.⁷²⁵ The JUNC group in the Ille-et-Vilaine attributed its rapid growth to the veteran Loiseleux, "...toujours sur la brèche, toujours plus jeune que le plus jeune des jeunes".⁷²⁶ As for the UF, Pichot argued that as long as their heart remained young and the fire of faith still burned in their

⁷²¹ G. Berthau, 'A propos d'une enquête: Les Anciens Combattants à la conquête du pouvoir. Par qui?', *La Vdc*, 3 August 1935.

⁷²² Ibid.

⁷²³ P. Delore, 'Pensées d'automne', *Le Combattant du Centre*, December 1933.

⁷²⁴ R. Schmitt, 'Les Jeunes: Liaison avec les Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 28 April 1934.

⁷²⁵ 'Jean Goy est élu président général de l'UNC en remplacement de Georges Lebecq démissionnaire', *La Vdc*, 14 December 1935.

⁷²⁶ 'Au lendemain de notre magnifique congrès', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, March 1935.

souls, the grey or white hair and the deepening wrinkles of the war generation mattered not at all. What was important was that the *jeunes* took up the torch of the *esprit combattant*.⁷²⁷

The task of remaining young concerned the youth members too. In this case, the quality of youth was explicitly linked to action. The JUNC advised that although the movement was young, as were its members, the only means by which to preserve this youth was to *militer*: “...vivre, c’est combattre... Lutter, toujours lutter, voilà le ‘Modus Vivendi’ de notre génération”.⁷²⁸ Action rendered a person *jeune*. Those people whom the JUNC defined as old were: “...ces trop nombreux hommes, jeunes par l’âge, mais précocement stérilisés par le scepticisme intellectuel et la lâcheté physique” and “...les incrédules, les blasés, les indifférents, les indécis, les timorés, qui sont légions”.⁷²⁹ In contrast, the *jeunes* were constructive fighters.⁷³⁰

The veterans used a subjective conception of age in their political discourse. It was another tool by which to establish their moral authority in France. For the UNC, the quality of youth, just like the quality of being a combatant, was qualification enough to supersede the democratic process and accede to power, in place of: “...cette triste génération d’hommes trop âgés et trop corrompus pour bien gouverner [qui] abdiquera devant une génération d’hommes jeunes, énergiques, qui eux, seront désintéressés parce qu’ils ne voudront pas ruiner un pays qu’ils ont eu tant de peine à défendre”.⁷³¹ In comparison to other European countries, France was a *pays de vieillards*.⁷³² Not only did the UNC level the charge of senility at politicians and parties, it did so at the Republic too. Similar to the men of its institutions, the State was anarchic, aged, ill-equipped and had simply run out of steam.⁷³³

Pichot condemned politicians in similar terms. He attacked their aged policies and formulas, exhausted ideas, quaint and old-fashioned habits and the worn out expedient measures that dominated political assemblies. It was time to make way for younger men.⁷³⁴ The UF’s Léon Viala questioned whether democracy still existed in France:

⁷²⁷ H. Pichot, ‘Nous voulons la France!’, *Cahiers de l’UF*, 10 May 1938.

⁷²⁸ R. Etienne, ‘Debout les Jeunes’, *La Vdc*, 16 December 1933.

⁷²⁹ Les jeunes du GRP, ‘Sont jeunes ceux qui bâtissent, luttent, possèdent une foi...’, *La Vdc*, 30 April 1938.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ A. Deprez, ‘Des Jeunes’, *La Vdc*, 11 February, 1933.

⁷³² R. Pinoteau, ‘La France serait-elle le pays de vieillards?’, *La Vdc*, 8 February 1936.

⁷³³ Bordachar, ‘Plaidoyer pour les Jeunes... et contre nous’, *La Vdc*, 21 January 1933.

⁷³⁴ H. Pichot, ‘La maison en ordre’, *Cahiers de l’UF*, 15 January 1933.

...je sais bien que notre Démocratie se montre vis-à-vis des jeunes actuels aussi marâtre qu'elle le fut vis-à-vis de nous. Quand je dis la Démocratie, je me trompe: ce sont ceux qui se sont arrogés le droit de parler et de commander en son nom. Ce sont les vieux routiers de la politique, les descendants dégénérés des fondateurs de nos institutions, ce sont ceux-là qui veulent nous barrer la route comme ils ont réussi à nous décimer et à nous diviser...ces vieillards n'ont d'autres ambitions que de défendre leurs intérêts et ceux de leur classe....⁷³⁵

The veterans' condemnation of politicians for their age was an important component of their challenge to the perceived legitimacy of deputies. While generational discourse may have constituted a conservative attempt to conceal social divisions, and therefore deny class struggle, it was also a means of political intervention.⁷³⁶ In their discursive offensives against the Republic, the veterans of the UNC used the notion of age and senility to condemn politicians, parties and their policies as outmoded and anachronistic formulae. The fact that they were the elected representatives of the nation mattered little. The politicisation of the notion of age allowed the veterans to claim to speak for vast swathes of French society. They presented themselves as a new force in French politics while certain undesirables were denied membership of their own generation and exiled to the generation of an earlier period. In this way, politicians and their practices were consigned to the pre-1914 generation, the same cohort that had taken France to war and sacrificed her best sons. These men populated the institutions of the Republic, a fact that rendered these very institutions archaic and exhausted.

The alliance of youth and age

The veterans aimed to imbue the youth of France with the *esprit combattant* and thus ensure their moral legacy. They urged readers to stay young, to *be* young, and to pass on the torch of memory to future generations.⁷³⁷ The young would swell the ranks of the veterans' moral elite in the work toward French recovery.⁷³⁸ Pinoteau defined this relationship in July 1935 as a union in which the *jeunes* would defend the rights and interests of the veterans and

⁷³⁵ L. Viala, 'Réflexions d'un ancien poilu devant la jeunesse française', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 November 1933.

⁷³⁶ Prost, III, p. 135-140. The *anciens combattants* presented the social body as a juxtaposition of rival generations. The veterans used the criticism that politicians were too old as a frequent insult and to attack the perceived lack of imagination of the post-war governments in dealing with modern problems.

⁷³⁷ A. Guyot, 'Anciens et Jeunes!', *La Vdc*, 22 July 1933.

⁷³⁸ A. Guyot, 'L'Action des Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 5 August 1933.

fight for the aims of a common programme. The task that lay with the *anciens* was to initiate youth into the civic struggle.⁷³⁹

The UNC did not believe French youth was ready to lead France. The veterans had already undertaken their apprenticeship in the administration of their movements. When the time came, the veterans would enter government with youth at their sides. It would then be the turn of French youth to learn the methods of administration. The UNC did not state how long this would take.⁷⁴⁰ This view differed from other sections of the *monde ancien combattant*. In 1935, Pichot admitted that the veterans had failed and it would not be the *génération du feu* that created a new France. He attributed this task to the *jeunes*. The war generation had amounted to nothing but a movement of transition between the old and young generations. The *jeunes* would 'seize the reins of the state' and in this event Pichot would submit to them: "...je mets mes cinquante ans, allègrement, au service de ceux qui n'avaient vingt ans quand sonna le tocsin et quand les bourdons des clochers clamèrent la délivrance".⁷⁴¹ In March 1935, André Gervais echoed Pichot's pessimism. He stated that without the youth of France veteran action was doomed to failure. Gervais pointed out that due to the inefficiency of veteran action thus far the generation gap appeared wider than ever. Within this judgement lay a critique of the fragmented nature of the *monde combattant*, unable to unify itself never mind the youth of the day.⁷⁴²

The JUNC considered itself qualified to join the veterans' moral elite but only with the guidance of the veterans.⁷⁴³ French youth had fallen into disarray, a symptom of existing within a decadent society that was heading for oblivion.⁷⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the *jeunes* co-appropriated the role of national saviour:

...il n'y a que les AC et les jeunes à présenter des éléments sains et vigoureux et c'est à eux qu'il appartient dans un bel effort de collaboration de redresser le pays. Il y a là un bel horizon d'activité et il faut que, nous, fils d'AC, nous allions grossir l'élite qu'ils représentent.⁷⁴⁵

⁷³⁹ R. Pinoteau, 'Pas d'assiette au beurre chez nous: Conseils aux Jeunes, Appel aux Anciens', *La Vdc*, 13 July 1935.

⁷⁴⁰ G. Berthau, 'A propos d'une enquête: Les Anciens Combattants à la conquête du pouvoir. Par qui?', *La Vdc*, 3 August 1935. Georges Rivollet of the Union nationale des mutilés et réformés and René Cassin of the UF expressed this view on the ill-preparedness of French youth for government.

⁷⁴¹ H. Pichot, 'Cloches de Pâques', *Cahiers de l'UF*, 15 April 1935.

⁷⁴² A. Gervais, 'La relève qui vient', *La Vdc*, 2 March 1935.

⁷⁴³ J. de Saint Louvent, 'La Relève', *La Vdc*, 2 December 1933.

⁷⁴⁴ C. Galland, 'Le mal des jeunes ? C'est la médiocrité de l'Esprit français', *La Vdc*, 5 December 1936.

⁷⁴⁵ A. Guyot, 'L'Action Jeune', *La Vdc*, 5 August 1933.

The youth sections were willing to take up the torch from the *anciens combattants* as men of order and high morality, better qualified to lead the country than those 'blinded by the party spirit'.⁷⁴⁶ For Humbert Isaac, youth members would become better than the generation that went before them.⁷⁴⁷

Some members of the UNC spoke of the veterans' relationship to youth in grander tones than the simple replacement of politicians. Delore linked a youthful national renovation to the future of the French race. An infusion of youthful blood would allow France to face up to the problems of the time. Western culture would be reborn through institutions that befitted its grandeur.⁷⁴⁸ Under the guidance of the *esprit combattant* and youth, the struggle for a new epoch had begun, the stakes of which were no less than the future of the West and France.⁷⁴⁹ Delore's millenarian vision contrasted with the rather more apocalyptic pronouncements of de Cromières. As section president, he regularly used his editorial in *Le Combattant du Centre* to launch diatribes against Jewish influences in France. De Cromières implicated French youth in the wider struggle for French civilisation against bolshevism and international Jewry. It was imperative that the *anciens* pass on to the *jeunes* the notions of good and justice. Without this tutelage, France would not break free from the slavery of shadowy forces. De Cromières attacked the Jewish banker of the City of London and the torturer of 'bloody and revolting' Russia in his diatribe against France's enemies.⁷⁵⁰ The veterans and their heirs were guardians of civilisation against the powers of international Jewry and the deceitful doctrine of bolshevism. Solidarity between the UNC and its youth wing would defeat both the excesses of capitalism and the barbarity of communism.⁷⁵¹

The relationship between the UNC and its youth movement was not always harmonious. On occasion, the *jeunes* questioned the right of the *anciens* to speak for them. They cast doubt on the 'sterile concepts' of age and maturity.⁷⁵² In spite of the promise to be at the side of the

⁷⁴⁶ L. De J., 'L'esprit combattant et les Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 6 May 1933; F. d'Hennezel, 'L'heure des jeunes', *La Vdc*, 3 March 1934.

⁷⁴⁷ H. Isaac, 'A nous les jeunes!', *La Vdc*, 17 November 1934.

⁷⁴⁸ P. Delore, 'La réforme primordiale: Celle de l'esprit public', *La Vdc*, 29 July 1933.

⁷⁴⁹ P. Delore, 'Pensées d'automne', *La Vdc*, 11 November 1933.

⁷⁵⁰ G. de Cromières, 'Et Nos Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 30 October 1937.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Evidence of conflict can be found in 'Que veut la Jeunesse?', *La Vdc*, 23 September 1933; A. Le Blanc, 'Les Jeunes: Leur psychologie, leur tendances, leurs aspirations. Comment agir sur les jeunes', *La Vdc*, 28 April 1934; J.

veterans, the *jeunes* warned that they would not act as the support in old age (*bâton de vieillesse*) for their fathers.⁷⁵³ The *jeunes* would not wait indefinitely for the call to action and may launch action independently. JUNC president Jacques Raudot condemned the *anciens* for liking the security of fine speeches while the *jeunes* took action. After the 1938 national congress, he expressed surprise that the discussion of reports had resembled the worst squabbles of the Palais-Bourbon.⁷⁵⁴ He pressed the UNC's executive committee for more support and warned that if the *jeunes* were not with the *anciens*, then they would be against them.⁷⁵⁵ Raymond Marin, president of the JUNC's Lagny section, described the veterans as broken men, despondent and paralysed. He judged as mistakes their rejection of politics and their unwillingness to combat politicians in the political arena. Contrary to this, the veterans believed the rejection of political intervention, in their terms the rejection of the 'bad' politics practised by politicians, to be a defining virtue.⁷⁵⁶

Initially, the JUNC accepted that it was up to the veterans, and not their sons, to make the necessary reforms and to take into their hands the direction of the country.⁷⁵⁷ This changed as the movement grew during 1935. The *jeunes*' commitment to fight for the material rights of veterans was no longer a worthy *raison d'être*. According to Veysset, youth members were not interested in the revision of pensions. He stated somewhat bitterly that the 'sacred rights' of the veterans, which nevertheless they recognised and defended, only concerned young men to the extent that they financed state payments as taxpayers.⁷⁵⁸ After the elections of 1936, Pinoteau judged that the *jeunes* now occupied a place in society as important as that of the *anciens combattants*, who were on the verge of disappearing. The tables had turned. The young now held the power and, in order to remain relevant, it was the *anciens* who needed *their* collaboration.⁷⁵⁹ Nevertheless, until the Second World War, the JUNC continued to champion the *esprit combattant* and extol the virtues of the veteran.

The veterans of the UNC attempted to guide French youth towards the goal of national renovation. They appreciated the energetic potential of young French men yet this could only be

Burger, 'Des moyens de propagande', *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935; J. Raudot, 'Aux anciens', *La Vdc*, 16 October 1938; A. Magnier, 'Union Sportive Française: Notre exemple à imiter', 12 February 1938.

⁷⁵³ R. Schmitt, 'Liaison avec les Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 28 April 1934.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ UNC/EC, 5 February 1938.

⁷⁵⁶ R. Marin, 'Avec ceux qui en sont revenus', *La Vdc*, 27 October 1934.

⁷⁵⁷ A. Guyot, 'Haut les coeurs!', *La Vdc*, 9 December 1933.

⁷⁵⁸ E. Veysset, 'Petite correspondance', *La Vdc*, 9 November 1935.

⁷⁵⁹ R. Pinoteau, 'Et demain?', *La Vdc*, 9 May 1936.

harnessed with the aid of the veterans. JUNC members were willing to follow the veterans up to a point. However, the perceived inaction of the *anciens* frustrated some youth members. Consequently, the JUNC openly advocated intervention in politics. It believed political intervention to be the only effective means of national renovation. Its programme, influenced by contemporary young intellectual thought, endeavoured to express a revolutionary dynamism to which the movement laid claim.

The Jeunes de l'UNC

Veterans played a prominent role in the JUNC. The UNC financed two-thirds of the JUNC's annual budget.⁷⁶⁰ Veteran members often founded JUNC sections and participated in each group's leadership and development. Youth sections existed as sub-sections within UNC groups. They possessed their own committee upon which sat two *anciens*. Similarly, two *jeunes* sat on the local *anciens* committee. On a national level, in November 1934, the UNC on the initiative of Isaac invited 3 members of the JUNC to attend the meetings of the executive committee.⁷⁶¹ Contrary to the wishes of some *anciens*, the *jeunes* members did not have the right to vote in committee elections.⁷⁶² This arrangement continued until the outbreak of the Second World War and illustrates the high level of co-operation between the UNC proper and the JUNC. Hubert Aubert vetted articles that appeared on the youth page. A series of letters attest to the fact that on one occasion at least an article was censored for its content.⁷⁶³ It is plausible then that published articles had the consent of the elders of the UNC.

It is important to stress the diversity within the JUNC, which mirrored the diversity of the combatants' movement itself. Certainly some youth groups existed merely as social associations to provide young people with a means to pursue leisure activities and to take holidays. The basic activities of a youth section included participation in national commemorations, the organisation of *fêtes*, regular meetings and marriage and death notices.⁷⁶⁴ Groups provided intellectual,

⁷⁶⁰ UNC/EC, 8 April 1939.

⁷⁶¹ UNC/EC, 24 November 1934, also reported in *La Vdc*, 1 December 1934.

⁷⁶² UNC/EC, 29 May 1936.

⁷⁶³ Series of letters exchanged between the leadership of the UNC and the JUNC: Charles Galland to Jean Goy, 22 December 1937; Jean Goy to Charles Galland, 24 December 1937; Charles Galland to Jean Goy, 29 December 1937; Jacques Raudot to Jean Goy, 29 December 1937; Jean Goy to Charles Galland, 5 January 1938; Jean Goy to Jacques Raudot, 6 January 1938.

⁷⁶⁴ E. Veyssset, 'Propagande pratique: L'activité minimum d'une section de JUNC', *La Vdc*, 4 July 1936.

sporting and recreational pursuits for their members and these opportunities attracted new recruits.⁷⁶⁵

Political action was the goal of some sections. Writing in July 1934, Schmitt, president of the JUNC until November 1936, congratulated the UNC on its actions on 6 February 1934 as before 1933 he could only offer sporting activities to his group. The UNC's new political turn had provided a doctrine for its members and the promise of action.⁷⁶⁶ The youth movement explicitly encouraged collaboration between its sections and political parties and leagues with the aim of grouping the country's national forces into a single front. Schmitt made no apology for the group's political tactics: "Laissons dire que les Jeunes sont des révolutionnaires... cette action, que je ne crains pas de qualifier de politique après l'avoir définie nettement, doit être menée parallèlement à une action sociale extrêmement forte...".⁷⁶⁷ Veysset clarified the stance of the JUNC regarding political organisations. In order to preserve its autonomy, the JUNC as an organisation should not conclude ententes or official alliances with other groups. Rather, on an individual level members had a duty to engage in political action as soon as possible. A member of the JUNC could be a member or activist even of a 'political party of order, a patriotic league or a mutual social aid association'.⁷⁶⁸ D'Hennezel urged readers not to forget their comrades in the Croix de Feu, the SF or the JP, who like the JUNC desired ordered non-revolutionary action.⁷⁶⁹ The JUNC admitted to the presence of members and leaders of the JP, the VN and Centre des Républicains Nationaux within the organisation.⁷⁷⁰ The *anciens* were aware of the political action of the youth groups. In May 1938, 100 presidents of the JUNC Vendéen group encouraged active collaboration with and attendance at meetings of political parties and leagues, the only condition being that these organisations follow a national politics. The veterans in attendance approved.⁷⁷¹

One cannot know whether JUNC members viewed the youth groups and their activities as anything more than a means to make new friends. This chapter will not argue that all

⁷⁶⁵ J. Dauguet, 'Appel aux Aînés', *La Vdc*, 17 March 1934. Dauguet of the Caudéran group cited social activities as the reason for the group's growth from 25 to 105 members over three years.

⁷⁶⁶ R. Schmitt, 'Au travail de Suite!', *La Vdc*, 21 July 1934.

⁷⁶⁷ R. Schmitt, 'Raymond Schmitt', *Inter-Sections*, March 1936.

⁷⁶⁸ E. Veysset, 'La Propagande: Conseils pour les Présidents de Sections', *La Vdc*, 6 July 1935.

⁷⁶⁹ F. D'Hennezel, 'L'action', *La Vdc*, 14 April 1934.

⁷⁷⁰ E. Veysset, 'La propagande: Nous unissons, nous fédérons, nous ne démolissons pas', *La Vdc*, 7 September 1935.

⁷⁷¹ Report from the general assembly of the Vendéen group, *La Vdc*, 14 May 1938.

members were of the same political conviction whether democratic, authoritarian, fascist or other. Simply, one can argue that the JUNC was a political movement whose discourse and actions leant towards an authoritarian conception of the Republic. The JUNC denied neither its interest nor its intervention in politics. The JUNC's programme was not of the Republican centre. It contained the potential for authoritarianism in its prioritisation of an abstract principle (youth) over the electoral process. The youth versus age dynamic did not respect the democratic legitimacy of Republican politicians. It provides further evidence that the UNC did not support the Republic as it was during the 1930s.

Foundation and Membership

For information on the membership and development of the JUNC, one must rely upon the UNC's own publications. *La Voix du combattant* (which would become *La Voix du combattant et de la jeunesse* in February 1936) printed a weekly youth column from July 1933 that soon expanded to a whole page. It contained information and articles sent to the youth page by regional activists. The JUNC conducted various censuses of members and groups. One should be cautious regarding the reliability of such information, which is open to exaggeration. However, regular appeals for information about groups, the relatively modest numbers published (with a few exceptions) and reprimands for sections that had not replied to various *appels* suggest that the information is of some use.

Founded at the Saint-Malo congress in 1928, the youth movement only gained momentum after the national Lille congress in 1932. The 'Tribune des Jeunes' column first appeared on 22 July 1933 and in August the newspaper opened its columns to provincial *jeunes* activists in an appeal for articles. The Wagram meeting in October 1933 gave new impetus to the development of a youth movement. The JUNC took off in a practical sense after the Metz congress in 1934, when for the first time the *jeunes* had their own commission.⁷⁷²

In January 1934, the JUNC's youth commission decided that membership of the movement should be opened to the sons and daughters of non-combatants who shared the views of the UNC.⁷⁷³ Delegates to the Metz congress in May 1934 ratified this decision. In April 1934, Marin stated that the ultimate goal was to create a united front of youth movements. He

⁷⁷² 'Centre permanent d'action: Séance du 3 mars', *La Vdc*, 10 March 1934.

⁷⁷³ Report from the 'Commission des Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 20 January 1934.

added that non-combatants' sons had shown as much if not more zeal for action as the sons of veterans.⁷⁷⁴ A report by the Parisian group in 1938 demonstrates the effect of the open recruitment policy. This local group had 1820 members across 50 sections, 75% of whom were the sons or daughters of non-UNC members.⁷⁷⁵ This testifies to the success of the JUNC in recruiting from outside the UNC circle and demonstrates the penetration of its ideas within a wider milieu.

Some indication as to the rate of expansion of the youth movement can be drawn from local reports on the youth page of *La Voix du combattant*. The UNC de Rugles created a JUNC group on 19 May 1933 and held its first meeting on 19 June 1933 that attracted 60 members. Less than a month later this had almost doubled to 108 members and by the end of the year the group claimed 330 adherents.⁷⁷⁶ Such rapid expansion is reflected in reports from other local groups.⁷⁷⁷ The JUNC census in mid-1934 boasted 62 sections across 22 departments, of which 15 were founded after the Metz congress in May 1934.⁷⁷⁸ By the first National Youth Council in January 1935, there were 158 sections, of which 56 began operating in the previous 3 months.⁷⁷⁹ In May that year, François Aubert for the first time gave an approximate figure for overall membership: 30,000 *jeunes*.⁷⁸⁰ By November 1935, the movement reported the existence of 320 sections in 54 departments.⁷⁸¹ The following January, the JUNC founded a section in Luxembourg.

