

PIERRE DRIEU LA ROCHELLE:  
THE DOCTRINE OF '*fascisme français*'

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# UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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	Page
Chapter I: Fin de siècle and Fascism .....	1
Chapter II: The First World War and the 'Twenties .....	20
Chapter III: Philosophy of Action and History .....	47
Chapter IV: 1934: The Elite, the Party, and the National Revolution.	74
Chapter V: Engagement: The P.P.F. and National Fascism .....	101
Chapter VI: Engagement: Collaboration and European Fascism .....	131
Bibliography .....	151

## ABSTRACT

The French intellectual has always held a prominent position in determining France's future. He represents the experimental conscience embracing a moral ideal erected above a national, political and social framework. The intellectual equates the dilemma of man's present and future with that of his society. The role of the intellectual is to seek and assess the forces of change within his society, evaluating them on the basis of his individual moral principles. Pierre Drieu La Rochelle was an intellectual who judged his society as morally, socially, and politically regressive, and advanced an alternative in a doctrine that envisioned a new order—an age of renaissance—for himself, for France, and for Europe. Pierre Drieu La Rochelle called this alternative fascism.

Drieu was one of the most original theoreticians of the doctrine of French fascism. This study is devoted to the examination of this intellectual and this doctrine. The examination will discuss the environment of post-war France, Drieu's development within it, and his assessment of it. It will also deal with the problem of why a man of letters, superior in intelligence and foresight, advanced a doctrine that would resolve in fascism the dilemmas of the individual, the nation, and European civilization. Fascism was the great experiment of the inter-war generation, of which Pierre Drieu La Rochelle was a spokesman.

## Chapter I

# FIN DE SIÈCLE AND FASCISM

The most fundamental element of pessimism is its method of conceiving the paths towards deliverance. A man would not go very far in the examination either of the laws of his own wretchedness or of fate, which so much shock the ingenuousness of our pride, if he were not borne up by the hope of putting an end to these tyrannies by an effort to be attempted with the help of a whole band of companions.

—Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*

Fascism in France was a phenomenon restricted to the post-war period. However its origins developed from the traditions of French counter-revolutionary thought, the crises of the Third Republic, and the intellectual developments in *fin de siècle*. Fascism developed on the basis of a conservative system of values enhanced by a revolutionary method within and against the Third Republic.

Traditional right-wing thought in France was represented by Joseph de Maistre and Hippolyte Taine in their attack on the principles of the French Revolution. Joseph de Maistre concentrated his fire on the revolution's deification of man as the foundation of civil society. He considered this principle as false and contrary to the traditional authority of Church and Monarch. Furthermore, he noted that human reason exalted by the revolution had destroyed order by destroying the faith essential to human existence. The individual required more than rational processes to construct a cultural, social, and political order of unity and stability. Man in civil society required authorities independent of his individual reason preserved by faith and religion in the Nation and the Church. De Maistre conceived of a theocracy synthesizing both the faiths of France and Roman Catholicism to ensure an historical progress founded in national unity and religious authority.

The major indictment of the revolution was its negation of authority and unity, the consequences of which were anarchy and disunity. The unity and authority violated by the revolution resulted in its ultimate failure. A nation required both elements to establish a true general will countering the political heresy of individual reason.

Awareness of the conflict existing from the effects of France's revolution was expressed in two concepts: in the *pays réel* of a nation's historical tradition, and the *pays légal* of a state's constitutional establishment. De Maistre regarded this distinction as fundamental, noting: "The *natural* constitution of a nation is always anterior to its *written* constitution and can dispense with it. . . . Every constitution is properly speaking a *creation* in the full sense of the word, and all *creation* is beyond man's powers. A written law is only the declaration of an anterior and unwritten law."<sup>1</sup> The constitution of the *pays légal* must therefore be in accordance with the dictates of historical tradition in the *pays réel*. Government must be the spokesman of the Nation as a community to which the individual must submit as a good higher than himself. The individual must lose himself in the national communal existence devoting himself to the principles of historical authority and religious faith.<sup>2</sup>

The destruction of the nation as a living organism was attacked by Hippolyte Taine. Whereas De Maistre mourned what France had lost by the Revolution, Taine attacked what France had become in the Third Republic. De Maistre's distinction between the *pays réel* and the *pays légal* found further development in Taine's critique. He distinguished between two facets of reason—a *raison raisonnante* and a *raison qui s'ignore*—a conscious and unconscious reason. *Raison raisonnante* was

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<sup>1</sup>J. S. McClelland, *The French Right: From De Maistre to Maurras* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.



individual reason attempting to comprehend the problems of civil society, and by logically formulated principles, to resolve them objectively. *Raison qui s'ignore* referred to wisdom acquired through a history of nation and people as the subjective basis to equate contemporary civil society with its tradition. The objective and subjective *raison* were two mutual foundations of national development.<sup>3</sup>

Taine deduced three principles forming a nation's future: race, environment, and momentum—the internal spring, the external pressure, and the present initiative—which collectively must be considered in determining the future. The naive assumptions of Rousseau's *Social Contract* stating the feasibility of the creation of a national and political will were fallacious. The true contract was not the effort of a single will combining with other wills, nor the effort of one generation, but the product of the will of a national race and its historical tradition. "The point is to discover it [the nation], if it exists, and not to put it to the vote. . . . The social and political mould into which a nation may enter and remain is not subject to its will but determined by its character and its past. It is essential that even in its least traits, it should be shaped on the living traits to which it is applied; otherwise it will burst and fall to pieces."<sup>4</sup>

The traditional doctrines of the Right formed a concept of the nation based on certain key principles. It stressed unity rather than

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Cited in Herbert Tint, *The Decline of French Patriotism, 1870-1940* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), p. 73.

diversity, the national interest above individual