By April 1936, François Aubert announced that the movement had successfully established itself. The next phase of youth action could now begin. It would involve the training of French youth in patriotic values.⁷⁸² This next phase witnessed an explosion in membership, if the figures can be believed. In May 1937, Raudot reported to the executive committee that the JUNC had gained 20,000 more members than expected, with 265 new sections having been

⁷⁷⁴ R. Marin, pre-congress report, *La Vdc*, 28 April 1934.

⁷⁷⁵ Les Jeunes, 'Appel aux AC', *La Vdc*, 30 April 1938.

⁷⁷⁶ Report from the general assembly of the Fils et filles des anciens combattants: Rugles, *La Vdc*, 10 March 1934.

⁷⁷⁷ For example, the Arcachon group increased its membership from 15 to 120 in 12 months. See the report from the general assembly of the Association des fils et filles des d'AC of Arachon, *La Vdc*, 21 April 1934.

⁷⁷⁸ 'Recensement', *La Vdc*, 14 July 1934.

⁷⁷⁹ 'Conseil national des Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 26 January 1935.

⁷⁸⁰ F. Aubert, 'Rapport du Secrétaire Général', *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

⁷⁸¹ 'L'Assemblée générale des Jeunes de l'UNC', *La Vdc*, 9 November; E. Veyssset, 'Assemblée Générale des Jeunes: Rapport fait à l'Assemblée Générale des Jeunes', 16 November 1935.

⁷⁸² F. Aubert, 'Des paroles, oui! Des actes surtout', *La Vdc*, 18 April 1936.

created since the previous November.⁷⁸³ By November 1937, the JUNC claimed to have 100,000 members and in April 1939, Raudot announced the existence of 1100 sections, likely an exaggeration.⁷⁸⁴

The JUNC proved to be more successful than Action combattante. Though one can question the validity of self-publicised membership figures – the UNC once claimed that Action combattante had 100,000 members too – other evidence exists for the success of the movement. The JUNC retained an ever-expanding youth page from 1933 to the outbreak of the Second World War. The UNC's executive did not concede the failure of the JUNC as it did in the cases of Action combattante and the Rassemblement français. Commissions at the national congresses continued to examine youth issues. Local UNC newspapers also testify to the existence of sections in their area. While the JUNC may not have had the 100,000 members it claimed, it was nevertheless successful in establishing itself within the wider UNC.

Propaganda

In March 1935, Veyssset published his vision of the development of a JUNC group. Once members had founded a section and nurtured it into an organisation with a strong local implantation, there would come the time for political action. Characterised by the penetration of professional, proletarian, commercial and agricultural circles, the *jeunes* would infiltrate existing organisations in an effort to spread the spirit of duty and discipline.⁷⁸⁵ Veyssset claimed that this *politique de noyautage* had worked well for the JUNC's adversaries and so the movement must take up this action itself. He admitted that few groups were currently at this stage and whether any JUNC groups reached this stage before 1940 is difficult to say.

The ultimate goal of the JUNC was to act as a reserve force for parties, movements and leagues until the time for intervention came. This intervention would then "... se produira comme se sont produits les interventions de nos Anciens". It is unclear what was meant by this but it could be a reference to the direct action undertaken by the UNC in February 1934.⁷⁸⁶ Veyssset's ultimate vision for the movement was to overtake the success of the UNC. He

⁷⁸³ UNC/EC, 8 May 1937.

⁷⁸⁴ J. Raudot, 'Aux anciens', *La Vdc*, 6 November 1937; 'Conseil National', 1 April 1939.

⁷⁸⁵ E. Veyssset, 'La propagande: Les trois stades envisagées', *La Vdc*, 30 March 1935.

⁷⁸⁶ E. Veyssset, 'Le sens profond de notre mouvement', *La Vdc*, 2 November 1935.

predicted a future time when the *jeunes* would found UNC sections to complement and aid youth members in areas where JUNC sections were isolated.⁷⁸⁷

JUNC propaganda was more active and innovative than the UNC. It sought to make the youth page one of 'combat' and 'action'.⁷⁸⁸ In January 1934, the JUNC founded the Centre permanent d'action des Jeunes to coordinate youth actions. From August 1934, the Centre met each month and founded technical committees concerned with press, propaganda, general action and feminine action.⁷⁸⁹ Two years later the JUNC initiated training courses for prospective orators and conference organisers.⁷⁹⁰ The youth groups embraced modern ways of spreading their propaganda. In November 1935, the association launched a campaign in support of aviation and articles on this subject appeared regularly on the youth page.⁷⁹¹ Leaders encouraged activists to use the radio and cinema as a means of propaganda. The Haut-Rhin group produced its own films on the JUNC, an example that other groups followed. In March 1935, the UNC's Montmartre section advertised a 'grande matinée cinématographique' for the *jeunes*, under the auspices of Lebecq. Youth leaders spoke at the meeting.⁷⁹² In November of that year, the general assembly of the JUNC asked the head of the Suresnes section Robert Gautron to take charge of cinematographic propaganda and establish relations with Pathé.⁷⁹³

The JUNC valued mass demonstrations for their ability to strike and impress public opinion through their size and vitality.⁷⁹⁴ It believed that eventually the JUNC's strength, evident through the sheer weight of numbers, would deter rivals.⁷⁹⁵ The veterans usually rejected military style discipline during parades. Conversely, Croix de Feu parades were meticulously organised. JUNC activist Michel Arnault set out guidelines for youth group marches:

Les défilés de Jeunes doivent être absolument parfaits. C'est affaire aux organisateurs de ces manifestations de prévoir les détails matériels (emplacement et parcours, formation des colonnes...) et de «styler» leurs commissaires, c'est affaire aux présidents de groupe et de section

⁷⁸⁷ E. Veyssset, 'Le sens profond de notre mouvement', *La Vdc*, 2 November 1935.

⁷⁸⁸ R. Marin, 'Précisions nécessaires', *La Vdc*, 29 September 1934.

⁷⁸⁹ 'Centre permanent d'action: Séance du 9 août 1934', *La Vdc*, 25 August 1934.

⁷⁹⁰ E. Veyssset, 'Action générale 1936: Pour la formation d'une élite des Jeunes de l'UNC', *La Vdc*, 18 January 1936.

⁷⁹¹ E. Veyssset, report from general assembly of the JUNC, *La Vdc*, 16 November 1935.

⁷⁹² A. Godon, 'Matinée cinématographe du 31 mars', *L'Echo montmartrois*, April 1935.

⁷⁹³ E. Veyssset, report from general assembly of the JUNC, *La Vdc*, 16 November 1935.

⁷⁹⁴ J. Mafaraud, 'La propagande', *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

⁷⁹⁵ C. Galland, 'Action Générale', *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

de faire encadrer leurs hommes de fanion à éviter tout flottement, c'est affaire à tous les Jeunes de se soumettre aux consignes qui leur sont imposées. Nous n'avons pas tant d'occasions de présenter notre mouvement que public qu'il nous soit permis, à celles-là, de lui donner une idée de laisser aller et de mollesse. Tout ce que nous faisons doit être bien fait et c'est pourquoi j'insiste sur la nécessité de faire, à tous nos Congrès, des défilés impeccables. Le mouvement y gagnera à coup sûr.⁷⁹⁶

Sport was a high priority in the JUNC. Its interest in sport was not unique. Sporting participation increased across France throughout the interwar years. By 1929, there were forty sporting federations with over 3.6 million members. Political movements took an interest in sport yet non-political groups such as the Scouts de France and the Eclaireurs organised games based on a 'combative virility'.⁷⁹⁷ These groups concerned themselves with the 'soul, spirit and body' of members through games and exercise.⁷⁹⁸ Influential at this time was the exercise doctrine of Lieutenant Georges Hébert. Drawn up in 1906, Hébertisme emphasised 'natural' activities, which encouraged precision, speed and form rather than useless sporting competition. It divided exercise into ten groups: walking, swimming, running, jumping, crawling, climbing, balancing, throwing, lifting and self-defence.⁷⁹⁹ Hébertisme was subsequently used in the army during the Great War and remained popular on the right throughout the twenties and thirties. Considered instrumental to the physical and moral regeneration of France, the Vichy government employed Hébert's techniques in the Compagnons de France and the Chantiers de la Jeunesse.⁸⁰⁰ The JUNC also adopted Hébert's method.⁸⁰¹

Political movements took an interest in sport for various reasons. Initially, the left dismissed physical recreation as the preserve of those wealthy enough to afford leisure time. However, once in government the Popular Front became concerned with improving the health of ordinary citizens. Blum's government founded the Conseil supérieur des sports in July 1936 to encourage physical recreation among the urban industrial classes.⁸⁰² Minister of Sport and

⁷⁹⁶ M. Arnault, 'Mise au pas !', *La Vdc*, 1 April 1939.

⁷⁹⁷ Laura Lee Downs, 'Comment faire appel à l'instinct viril du garçon'? La pédagogie du jeu et la formation de l'enfant au masculin: Les Scouts de France, 1920-1940', *Cahiers Masculin/Féminin de Lyon 2: L'éternel masculin*, (2003), pp. 62-63; Jean-Louis Gay-Lescot, *Sport et Education sous Vichy* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1991), p. 8.

⁷⁹⁸ Downs, 'Comment faire appel', p. 57.

⁷⁹⁹ Halls, *Youth of Vichy France*, p. 199.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

⁸⁰¹ D. Strohl, 'Le Sport et la Jeunesse: Comment créer des Centres d'éducation physique', *La Vdc*, 16 June 1934;

René Franconi, 'Le Devoir d'être fort', *La Vdc*, 19 November 1938.

⁸⁰² Jackson, *The Popular Front*, pp. 131-138; Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 174.

Leisure Léo Lagrange used public funds to improve physical education amenities.⁸⁰³ He introduced the Brevet sportif populaire in 1937, a certificate aimed at French people of various sporting ability. In 1937, 420,000 people obtained the Brevet.⁸⁰⁴ Lagrange reported to President Lebrun: “En créant le Brevet sportif populaire, c’est à un effort national de rénovation physique que nous entendons convier tous ceux qui ont la charge de la jeunesse française et le souci de l’avenir de notre pays”.⁸⁰⁵ The language of Lagrange’s report would not have been out of place on the right.

Yet right-wing groups were not interested solely in raising individual levels of health to a national standard. The self-discipline and perfection of the body that exercise required was linked to a morality of spirit. The right believed that the demands of sport would bring a physical *and* a moral renovation of French men. Appearance took on a moral and patriotic value and the ‘softness’ of men was cited as proof of national decline.⁸⁰⁶ A man should be muscular and steadfast in his convictions, a force for re-establishing virility and discipline in the nation. The extreme right went further in its conception of sport. Elements in the Croix de Feu/PSF desired the complete moral, intellectual and physical renovation of French youth. They wanted to create a new man. Under the leadership of Gaëtan Maire and Jean Mierry, the Croix de Feu/PSF’s Société de préparation et d’éducation sportive (SPES) worked to this end, though it stopped short of eugenicist and racial theories common to Nazism.⁸⁰⁷

Regenerative in its effect, sport was comparable to the experience of war. It encouraged the development of masculine bodies essential for military service. Pétain connected moral and physical health. He argued that this should be taught in schools to prepare children for the future defence of the *patrie*.⁸⁰⁸ Robert Brasillach likened the nation to a sports team. Pierre Drieu La Rochelle saw a regenerative value in sport: “Guerre et sport, esprit d’équipe et ardeur communautaire, ascétisme et militantisme imposent l’exploit et trempent les caractères, bref stimulent les vertus civiques. Une nouvelle jeunesse sera «durcie par le sport, revirilisée par le sport»”.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰³ Ibid., p. 174.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 174.

⁸⁰⁵ Gay-Lescot, *Sport et Education*, p. 12.

⁸⁰⁶ André Rauch, *L’Identité Masculine à l’Ombre des Femmes: De la Grande Guerre à la Gay Pride* (Paris: Hachette, 2004), p. 70.

⁸⁰⁷ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, pp. 176-179.

⁸⁰⁸ Richard Griffiths, *Marshal Pétain* (London: Constable, 1970), pp. 162-164.

⁸⁰⁹ Rauch, *L’Identité Masculine*, p. 82.

The JUNC reflected this thinking. In March 1937, the fourth general assembly of the JUNC founded the Union Sportive Française (USF), under the impetus of Magnier. By the first USF congress in September 1937, the association claimed to have 28 affiliated sporting clubs. The USF aimed to improve the health of the nation's youth and prepare them for military service. It was also a propaganda tool for the JUNC. To join the USF, one first had to be a member of the youth group. The USF would contribute to the wider project for national renovation. The encouragement to take up sport would combat the decadent lifestyle of France epitomised in dancing, the cabaret and cinema: "On se croit nécessairement obligé d'être un excellent danseur, un coureur de cabarets de premier ordre pour devenir un «homme». Il faut avoir «vécu» telle est la devise avec laquelle les jeunes se gargarisent... voilà le plus grand ennemi du sport chez les jeunes".⁸¹⁰ In the JUNC, if the remaking of French minds was the primary goal, it was nevertheless essential to train healthy, robust and dependable bodies.⁸¹¹ Each club within the USF knew its mission: "Faire des hommes, ayant acquis par une éducation physique appropriée le courage, la force, la volonté, et toutes les qualités nécessaires pour affronter la vie".⁸¹² Physical exercise, therefore, engendered moral qualities. The JUNC wanted to make and remake French men.⁸¹³ The extreme right pursued the same goal.

Sport would prepare these new men for military service. In January 1937, at a time when the UNC believed France to be under threat from a left-wing government and a resurgent Germany, Raudot demanded that the *jeunes* be trained and educated in military preparation. This preparation would facilitate the return of the notion of honour to the *patrie*, the cultivation of military virtues and the celebration of France's glorious and heroic past.⁸¹⁴ An article by lieutenant-colonel Mercadier on the youth page advocated a national movement in favour of shooting training, physical education and military preparation.⁸¹⁵ Speaking at the departmental congress of the Nord group, Jean Ravau of the JUNC demanded that military preparation begin in school. *Anciens* and *jeunes* alike should contribute to the military preparation of French youth and help the school system to perfect reserve and non-commissioned officers.⁸¹⁶ The

⁸¹⁰ A. Magnier, 'Actualité sportive', *La Vdc*, 10 April 1937.

⁸¹¹ 'Le premier congrès de l'Union Sportive Française', *La Vdc*, 18 September 1937.

⁸¹² A. Magnier, 'L'Union Sportive Française', *La Vdc*, 30 April 1938.

⁸¹³ C. Galland, 'L'action des Jeunes: Action Générale', *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935; A. Magnier, 'L'Union Sportive Française', 30 April 1938.

⁸¹⁴ J. Raudot, 'L'Allemagne en Armes', *La Vdc*, 23 January 1937.

⁸¹⁵ M. Mercadier, 'La Préparation militaire de nous jeunes français', *La Vdc*, 18 December 1937.

⁸¹⁶ 'Les Jeunes à Merville', *La Vdc*, 22 May 1938.

departmental congress of the Seine-et-Marne group voted in May 1938 to support compulsory military service that would begin while children were still in school under the direction of monitors supplied by the army.⁸¹⁷

The JUNC's exploitation of sport for military purposes comes as no surprise when one takes into account the JUNC's admiration of military values. J.R. Moustiers, president of the Marne JUNC, specified that the most important quality of the *anciens combattants* was their military service: "Adhérez, mais soyez les vrais «Fils d'Ancien Combattant». Souvenez-vous qu'ils ont combattu."⁸¹⁸ In order to be true sons of veterans, one had to act like a veteran and live by military values.⁸¹⁹ In addition, youth groups were sometimes referred to as *escouades*.⁸²⁰ In February 1938, Magnier restated the aims of the USF: "...l'Union Sportive Française... a pour seul et unique but, l'amélioration de la race et la formation physique de la Jeunesse par la création de sociétés sportives, ayant à la base l'éducation physique obligatoire ainsi que la préparation militaire".⁸²¹ Sport, military preparation and the moral and physical renovation of the nation thus became intertwined. The desire to remake French minds and bodies and to militarise French youth placed the JUNC close to the extreme right.

The JUNC programme

Comparable to the intellectual ideas of *Esprit*, *Ordre Nouveau* and the *Jeune Droite*, the *jeunes* mixed reactionary and revolutionary concepts. The JUNC claimed to have inherited its national spirit, its rejection of internationalism and its desire for national defence, empire and the autarkic organisation of the country from the leagues, right-wing parties, 'radical patriots' and neo-socialists.⁸²² It attacked liberalism as the root of the class struggle during the past century. The complete freedom that reigned had led to a freedom of pleasure, a reference to the decadence of French society. As the rate of salaries declined and quality diminished, money had become the master.⁸²³ The movement drew from socialism and communism an anti-capitalism directed against high finance, trusts, cartels and 'irresponsible anonymous societies'. The JUNC reviled the excesses of the capitalist system, epitomised in monopolies, the abuse of credit, the market

⁸¹⁷ 'Seine-et-Marne, Congrès Départemental', *La Vdc*, 21 May 1938.

⁸¹⁸ J. R. Moustiers, 'Maintenant que vous êtes forts, soyez actifs', *La Vdc*, 25 September 1937.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

⁸²⁰ Les Jeunes, 'Appel aux AC', *La Vdc*, 30 April 1938.

⁸²¹ A. Magnier, 'Union Sportive Française: Notre exemple à imiter', *La Vdc*, 12 February 1938.

⁸²² E. Veysset, 'Libres opinions. La Propagande: Pas de programme?', *La Vdc*, 24 August 1935.

⁸²³ Joublin, 'Etudes corporatives: Les méfaits du libéralisme', *La Vdc*, 10 September 1938.

and, above all, speculation with other people's money. This anti-capitalism nevertheless respected private property whether from savings or inheritance.⁸²⁴ After the election of the Popular Front, the JUNC did not ally its interests with big business against socialism. The organisation continued to condemn both capitalism and socialism.⁸²⁵

An important part of its programme was the claim to a mystique based on the dynamism of youth. The JUNC qualified itself as a force for action, opposed to the established order, whether political, moral or social, and committed to the construction of a new order in these three areas. Parties, politicians and their politics were the antithesis to youthful action. They symbolised paralysis, and even death.⁸²⁶ The JUNC decried the power of the politician in France that held sway over parliamentary institutions and the people. Competence was the subject of some attacks. Politicians spoke on a wide range of subjects, but were experts in none, a problem that parliamentarianism had aggravated.⁸²⁷ JUNC discourse denigrated politicians as, "...Messieurs les responsables de la décadence publique..." and a band of gangsters.⁸²⁸

The opposition to France's seemingly inevitable 'death-by-politics' formed the basis of the JUNC's challenge to the established order: "...nous refusons l'ordre établi que nous qualifions de désordre: nous sommes révolutionnaires...nous refusons ce qui est sujet de dissolution, ce qui mène à la mort".⁸²⁹ If the *jeunes* did not act, they would share responsibility for the death of France with the criminal politicians.⁸³⁰ At a meeting of the Lagny group in 1934, François Aubert spoke of the Stavisky Affair and the gangrene that it had uncovered in government, a symptom of a deeper sickness and the moral crisis within France.⁸³¹

In contrast to politicians, the JUNC brimmed with energy, dynamism and was life itself: "...nous, les Jeunes! nous sommes la vie! Et la vie, non point figée et déclinante mais hardie, «vivante». Nous sommes les jeunes et nous n'échouerons point".⁸³² The JUNC had its own 'living *esprit*': "...vivant car il est dégagé de tout ce qui est mort dans notre civilisation actuelle, des soi-disant droits de l'homme aux conceptions politiciennes. Il est vivant parce qu'il n'est pas

⁸²⁴ E. Veyssset, 'La Propagande: Pas de programme?', *La Vdc*, 24 August 1935.

⁸²⁵ J. Raudot, 'Notre action, Les principes', *La Vdc*, 20 November 1937.

⁸²⁶ A. Guyot, 'Notre mystique', *La Vdc*, 5 May 1934.

⁸²⁷ M. Arnault, '...universelles', *La Vdc*, 30 October 1937.

⁸²⁸ C. Galland, 'Démagogies "pour adultes seulement"', *La Vdc*, 9 October 1937.

⁸²⁹ A. Guyot, 'Nous les Jeunes!', *La Vdc*, 15 September 1934.

⁸³⁰ C. Gontemps, *La Vdc*, 30 October 1937.

⁸³¹ Report from a meeting of the Lagny group, *La Vdc*, 31 March 1934.

⁸³² A. Guyot, 'Etre jeune, c'est aimer', *La Vdc*, 29 September 1934.

séparé du réel et de la vie”.⁸³³ France as a civilisation needed their revitalising blood in order to provide the permanent impulse necessary for continued national development.⁸³⁴ The *jeunes*’ very state of existence was action. To be young was to be in essence revolutionary.⁸³⁵ This revolutionary strength would be the pivot of their action. Through the identification of youth with action and revolution, the *jeunes* exclusively appropriated the ability to solve France’s problems.

Contemporary intellectual youth movements classified themselves as revolutionary too. They defined their ‘spiritual’ revolution in contrast to the ‘established’ revolutions of fascism, Nazism and Marxism. For them, revolution meant more than mere reform of capitalist society. It implied a complete transformation of human practices and values.⁸³⁶ The groups expressed some sympathy with the established revolutions. The young intellectuals recognised in them the attempts of men to transform society. However, the results were disappointing and amounted to little more than a simple modification of capitalist society.⁸³⁷ For the young intellectuals the new order would not be built on the basis of present principles. Institutional reform was useless unless accompanied by the overthrow of modern values and a transformation in the relations between men and between man and himself. For Thierry Maulnier and Robert Francis of the *Revue française* the ultimate goal justified all means necessary. Maulnier and Francis accepted that tactics and doctrine need not be concurrent and that the act of revolution should be led by an elite that used all available means to end the present disorder.⁸³⁸ This trend was small among the young intellectuals and differentiated radically this *revue* from others.

The desire for spiritual revolution is similar to the revolution proposed by the JUNC. The youth of the UNC would help the veterans reconstruct the world as one civilisation reached its end and a new one began: “Dans presque toutes les opinions de jeunes, ce qui frappe c’est la perception claire qu’un monde finit et qu’un autre s’ébauche. Un monde: non pas simplement des régimes, économiques ou politiques, mais une civilisation, un système de conceptions de vie”.⁸³⁹ Conscious of their presence at a historical turning point, the JUNC wanted to remake the French mindset (*esprit*). National renovation could not occur through victory at the polls. JUNC

⁸³³ ‘Conseil National: Vue générale du mouvement’, *La Vdc*, 26 March 1938.

⁸³⁴ A. Guyot, ‘Nous les Jeunes !’, *La Vdc*, 15 September 1934.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

⁸³⁶ Loubet, *Les non-conformistes*, p. 294.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., p. 297.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., pp. 323-324.

⁸³⁹ J. Folliet, ‘Que veut la Jeunesse ? Quelques opinions de Jeunes: Conclusions’, *La Vdc*, 2 September 1933.

members were to obtain posts in professional organisations, local and regional councils, in the domains of social assistance, hygiene, teaching and even radio. Only in such jobs would their activities be useful. The JUNC claimed to be a movement for re-education, a movement for training, to recondition the French *esprit*.

What would follow the revolution? The JUNC argued that the form that the French state took was variable. The best one was that which adapted most easily to the needs of the nation. This was hardly an endorsement of the French Republic under which the French nation had become incoherent, fraught with factional squabbling and weak. The democratic system dealt in the notions of *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité*, 'empty' words at the basis of an 'intangible' formula.⁸⁴⁰ Parliamentary democracy degraded man into an abstract being, detached from 'natural' moral, familial and professional communities.⁸⁴¹ Reform of Republican institutions would not be sufficient. Instead of the modification of the existing system, the creative impulse would come only after the destruction of the old institutions:

Cette mystique [celle des jeunes] sera rénovatrice parce que la jeunesse qui voit la société et ses institutions se dissoudre lentement, rongées... réclame des entreprises hardies.... parce qu'aussi rénovation implique l'idée de jeunesse... Cette mystique sera créatrice parce qu'à la place de ce qui sera détruit, il faudra mettre quelque chose. Les jeunes, après avoir été destructifs, devront créer les institutions, avec lesquelles ils pensent que l'ordre nouveau qu'ils construiront, devra fonctionner.⁸⁴²

Pinoteau proposed a 'managed revolution'. One should neither wait for the structure (the Republic) to collapse nor attempt to shore up its weaknesses. The JUNC would begin reconstruction immediately through a necessary but controlled revolution.⁸⁴³ On occasion, more violent language entered JUNC discourse. In May 1936, François Aubert warned that the "...coup de balai donné par des poignes vigoureuses de réalisateurs..." would not be long in coming.⁸⁴⁴ The JUNC's statements regarding politicians could justify a violent interpretation of their plans. Reviewing a book in April 1936, Merchiez wrote in *Inter-Sections*:

⁸⁴⁰ Pre-congress report, 'Action Générale', *La Vdc*, 28 April 1934.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid.

⁸⁴² A. Guyot, 'Notre mystique', *La Vdc*, 5 May 1934.

⁸⁴³ R. Pinoteau, 'Notre politique: Violence? Inertie? Non! Révolution dirigée', *La Vdc*, 14 December 1935.

⁸⁴⁴ F. Aubert, 'A propos d'une controverse', *La Vdc*, 16 May 1936.

...«les «vieillards» pervers, roués, voronoffisés, du Luxembourg, camelots bourdonnants et pharisiens obscurs du Palais Bourbon...»...il faut noter le désir sincère, qui est bien le nôtre aussi, d'insuffler une vie nouvelle dans ce vieux tronc qui n'est pas cependant encore mort. Tuons en les vers et l'arbre refleurira. C'est du moins notre avis.⁸⁴⁵

To propose the extermination of the worms (politicians) in the old trunk (the Palais Bourbon) was a violent verbal attack on the elected government. The JUNC attacked the French state as too old and claimed that France was suffering from a politics of old men, while all over Europe the *jeunes* entered government.⁸⁴⁶

Ostensibly, the JUNC's programme offered a dynamic plan for the renovation of France. Its spiritual revolution would overhaul contemporary mindsets and renew human civilisation. Plans for reform often seemed vague and anarchic. The content of the future regime, though not democratic, mattered less than the fact that it would be new. However, when the JUNC did publish the specifics of its vision, elements of it were close to the right. In August 1935, Veyssset expressed the JUNC's support for the state reform ideas of André Tardieu and the leagues.⁸⁴⁷ Chapter two has looked at Tardieu's plans for reform during 1934. In summer 1935, the deputy from Belfort had cut all ties to the parliamentary world short of giving up his seat. In May 1935, the publication of *Sur la pente* (1935) showed the first signs of Tardieu's drift to a reactionary politics that would be cemented in his work *La Révolution à refaire*. In the preface, he located the causes of French decadence in the centuries since the Revolution. He attacked the political doctrine based on the belief in human progress, social laws and the rejection of religion, which had undermined national unity, and declared war on the past and the Church.⁸⁴⁸ Freemasons lay behind the corruption in French history. It was their aim to destroy 'love for the nation, respect for the family and pride in the past'.⁸⁴⁹ Tardieu recommended a complete re-education of French people, which would give them a 'head and a heart'.⁸⁵⁰ His plans for the moral renovation of France, state reform that would break the left and restore authority found favour with the JUNC.

Like the UNC, the JUNC was anti-communist. In June 1934, d'Hennezel used a Maurassian expression when he warned of the conflict between France and the Anti-France.

⁸⁴⁵ G. Merchiez, 'Les livres et nous...Les Jeunes face au monde politique, Alphonso-Augustin Daulnois', *Inter-Sections*, April 1936.

⁸⁴⁶ R. Pinoteau, 'La France serait-elle le pays des vieillards?', *La Vdc*, 8 February 1936.

⁸⁴⁷ E. Veyssset, 'La Propagande: Pas de programme?', *La Vdc*, 24 August 1935.

⁸⁴⁸ Monnet, *Refaire la République*, p. 390.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 390.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 391.

Saint-Quentin, he warned, was not the only town subjected to the tyranny of the Internationale.⁸⁵¹ In March 1935, the JUNC section in Angevillers vowed to combat the forces of socialism and communism by every means.⁸⁵² Anti-communism in the UNC and JUNC will be discussed further in chapter five. Suffice it to say here that after the election of the Popular Front in May 1936, the JUNC vowed not only to fight but to destroy the 'crime' and 'treason' of the left.⁸⁵³

Other aspects of JUNC doctrine echoed the traditional themes of the right. To combat materialism and contemporary decadence, the JUNC advocated a return to the land. It targeted the *paysan* as vital to the nation's rebirth. The association desired a strong rural implantation and urged its members to found rural sections.⁸⁵⁴ In its plans, each rural commune would possess a *maison* for the JUNC. The *jeunes* of the district would receive a practical education in farming matters and a political education in the doctrine of the UNC. Social work in the countryside would combat rural depopulation and encourage the urban unemployed to return to the land.⁸⁵⁵ In its family policy, the JUNC conceived of the nation as an organic whole, in which the family was the basic cell. If the family broke down then so would the 'body' of France.⁸⁵⁶ As we will see, it proposed the return of French mothers to their *foyers* and pro-natalism.⁸⁵⁷ Additionally, fathers were to play an important role in French national life. The *jeunes* demanded that election to the Chambers be restricted to fathers of at least two children.⁸⁵⁸

In labour relations, the *jeunes* followed the traditional doctrine of Social Catholicism and the right. The JUNC backed corporatism as the only means by which to overcome class struggle.⁸⁵⁹ The local organisation of professions within corporative institutions would revive a sense of community among the *déracinés* of urban settlements. Under the corporation, the proletariat would cease to exist as workers became property owners. The strike as a means of action would be obsolete once the workers were represented in the corporative council. The JUNC claimed that a totalitarian state was not the goal of this idea, simply a state in which

⁸⁵¹ F. D'Hennezel, 'France d'abord! De Saint-Quentin à Metz', *La Vdc*, 16 June 1934.

⁸⁵² 'La vie des Sections de Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 9 March 1935.

⁸⁵³ M. Arnault, 'Le communisme nous auront la peau', *La Vdc*, 5 December 1936.

⁸⁵⁴ C. Galland, 'Action rurale: La Section rurale', *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

⁸⁵⁵ J. Vaujour, 'Appel à la jeunesse des campagnes', *La Vdc*, 14 December 1934.

⁸⁵⁶ A. Debèvre, 'La décadence de la famille', 18 April 1936.

⁸⁵⁷ Rangot, 'La main-d'œuvre féminine', *La Vdc*, 24 August 1935.

⁸⁵⁸ 'La voie de salut', *La Vdc*, 4 February 1939.

⁸⁵⁹ R. Schmitt, 'Grandes lignes de notre action sociale', *La Vdc*, 16 March 1935.

corporations could make social laws without recourse to parliament.⁸⁶⁰ The new state would be based on the maxim 'Famille, Métier, Nation'.⁸⁶¹ It would be decentralised with a strong executive and a legislature that would not 'surpass its mandate'. Corporations would run the economy, free from *étatisme* and the influence of international capitalism.⁸⁶² The JUNC explicitly allied their corporative aims with those of other nationalist groups:

...nous sommes contre le libéralisme actuel, truqué, périmé, et noyauté par un étatisme et un socialisme que nous combattons. Avec l'Action Française, avec les Jeunesses Patriotes, avec les catholiques sociaux, nous sommes pour un système corporatif redonnant aux métiers leur valeur et leur discipline.... laissant à des chambres professionnelles l'initiative des mesures de réglementation sociale et le jugement des conflits du travail".⁸⁶³

The JUNC's programme complemented that of the UNC. It approved of both the Wagram manifesto of October 1933 and the UNC's participation in the riots of February 1934.⁸⁶⁴ It challenged the democratic legitimacy of deputies and their ability to solve the French crisis. Though the JUNC claimed to be neither of the right nor the left, its programme was close to the right. It supported corporatism, the organised profession and promoted the virtuous French peasant and family life; all were tenets of conservative doctrine. Youth members espoused an identical anti-communism to their parent organisation. By 1938, the movement based its programme for renovation on a return of authority to government. Members no longer called for an undefined spiritual revolution. The JUNC supported the veterans' plan for a public safety government that would bring order and discipline to France.

There were several differences between UNC and JUNC policies. Firstly, youth sections were not afraid to declare their political intent. The UNC always claimed to be apolitical, in spite of its apparent right-wing preference. The veterans believed that this self-imposed exclusion from politics added further to their ability to lead France. Conversely, the *jeunes* considered political intervention essential and endorsed the initiatives of other groups. The group supported the 'Charte sociale du travail' of the JP, the corporatist schemes of the AF and

⁸⁶⁰ 'Rôle et fonctionnement de la Corporation', *La Vdc*, 17 September 1938; 'La corporation, c'est l'union organique des classes', *La Vdc*, 24 September 1938.

⁸⁶¹ 'Voix de nos groupes: Un Appel des Jeunes de la Marne', *La Vdc*, 11 February 1939.

⁸⁶² 'Aux Français !', *La Vdc*, 26 June 1937.

⁸⁶³ E. Veyssset, 'La propagande: Pas de programme ?', *La Vdc*, 24 August 1935.

⁸⁶⁴ A. Le Blanc, 'Rapport Moral', *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

the social doctrine of the Démocrates populaires and other catholic milieus.⁸⁶⁵ Secondly, the *jeunes* based their claim to national salvation on youth. In veteran discourse, youth was a secondary feature of the claim to the leadership of France. The veterans' historical legitimacy rested upon the fact of their war service. The *jeunes*' prioritisation of youth was another means by which to attack the politicians for their incompetence. Young Frenchmen were better qualified to save France than old and outdated politicians. Finally, the *jeunes*' ostensible amalgamation of left- and right-wing politics and their desire for spiritual revolution was similar to the ideas of contemporary young intellectuals. Like the UNC, the JUNC sought a spiritual renovation of the French people. Unlike the UNC, the JUNC initially prescribed the destruction rather than the revision of the old institutions as the precondition for national recovery.

Women in the JUNC

Action féminine

Another important difference between the JUNC and the UNC was the former's admittance of women members. The existence of women's section on the right was not uncommon yet they did not always enjoy success. Founded in January 1926, the Faisceau Féminin was powerless to affect decision-making and policy within the larger movement.⁸⁶⁶ The Women's Section of the Fédération Républicaine was purported to have representatives in 65 departments but the overall number of subscribers to its monthly bulletin was small.⁸⁶⁷ Far more successful were the women's sections of the Croix de Feu/PSF. Mainly concerned with social work, they numbered 400,000 members at their peak.⁸⁶⁸ Anti-feminist and pronatalist, the Croix de Feu/PSF deplored the working woman and declared parenthood a national duty for men and women.⁸⁶⁹ However, despite the priority given to women's activism, they were nevertheless excluded from meetings and associational activities such as parades.⁸⁷⁰

For the female sections of the JUNC, the *anciens combattants* remained the central inspiration and *raison d'être*. As the guardians of French *foyers* and tradition, the future wives of

⁸⁶⁵ E. Veyssset, 'La Propagande: Pas de programme?', *La Vdc*, 24 August 1935.

⁸⁶⁶ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 119.

⁸⁶⁷ Irvine, *French Conservatism*, p. 31. There were 1625 subscriptions in 1936.

⁸⁶⁸ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, pp. 123-124. On women and the extreme right see Caroline Campbell's forthcoming thesis 'Women and Men in French Authoritarianism: Gender in the Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français, 1927-1947' (Ph.D thesis, University of Iowa, forthcoming 2009)

⁸⁶⁹ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 125.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 124; Passmore, 'Planting the tricolour', p. 817.

young French men claimed to represent the feminine elite. It was natural that they be driven by the same spirit as the *jeunes* and the *anciens*.⁸⁷¹ Some members played an important role in the leadership of the youth movement both nationally and locally. This involvement contrasted sharply with a lack of feminine involvement in the upper echelons of the UNC proper. Of the 31 members of the Youth National Council elected in November 1934, three were women – Yvonne Luzier (Les Lilas), M. A. Rocchesani (Courbevoie) and Liégeois (Sedan).⁸⁷² A year later, the Council admitted five new members, one of which was Yvonne Boulet who would become women's propaganda delegate in the JUNC and a member of the Action féminine commission for the Seine group.⁸⁷³ Luzier was elected a vice-president of the JUNC at the general assembly in November 1935. Perhaps an indication of the regard in which she was held, Luzier received 241 votes, equal to the number received by François Aubert and more than those received by Pinoteau and Veysset.⁸⁷⁴

In the provinces, women were involved in the youth groups as JUNC vice-presidents, secretaries and council members. In April 1934, the Arcachon JUNC group voted in a new executive committee of which seven out of the fifteen members were women.⁸⁷⁵ Upon its foundation in summer 1931 the Lilas group counted 5 women out of 14 members on its policy-making committee.⁸⁷⁶ By February 1933, this group had 8 women out of 27 members of its executive committee. The Madelons elected by UNC sections acted as local propaganda activists. These women were not simply the trophy of youth sections but active participants in the movement. It was hoped that they would help found JUNC sections in new territory.⁸⁷⁷

While there were female vice-presidents and treasurers, women were usually responsible for a section's leisure and charitable pursuits, such as soup kitchens, second-hand clothes collections and holiday camps, of which the UNC possessed several.⁸⁷⁸ Feminine sections organised the provision of meals for the children of the unemployed.⁸⁷⁹ Some women members

⁸⁷¹ F. Vivié, 'Les Jeunes', *Le Poilu basque*, April 1935; Y. Boulet, 'Notre féminisme', *La Vdc*, 7 December 1935.

⁸⁷² Report from the general assembly of the JUNC, *La Vdc*, 10 November 1934.

⁸⁷³ 'Conseil National des Jeunes, 27-28 avril 1935', *La Vdc*, 4 May 1935.

⁸⁷⁴ 'L'Assemblée générale des Jeunes de l'UNC', *La Vdc*, 9 November 1935.

⁸⁷⁵ 'Les Jeunes: Arcachon', *La Vdc*, 21 April 1934.

⁸⁷⁶ Report from a meeting held on 17 June 1931, *L'UNC de Paris*, August 1931.

⁸⁷⁷ Y. Boulet, 'Propagande féminine. Ce que dit un 'Madelon' de 1935 à ses Jeunes Collègues de 1936', *La Vdc*, 21 December 1935; Y. Boulet, 'Petite correspondance de la propagande', 28 December 1935.

⁸⁷⁸ Referred to in *La Vdc*, 5 December 1936 and 17 September 1938.

⁸⁷⁹ See the report featured in *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935. The JUNC's 7th section organised a meal for 80 children whose parents were unemployed.

did not want their role to expand beyond social work and the planning of festivities. At the general assembly of the departmental UNC group in the Lot-et-Garonne, Mlle Magné, vice-president of the local JUNC, asked that female members not be encumbered with the collating of reports. Magné stated that it would be more logical and gallant of the young men to undertake these tasks.⁸⁸⁰ However, women were not confined to these activities.

In some cases a political motive lay behind social work. Luzier, president of the association's Action féminine, reminded the male members of the UNC that social work made for the best propaganda.⁸⁸¹ Like the Croix de Feu/PSF, on occasion JUNC social work aimed to attract the working class from communism. In March 1935, 63 children attended a monthly meal organised by the Lilas JUNC group. The accompanying report on the youth page revealed the desired consequence:

Nous espérons que les enfants viendront toutefois plus nombreux et si comme le disait ces jours derniers un communiste «nos bienfaits s'arrêtent aux élections», eh bien, ces enfants ne songeront pas sans regrets à ces bienfaits de première nécessité, et se diront lorsqu'ils auront l'âge de comprendre: «Ce ne sont pas les Communistes, qui aura offert cela, même avec l'argent de Moscou».⁸⁸²

The national youth page reported the involvement of women at local meetings. Women spoke on political and social issues. Throughout the reports of women's participation in JUNC meetings, their ability as controlled and competent speakers was reiterated. The speeches were noted as having been warmly applauded and appreciated.⁸⁸³ One such example was Rocchesani's report at the JUNC General Assembly in November 1934. Her presentation was testament to "...la mesure, de la pondération, de la clairvoyance que les femmes peuvent apporter dans les travaux intellectuels".⁸⁸⁴ Furthermore, women were held as an example to follow. François Aubert portrayed women members as more efficient and better organised than their male counterparts.⁸⁸⁵ Boulet wrote of a section whose very existence depended on the incessant

⁸⁸⁰ Y. Boulet, 'Doit-il y avoir des limites à l'aide que nous apportons à ces "Messieurs" JUNC?', *La Vdc*, 18 April 1936.

⁸⁸¹ Y. Luzier, 'Action féminine', *La Vdc*, 26 June 1937.

⁸⁸² 'La vie des Sections de Jeunes. Région parisienne: Les Lilas', *La Vdc*, 30 March 1935.

⁸⁸³ For example see 'La vie des Sections de Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 29 December 1934.

⁸⁸⁴ 'L'Assemblée générale des jeunes de l'UNC 3-4 novembre 1934 fut une belle manifestation de l'activité', *La Vdc*, 10 November 1934.

⁸⁸⁵ F. Aubert, 'Le coin des secrétaires', *La Vdc*, 1 September 1934.

action of its female element, despite the presence of male members. She encouraged women members to found their own JUNC sections if masculine action was lacking.⁸⁸⁶ In some cases, men abandoned sections that were subsequently saved and run by women.⁸⁸⁷ In March 1936, Mme Schmitt, wife of the JUNC national president at the time, recommended that if a woman could not find a man to become president of her local group, she should act as a vice-president and name Raymond Schmitt as president.⁸⁸⁸ In this case, the female vice-president would effectively run the new section.

The Action féminine commission was successful in its action to such an extent that, at the JUNC's third general assembly in November 1936, members announced that Action féminine was now a semi-autonomous group.⁸⁸⁹ This measure was intended to maximise recruitment as some parents did not want their daughters to join mixed sex groups.⁸⁹⁰ Raudot ordered that all groups must provide a delegate to the autonomous Action féminine sections.⁸⁹¹ Some JUNC members were concerned with the amount of autonomy that Action féminine demanded. Female members continued to encounter hostility from regional groups who refused to admit them or attempted to obstruct their action. As a result, at the general assembly in 1938, Action féminine renounced all claim to administrative and financial autonomy. Luzier blamed the attempts of male members to suffocate the movement. The group had achieved great success in the Somme and the Loire-Inférieure where local UNC presidents had encouraged its action.⁸⁹²

Action féminine's policy on women was conservative. Motherhood had long been a concern for political forces of various colours. In the late nineteenth century, groups such as the Alliance nationale demanded state intervention in family life. In 1916 the French state, concerned with the infection of women on the home front with venereal disease brought home by their soldier husbands, worked to construct a new national obligation: procreation. Educational lectures and pamphlets attempted to instill the *poilu* with the belief that to become a father was his national duty.⁸⁹³ Pro-natalist policies were later to be found in the programmes of diverse

⁸⁸⁶ Y. Boulet, 'Petite correspondance...féminine', *La Vdc*, 23 November 1935.

⁸⁸⁷ 'L'action féminine', *La Vdc*, 2 April 1938.

⁸⁸⁸ Letter from M. A. Schmitt in Y. Boulet, 'Propagande féminine', 7 March 1936.

⁸⁸⁹ Y. Luzier, 'Rapport sur l'Action Féminine', *La Vdc*, 5 December 1936.

⁸⁹⁰ Y. Luzier, 'Action féminine', *La Vdc*, 26 June 1937.

⁸⁹¹ 'IV Assemblée Générale des JUNC, 14 mars 1937', *La Vdc*, 20 March 1937.

⁸⁹² 'La réunion du Conseil National JUNC à Caen, le 25 mai 1938: Action féminine', *La Vdc*, 11 June 1938.

⁸⁹³ Michelle Rhoades, 'Renegotiating French masculinity: Medicine and venereal disease during the Great War', *French Historical Studies*, 29 (2006), pp. 293-327.

groups from the JP and the Croix de Feu to the Radical and the socialist parties.⁸⁹⁴ The pro-natalist campaign culminated in the Code de la Famille, drawn up by the Radicals Daladier and Reynaud in 1939.⁸⁹⁵

While feminists had campaigned for women's rights since the late-nineteenth century, the entry of women into the workforce during the Great War did much to upset traditional gender norms in French society.⁸⁹⁶ After the war, the public presence of women who both continued to work and reject modest forms of dress and moral behaviour antagonised conservatives.⁸⁹⁷ Faced with the prospect of career-minded, sexually liberated, childless women, they feared for the future of the family and the falling French birth rate. In fact, groups across the political spectrum expressed remarkably similar concerns on the family and natalism.⁸⁹⁸ Movements on the right were determined to return French women to the home as wives and mothers. Confronted with the perceived virility of Germany and Italy and what this implied for the size of their future armies, the right hoped to arrest the moral and demographic decline of the nation. Though the extreme right echoed these sentiments, it blamed the Republic for its failure to bring feminism to heel. The JUNC's female writers such as Paulette Chailleux and vice-president of the Courbevoie section Rocchesani claimed to support feminism, if by feminism one meant the 'emancipation of the moral feminine person, her intellectual development' and 'her application to all occupations suitable to her aptitudes and duties'.⁸⁹⁹

The JUNC considered a woman's aptitudes and duties best suited to motherhood. The *jeunes* deplored women who *chose* to work. It argued that the shortfall of men in the labour market after the war no longer existed. If a woman's husband earned a salary sufficient for the family then she should be forced to give up her job.⁹⁰⁰ A working mother could not care for children and continue to earn.⁹⁰¹ Women worked for selfish reasons: "...partir au bureau le matin, bien habillée, bien pomponnée, voilà le rêve de trop de jeunes mères".⁹⁰² These women

⁸⁹⁴ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 135.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 136.

⁸⁹⁶ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 9 and 31.

⁸⁹⁷ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 111; Cheryl Koos and Daniella Sarnoff, 'France' in *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 168-189.

⁸⁹⁸ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 112.

⁸⁹⁹ P. Chailleux, 'Sachons vouloir', 24 November 1934.

⁹⁰⁰ Y. Luzier, 'Action sociale: Action féminine', pre-congress report, *La Vdc*, 31 May 1935.

⁹⁰¹ A. Debèvre and M.-A. Schmitt, 'Pour défendre la Famille', *La Vdc*, 7 March 1936.

⁹⁰² Y. Luzier, 'Action féminine: Faisons le point', *La Vdc*, 27 November 1937.

were bored with housework. Action féminine planned to combat this boredom through educational courses that taught housework, cookery, sewing and clothes-making. Additionally, hygiene and nursing courses were taught. By November 1937, the Parisian group boasted 30 girls who had achieved the *diplômes d'auxillaire* and who then undertook work experience at a UNC health centre in Belleville. In this way Action féminine hoped to revive familial life and redress the moral situation in France.⁹⁰³

Youth groups were to encourage women into activities in harmony with the 'delicateness of heart and morality' that was in the 'nature of the woman'.⁹⁰⁴ The JUNC claimed that while laws granted women equal rights in the pursuit of jobs, they could not change the organic and physical differentiation between man and woman, which translated into a natural division of labour. Concomitantly, Action féminine encouraged motherhood. Woman brought life into the world and it was her job to care for and educate this life. If a woman aspired to the professions, motherhood would teach her the skills of a psychologist, a teacher and a lawyer, in the natural setting of the *foyer*.⁹⁰⁵

Like conservatives and the extreme right, the UNC perceived the family to be one of the basic cells of society, the *cellule mère*.⁹⁰⁶ UNC discourse on the family combined two interpretations of the family. In the main, the association considered the family as an expression of morality, under threat from contemporary decadence and Republican values that allegedly favoured materialism and individualism. This view was prevalent throughout the interwar period among diverse groups, even those of the extreme right such as the Croix de Feu.

André Loez, who regularly examined the 'family problem' in the UNC's publications, blamed the excesses of individualism, selfishness and free opinion, which had replaced authority and order. The notion of rights was now more important than duty.⁹⁰⁷ Loez alleged that the death of the *patrie* would be the fault of the *sans-enfant*.⁹⁰⁸ Action féminine accused politicians of ignoring the family at the expense of the next generation of French children. The group

⁹⁰³ Y. Luzier, 'Action féminine: Faisons le point', *La Vdc*, 27 November 1937.

⁹⁰⁴ Report from the Commission des Jeunes, *La Vdc*, 20 January 1934.

⁹⁰⁵ A. Debèvre and M.-A. Schmitt, 'Réponse aux critique contre le maintien de la femme au foyer', *La Vdc*, 28 March 1936.

⁹⁰⁶ See for example M. Dupouey, 'Danger Social', *La Vdc*, 9 January 1937; A. Loez, 'Famille d'abord', *La Vdc*, 22 January 1938.

⁹⁰⁷ A. Loez, 'De l'Echo de Paris au ... 'Popu'', *La Vdc*, 12 December 1936.

⁹⁰⁸ A. Loez, 'Après le mal le remède', *La Vdc*, 10 April 1937.

attacked 'our demagogic politicians' and 'our stale democracy' for this failure.⁹⁰⁹ Politicians symbolised the ills of France and the general decline in French moral standards: "On nous a trop abreuvés de discours pompeux et menteurs, et les mots sonores de «Devoir, Patrie, Honneur, probité», revenus trop souvent sur les lèvres de ceux qui les ignorent manifestement dans leurs réalisations, ont perdu pour beaucoup leur signification véritable".⁹¹⁰ If the family could be 'healed' then authority would return to France.⁹¹¹

Women within the JUNC demanded the right for a fair representation in State affairs.⁹¹² Chailleux reassured male members that woman's quest for the right to vote would not pose her as an enemy of the 'sexe fort'. Rather, she would be an ally with whom to work with for just causes.⁹¹³ The JUNC criticised the Senate for blocking the attempts of the Chamber to enfranchise women. Aged senators, wrote Claude Gauden, saw only two types of women: "...celles destinées au gynécée et celles destinées au french can-can avec dentelles et froufrous à volonté...".⁹¹⁴ Gauden even suggested that if this sexist obstruction continued then women would use the only weapon they had, the refusal to have children:

...nous qui assurons au pays la continuité de sa race... Que le Sénat prenne garde: si la France voit sa natalité décroître, si les femmes de chez nous ne veulent plus d'enfants, c'est qu'elles sentent obscurément qu'elles n'ont pas d'armes dans les mains pour se protéger, elles et leurs petits, contre la vie si dure, contre l'égoïsme si féroce des hommes.⁹¹⁵

This was not the only time women members used their gender to underscore political division. Whereas the veterans denigrated politicians for their lack of war service, and the *jeunes* opposed their youth to aged deputies, Chailleux attacked the maleness of French politics:

...les hommes ont fait de la politique une science abstraite et un but plutôt qu'un moyen... Les hommes ont permis que la politique devienne un refuge trop facile pour les arrivistes ou les ratés... le parlementarisme s'est égaré dans des dédales où l'éloquence verbeuse tient parfois lieu, à elle seule, de mérite vrai, et où dans le chapitre des réalisations on ne sait plus coordonner les

⁹⁰⁹ 'Action féminine: Sauvons l'enfance', *La Vdc*, 26 January 1935.

⁹¹⁰ P. Chailleux, 'Une conscience et des actes', *La Vdc*, 9 February 1935.

⁹¹¹ A. Debèvre, 'La décadence et la famille', *La Vdc*, 18 April 1936.

⁹¹² M.-A. Rocchesani, 'Action féminine: Les Jeunes filles et la crise', *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935.

⁹¹³ P. Chailleux, 'A un antiféministe', *La Vdc*, 3 November 1934.

⁹¹⁴ C. Gauden, 'Voterons-nous en mai 1935?', *La Vdc*, 16 February 1935.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid.

efforts, les réformes, les manifestations d'autorité ni distinguer en toutes chose l'essentiel de l'accessoire.⁹¹⁶

In contrast, Chailleux posed the natural qualities of women as the remedy:

Guidée par son besoin naturel de dévouement, par la part intime qu'elle prend aux grandes souffrances, par ses élans venus du coeur – et à cause de cela, plus puissants, plus humains que les idées – elle puisera son savoir et son expérience dans des faits patents, dans une faculté d'observation et de compréhension plus aiguë que celle de l'homme.⁹¹⁷

Nevertheless, French *chefs de famille* were the key to recovery. After all, the decadence of France had resulted from the diminishment of *paternité, patriarchat* and *patrimoine*.⁹¹⁸ Only by bringing the 'probité ferme' and 'rude labeur' of the father (and, by implication, the *poilu*) to the leadership of the nation would the *chef de famille* regain his rightful place and the childless individual be put in his.⁹¹⁹ In October 1938, the JUNC of Béarn concluded that in the event of war childless single and married men should be called up first and sent immediately to the frontline. Thoughts of family would not distract them from their duty as it would fathers. *Chefs de famille*, which the UNC believed all veterans were, would remain at home in charge of national defence on the home front.⁹²⁰

The existence of the women's sections saw the JUNC come close to aspiring to be a populist movement of the extreme right. It both outlined a vision of woman's role in a future France (as mothers and homemakers) and attempted to mobilise women politically in pursuit of this vision. Women members in the JUNC succeeded in establishing themselves within the wider movement. They faced opposition on the grounds of their sex yet, to some extent, they managed to overcome this and operate Action féminine semi-independently if only for a short time. Although women members encountered enmity because of their sex, they exploited the division between the sexes for their own ends. They blamed men for corruption in politics and staked their claim for the vote on the 'natural' qualities of woman. However, while they argued

⁹¹⁶ P. Chailleux, 'La Révolution féminine', *La Vdc*, 6 April 1935.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid.

⁹¹⁸ 'Un impérieux problème', *La Vdc*, 9 June 1934.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

⁹²⁰ 'Le congrès des jeunes de l'UNC du Béarn', *La Vdc*, 29 October 1938; C. Inargues, 'En cas de mobilisation, chacun à sa place', 15 April 1939.

that women were essential to national recovery, not only as mothers but as political actors, the JUNC nevertheless promoted natalism and the return of women to the family home. The participation of fathers in the State would arrest the national decline. While groups on both the left and right championed the pronatalist cause, the JUNC placed the blame for the declining birth-rate on the Republic and democracy itself. In this way, it depicted the democratic regime as detrimental to the national interest. Combined with the UNC's plans for state reform, Action féminine represented another component in the associations' authoritarian designs.

Conclusion

One could attribute veteran discourse on age to the debate over parliamentary competence. Yet the UNC did not base its solution on raising the level of competence through technical and educational means. Its plan was to replace politicians who were 'elderly' in *esprit* and not in age with 'younger' men. Veterans would take up the reins of leadership but not as a result of an electoral process. The association's politicisation of age was another factor in the UNC's claim to historical legitimacy. Its attacks may have centred on the content of the regime but they also included the institutions of the State too. The issue of youth allowed the UNC to define a single national interest and then depict elected politicians and the regime as contrary to this.

Within the UNC itself, the JUNC embodied an extreme right-wing tendency. In spite of the apparent entente between the more radical members of the UNC's leadership and the extreme right, the association did not publicly endorse collaboration, at least until mid-1936. The JUNC not only encouraged its members to co-operate with the leagues but also endorsed their programmes too. Political intervention, it claimed, was essential. When it came to street action, Action combattante was not used to this end and even Lebecq admitted the failure of public demonstrations. Conversely, the JUNC advocated this tactic. In these ways the JUNC embodied an extremism that the UNC did not. That is not to say that extremist elements did not exist in the UNC but when it came to political activism in the main moderation won out. This was not the case in the JUNC.

Moreover, the plans of the JUNC cannot be reconciled with the Republican centre. One can argue that the JUNC desired an end to the Third Republic as it stood in France. The movement derided the limited scope of the Marxist and fascist revolutions in Europe. Claiming that the form of the State was variable, it called for the destruction of French institutions and the

subsequent creation of new ones. Even if one dismisses this as hyperbole, the youth group's support for the veterans' public safety government was still incompatible with the continuation of the Republic. The JUNC's authoritarianism was expressed in other ways too. Action féminine located the moral decline of France and its families in the democratic system. The JUNC supported some form of state representation for fathers, which would not be based on the elective principle. Similar to the beliefs of the extreme right, sporting practice would facilitate a physical and moral regeneration of France while preparing French youth for military service from an early age. Standing on the threshold of a new era, the *anciens combattants* and their youth groups aimed to form a new generation of French.

The ideas of the *esprit de 1930* revived with the defeat in 1940, an event that signalled to many the ultimate collapse of the political system. Although eclipsed by political differences after 1934, the young intellectuals considered the National Revolution an opportunity to finally realise their programme. Eventually to be disappointed by the political reality of Pétain's Revolution, their ideas persisted in the Vichy regime and the resistance as both sought to construct a new order upon the ruins of the old. Before the foundation of Vichy's first official youth movement, the Compagnons de France, three youth groups initially operated in the occupied zone, although all were soon prohibited. One of these groups was the JUNC.⁹²¹

⁹²¹ Halls, *Youth of Vichy France*, see note, p. 267.

Chapter Five

The language and culture of war in UNC discourse

Viens avec les copains, bonhomme,
De Verdun, de Marne et de Somme,
Rongés de rage et de dégoût,
Tu n'aurais pas, jadis, pu croire,
Ce qu'on ferait de la Victoire....
C'est encore le tocsin....Debout!
Pour nous sortir de la misère,
Ce que nous ne pourrions pas faire,
Nos fils, après nous le feront,
Fils de l'indivisible France,
Poussés par un vent d'espérance,
En avant!...Unis comme au front.⁹²²

Chant pour l'UNC, by Paul Galland

The *Chant pour l'UNC* is just one example of UNC discourse that made reference to the language and culture of the Great War. Though this tactic was not the only weapon in the UNC's discursive arsenal, the culture of war appeared in a good deal of veteran rhetoric. It was often employed against the perceived enemies of France, namely politicians and the left. Recent scholarship has investigated the culture of the Great War and its influence on millions of civilians and soldiers.⁹²³ For some, it continued to affect their values, ideas and language in the years after the Versailles peace conference, most notably in the violent politics of the European nations that turned to fascism or communism. In France, the lack of political violence on the scale of Germany and Italy has precluded historical study of the war culture in the interwar

⁹²² P. Galland, 'Chant pour l'UNC, à Georges Lebecq, de Paul Galland', *Le Combattant du Centre*, October 1934.

⁹²³ For a general examination of the war culture see Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*; Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*. See also John Horne & Alan Kramer, 'German 'atrocities' and Franco-German opinion, 1914: The evidence of German Soldiers' diaries', *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (1994), 1-33, and Becker, 'From war to war'. On trench culture see Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War 1914-1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France during the First World War* (Oxford & Providence: Berg, 1992). For the culture amongst civilians see Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L'enfant de l'ennemi* (Paris: Aubier, 1995), Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre: Humanitaire et culture de guerre 1914-1918. Populations occupées, déportés civils, prisonniers de guerre* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 1998) and Charles Ridel, *Les embusqués*, (Paris: A. Colin, 2007). On the war culture prior to the Great War see Paul Hanebrink, 'Transnational culture war: Christianity, nation and the Judeo-Bolshevik myth in Hungary, 1890-1920', *Journal of Modern History*, 80 (2008), 55-80 and David Hopkin, Yann Lagadec and Stéphane Perréon, 'The experience and culture of war in the eighteenth century: The British raids on the Breton coast, 1758', *French Historical Studies*, 31 (2008), pp. 193-229.

years. A notable exception is Kevin Passmore who suggests that some parts of the right appropriated the culture of war and channelled it into anti-communism. Most prominent in its opposition of Western and Christian civilisation to Eastern or Asian barbarism, the culture of war remained a sub-current on the right during the twenties that waxed as the perceived threat of communism grew at home and abroad.⁹²⁴

During the years 1936-38, the influence of the war culture was particularly evident in the UNC's anti-communism. On the one hand, just as the culture provided trench soldiers with a synthesis of contemporary scientific, religious and racial thinking, it also provided the veterans with new frames of reference. They assimilated a lexicon of terminology and a system of values to which they sometimes reverted in their discourse. Indeed, in some ways recourse to the culture of war was an involuntary response at a time of real or perceived trauma. On the other hand, the veterans chose purposely to reference the war experience, a fact that suggests use of the war culture in their discourse was to some extent intentional. Frequently eulogising the fraternity of the trenches and its perceived nobility, the veterans contrasted the sacrifice of this community with the self-interest of parliamentary political culture. The veterans deliberately reconstructed a tenet of the culture of war (the trench fraternity) in order to legitimise their own experience and claims.⁹²⁵ They applied wartime language to the political arena. In doing so they identified parties and parliament with the enemies of France. This was not supportive of the Republic and its institutions. Consequently, as we will see, the UNC came to question whether the Republic still existed when, in reality, only the ephemeral political content of the regime had changed.

After the Popular Front victory, the right launched attacks on left-wing personalities that were unprecedented in their maliciousness.⁹²⁶ The UNC was no different. According to the association, Socialists and communists were the enemies of France and they had no place in a future France. Hubert Aubert implied this when he wrote in July 1937 that the UNC sought reconciliation "...[a]vec tous ceux qui veulent construire en éliminant ceux qui veulent

⁹²⁴ Passmore, *The Right in the French Third Republic*.

⁹²⁵ Historians have argued that nostalgia for the trench fraternity was largely constructed after the war. See Bessel, 'The 'front generation''. Contrarily, in 'The psychology of killing: The combat experience of British soldiers during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), pp. 229-246, Edgar Jones argues that the bonds formed in war were too strong to be broken and so continued into peacetime.

⁹²⁶ Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 251.

démolir”.⁹²⁷ Goy claimed that the UNC did not seek to exclude anyone from the national community yet communists would ‘have no say in the matter’.⁹²⁸ The UNC named and criticised the deputies and policies of the Radical party, the SFIO and the communists. A column in *La Voix du combattant* commented upon the political machinations of the past week. More often than not solely concerned with the disparagement of left-wing politicians and activists, the column vilified the ‘homme diabolique’ Léon Blum, communist chief Maurice Thorez (the ‘true’ leader of the CGT) and condemned Popular Front deputies as Stalin’s lieutenants and lackeys.⁹²⁹ Even Blum’s wife did not escape attack: “...le plus beau jour de sa vie fut celui où, un flacon de benzine à la main, elle put se dépenser auprès des militants venus assister au Congrès d’Avignon...”.⁹³⁰ The national and local editions of the UNC’s press occasionally reproduced anti-communist articles from political sources. For example, *Le Combattant du Centre* reprinted a speech by Doriot that originally appeared in *l’Emancipation Nationale*, the weekly publication of the PPF.⁹³¹

This chapter will investigate the culture of war in UNC discourse. It is organised thematically but in the later sections the period of the Popular Front government is the focal point around which the themes are explored. Firstly, the chapter will show that the UNC transposed the culture of war from Germany to communism when the threat from the latter appeared greater. It is difficult to say whether this was intentional or an involuntary reaction. What one can say is that though the UNC feared an imminent communist revolution in France, the threat from Germany did not recede. Hitler continued to undermine the Versailles treaty yet for the UNC the threat from communism appeared greater. Secondly, the chapter concerns the context of the UNC’s anti-communism, which largely depended on its Rassemblement français campaign (hereafter referred to as the Rassemblement). The third and fourth sections examine the tactics of the UNC’s anti-communism which, though most prominent in the Rassemblement, were used prior to 1936. In its anti-communism, the association drew on the wartime opposition of civilisation and barbarity. It depicted the left-wing government as un-French and un-Christian. In doing so, it placed the government in opposition to the UNC’s conception of the

⁹²⁷ H. Aubert, ‘Les yeux qui s’ouvrent’, *La Vdc*, 31 July 1937.

⁹²⁸ ‘Réunis à la salle Wagram les anciens combattants réclament un gouvernement de salut public’, *Le Figaro*, 27 March 1938.

⁹²⁹ ‘L’Affût’, *La Vdc*, 4 July 1936; J. Goy, ‘Sommes-nous encore en république?’, *La Vdc*, 11 July 1936; P.

Galland, ‘Le Temps des Paradoxes: Révolutionnaires en peau de Scapin’ and ‘L’Affût’, *La Vdc*, 12 September 1936.

⁹³⁰ ‘L’Affût’, *La Vdc*, 6 June 1936.

⁹³¹ ‘L’Assaut contre notre civilisation: Le complot communiste’, *Le Combattant du Centre*, June 1937.

national interest. The association used the experience of the Spanish civil war to further emphasise the menace of domestic communism. The final section considers the UNC's claim that the Popular Front regime was not the Republic. While it is difficult to judge the effect of UNC discourse on the French public, the variety of ways in which it attacked the state and its politicians testifies to a wider extremism that historians have underestimated in the veterans' movement.

The UNC and Germany

The original target of the culture of war was Germany. During the Great War, the culture of war constructed the war as one fought in defence of the French race, Western civilisation and for God Himself.⁹³² Internalised by civilians and soldiers alike, for some French, Germany was the incarnation of atavistic barbarity and evil. Hostility to Germany characterised the UNC's foreign policy during the 1920s. Viewing Germany as the hereditary enemy, UNC leaders and members alike rejected any notion of contact with the wartime adversary from the end of the Great War until 1934. Instrumental to the foundation of FIDAC in November 1920, the UNC rejected Wilsonian ideas on peacemaking and regarded the League of Nations with suspicion. Instead, it sought to maintain wartime alliances. In 1925, when the UF pursued co-operation with German veterans' associations, French right-wing associations including the AGMG and the UNC (and Goy in particular) expressed a continued hostility to Franco-German rapprochement. Unreceptive to Briandism throughout the twenties, the UNC eventually accepted this approach to foreign policy in the Confederation's motion of June 1931, which called for the international organisation of world and European financial affairs.

Hitler's gains in the elections of 1930 and the growing *revanchisme* in Germany appear to have motivated the UNC's change of heart.⁹³³ The association was aware of Hitler's aggressive pronouncements on France contained within *Mein Kampf*. Soon after Hitler's accession to the chancellery, Galland advised members to be wary of Germany's apparent pacifism. Early acts of persecution against the German Jewish population had revealed once again Germany's 'natural brutality'. Such violence, met with mute passivity from the

⁹³² Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, pp. 119-120; Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, pp. 177-179; Smith, *The Embattled Self*, p. 18.

⁹³³ Prost, I, p. 139.

population, underscored the continued predilection for force of France's eastern neighbour.⁹³⁴ Whipped up into a frenzy, Germans had rediscovered their 'insolent atavism and contempt' for perceived inferiors.⁹³⁵ Jean Hap of the UNC alleged that Nazis made regular incursions into the Saar and manhandled French inhabitants.⁹³⁶ Perhaps Hap wanted the reader to recall German mistreatment of French people in occupied territories during the war. Throughout 1933 and 1934, UNC foreign policy demanded that France remain strong in the face of German demands. It alleged that Germany considered France the largest obstacle to regaining her former strength. Persistent German declarations on Germany's pacifist intentions, such as Hitler's interview with *Le Matin* in 1933, did not appear to fool the association. This outward appearance of pacifism could not be reconciled with the chancellor's policy of rearmament and the war footing of twenty-one German divisions.⁹³⁷

In spite of the caution expressed in the pages of *La Voix du combattant*, some veterans sought to open a dialogue with Hitler. On 2 November 1934, the previously staunch anti-German Goy and veteran luminary Robert Monnier met the German chancellor in Berlin. Otto Abetz had set up the conference, an invitation to which Pichot declined. He was irritated that the UNC was now posing as the pioneer of Franco-German rapprochement when the UF had been pursuing this since mid-1934. The subsequent publication of the interview in *Le Matin* later that month, in which Hitler vowed that Germany did not want war with France, caused a sensation in France and the combatant world. Deputy Franklin-Bouillon berated Goy in the corridors of the Chamber for having sold his story to the newspapers rather than discussing the meeting solely with the foreign minister.

In spite of an apparent softening of the UNC's attitude, continued German infringements upon the Treaty of Versailles appeared to have ended any hope of rapprochement by March 1935. Aubert announced the end of the Versailles treaty and even questioned Germany's justification for the expansion of its armed forces. Given the UNC's later anti-communism, Aubert's statement proved ironic:

Pour les besoins de sa cause...elle feint de croire à un péril asiatique.... Quel motif le Reich a-t-il de la (l'URSS) redouter? Regardez une carte et vous vous rendrez compte que l'URSS ne borde

⁹³⁴ P. Galland, 'Où sont les pacifiques?', *La Vdc*, 8 April 1933.

⁹³⁵ P. Galland, 'Jeux de vilains', *La Vdc*, 22 April 1933.

⁹³⁶ J. Hap, 'La situation dans la Sarre: Nos nationaux sont-ils en sécurité?', *La Vdc*, 13 May 1933.

⁹³⁷ W. d'Ormedsson, 'Grandes manoeuvres ou Congrès?', *La Vdc*, 15 September 1934.

l'Allemagne sur aucune de ses frontières... Mais, pourquoi raisonner avec un peuple qui ne raisonne pas et est rompu à l'obéissance passive, qu'il a au reste dans le sang.⁹³⁸

In specifying a fundamental difference between the French and the Germans, the article revived the pseudo-biology of the culture of war: "Nos cerveaux, ni nos nerfs ne sont pas fait de la même pâte et c'est pourquoi nous ne comprenons pas, pourquoi nous ne pouvons pas nous comprendre. Et c'est bien là qu'est le péril".⁹³⁹

With the victory of the Popular Front, the campaign for rapprochement with Germany gained new impetus. Despite the growing threat from Germany following the remilitarisation of the Rhineland and the agreement of the Rome-Berlin axis, the UNC came to perceive communism as the greater danger. Germany's actions, in direct contradiction to Hitler's pacifist assurances to French veterans, no longer incited reproving remarks. France and the Soviet Union were on friendly terms yet Stalin's meddling in French domestic politics was the action of an enemy.⁹⁴⁰ At this time, the UNC deployed the culture of war against communism and came to view German plans in the East with indifference, if not approval. Raudot argued that if France could appear militarily strong Hitler would no longer look to the West: "Une France forte et l'Allemagne cherchera ailleurs, vers l'Est, peut-être, une solution à ses rêves d'expansion".⁹⁴¹ Aubert saw the positive side of Germany's designs on Eastern Europe: "L'Allemagne est en marche vers l'Est. Et l'on répond: qu'on la fasse faire. Tant qu'elle sera occupée là, elle nous laissera en paix à l'Ouest".⁹⁴² The target of the war culture had now changed.

The association opposed sending Frenchmen to war in Spain. It opposed the imposition of sanctions on Italy over the Abyssinian crisis. It claimed that both courses of action would result in the loss of French lives. Regarding German intervention in the Spanish civil war, Galland condemned a Republican attack upon the German ship *Deutschland*. His view of the 'brutal but short' German response was less reproachful.⁹⁴³ In 1937, *La Voix du combattant* featured a series of interviews on the subject of Franco-German rapprochement with Drieu La Rochelle, senator Henry-Hae and deputy Victor Bataille, all of whom endorsed closer co-

⁹³⁸ H. Aubert, 'Nous ne pouvons pas nous comprendre', *La Vdc*, 23 March 1935.

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁰ 'Le XVIII Congrès Nationale de l'UNC fut une imposante manifestation de force et d'union. 2e Assemblée plénière: Relations internationales: Relations avec la Russie', *La Vdc*, 26 June 1937.

⁹⁴¹ J. Raudot, 'L'Allemagne en Armes', *La Vdc*, 23 January 1937.

⁹⁴² H. Aubert, 'La guerre est évitée, mais la paix...', *La Vdc*, 24 September 1938.

⁹⁴³ P. Galland, 'Coups de canon', *La Vdc*, 5 June 1937.

operation with Germany.⁹⁴⁴ At a meeting of the heads of German youth organisations and the JUNC in Paris in August 1937, Charles Galland stated that the biggest guarantee of peace in Europe would be peaceful relations between France and Germany.⁹⁴⁵ In early 1938, 25 JUNC members visited Munich in response to an invitation by the Hitler Youth.

As the Popular Front entered its final months, the perceived threat of communism receded. While Daladier dismantled labour legislation, suspicion of Germany as a threat returned to UNC discourse. The culture of war was used once again against Germany, the 'hereditary enemy'. Aubert described Germany in similar terms to the communist threat: "Le chef de l'Allemagne est lui-même d'autant plus inquiétant qu'il s'est fait l'apôtre d'une religion nouvelle ayant pour idole: l'Allemagne et pour credo: la force".⁹⁴⁶ Issac denounced Germany who had shown herself to be "...comme toujours, fourbe, dominateur, cruel".⁹⁴⁷

The association's application of the culture of war to anti-communism may appear to have been an inherent reaction to the trauma of a left-wing victory and all that this would imply. However, the UNC deliberately detached the culture of war from Germany. Once communist 'barbarity' appeared to be the greater threat, the UNC did not continue to warn against German inhumanity. Rather the association would accept German action in the fight against communism. The UNC's willingness to let Hitler have what he wanted in the East does not point to an inherent fear of Germany. It suggests that the language, ideas and concepts of the war culture could be transposed from one foe to another.

The Rassemblement français: A civic crusade

Since the nationalist riots of 6 February 1934 and the left's response several days later, political activists on the left and right had taken to the streets of France. Violent clashes resulted in injury and sometimes death.⁹⁴⁸ Over a thousand public ceremonies, gatherings and processions took place from February 1934 and May 1936. Nationalists in the Front national and the Croix de Feu publicly confronted the Front commun, later to become the Front populaire. To have one's

⁹⁴⁴ 'Le rapprochement Franco-Allemand, interview de M. Drieu-La Rochelle', *La Vdc*, 3 April 1937; 'Le rapprochement Franco-Allemand, interview de Henry-Hae, Sénateur de Seine-et-Oise, Maire de Versailles', *La Vdc*, 1 May 1937; 'Le rapprochement Franco-Allemand, interview de Victor Bataille', *La Vdc*, 15 May 1937.

⁹⁴⁵ 'Les chefs des organisations allemandes de la Jeunesse en visite à Paris sont reçus par les Jeunes de l'UNC, 25-27 août 1937', *La Vdc*, 4 September 1937.

⁹⁴⁶ H. Aubert, 'Hitler apôtre de la révolution', *La Vdc*, 17 September 1938.

⁹⁴⁷ H. Isaac, 'Haut les cœurs!', *Le Combattant du Sud-Est*, March 1939.

⁹⁴⁸ Tartakowsky, 'Stratégies de la rue', p. 32.

members in the street became more about a show of presence and strength than a protest over any particular policy.⁹⁴⁹ As we have seen, the UNC joined nationalist associations in this practice. Accepting the failure of Action combattante, the UNC turned once again to the extreme right as it attempted to establish an anti-communist alliance. The UNC had long opposed communism. During the strike of 1920, UNC leaders organised *union civiques* against the strikes.⁹⁵⁰ In 1936, opposition to strikes and factory occupations recurred in the UNC's initial reaction to the Popular Front when Galland recommended a 'good [police] raid' on strikers as a solution.⁹⁵¹ The unprecedented ferocity of UNC discourse after May 1936 distinguished its anti-government attacks from those of a previous period. The UNC accused the left-wing coalition of being in the hands of the communists. The association criticised Blum for having lost control of the movement, to the profit of the CGT, its president Jouhaux, and the 'agents of Moscow'.

The UNC's executive committee met at the end of May 1936 to discuss the new political situation. It decided that the French public had rejected the combatants' programme of civic action. Rival groups had hijacked the UNC's ideas and presented them as their own. Action combattante had not taken root. Provincial members had failed to act on the civic action programme launched in the much vaunted Wagram manifesto of October 1933. Executive committee members decided to launch a new initiative open to all Frenchmen not just the *anciens combattants*.⁹⁵² Unlike Action combattante, no new group would be created. The national congress in Pau took the decision that the new initiative would form the centre of an alliance to attract all groups with French interests at heart. Ostensibly, this action was intended to encourage national reconciliation at a time of conflict and division in France. Yet the authoritarianism of the plan is revealed in its exclusion of those groups deemed to be working contrary to the national interest, namely the left: "...s'excluent de la famille française ceux qui vont chercher leur mot d'ordre à l'étranger et préparent la ruine de la société par l'anarchie économique et la guerre civile".⁹⁵³ While the UNC's new programme contained policies familiar to the UNC's past civic action projects, such as the protection of veterans' material rights, benefits and demands for state reform, anti-communism came to dominate not only the agenda of the conference but the UNC's action throughout the following two years.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹⁵⁰ Prost, I, p. 74.

⁹⁵¹ P. Galland, 'L'épuration nécessaire', *La Vdc*, 4 July 1936.

⁹⁵² UNC/EC, 28 May 1936.

⁹⁵³ Notice, 'L'Union Nationale des Combattants opère le Rassemblement français', *La Vdc*, 24 October 1936.

The Rassemblement would provide a platform from which the UNC could launch its action to 'prevent the triumph of Asian barbarism'.⁹⁵⁴ In July 1936, 6000 veterans attended a meeting in the Salle Wagram that officially launched the anti-communist campaign. The orators at this meeting - Goy, Lebecq and vice-president Alexis Thomas - left attendees under no illusion that the Rassemblement was an anti-communist initiative. Lebecq warned that many French organisations and newspapers were in the pay of the Comintern. Goy stated that the executive committee, the policy-making committee and the national congress had all decided it was time to take action beyond the scope of veterans' rights. The UNC would no longer languish in political neutrality.⁹⁵⁵

Like Action combattante, the UNC held meetings across France to promote the Rassemblement. As well as small-scale political meetings, Lebecq urged members to spread anti-revolutionary propaganda through large *manifestations*.⁹⁵⁶ His opinion that street action was an ineffective exercise had apparently changed. On one occasion a meeting of the Rassemblement closely resembled the organisation and logistical arrangements of La Rocque's movement. The meeting took place in the Drôme in September 1936. *La Voix du combattant* claimed that the Popular Front had tried to ban the gathering. As a result, a field was found at short notice near Malissart, four kilometres from Valence. The decision to hold the meeting there was kept secret until midday. At this time, members of the UNC and associated groups were notified. One thousand vehicles were reported to have descended upon Malissart so quickly that the meeting was able to begin at 3.30pm. Goy and Isaac both addressed the crowd. In response to vociferous demands from the crowd, Vallat gave an impromptu speech against the 'Muscovite extremists' who had attempted to ban the meeting.⁹⁵⁷

Upon the devaluation of the Franc in September 1936, the UNC expanded its attacks on communism to include the Popular Front as a whole. Goy warned that the Popular Front stood for 'revolution, bankruptcy and war'.⁹⁵⁸ He instructed all departmental sections to establish

⁹⁵⁴ A. Albaret, 'L'Espagne ruinée: Ruines matérielles et ruines spirituelles', *La Vdc*, 6 February 1937.

⁹⁵⁵ 'Au Meeting de Wagram organisé par l'UNC, le rassemblement des Français est réclamé par tous: Discours de Jean Goy', *La Vdc*, 25 July 1936.

⁹⁵⁶ 'Au Meeting de Wagram organisé par l'UNC, le rassemblement des Français est réclamé par tous: Discours de Georges Lebecq', *La Vdc*, 25 July 1936.

⁹⁵⁷ Meeting report, 'Le Rassemblement français: Le triomphal meeting de la Drôme', *La Vdc*, 12 September 1936. Compare this to the tactics of the Croix de Feu as described in Passmore, *From Liberalism*, p. 232 and Tartakowsky, 'Stratégies de la rue', p. 40.

⁹⁵⁸ J. Goy, 'Le Front populaire vient de commettre sa première escroquerie!', *La Vdc*, 3 October 1936.

relations with groups on the left and right in the offensive against Moscow. For the first time, formal links with political groups, namely the Radical party, the PSF, the JP and the PPF, were openly encouraged rather than merely tacitly endorsed.⁹⁵⁹ This message was understood throughout the movement. As we saw in chapter three, certain *anciens* and *jeunes* sections looked for co-operation with the extreme right. This continued under the Rassemblement, whether with ex-leaguers or the Front de la Liberté.⁹⁶⁰ In July 1936, Colonel Sarrochi, president of the UNC's Nîmes section, expressed his approval of the alliance against communism even if this meant having allies in political groups:

...la France... repousse la tutelle des métèques et des mauvais prophètes....Il m'est infiniment agréables de voir autour de nous de nombreux patriotes, de bons Français qui, quelles que soient leurs aspirations politiques, quelles que soient leurs convictions religieuses, sont aujourd'hui unis dans un même et noble sentiment: le culte de la Patrie.⁹⁶¹

Rassemblement meetings united groups on the right and the extreme right. In February 1937, under the auspices of the UNC section of the ninth *arrondissement*, representatives of the Rassemblement Populaire Français, the AF, the PSF, the Ligue des Chefs de Sections, the PRNS and the Association Catholique des pères de famille met. Anti-communist diatribes tinged with anti-Semitism were delivered. Lebecq drew on the themes of the war culture in his speech: "La doctrine du Parti Communiste est la négation de tout ce qui nous est cher. Nous n'avons pas besoin de la civilisation communiste qui est plutôt une barbarie... Le communisme est la négation de toute patrie... Les communistes s'arment".⁹⁶² The UNC continued to co-operate with La Rocque's movement, although both groups maintained their independence. The UNC and PSF agreed to promote local ententes whose mission it would be to denounce the action of

⁹⁵⁹ The following groups expressed their support for the Rassemblement français: the Parti Nationale, the PSF, the FR, the Parti démocrate populaire, the Parti populaire, the Parti socialiste de France, the Groupement des radicaux indépendants, the Parti républicain radical et radical-socialiste, the AGMG Paris, the Association des officiers combattants, Taittinger's Parti républicain national et social, the Ligue des Patriotes and the Comité d'entente des grandes Associations pour l'Essor National. The following newspapers also expressed their support: *La République*, *Le Jour*, *L'Ami du Peuple*, *L'Echo de Paris*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Temps*, *L'Action Française*, *L'Intransigeant*, *Le Matin*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Journal*, *Paris-Soir*, *L'Ere Nouvelle*, and *Les Débats*. This list was published in *L'Action Combattante: Organe de la Section de l'UNC de Bures-sur-Yvette, Gometz-le-Châtel et Gometz-la-Ville et de la Société de Secours Mutuels de l'UNC, (Seine-et-Oise)*, January 1937.

⁹⁶⁰ Gydé, 'Rassemblement de toutes les bonnes volontés !', *Entre Nous*, December 1936.; FM, 19 940 500: 229, document dated 20 June 1937.

⁹⁶¹ 'Pour protester contre le drapeau rouge: Un meeting à Nîmes', *La Vdc*, 11 July 1936.

⁹⁶² AN F⁷ 12966, 'Réunion dite de "Rassemblement français" organisée par les groupements nationaux du IXe arrondissement, Salle du Petit Journal, 21 rue Cadet, le 25 février', 26 February 1937.

Moscow's agents. They would also 'disarm' insurgents in order to prevent bolshevisation. *Le Flambeau* reported that the agreement established the principle of co-operation in the groups' relations, a course of action long recommended by La Rocque.⁹⁶³ Co-operation stretched as far as electoral agreements. In 1937, Goy ran for election in Falaise. Faced with competition from a PSF candidate, La Rocque agreed to withdraw his party's nominee. PSF members were asked to vote in favour of Goy.⁹⁶⁴

Led from Paris, the Rassemblement found support among provincial veterans. As early as February 1936, Emile Lacquièze, a member of the UNC's executive committee and secretary general of the south western group, reported on the provincial desire for action. He indicated that the members with whom he had regular contact wanted the UNC to go further than the decisions taken at the Metz congress in May 1934.⁹⁶⁵ While one must rely on *La Voix du combattant* for instances of support for the Rassemblement, one should not dismiss them as fabrications. The newspaper reported that several provincial groups were reluctant to support the campaign. It did not claim that enthusiasm was widespread among provincial sections. This apparent transparency surrounding issues of consent lends weight to the argument that reports supportive of the central UNC's plans were authentic.

A meeting of the Poitevin group attended by 1500 members issued an *ordre du jour* that approved the plan.⁹⁶⁶ A meeting in Lyon of 2500 members who represented 70 sections agreed that the UNC should aid all groups in favour of order against bolshevism.⁹⁶⁷ In December 1936, the Vaucluse group also lent its support to the national leadership.⁹⁶⁸ Even where groups expressed reservations, these concerned the lack of consultation with provincial groups rather than the principle of the programme itself. A meeting of 28 section presidents and one youth section in the Calais region chastised the Parisian leadership for its lack of clarity in the launch of the Rassemblement. Nevertheless, a vote of confidence was passed unanimously.⁹⁶⁹ The groups of the Bas- and Haut-Rhin approved the initiative but those of the Marne, Saône-et-Loire,

⁹⁶³ 'Entre d'autres: L'adhésion du Parti Social Français', *La Vdc*, 31 October 1936.

⁹⁶⁴ 'Précisions', *La Vdc*, 24 April 1937.

⁹⁶⁵ UNC/EC, 29 February 1936.

⁹⁶⁶ 'Une grande manifestation d'union. Le 16e Congrès Départemental du Groupe Poitvin à Lussac les Châteaux', *La Vdc*, 10 October 1936.

⁹⁶⁷ 'Pour la renaissance française', *La Vdc*, 21 November 1936.

⁹⁶⁸ 'Dans l'Action', *La Vdc*, 19 December 1936.

⁹⁶⁹ 'Réunion des Présidents de Sections du 13 décembre 1936', *Le Créneau*, January-February 1937.

Indre-et-Loire and Berry did not.⁹⁷⁰ Dissenters in this region did not challenge the purpose of the Rassemblement. The president of the Berry group and four others were reported to have simply preferred to follow an action independent of the UNC.⁹⁷¹ Expressions of support came from the general assembly of the Ille-et-Vilaine group, the departmental group of the Sarthe, a meeting of 2500 members in Nancy, the Ardèche group, the Limoges group and the 17th departmental congress of the Maine-et-Loire which spoke for 282 sections and 30 JUNC groups.⁹⁷²

Goy intended the JUNC to be the 'apostles' of the new Rassemblement.⁹⁷³ Like its parent organisation, the JUNC was unequivocal in its opposition to communism.⁹⁷⁴ Even before the election of the Popular Front, the youth movement confronted communism on a local level. At a meeting on 6 January 1935, the Angevillers youth section decided to fight the Front commun by 'all means available'.⁹⁷⁵ The national JUNC threw its weight behind the 'rassemblement antirévolutionnaire'. The Jeunes du Nord linked the success of the Rassemblement to the very success of the JUNC itself.⁹⁷⁶

Though some members were willing to back the Rassemblement, the new campaign once again revealed the diversity of opinion in the UNC's leadership and membership. Goudaert expressed concern that in the Nord any campaign against the Popular Front would alienate the 10,000 socialists and communists in his group. He feared that the association may lose a third of its members.⁹⁷⁷ Conversely, UNC section president Morizot wholly backed a political campaign against communism. He was prepared to accept a 'thinning out' of the UNC's ranks as long as those who were 'to march' remained committed to the cause.⁹⁷⁸ In January 1937, the executive committee met for the first time since the launch of the Rassemblement. Though Goy stated that each day the initiative was making progress this was not without difficulties. In some

⁹⁷⁰ A. Soubiran, 'Réunion des Présidents du Groupe', *L'Ancien combattant du Berry*, November 1936.

⁹⁷¹ 'Réunion des Présidents de Section du 7 novembre 1936', *L'Ancien combattant du Berry*, December 1936.

⁹⁷² 'Dans l'Action: Le XVII Congrès du groupe départemental Maine-et-Loire à Angers, 7 mars 1937', *La Vdc*, 6 December 1936; 'Assemblée générale du groupe d'Ille-et-Vilaine à Rennes, 20 décembre 1936', *La Vdc*, 26 December 1936; 'Congrès départemental du groupe de la Sarthe à Vibraye, 6 décembre 1937' and a report from a meeting of 2500 veterans in Nancy, *La Vdc*, 2 January 1937; 'L'Ardèche donne son adhésion au Rassemblement français', 9 January 1937; 7 March 1937; 'Chronique de l'UNC du Limousin: Section de Limoges, Réunion des Présidents de Section', *Le Combattant du Centre*, September 1936.

⁹⁷³ 'Congrès départemental du groupe de la Sarthe à Vibraye, 6 December 1937', *La Vdc*, 2 January 1937.

⁹⁷⁴ M. Arnault, 'Le communisme, nous aurons sa peau', *La Vdc*, 5 December 1936.

⁹⁷⁵ 'La vie des sections de jeunes: Moselle, Angevillers', *La Vdc*, 9 March 1935.

⁹⁷⁶ 'Documentation: Bien les connaître pour mieux les combattre', *La Vdc*, 26 September 1936; 'Les Jeunes et l'Action de l'UNC', *L'UNC de Normandie*, December 1936.

⁹⁷⁷ UNC/EC, 29 February 1936.

⁹⁷⁸ UNC/EC, 28 May 1936.

departments there had been strong reactions against the idea. Some members of the committee were not pleased with the PSF's role in the alliance.⁹⁷⁹ In May, the leadership decided that the Rassemblement would become a 'campaign of ideas' rather than a political action. Maillard demanded that the UNC renounce all politics and concentrate solely on the veterans' material demands. He said that the Rassemblement had failed because it had divided provincial groups. Rossignol disagreed. The former UNC president alleged that certain members had undermined the campaign from the start.⁹⁸⁰ As in the past, the moderates and activists came into conflict over the meaning of the UNC's civic action.

In spite of opposition, the Rassemblement demonstrates that the UNC continued to pursue political intervention. It was not an association like Action combattante and so did not compete with other nationalist forces. The Rassemblement was intended to be an anti-communist alliance of national groups against the left. However, the UNC's rejection of political participation meant that it could not be an electoral alliance. It aimed to form local ententes against communist action that would attract support from the veterans' movement and beyond. One may speculate that come election time these ententes would work for the good of 'national parties'. Yet, as we will see, the UNC's fear of communist revolution suggested that these groups would perhaps have a violent function in the event of a communist coup.

Undeclared war, covert occupation

By October 1936, the UNC claimed that its members were more anxious about the future of France than at Verdun in 1916.⁹⁸¹ To some extent the battle was already lost. The election of the left was tantamount to revolution or 'something that closely resemble[d] it'.⁹⁸² The association had previously warned of the soviet threat. In February 1935, *La Voix du combattant* reported that a preliminary invasion had already been set in place. Spanish revolutionaries had infiltrated southern France while German insurgents were scattered throughout the north and centre of the country. When the call of the left finally came to machine-gun French patriots, these forces would take to the urban boulevards.⁹⁸³

⁹⁷⁹ UNC/EC, 16 January 1937.

⁹⁸⁰ UNC/EC, 23 October 1937.

⁹⁸¹ 'Comment s'est fait le Rassemblement', *La Vdc*, 31 October 1936.

⁹⁸² P. Galland, 'La révolution spontanée', *La Vdc*, 13 June 1936.

⁹⁸³ R. Sille, 'Dédaignant le paradis rouge ils choisissent l'enfer capitaliste', *La Vdc*, 2 February 1935.

The UNC depicted the campaign against communism as a conflict between civilisation and barbarity. Yet while the veterans sought to exclude communists from humanity, they were also concerned with denying them membership of the national community. The veterans considered themselves the ultimate expression of the French national interest and they denied the left this quality. Indeed, the UNC drew on the war experience to frame the Popular Front as contrary to the national interest. It levelled the charge of *embusquage* at left-wing deputies in order to compare the left with wartime shirkers and confirm their anti-national sentiment. In August 1936, *La Voix du combattant* published a cartoon that pictured a physically disabled veteran opposite the communists Maurice Thorez and Jacques Duclos. In response to the latter's pronouncement on the need for a 'French front' to bring liberty to France, the veteran replies: "Et vous n'étiez pas là, en 1914, pour nous l'apprendre!".⁹⁸⁴ In December 1938, in reference to Jouhaux's decision to call a strike, Galland compared the CGT chief's actions to that of an army commander who was willing to give the order to advance into battle but who was himself unwilling to join in the attack.⁹⁸⁵ In November 1938, Galland congratulated the Daladier government for its firm stance in the face of a failed general strike. He compared the premier's action to tossing grenades back into the enemy trench.⁹⁸⁶ During the war, the right had condemned factory workers and 'CGT shirkers' who were allegedly sheltered from the danger of the front and paid handsomely for the privilege.⁹⁸⁷ *Embuscomanie* appeared again when in January 1938, Raudot raised the issue of industrial wages. Comparing the low wage of a soldier to that of a factory worker who worked only forty hours per week, Raudot condemned the CGT and the government for this abusive discrepancy.⁹⁸⁸ Worse still, the UNC reported that some veterans were refused work because they were not members of the CGT.⁹⁸⁹

Another component of the UNC's campaign was its portrayal of the government as a foreign power in occupation. In evermore alarmist tones, the UNC continually stated that France was on the verge of, or had already undergone, sovietisation. In July 1936, the UNC declared that the French Republic was ceding ground little by little to a Republic of Soviets.⁹⁹⁰ Three

⁹⁸⁴ Cartoon on page one, 'La leçon de patriotisme', *La Vdc*, 22 August 1936.

⁹⁸⁵ P. Galland, 'Et maintenant?', *La Vdc*, 10 December 1938.

⁹⁸⁶ P. Galland, 'Victoire précaire', *La Vdc*, 17 December 1938.

⁹⁸⁷ Ridel, *Les embusqués*, pp. 45-46.

⁹⁸⁸ J. Raudot, 'La misère des cadres: Et dans l'armée', *La Vdc*, 8 January 1938.

⁹⁸⁹ 'La tyrannie de la CGT', *La Vdc*, 26 September 1936; 'La dictature de la CGT', 18 December 1937.

⁹⁹⁰ J. Goy, 'Sommes-nous encore en république?', *La Vdc*, 11 July 1936. De Cromières announced France's regression to primitive barbarism since the Bolshevik spirit had crushed all religious and moral doctrines.

months later, the association depicted the new government as a *de facto* soviet regime: “La France n’est plus la France. C’est un pays soviétisé”.⁹⁹¹ The UNC made reference to the fact that the communists under the orders of Stalin in Moscow were the ones really running the government: “Le parti communiste «français» ne fait pas appel à l’étranger, il est l’étranger lui-même, installé en France. Créé par Moscou, sa seule raison d’être est de bien servir Moscou”.⁹⁹² Communist party members were instruments in the hands of the enemies of the *patrie*. The Popular Front had duped the workers into wasting their votes.⁹⁹³ The ‘occupation’ sprang from a covert ‘invasion’ that had been threatened for years. This invasion, although less brutal than the German one over twenty years ago, was just as serious.⁹⁹⁴ Moscow thus controlled every action of the government.⁹⁹⁵ The provincial *Le Combattant du Centre* expressed the same opinion:

C’est justement de cette Russie reléguée au banc des nations civilisées, que la France trahie et vendue par ses dirigeants, subit elle-même l’Esclavage... à l’heure actuelle, c’est Moscou qui règne à Paris. La France des ancêtres, celle de 1914, cette France héritière de toutes les vertus civiques et nationales n’existe plus. La défense de nos frontières est une leurre. La ligne Maginot ne peut arrêter notre ennemi le plus acharné et le plus cruel. Il est déjà chez nous. C’est lui qui gouverne, commande, exécute. La haute finance juive internationale et bolchevique a conquis le peuple de France par le mensonge et le poison moral.⁹⁹⁶

A symptom of the alleged soviet occupation was the perceived communist usurpation of French culture and its national symbols, especially the tricolore and the Marseillaise. At this time, both left and right fought for the right to claim national rhetoric and symbols for themselves. With the inclusion of the Radical party in July 1935, the Popular Front moved from being a worker’s movement to become one of republican defence. To this end, the left sought to re-appropriate French national symbols from the right. The right reacted to this challenge and ridiculed the left’s new-found patriotism. It alleged that the number of foreigners and Jews in government meant that the Popular Front was a threat to French security. The PSF and PPF

⁹⁹¹ ‘Comment s’est fait le Rassemblement’, *La Vdc*, 31 October 1936.

⁹⁹² J. Parrot, ‘L’ennemi de l’intérieur’, *La Vdc*, 24 April 1937.

⁹⁹³ Vimal, ‘L’UNC avait raison’, *La Vdc*, 3 October 1936.

⁹⁹⁴ J. Parrot, ‘L’ennemi de l’intérieur’, *La Vdc*, 24 April 1937.

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁶ G. de Cromières, ‘Pays d’esclaves’, *Le Combattant du Centre*, October 1936.

argued that the government of France would only be truly national once these foreign elements were removed.⁹⁹⁷

The veterans dearly prized national icons. Patay, for example, declared his 'quasi-religious' respect for the national anthem.⁹⁹⁸ The tricolore was of especial importance. It represented the interest of the national elements against those of perceived anti-national forces. After the riots of February 1934, Lebecq demanded that Frot make the only gesture of contrition worthy of his crime: to kneel before the national flag on the Place de la Concorde.⁹⁹⁹ Three years later, Lebecq urged UNC members and French citizens to fly proudly the French flag and never to accept the 'red rag of the International' as the national emblem. The UNC had long expressed outrage at communist attempts to replace French national symbols and ceremonies. In December 1933, Lebecq condemned the communist commemoration of the armistice the previous month. He claimed that under the protection of the municipal police, men, women and children sang the Internationale and shouted 'A bas la guerre!' and 'A bas l'armée!'. Police allegedly beat two youths who dared to protest. To Lebecq, it appeared that the cry of 'Vive la France!' had become seditious.¹⁰⁰⁰ On the occasion of the inauguration of a war memorial in June 1934, the UNC decried the government's decision to allow two ceremonies to take place. The official ceremony comprised the songs and symbols of France: patriotic speeches, the Marseillaise and the tricolore. The alternative ceremony, attended by the veterans of ARAC, witnessed incendiary speeches, the singing of the Internationale and took place under the flag of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰¹

Once the Popular Front entered government, the perceived affront to French national symbols intensified. The veterans were outraged that the forces of order allowed communist offences to go unpunished while the right was hounded and the members of the leagues arrested. In July 1936, Aubert reported an incident in which three coal deliverymen attacked a veteran for wearing a tricolore cockade. When the veteran in question reported the incident, police responded that they could take no action. Aubert cited this incident as proof of the subversion of

⁹⁹⁷ Wardhaugh, 'Fighting for the Unknown Soldier', pp. 192-195; Philippe Burrin, 'Poings levés et bras tendus. La contagion des symboles au temps du Front populaire', *Vingtième Siècle*, 11 (1986), pp. 5-20.

⁹⁹⁸ Patay, 'Le rassemblement français', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, November 1936.

⁹⁹⁹ Roux-Desbreaux, 'Après', *L'UNC de Paris*, February 1934.

¹⁰⁰⁰ G. Lebecq, 'A propos d'une manifestation déplacée', *La Vdc*, 2 December 1933.

¹⁰⁰¹ 'Un monument profané', *La Vdc*, 23 June 1934.

the police force.¹⁰⁰² UNC activist Henri Roure decried the 'red flags, sickles, hammers, three arrows and revolutionary songs' of the left.¹⁰⁰³ On Armistice Day 1938, Gaston Maillefert, president of the cantonal UNC group at Chalindrey paraded with his comrades through the streets of the town. Upon seeing a red flag flying from the *salle de fêtes*, a municipal building, he climbed up, tore the flag down and burned it with his fellow veterans. He was duly arrested.¹⁰⁰⁴ The police reportedly treated French 'patriots' who dared to display any symbols of nationalism as criminals and punished such offences with arrest or a beating.¹⁰⁰⁵ *La Voix du combattant* recounted an incident in Paris that led it to question the motives of the police:

...nous avons particulièrement souffert moralement de voir se dérouler dans les rues de la capitale des cortèges procédés du drapeau rouge orné de la faucille et du marteau. Dimanche dernier, la police parisienne faisait la guerre aux automobilistes, qui sur le côté de leur voiture, avait posé un petit drapeau tricolore. Est-ce donc un crime d'arborer les couleurs nationales?¹⁰⁰⁶

In keeping with the UNC's depiction of the anti-national nature of the Popular Front, diatribes against the government usually made reference to the influence of foreign elements in France. During the 1920s, though some extremists practised an intransigent racism, the relative prosperity of France and the shortfall in male labour encouraged tolerance toward the *étranger*. Foreigners became the target of violent xenophobic campaigns in the thirties. Xenophobia was by no means unique to the UNC.¹⁰⁰⁷ Concern for French jobs after the onset of the Depression and an increase in immigration from Germany fed fear of 'foreign' invaders who would take French jobs and subvert traditional French values. Scare stories abounded about the disappearance of the French race and the pollution of national blood by freeloading *étrangers*. This sentiment suffused diverse sections of the political establishment. The extreme right was most virulent but parties of the left and centre also succumbed. In May 1938, the Radical government introduced legislation that compelled foreigners to obtain identity cards, restricted

¹⁰⁰² H. Aubert, 'Pourquoi les Français pavoisent', *La Vdc*, 4 July 1936.

¹⁰⁰³ H. Roure, 'L'expérience Socialiste', *La Vdc*, 25 July 1936.

¹⁰⁰⁴ FM, 19 940 500: 82, reported in *Le Jour* and *L'Echo de Paris*, November 1938.

¹⁰⁰⁵ J. Goy, 'Sommes-nous encore en république?', *La Vdc*, 11 July 1936.

¹⁰⁰⁶ 'La justice doit être égale pour tous', *La Vdc*, 27 June 1936.

¹⁰⁰⁷ On xenophobia and anti-Semitism in France at this time see Kalman, *Extreme Right*, pp.185-190 and 217-221; Michel Winock, *Nationalisme, antisémitisme et fascisme en France* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1998), pp. 79-195, especially pp. 115-141 on Edouard Drumont, author of *La France juive*.

their right to work and withdrew their right to vote.¹⁰⁰⁸ In November, a decree increased the number of offences for which foreigners could be deported.¹⁰⁰⁹

In some measure, the UNC's xenophobia stemmed from the economic crisis. UNC polemics accused foreigners of taking French jobs while millions of Frenchmen, many of them veterans, remained unemployed. Concern at foreign workers in French industry stretched back at least as far as the war, when Russians and Poles were singled out as foreign *embusqués*.¹⁰¹⁰ Veteran Georges Heldet argued that the *poilus* had not fought for four years to lose their jobs to foreigners.¹⁰¹¹ The association supported a bill to exclude foreign labour from public works. When this bill was defeated, the newspaper printed the names of all 328 deputies who had voted against the proposal.¹⁰¹² Moreover, immigration was nurturing corruption in communist controlled suburbs: "...des «indésirables» que l'on retrouve trop souvent mêlés à certaines affaires louches, à tels ou tels coups durs dans la banlieue rouge, à telles ou telles campagnes d'agitation politique ou syndicaliste...".¹⁰¹³

Xenophobia also drew on the culture of war. Anxiety revived over the threat that foreigners posed to the physical and metaphorical health of the French race. In 1938, Loez expressed concern for the effects of unrestricted immigration: "L'invasion étrangère – brutale ou pacifique – aura beau jeu. Il n'y aura plus de France parce qu'il n'y aura plus de Français".¹⁰¹⁴ In August 1936, Berthau combined the fear of the invasion of the workplace with that of the body. He compared French reliance on foreign labour to a blood transfusion. Berthau demanded that undesirable immigrants be denied the right to naturalisation. 'Healthy' immigrants were fathers with families abroad or foreign women who married Frenchmen.¹⁰¹⁵ His exclusion of single men reveals a deeper concern that male immigrants should not have access to Frenchwomen. The UNC considered the foetus of a Frenchman and his foreign wife to be French while the foetus of a Frenchwoman and her foreign husband was not. During wartime, arguments for the right to abort these illegitimate foetuses played on the fear that the 'children of

¹⁰⁰⁸ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Gérard Noiriel, *Les origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 1999), pp. 144-146. Noriel explores the roots of Vichy's racial legislation in the era of the Third Republic.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ridet, *Les embusqués*, p. 176.

¹⁰¹¹ G. Heldet, 'Les étrangers chez nous', *La Vdc*, 25 August 1934.

¹⁰¹² G. Berthau, 'On aura tout vu: Comme 'ILS' défendent les ouvriers de France', *La Vdc*, 1 August 1936.

¹⁰¹³ A. Loez, 'L'invasion étrangère', *La Vdc*, 11 September 1937.

¹⁰¹⁴ A. Loez, 'L'invasion étrangère', *La Vdc*, 8 January 1938.

¹⁰¹⁵ G. Berthau, 'Naturaliser, oui, mais qui?', *La Vdc*, 22 August 1936.

the barbarian' would become the 'enemy within', a fear that continued into peacetime.¹⁰¹⁶ The situation would be dire indeed if, in women, foreign foetuses developed in French wombs, while in men foreign cancers ate away French bodies.¹⁰¹⁷ Laferrière, president of the Limoges group, supported Berthau. Limitations alone would preserve the national and ethnic substance of the French race.¹⁰¹⁸ Activists urged youth members to have children soon and thus banish the *métèques* from France.¹⁰¹⁹ D'Hennezel described the communists as part of the Anti-France. His town, he claimed, like many others in France, suffered under the tyranny of the Internationale. This situation led him to conclude that the primary aim was to defend the homeland that was under threat from France's interior enemies.¹⁰²⁰ In 1939, the JUNC released a statement outlining the four steps to a 'France française'. Among its points, it detailed the need for the dissolution of the communist party and the expulsion of all undesirable foreigners and *métèques*.¹⁰²¹

The UNC employed the vocabulary of pathology to describe the threat from both foreigners and communism. France's poor health was attributed to a foreign threat: "Des microbes sans nombre travaillent notre corps national et social. Les plus virulents ont été importés de l'extérieur".¹⁰²² Isaac warned against the perils of allowing the 'Bolshevik virus' to survive in France while Galland demanded that the police prevent Bolshevik *métèques* from spreading their 'cholera'.¹⁰²³ André Vital, writing in *L'UNC de Paris*, laid the blame for the crisis squarely at the feet of foreigners in France. Despite the fact that foreigners allegedly insulted French traditions and spat on the French flag, the government continued to allow the carriers of 'physically and morally morbid germs' to poison the French race. French hospitals, 'cluttered with the dregs of humanity', proved this fact.¹⁰²⁴

At the time, xenophobic attacks on the Popular Front often went hand-in-hand with anti-Semitism. Since the 1880s, extreme right-wing groups, authors and intellectuals such as Edouard Drumont had denounced the deleterious presence of Jews in France. The flawed

¹⁰¹⁶ Ruth Harris, 'The 'Child of the Barbarian': Rape, race and nationalism in France during the First World War', *Past and Present*, 141 (1993), pp. 170-206; Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, p. 246.

¹⁰¹⁷ Les Jeunes de la Marne, 'Voix de nos groupes: Un Appel des Jeunes de la Marne', *La Vdc*, 11 February 1939.

¹⁰¹⁸ H. Laferrière, 'Le Sang Français', *La Vdc*, 31 July 1937.

¹⁰¹⁹ Le Dur-Caillou, 'Un ancien parle aux Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 18 December 1937.

¹⁰²⁰ F. d'Hennezel, 'France d'abord ! De Saint-Quentin à Metz', *La Vdc*, 16 June 1934.

¹⁰²¹ 'La voie du salut', *La Vdc*, 4 February 1939.

¹⁰²² P. Galland, "'National'" et "'International'"', *La Vdc*, 22 January 1938.

¹⁰²³ H. Isaac, 'Ni communisme, ni fascisme', *La Vdc*, 10 October 1936; P. Galland, 'L'épuration nécessaire', 4 July 1936.

¹⁰²⁴ A. Vital, 'Métèques', *L'UNC de Paris*, January 1938.

conviction of Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus deeply divided France. Dreyfusards furiously criticised the establishment and the army's cover-up. Anti-dreyfusards argued that nothing, least of all an inconvenient truth, should be allowed to compromise the standing of the army. The Dreyfus Affair convinced the anti-dreyfusard right at least of a Jewish plot against the nation. Right-wing thinkers such as La Tour du Pin and Barrès denied Jews the right to be French. From the turn of the century, the AF and the Ligue des Patriotes regularly protested against the residence of Jews and foreigners in France.

In the first decade after the war, the AF and the Faisceau kept the torch of anti-Semitism burning. During the 1930s anti-Semitism spanned the whole political spectrum. Various nationalist leagues took up the crusade to save France from Jewish influence. Extreme right-wing personalities and newspapers enjoyed great success with little censure from contemporaries.¹⁰²⁵ On the left, the CGT protested against the influx of German Jewish refugees and the effect this would have on the French job market. Faure of the socialist party complained that Jews wanted war with Hitler to protect their families in Germany.¹⁰²⁶ The victory of France's first Jewish prime minister in May 1936 reignited anti-Semitism as never before. Jews had long been associated with Marxism and the left in anti-Semitic propaganda.¹⁰²⁷ They had founded communism and sought to bring the entire world under their authority.

Anti-Semitism was not widespread in UNC publications. It was most prominent in the provincial newspaper *Le Combattant du Centre*, due in large measure to the consistently venomous editorials of group president de Cromières. De Cromières saw the hands of many anti-French conspirators in the crisis of the thirties. Though the Jew was by far the greatest threat to France, Russian communists and even the co-founder of the UNC, Clemenceau, were not spared his vitriol. He accused *Père la victoire* of aiding England's international designs at the Versailles conference.¹⁰²⁸ His anti-Semitism was based on race. A Jew's physical appearance marked him out as a barbarian: "Leurs peaux huileuses, la forme de leurs nez et de leurs mâchoires, leur regard, leur odeur, le profil de leurs épaules, les font reconnaître comme

¹⁰²⁵ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, pp.187-200. Gérard Noiriel, *Les origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 1999), explores the roots of Vichy's racial legislation in the era of the Third Republic.

¹⁰²⁶ Kalman, *Extreme Right*, p. 199.

¹⁰²⁷ J.-J. Becker & S. Bernstein, *Histoire de l'anticommunisme. Tome 1: 1917-1940* (Paris: O. Orban, 1987), p. 307.

¹⁰²⁸ See G. de Cromières, 'La France conquise', *Le Combattant du Centre*, October 1935 and 'Confusion', *Le Combattant du Centre*, December 1935.

Barbares...”.¹⁰²⁹ Consequently, he rejected the notion of assimilation. Whether M. Blum changed his name to M. Fleur, or M. Lévy became M. Lefèvre, he would remain a Jew.¹⁰³⁰ De Cromières contended that the Popular Front ‘Government of Jews’ was conspiring with the *embusqués* of the last war and the organisers of the next to bring about the destruction of France.¹⁰³¹ The men of the ‘Jewish Front’ in alliance with bolshevism would feed on the blood of Frenchmen.¹⁰³² The communist takeover of France was a fine victory for the Jew: “Cette méthode de conquête et d’absorption d’un pays, sans aucun risque ni péril, par la seule action du Marxisme, est un beau triomphe pour le Sémite.... il vise, par ses esclaves bolchevistes, tous les biens mobiliers et immobiliers...”.¹⁰³³

Anti-Semitism in the UNC was not confined to *Le Combattant du Centre*. The JUNC in Somain denounced the Popular Front government as being in the pay of Jews.¹⁰³⁴ In March 1938, in his editorial for *La Voix du combattant*, Aubert questioned the proportion of Jews in government:

Je n’ai jamais été et ne suis pas antisémite. J’appartiens, en effet, à une race qui ne redoute pas les Juifs et fait, au contraire, bon commerce avec eux. Mais lorsque, dans un gouvernement de 36 membres, je vois six israélites en place, j’estime qu’il y a une exagération.¹⁰³⁵

In May 1939, *L’UNC de Normandie* published a report from a local congress at which Jean Goy, then UNC national president, attended. The congress demanded a public safety administration to put an end to the governmental merry-go-round behind which hid the forces of Freemasonry and international Jewry.¹⁰³⁶

Family policy provided another means by which to attack communism. The association accused the extreme left of prising women away from the family home and into the workforce. This made women too physically and mentally exhausted to attend to children or housework. The labour legislation in the Matignon accords and the CGT further degraded the position of the family: “Ainsi, peu à peu, à travail égal, les niveaux de vie s’égaliseraient entre la famille

¹⁰²⁹ G. de Cromières, ‘On va voler nos noms’, *Le Combattant du Centre*, December 1937.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰³¹ G. de Cromières, ‘Le vrai complot’, *Le Combattant du Centre*, April 1938.

¹⁰³² G. de Cromières, ‘Et la France !’, *Le Combattant du Centre*, July 1938.

¹⁰³³ G. de Cromières, ‘La France juive’, *Le Combattant du Centre*, September 1938.

¹⁰³⁴ ‘La juiverie internationale déclare...’, *Entre Nous*, May 1937.

¹⁰³⁵ H. Aubert, ‘Dedans et Dehors’, *La Vdc*, 19 March 1938.

¹⁰³⁶ ‘Textes des Rapports et des Vœux, Elbeuf-sur-Seine, 11 juin 1939’, *L’UNC de Normandie*, May 1939.

nombreuse et le célibataire”.¹⁰³⁷ Loez offered the family as the only remedy to the communism in charge of France.¹⁰³⁸ He accused Thorez of encouraging pro-natalism in order to provide cannon fodder for the Soviet Union. In 1937, *La Voix du combattant* declared that the Marxist danger aimed to destroy the family and draw even more women from the *foyer* and into the workforce.¹⁰³⁹ Communists and socialists craved feminine liberation and sexual equality “...pour pouvoir les immatriculer (les deux sexes) sans distinction de valeur ou de sexe”.¹⁰⁴⁰

The UNC attacked the left-wing government on several fronts. Blum’s administration was compared to the German wartime adversary. It was a foreign power, under the influence of subversive foreign elements, Jews and directed from Moscow. The ‘evidence’ for this lay in the replacement of French national symbols, the presence of foreigners and Jews in the country and the destruction of the French family. The association’s discourse at this time revealed an authoritarianism that pitted a single national interest, embodied in the veterans and the right, against the anti-national forces of the left, expressly communists, socialists, foreigners and Jews. Yet the association’s attacks went deeper than a critique of the government. The UNC associated the change of government in May 1936 with a change of regime. The ‘Republic of Soviets’ had replaced the Third Republic. It had come to power illegally, either through foreign influence, ‘invasion’ or electoral dupery. Of course, this was not the case. The fact that the association no longer recognised the true French Republic in a France governed by the left would see the UNC cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the regime itself.

The anti-communist crusade

As shown above, the UNC used a variety of tactics to undermine the French identity of the communist foe. The association also denied the human quality of the left. It linked France with Western and human civilisation. Similarly, the culture of war mobilised local and national energies to foster the belief that the Great War was a struggle between civilisation and barbarity. The war effort thus became a moral crusade to ‘exterminate’ the uncivilised enemy, believed to be inhuman and a bestial monster incapable of civilisation.¹⁰⁴¹ Soldiers believed that they were

¹⁰³⁷ Langlois, ‘Allocations familiales’, *La Vdc*, 26 June 1937.

¹⁰³⁸ A. Loez, ‘Politique nataliste ou politique familiale’, *La Vdc*, 29 August 1936.

¹⁰³⁹ R. Joubin, ‘Le retour de la femme au foyer’, *La Vdc*, 1 May 1937.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴¹ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *14-18*, p. 104.

fighting for God in a holy war.¹⁰⁴² The enemy was thus a godless barbarian. Atrocities against religious symbols, such as the clergy or churches, reinforced this belief.¹⁰⁴³

In February 1938, for example, the *jeunes* and *anciens* sections of the UNC met to discuss 'La Civilisation en Péril'. Charles Galland summed up French superiority: "Défendre la civilisation, pour nous cela revient à défendre la France: c'est la même chose." He noted "...que la civilisation française, héritière privilégiée de la double tradition antique et chrétienne, est la civilisation par excellence... l'histoire de France, c'est un magnifique raccourci du progrès de l'Humanité."¹⁰⁴⁴ Conversely, the association attempted to deny the communists any claim to humanity, much as the German soldier had been denied this quality during the Great War. De Cromières alleged that the forces of international Jewish finance were attempting to impose vile Russian bestiality upon France.¹⁰⁴⁵

The war culture connected civilisation and spirituality. It made use of religious language and themes to emphasise further the humanity (or inhumanity) of protagonists and thus help to define the threat to both the nation and the West.¹⁰⁴⁶ This tactic was common in UNC discourse. Doubtless the threat to Christian civilisation seemed real for the numerous Catholics in the leadership of the UNC. For more pragmatic members, religious rhetoric was an expedient medium. In July 1935, for example, Goy, a man who 'owed nothing to the Catholic tradition', emphasised the fundamental difference between the 'Christian and Latin soul' of the French and that of the Germans.¹⁰⁴⁷ Furthermore, in January 1937, he presided over a conference that united Catholics, Protestants and Jews to discuss Bolshevism's attack on spirituality.¹⁰⁴⁸ For men such as Goy, the appeal to a common spiritual identity facilitated the construction of a unifying moral and national interest for France.

The threat to French spirituality was not confined to Catholicism. In January 1937, the UNC and the Union Patriotique des Français israélites, convened a conference, attended by 8000 people, entitled "La civilisation française: Le matérialisme bolchevique contre la spiritualité".¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴² Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid., p. 143.

¹⁰⁴⁴ 'Les Jeunes et les Anciens Combattants devant 'La Civilisation en Péril'', *La Vdc*, 5 March 1938.

¹⁰⁴⁵ G. de Cromières, 'Hier et Demain', *Le Combattant du Centre*, August 1936.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Hanebrink, 'Transnational culture war', pp. 55-80.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Prost, III, p. 207; J. Goy, 'L'énigme allemande', *La Vdc*, 6 July 1935.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Report from conference 'La civilisation française en péril: Le matérialisme bolchevique contre la spiritualité', *La Vdc*, 30 January 1937.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ibid.

The meeting aimed to form a spiritual union of Frenchmen against communism. Speakers linked the struggle for the survival of French civilisation with the anti-religious tactics of the extreme left, which included: “...perfection de la propagande des sans-Dieu qui s’emploie à capter l’homme depuis le baptême rouge jusqu’à l’incinération...Le but reste le même: attirer les travailleurs d’abord; les déchristianiser ensuite”.¹⁰⁵⁰ Pastor Wautier d’Aygallier claimed that there was an absolute opposition between Christianity and Bolshevism that allied ‘the barbarism of the Asian mind to the troubled soul of the Tartar’.¹⁰⁵¹ The *ordre du jour* of the meeting warned of the anti-religious activity of communist agents. It called on France’s ‘great spiritual families’ to combat the ‘rising forces of this barbarism’.¹⁰⁵² Furthermore, a speaker at the meeting, Father Ferrand, linked the wartime experience to the present battle. Recalling the union of the trenches, he called for a new union: “...le RP Ferrand fait appel à l’union réalisée dans la tranchée pour cette nouvelle bataille contre la barbarie qui nous menace”.¹⁰⁵³ Veteran Edmond Bloch expressed the same opinion: “Nous menons ici... la même bataille qu’en 1914-1918. Combien d’entre nous partis mécréants, ont rencontré Dieu sur le champs de bataille!”.¹⁰⁵⁴ The communist, as a godless barbarian, replaced the Boche in his opposition to French civilisation. While the UNC denied communists the claim to spirituality, the association also depicted communism as a false religion. Galland denounced those Frenchmen for whom Stalin was a god, Cachin his prophet, Thorez an apostle and *L’Humanité* a theology. Followers of communism read the holy texts of Moscow with their morning coffee and dreamt each night of a red heaven.¹⁰⁵⁵ Aubert described Stalin as the supreme leader of a new religion. His acolytes were Russian before being French.¹⁰⁵⁶

The campaign to deny the enemy a place in human civilisation demanded proof of depravity. Within the culture of war, atrocity propaganda served a dual purpose. It presented further evidence of the enemy’s inhumanity as the victims of alleged atrocities were usually the most vulnerable: women, children and the infirm. Stories of atrocities consequently provided a means by which to re-legitimise the crusade. The UNC reported communist violence against its members and these acts served the same function as wartime atrocities. Reports depicted

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid.

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁵ P. Galland, ‘Faillite du communisme’, *La Vdc*, 6 February 1937.

¹⁰⁵⁶ H. Aubert, ‘Dedans et Dehors’, *La Vdc*, 19 March 1938.

communists as uncivilised brutes who attacked women and war invalids. In July 1936, for example, the UNC reported the assault of the ‘grand mutilé’ Joseph Magne, founder of the association’s Nîmes section and holder of the *légion d’honneur* and the *croix de guerre*. Assailed by communists upon his exit from a section assembly, his crime was to display a tricolore on a medal awarded in recognition of his 32 years’ service as a miner.¹⁰⁵⁷ At a meeting in the Drôme in 1936, *La Voix du combattant* reported:

Les admirateurs Valentinois et Romanais de Staline, n’ont pas voulu rompre avec la tradition... Au moment où la longue file des autos passait place Madier Montjan au coeur de la ville et sous le regard bienveillant de la police et des gendarmes, une centaine de voyous, dont le plus âgé n’avait pas 25 ans et parmi lesquels on a reconnu des repris de justice, des Arméniens, des Arabes et des Espagnoles, se livrèrent à une série de voies de fait contre les occupants des automobiles.¹⁰⁵⁸

This incident resembled wartime reports of atrocities in two ways. Firstly, the perpetrators were said to be foreigners and so, following previous arguments, uncivilised. Secondly, the attack targeted the most vulnerable people at the meeting. The article reported women being spat upon, old people being insulted and *mutilés* and *aveugles* being punched and beaten with truncheons.¹⁰⁵⁹ After the last car passed, the crowd, reportedly under the orders of a CGT member, marched down the street. With their fists in the air, they sang the Internationale and broke windows with impunity from the police. The JUNC had evidence of further communist atrocities. At the fourth JUNC general assembly in March 1937, Raudot announced the death of the vice-president of a provincial group and the injury of the president of the Ardennes section, both alleged victims of communist activists as they left a PSF meeting.¹⁰⁶⁰

Atrocity propaganda, especially alleged crimes against religion, figured prominently in the UNC’s reports on the Spanish civil war. From the beginning of hostilities in Spain, the French right-wing press argued for non-intervention. Its campaign was so fierce that Blum’s government adopted this policy, a testament to the atmosphere created by newspapers on the right.¹⁰⁶¹ The UNC’s experience of the French Popular Front informed its stance on the Spanish

¹⁰⁵⁷ ‘Pour protester contre le drapeau rouge: Un meeting à Nîmes organisé par l’UNC’, *La Vdc*, 11 July 1936.

¹⁰⁵⁸ ‘Le Rassemblement français: Le triomphal meeting de la Drôme. Après la réunion’, *La Vdc*, 12 September 1936.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶⁰ ‘IV Assemblée Générale des JUNC, 14 mars 1937’, *La Vdc*, 20 March 1937.

¹⁰⁶¹ Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 258.

civil war. Advocating a firm and absolute neutrality in matters, the Parisian leadership criticised the French Popular Front government for not presenting a unified policy, wavering as it did between the non-interventionism of Blum and the 'bellicose' Jouhaux who had 'forgotten' to do his duty in the last war.¹⁰⁶² As August 1936 progressed, UNC policy on Spain became concerned with Moscow's design on France. Any French participation in the war would lead to a revolution within France and civil war.¹⁰⁶³ A French civil war would benefit only one nation, Germany, ready to invade France to prevent the spread of communism. The UNC reported that the people who supported intervention had doubled their efforts, to the profit of Germany and Moscow.¹⁰⁶⁴ The association cautioned youths against being press ganged into fighting in Spain.¹⁰⁶⁵

The UNC sought to demonstrate Spanish communism's incompatibility with Western civilisation through reported atrocities and accusations of anti-religious violence. Stories of atrocities committed by the 'Reds' in Spain concentrated on crimes against religion in order to highlight the barbarity of the left-wing government. Moscow, foreign communists, Jouhaux and the CGT supported the men who slit the throats of nuns and burned down churches.¹⁰⁶⁶ *Le Combattant du Centre* refused to allow France to slip into the 'primitive barbarity' practised by the Popular Front in Spain.¹⁰⁶⁷ Desroches underlined the atrocities 'worthy of the worst Asian torture' committed against women and children in Spain in his argument for the Rassemblement.¹⁰⁶⁸ The material damages to Spain were nothing compared to the spiritual ones. Comparable only to the brutality of the Turks under Suliman or the Roman emperors against early Christians, Spanish communists tortured bishops and priests, raped and molested nuns, destroyed churches, displayed profane images and prevented citizens from practising their religion. If Moscow continued to govern France, then the French could expect the same.¹⁰⁶⁹

The association interpreted the Spanish conflict as a theatre in the war between civilisation and barbarity:

¹⁰⁶² H. Aubert, 'Oui ou non, veut-on la paix ?', *La Vdc*, 15 August 1936.

¹⁰⁶³ P. Galland, 'Neutralité... Neutralité', *La Vdc*, 22 August 1936.

¹⁰⁶⁴ See H. Roure, 'La comédie de la neutralité'; R. Angot, 'Pour la paix... pour la neutralité'; P. Galland, 'Silence aux embusqués !', *La Vdc*, 29 August 1936.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Le Dur-Caillou, 'Un ancien parle aux Jeunes', *La Vdc*, 18 December 1937.

¹⁰⁶⁶ H. Roure, 'La comédie de la neutralité', *La Vdc*, 29 August 1936.

¹⁰⁶⁷ 'Section de Limoges, 'Réunion des Présidents de Sections', *Le Combattant du Centre*, September 1936.

¹⁰⁶⁸ D. Desroches, 'La Patrie en Danger !', *Le Cri du Poilu*, 1 October 1936.

¹⁰⁶⁹ A. Albaret, 'L'Espagne runiée: Ruines matérielles et ruines spirituelles', *La Vdc*, 6 February 1937.

La guerre civile qui ensanglante l'Espagne... n'est en réalité, que la choc de la doctrine nationale de l'ordre et de la doctrine internationale du chambardement et du désordre propagées par les Soviets moscovites. C'est un épisode localisé de la lutte mondiale entre la civilisation et la barbarité.¹⁰⁷⁰

September 1936 saw the UNC come out firmly in favour of Franco and his Spanish 'patriots'. Two months later, the UNC was unequivocal in its condemnation of the Spanish Popular Front: "La guerre civile a éclaté en Espagne parce que la dictature du Front Populaire (Frente Popular), menée par les Soviets, était devenue intolérable au pays.....Communisme = Tyrannie + Assassinat.... Les responsabilités de la guerre civile sont toute entière du côté du Front Populaire".¹⁰⁷¹ The UNC linked the revolutionary actions and laws of the Spanish Popular Front with the 'crimes' of the French incarnation, such as the dissolution of the right-wing leagues. Communist savages and brutes recruited among the purported defenders of liberty while Franco only allowed indigenous and strictly disciplined men to join his cause.¹⁰⁷²

"Et l'on prétend que nous sommes en République!"

The UNC's belief, influenced by the culture of war, that the Popular Front was a foreign power in occupation akin to the German enemy of times past led it to question the continued existence of the Republic. During 1937, two incidents led the UNC to this position. In March 1937, violence between Popular Front supporters and the police heightened tensions in France. Bloodshed followed the PSF's screening of a family film in the working-class area of Clichy. The left saw this as a provocation and organised a demonstration. After PSF members were evacuated from the cinema, police clashed with marchers. Five people were killed and hundreds more injured. The Popular Front came in for intense criticism from the right because the Socialist mayor, the communist deputy for Clichy and a communist councillor had sanctioned the protest.¹⁰⁷³ The UNC accused the 'elected Muscovites' of fomenting trouble. Aubert questioned whether freedom of expression in France still existed if one could not criticise the left without the fear of an officially licensed counter-demonstration.¹⁰⁷⁴ The violence at Clichy

¹⁰⁷⁰ H. Roure, 'La comédie de la neutralité', *La Vdc*, 29 August 1936.

¹⁰⁷¹ A. Goudaert, 'Français, Restez Français !', *La Vdc*, 11 November 1936.

¹⁰⁷² Ibid.

¹⁰⁷³ Kennedy, *Reconciling France*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁰⁷⁴ H. Aubert, 'Le Deuil de la Liberté', *La Vdc*, 27 March 1937.

provided the Jeunes de Limoges with evidence of the current democratic regime's status as a camouflaged dictatorship.¹⁰⁷⁵

The Cagoule plot, in which right-wing conspirators conspired to overthrow the regime, supplied further grist to the mill. In certain sections of the press the UNC stood accused of involvement in the planned coup. Goudaert claimed that the association was under attack from all sides. Radicals, socialists, and members of the FOP and FNCR were now adversaries of the association.¹⁰⁷⁶ Among the more radical elements of the UNC's provincial press, the Cagoule affair aroused anger and racism. Published in the JUNC's *Entre Nous*, the article *Le Cagoulard* left the reader in little doubt about the cagoulard's non-French origin: "Si on parvient à lui arracher sa cagoule on lui trouverait sans doute les yeux brides de l'Asiatique, le nez busqué d'un du 'Ghetto', les lèvres épaisses d'un rastaquouère, et dans ses poches de l'argent venant un peu de tous les pays....Pouah!....".¹⁰⁷⁷ De Cromières alleged that the 'vampires' of the Jewish Front had framed the veterans in question for the crime of terrorism.¹⁰⁷⁸

In the eyes of the UNC, the events of late 1937 were proof positive of the Popular Front's sinister plans. *La Voix du combattant* concluded: "Décidément, ce pays est mûr pour la dictature... Ce sont des méthodes bolchevistes qui sont ainsi instaurées en France... Et l'on prétend que nous sommes en République!".¹⁰⁷⁹ In Paris, the policy making committee of the JUNC condemned the harassment of veterans while the police turned a blind eye to communist arms dumps. The *jeunes* compared the current situation to that of living under a totalitarian regime:

Dès lors, il est inadmissible que soient plus longtemps maintenus en prison des inculpés qui ignorent encore ce qui leur est véritablement reproché; ou alors, avouons tout de suite que nous sommes comme en Russie ou en Allemagne, où les citoyens ne sont libres que dans la mesure où le Gouvernement les y autorise.¹⁰⁸⁰

¹⁰⁷⁵ J. Redondin, 'Réflexions d'un Jeune', *Le Combattant du Centre*, May 1937.

¹⁰⁷⁶ UNC/EC, 5 February 1938.

¹⁰⁷⁷ 'Le Cagoulard', *Entre Nous*, April 1938.

¹⁰⁷⁸ G. de Cromières, 'Et la France !', *Le Combattant du Centre*, July 1938.

¹⁰⁷⁹ 'La dictature de la CGT', *La Vdc*, 18 December 1937.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Le Bureau National des Jeunes de l'UNC, 'La justice et la liberté: Mauvais exemple', *La Vdc*, 25 December 1937.

This injustice led the JUNC to question the true nature of the government and whether France was now a police state.¹⁰⁸¹ In May 1937, Jean Redondin of the Limoges JUNC section voiced the widely held concern that the government was now a dictatorship.¹⁰⁸² In December 1937, the JUNC's policy-making committee expressed similar concerns.¹⁰⁸³ If the government was prepared to arrest and imprison citizens arbitrarily then it would soon execute them without trial. Frenchmen were faced with a choice: react now or suffer revolution, dictatorship, civil and foreign war.¹⁰⁸⁴

This belligerence was not new. From the start, the UNC reacted to the perceived communist threat with aggression. Members of the Rassemblement were united by one aim: "Que le Communisme soit combattu et pourchassé".¹⁰⁸⁵ Galland placed the French flag in juxtaposition to the standard of the Soviet Union in order to express the battle between the two: "Nous avons opposé le drapeau tricolore au drapeau rouge.... Nous ne désirons pas la bataille. Ah! certes non! Mais s'il faut se battre, on se battra. Et toute attaque aura sa riposte; et la vérité sera opposée à toute calomnie".¹⁰⁸⁶ Underlining the need to destroy rather than merely wound communism, Arnault of the JUNC vowed that the veterans would 'have its skin'. The *anciens* and the *jeunes* would fight 'ferociously' against the 'crime' and 'treason' of communism.¹⁰⁸⁷ As we have seen, some provincial sections such as the one in Antibes advocated a potentially violent action to rid France once and for all of the Popular Front.¹⁰⁸⁸

In October 1936, Georges Merchiez called on members to be vigilant, as, in the event that the Popular Front failed, the 'scum' on the left would continue the battle in the streets. Murder and rape would follow and blood would flow.¹⁰⁸⁹ After the violence at Clichy, Lagrée, president of the Ille-et-Vilaine youth section, reminded his readers that in the face of oppression, insurrection was not only a right but also a duty.¹⁰⁹⁰ Still, would the UNC have undertaken armed action? Lebecq warned that communist insurgents were planning for an armed struggle. In this

¹⁰⁸¹ Le Bureau National des Jeunes de l'UNC, 'La justice et la liberté: Mauvais exemple', *La Vdc*, 25 December 1937.

¹⁰⁸² J. Redondin, 'Réflexions d'un Jeune', *Le Combattant du Centre*, May 1937.

¹⁰⁸³ Le Bureau National des Jeunes de l'UNC, 'La justice et la liberté: Mauvais exemple', *La Vdc*, 25 December 1937.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸⁵ J. Goy, 'Le Rassemblement français est en marche', *La Vdc*, 1 August 1936.

¹⁰⁸⁶ P. Galland, 'Les Rassembleurs et les Diviseurs', *La Vdc*, 4 August 1934.

¹⁰⁸⁷ M. Arnault, 'Le communisme, nous aurons sa peau', *La Vdc*, 5 December 1936.

¹⁰⁸⁸ FM, 19 940 500: 229, document dated 20 June 1937.

¹⁰⁸⁹ G. Merchiez, 'Vers la... Cassure', *La Vdc*, 10 October 1936.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Jh. Lagrée, 'Liberté', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, 15 April 1937.

event the UNC would combat communism in the street. Though the former president stated that the UNC would not provoke such a confrontation, his appeal to members to 'use the same means as them' is unclear. Perhaps this meant that in the case of a revolution the veterans would respond with armed force. It is possible that he was advocating the stockpiling of arms, an action he claimed the communists were already undertaking:

Ils ont des dépôts d'armes et on a fabriqué des grenades pour l'Espagne, mais toutes ne sont pas parties là-bas. Il faut que vous ayez la volonté de barrer la route au communisme... Vos dirigeants sont là pour vous aider, mais il faut que vous soyez prêts à la lutte. Le travail que vous aurez à faire sera personnel et il ne faut pas compter sur le voisin. Nous donnerons notre peau pour des hommes qui en valent la peine et non pour des pleutres ou des lâches.... Nous subirons la lutte de rue si elle se présente, mais nous ne provoquerons pas.... Il faut combattre et abattre le communisme et pour cela, employer les mêmes moyens qu'eux. Quand vous aurez mis le communisme à bas, nous pourrons reconstruire une France aussi belle que dans le passé.¹⁰⁹¹

In March 1938, Lebecq repeated his warning to *Le Figaro*. In the name of French civilisation against soviet barbarity, the veterans were resolved, if necessary, to 'once again take up their arms'.¹⁰⁹² Speaking before 450 members at Saint-Malo, Alexis Thomas of the Lorraine group denounced Stalin's control of French domestic policy by means of the CGT. Thomas warned provincial members: "...le moment est venu d'opposer un barrage au communisme envahisseur".¹⁰⁹³ *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine* reported that attendees 'literally drank his words'. Thomas' call to stand-up to the communist invader received an ovation.¹⁰⁹⁴

By March 1938, when the UNC joined the UF's call for a government of public safety, the association despaired of the situation in France. In the eyes of the UNC, the Popular Front victory was indistinguishable from communist revolution. The government's allegedly draconian actions over Clichy and the Cagoule plot saw the UNC claim that the Republic was either threatened or had been supplanted by dictatorship. The threat to the French nation raised the prospect of armed action in return. After all, electoral action to remove the Popular Front was anathema to the veterans. The violent removal of those believed to be enemies of the

¹⁰⁹¹ AN F⁷ 12966, 'Réunion dite de "Rassemblement français" organisée par les groupements nationaux du IXe arrondissement, Salle du Petit Journal, 21 rue Cadet, le 25 février', 26 February 1937.

¹⁰⁹² '«Devant la carence de l'opinion les anciens combattants s'emploient à réveiller le pays...», nous déclare M. Georges Lebecq avant la réunion de Wagram', *Le Figaro*, 26 March 1938.

¹⁰⁹³ 'Vie du groupe: Saint-Malo', *Le Combattant d'Ille-et-Vilaine*, February 1937.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid.

national interest remained an option. The direct action against the government that the UNC implied was neither Republican nor democratic.

The UNC's ultimate response to the Popular Front would be the campaign for a government of public safety. It is worth noting that the suspension of the democratic process and the eviction from power of democratically elected representatives was not a desire confined to the Parisian leadership. On 20 March 1938, a meeting of the Seine-Inférieure group in Rouen, representing 28,000 veterans and 270 sections, adopted an *ordre du jour* specifying that a government be formed of men from outside the parties and parliament.¹⁰⁹⁵ *L'UNC de Normandie* reported that a meeting of section presidents had endorsed the plan and that the Rouen section had begun to collect signatures to a petition.¹⁰⁹⁶ On 27 March, 100 youth section delegates attended a meeting of section presidents of the Yonne Groupe at the congress of Villeneuve-Archevêque. The *jeunes* approved a motion in favour of the constitution of an extra-parliamentary government and the suspension of parliament.¹⁰⁹⁷ This motion was published in all the newspapers of the department. Support was also expressed at the departmental congress of the Rhône group.¹⁰⁹⁸ Sections of the UNC and UF began to work more closely with each other. The Ardèche groups suggested a joint national congress, under the presidency of Jean Goy and Pichot. Representatives of the UF and UNC addressed united audiences across France: Pichot and Jean Goy at Lyon, Pichot and Berthier at Bordeaux. From October 1938 to July 1939, most UNC meetings included the UF, under the banner of the campaign for public safety.

Conclusion

Prost assigns little value to veteran discourse. He claims that it was a religious or laicised sermon in which the veterans invited the French to emulate the veterans' civic virtue. The key to this interpretation is the alleged disjunction between veteran discourse and political reality. Politicians were reduced to stereotypes and allegories.¹⁰⁹⁹ The veterans alleged that all parties

¹⁰⁹⁵ 'L'activité de nos groupes: Seine Inférieure', *La Vdc*, 2 April 1938.

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'L'Assemblée de Présidents de Sections du Groupe, réunie 20 mars, réclame un Gouvernement de Salut Public dégagé de toutes attaches politiciennes', *L'UNC de Normandie*, April 1938; J. Toutain, 'La Pétition de l'UNC et le Gouvernement de Salut Public', *L'UNC de Normandie*, May 1938.

¹⁰⁹⁷ 'Les présidents de Sections du Groupe de l'Yonne au Congrès de Villeneuve-Archevêque', *La Vdc*, 16 April 1938.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 'Congrès départemental du Groupe du Rhône', *La Vdc*, 14 May 1938.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Prost, III, p. 176.

and politicians worked for interest groups, were divided by narrow dogmas inadaptable to modern problems, and simply too old.¹¹⁰⁰ The veterans avoided the discussion of 'real' daily politics. They presented France as a simple dichotomy between the 'good' politics of the veterans and the 'bad' politics of the parties.¹¹⁰¹ Bombastic rhetoric was designed to reinforce the enthusiasm of members but little else. In spite of the veteran's anti-parliamentarianism, therefore, the incantatory nature of their discourse set them apart fundamentally from the extreme right. Although one can read their discourse as fascist, the veterans' refusal to treat a section of their fellow citizens as enemies meant that they could not have launched such an action themselves.¹¹⁰²

However, the veterans did treat an important group of their compatriots as adversaries. Their discourse intensified throughout the Popular Front's tenure in power and sought to deny communists and socialists a place in French and Western civilisation. Whether the UNC used the language of the culture of war consciously or not, it is nevertheless present in the association's discourse. The association used the language of a conflict between civilisation and barbarity against whomever it designated as enemies of France, in this case the communists, as it had been used against the German foe. It preached a form of reconciliation but this entailed the union of forces deemed 'national' against those considered to be 'anti-national'. In essence this would pit the forces of the right against the left.

As political leagues and extremist groups took to the streets, an atmosphere of civil war developed. The public discourse of the UNC was not moderate. After 1936, the UNC undermined the Republic in a variety of ways. It depicted the democratically elected government as traitorous to France, contrary to a (UNC-defined) national interest and an illegitimate regime that would be removed by force if necessary. In this context, the radical elements of the UNC, and the extremist potential of the movement have been underestimated. Though the government was elected democratically and the Republic continued to function, the veterans denied this fact. The Republic no longer existed. France was simultaneously an occupied nation and a dictatorship. The association discredited both the legal government of France and the elective principle. Furthermore, the government was incompatible with French and Western civilisation. Like the wartime German adversary, the left threatened both. In

¹¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 145.

¹¹⁰² Ibid., p. 179.

response then, the UNC attempted to form an alliance of national forces, but to what end? The association was not a political party and so an electoral alliance was out of the question. Instead, the Rassemblement would be a coalition that was ready to act when the perceived communist threat became too great to tolerate. In sum, these were not the practices of a democratic group.

Conclusion

Sûr de l'affection de notre admirable armée, qui lutte avec un héroïsme admirable contre un ennemi supérieur en nombre et en armes.... Sûr de l'appui des Anciens Combattants que j'ai eu la fierté de commander.... je fais à la France le don de ma personne pour atténuer son malheur.¹¹⁰³

Marshal Pétain, 17 June 1940

Aux problèmes posés, qu'ils fussent moraux, politiques, sociaux ou économiques, nous avons cherché et trouvé des solutions, celles mêmes qui sont, depuis le 10 juillet 1940, la substance de la «Révolution Nationale».¹¹⁰⁴

Henri Pichot

The UNC's desire for rapprochement with Germany, inspired by its anti-communism, declined after Munich.¹¹⁰⁵ The Munich conference in September 1938 was the high-water mark of French pacifism. As 1938 turned to 1939, among the veterans' associations and the population at large the resolve to resist Hitler's demands largely strengthened as pacifism diminished.¹¹⁰⁶ Despite Pichot's presence at Munich, pessimism within the UF grew. The following year the UF, although not resigned to the inevitability of conflict, advocated preparation for war. Nationalism and imperialism marked its national congress in 1939. In March 1939, in response to German actions in central Europe, Pichot and Goy decided to suspend the Comité France-Allemagne, the body through which French and German veterans had met regularly.¹¹⁰⁷ As war seemed likely, both associations called on Daladier to maximise arms production. The veterans' committee in charge of the 20th Armistice celebrations decided to donate the 700,000 F left over to the Caisse autonome de la Défense Nationale with the intention of '[stimulating] the zeal of the French'.¹¹⁰⁸

On 3 September 1939, France declared war on Germany. The *drôle de guerre* that followed witnessed increasing anti-communism in France after the Soviet Union's pact with

¹¹⁰³ Cointet, *La Légion française des combattants*, p. 17.

¹¹⁰⁴ AN 43 AS 8: taken from Pichot's preface to *Les Combattants avaient raison....*, (Paris?, 1940).

¹¹⁰⁵ Gorman, 'The anciens combattants', pp. 81-83.

¹¹⁰⁶ Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 150.

¹¹⁰⁷ 'La dissolution du Comité France-Allemagne', *La Vdc*, 1 April 1939.

¹¹⁰⁸ 'Réliquat du 20^e anniversaire de l'Armistice: Les anciens combattants remettent 700, 000 fr à la Caisse Autonome de la Défense Nationale', *La Vdc*, 21 January 1939.

Germany in August. Months of inaction saw growing *cafard* among troops. Rumours abounded about France's unpreparedness for war and Britain's cynical use of French troops. The Daladier government proved unable to combat defeatist sentiment. These factors combined to bring down Daladier in March 1940. He was replaced by Paul Reynaud.¹¹⁰⁹

On 10 May, Germany invaded France through the Ardennes and not via Belgium, as the French believed they would. The Battle of France was short. Six days later the Germans faced an unhindered advance to Paris. On 14 June, German troops entered Paris. Two days later Pétain succeeded Reynaud as head of government and an armistice was signed on 22 June. It divided France into a northern Occupied Zone and a southern Unoccupied Zone, demobilised all but 100,000 men of the French army, disarmed the naval fleet and landed the French government with the cost of occupation.¹¹¹⁰ On 1 July, the final government of the Third Republic took up residence in the Unoccupied Zone at Vichy. In reality Pétain sought to consolidate his position. Pierre Laval, at the time deputy premier, formulated a plan that would see parliament grant Pétain the powers to revise the constitution. Already approved by the cabinet, parliament met in Vichy to discuss the plan on 9 July. The next day, Pétain, empowered by parliament, put an end to the Third Republic and became head of state.¹¹¹¹

Ultimately, there was no veterans' revolution. On 17 June 1940, in his first address to the nation, Marshal Pétain mentioned the support of the *anciens combattants*.¹¹¹² Would the new regime finally take heed of the veterans and grant them their long-pursued role in the leadership of the nation? On 28 August 1940, Vichy's council of ministers adopted a law that merged all veterans' associations into the Légion française des combattants. Intended to be 'the eyes and the ears' of the Marshal, according to Vallat, the Légion would help to spread the principles of the National Revolution in collaboration with the public powers.¹¹¹³ Members of the defunct UNC joined the leadership of the movement. Péricard became vice-president representing the army. Lebecq was chosen as president of the occupied zone, although the Légion was prohibited in the north.¹¹¹⁴ The *directoire* of the Légion contained 15 members, of which Aze, du Plessis de

¹¹⁰⁹ Jackson, *Dark Years*, pp. 113-118.

¹¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-133.

¹¹¹² Cointet, *La Légion française des combattants*, p. 17.

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-59.

¹¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Grenédan, Emile Goudaert and Vimal de Fléchac were former UNC members. From the UF, Blanchard, Lhospied, Maupoil and Mercier had all been members of their association's executive committee in 1940.¹¹¹⁵ In the choice of departmental presidents, where the selected candidate had belonged to an association before the war former UNC members held the lion's share (13/45 compared to the UF's 7).¹¹¹⁶

The veterans supported the foundation of the Vichy regime because, in their opinion, it was moral and national. In Pétain they found a leader who they believed could represent their views and address their concerns. As evidenced in their campaigns for state reform, both the UNC and the UF had desired to see a personality such as the Marshal take over the government of France. The new regime would satisfy the veterans' long standing demands for authority after years of alleged parliamentary decadence. The veterans supported Vichy's removal of elected mayors and the imprisonment of political figures and suspect individuals.

Though the veterans supported Vichy, Prost writes that this fact does not undermine their legalistic inclination. The veterans endorsed the removal of enemies of the national interest by a legal regime. During the thirties, they did not eliminate these enemies in the course of a political struggle as Italian Fascists and German Nazis did. However, given that the veterans were neither fascist in programme, associational structure nor political tactics, it is problematic to prove their legalism in comparison with fascism. The UNC did not partake in violent physical confrontation but as we have seen in their opposition to the left that did not mean that they rejected confrontation *tout court*. Should one discount the UNC's often violent discourse because it did not transmute into physical violence? The UNC desired an authoritarian regime be implemented through legal reform. It never intended to take power by violent means. One should not therefore judge its failure to do so as indicative of the movement's moderation.

With the benefit of hindsight, one can dismiss veteran discourse as 'situated in an unreal universe, where action had an incantatory function'.¹ The incantatory function of veteran

¹¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 314-316. There were 45 departmental presidents of which 15 had no previous affiliation to a veterans' association. The 13 former UNC members were from: the Ardèche (former group president), the Corrèze (former member of the national council and the policy-making committee), the Dordogne (former group president), the Drôme (former group president), the Hérault, the Haute Loire, the Basses-Pyrénées (former departmental president), the Hautes-Pyrénées (former departmental president), the Rhône (former section president), the Vienne and the Haute Vienne. The number of departmental presidents drawn from other associations were as follows: UF, 7; UNP, 1; Fédération. Bourbonnaise des AC, 1; the SDC, 1; the Fédération Maginot, 3; the AGMG, 1; the UMAC, 1; the Fédération des Poilus de la Loire, 1; the Gueules Cassées, 1.

discourse is proved by the fact that the veterans did not act upon it. Yet once again this depends upon using an outcome to dismiss veteran discourse as lacking seriousness. If one accepts the incantatory function of their discourse one must also accept that contemporaries understood it as such too, a point that is difficult to prove.

One can argue that UNC discourse had some grounding in political reality. Articles in *La Voix du combattant* dealt with contemporary political issues. Though verbal attacks often targeted the nameless and undefined *politicien*, this did not mean that specific politicians were not named. Particularly after May 1936, when the left came in for venomous criticism, the UNC was not afraid to single out politicians and parties in its bitter campaign against parliamentarianism. UNC discourse drew on the influence of the culture of war to target violently communists and socialists. The left, depicted as an anti-national force, replaced the German wartime enemy. The association relied on wartime language and ideas to portray their political enemies as incompatible with French and Western civilisation. Through the accusation that the left had won power only to then install a soviet dictatorship the UNC cast doubt on the legitimacy of the Republic at this time.

A proportion of veterans heeded the UNC's supplications to action. On 6 February 1934, several thousand members answered the call to march. The UNC took part in the violence that brought down an elected government. Some veterans were involved in the incidents on the Place de la Concorde early in the riot. Moreover one should not ignore the fact that the UNC clashed with police in their march to the Elysée. Veterans returned to the Concorde late in the evening and took part in renewed violence. Certainly, not all UNC veterans agreed with the GRP's march. The association lost members yet it gained the approval of some provincial sections. It also attracted new recruits.

Though the UNC did not explicitly state its aim was to bring down the government, it claimed credit for the fall of Daladier and the arrival of Doumergue in power, an action that reversed the parliamentary mandate of 1932. Aubert claimed that without the UNC's presence on the night, the Republic 'would have had its day' (*aurait vécu*), a view shared by Isaac.¹¹¹⁷ What this meant is open to interpretation. Perhaps the event marked a *coup d'arrêt* in the decline of the regime, after which the Doumergue administration could begin the process of recovery.¹¹¹⁸

¹¹¹⁷ H. Aubert, 'Le Bilan d'un soir tragique', *La Vdc*, 17 February 1934; Prost, I, p. 164.

¹¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Yet the UNC and sections of the right placed great hope in the new government for another reason. They believed that reform of the regime would not be long in coming. This reform would satisfy their more or less authoritarian demands, especially given the appointment of Tardieu, Louis Marin and Pétain to governmental posts. Whatever Aubert and Isaac meant, one can argue that the association supported an illegal action that toppled a democratically elected government. By associating its action with the 'people' and laying claim to a 'Republican' action against a government that was not, the UNC posed its own popular sovereignty against the democratic sovereignty of the Chamber. In this way it challenged the right of parliament to govern France.

Discourse on youth in the UNC was a component of its authoritarianism. The associations used the perceived youthfulness of veteran ideas to reinforce its claim to the government of France and further undermine the claim of 'aged' politicians to power. The JUNC pursued an openly political action. Its programme drew on the themes of the contemporary young intellectual milieu, especially in its call for spiritual revolution and a palingenetic vision of French society. The JUNC's plans for reform took two forms. Initially, the *jeunes* called for a revolution both in the national *esprit* and the French state, which would entail the destruction of its institutions. As the thirties progressed, the *jeunes* came to value authority, evidenced in its support for the UNC and UF's plan in March 1938 and its statements on returning authority to France. Either way, the Third Republic as it stood, that is, as a parliamentary democracy, would not have survived.

If one defines the veterans' movement as a pillar of a French democratic political culture it appears that co-operation with anti-democratic organisations was out of character. It follows from this that such co-operation was anomalous and limited to a minority of the movement or perhaps the extreme right 'seduced' the *anciens combattants*. However, one should not seek to define the essence or nature of the UNC or the combatants' movement. To do so leads one to classify examples of discourse and action as either 'real' (and therefore revelatory of the true identity of the group) or 'unreal' (and so against the group's nature). If one examines the UNC from a relational perspective based on its programme and tactics then co-operation with the extreme right becomes less mysterious. This political involvement shows that some UNC

veterans went beyond 'cathartic' expressions of frustration, bitterness and spite against politicians.¹¹¹⁹

As the thirties progressed, the UNC adapted its political tactics and discourse to the demands of the time. Astute enough to observe the structure and tactics of the thriving leagues, the UNC adopted a league-style action precisely because it had proved successful for *other* groups. Action combattante not only represented the veterans' desire to enter into politics but also their willingness to adjust their tactics in relation to others, especially the Croix de Feu. The association's later political initiative, the Rassemblement français, saw the UNC once again alter its political tactics to suit a new situation. For the first time, the association explicitly encouraged national and local co-operation with political groups that were violently opposed to the Third Republic.

The veterans shared common ideas with extreme right-wing groups and this facilitated co-operation. It allowed members to lend their support to several organisations at once. The Croix de Feu and the UNC competed for the same clientele, laid claim to a common heritage and espoused largely similar ideas. Moreover, Goy and Lebecq endorsed the leagues and encouraged informal and formal collaboration among members. It is unsurprising that members had few qualms over relegating loyalty to a single group to the practice of multiple memberships. This collaboration showed the desire of some veterans to engage in action with groups that could not be described as Republican, even if there is still disagreement among historians over their fascist characteristics. The UNC was not a fascist threat to the Republic yet it was not a major obstacle to the development of a French fascism. It did not inculcate in its members an attitude opposed to fascism. Prost is wrong to assert that all veterans rejected the Croix de Feu. The veterans, like French society, were not immune to fascism. In the end, common political discourse, ideas and actions meant that extreme right-wing groups did not find it difficult to recruit from the UNC.

The veterans' plans for state reform did not allow for the continuation of the Republic in the democratic and parliamentary sense of the word. A leading 'national' personality, probably from the armed forces, would lead the government. Around him, a group of honest, competent and unelected men (such as the veterans) would form the government. The veterans' movement though not in power would become part of the state apparatus perhaps as a surveillance force.

¹¹¹⁹ Prost, III, p. 213.

Parliament, reduced in size and disarmed of its obstructive powers, would ratify the decisions of the executive. Replacing the Senate as an institution of the state, a new chamber made up of economists and fathers (who would naturally work in the 'national interest') would direct the economy and manage the professions through corporations. With political pluralism severely restricted, the parties of the left would most likely be outlawed. Enemies of the state, that is to say those deemed to be in opposition to the single national interest, would be punished. If measured by the standard of the Fourth and Fifth Republics, one may judge the veteran's plans as objective modifications intended to make the regime more efficient. However, one should not consider these 'modern' regimes as an historical norm and the goal to which all French were striving. The UNC's plans would make the regime more 'efficient' but only according to its own definition of efficient government: a permanent authoritarian right-wing government of veterans, under a military personality, which would restore order and reduce the role of parliamentary democracy. Close to the plans of the right and extreme right, the UNC's programme for state reform was not of the Republican centre.

Was the veterans' movement integral to a French democratic political culture? Given the social, cultural and political heterogeneity of France during the interwar period it is problematic to assert that this democratic culture existed at all. One cannot say how French citizens internalised a certain set of values, whether democratic or not.¹¹²⁰ The same is true for the *mouvement ancien combattant*. With a membership of 3 million veterans, heterogeneity characterised the associations. Within the UNC itself, activists, extremists and those who favoured relative moderation disagreed over the meaning of civic action, the veterans' role in society and over the meaning of the UNC itself. What one can say is that the discourse and actions of not a few UNC veterans were not compatible with democracy. The association was close to the right and extreme right in its plans for state reform, its discourse and its programme. It readily co-operated on a national and provincial level with groups of this political persuasion.

The UNC was not part of a French democratic political culture. In casting doubt on the capability of Republican institutions and parliamentarians to represent the national interest and in posing themselves as the true representatives of these, the veterans undermined the regime. They did this in a variety of ways. Parliament was branded as incompetent, corrupt, selfish and was regarded with suspicion. Governments and deputies worked for their own career interests and

¹¹²⁰ Passmore, 'The construction of crisis', p. 164; Dobry, 'February 1934', pp. 145-146.

not those of the nation. As an institution then parliament acted contrary to the will of the nation. As it stood, parliamentary democracy in the Third Republic was unsuitable. In contrast, the veterans of the UNC represented the true will of the people. Gifted with the necessary competence for leadership, they were better able to express this than parliamentarians. Furthermore, the veterans' claim to power was not based on the elective principal, the usual route to power in the Third Republic. It was based on the historical legitimacy of the trench experience. Consequently, veteran discourse was not suited to electoral politics. When the UNC spoke of evicting parliamentarians from the Chamber this would not come after a successful electoral campaign, which the veterans rejected. It implied an extra-parliamentary route to government.

Authoritarian in its objectives and willing to co-operate with anti-Republican and anti-democratic organisations, the UNC provided recruits for and shared ideas with extreme right-wing groups in France. The UNC's general assemblies, propaganda tours, and its national and local congresses exposed members to ideas and initiatives that were not democratic. Would the veterans have installed an authoritarian regime if the Second World War had not broken? However much one speculates, war *did* break out. In spite of all their plans, the veterans *did not* install an authoritarian regime. This outcome (or indeed this *lack* of an outcome) should not lead one to dismiss all that the veterans did and said as 'boasting, sabre-rattling and bluster'.¹¹²¹ One should not remove all serious intent from their 'thundering' rhetoric and claim to see it for what it was: 'an empty discourse' and 'an admittance of impotence'.¹¹²² It is not surprising that the veterans' associations supported Pétain in 1940. They were, after all, part of the historical hinterland of the Vichy regime.

¹¹²¹ Prost, III, p. 163.

¹¹²² Ibid., p. 163.

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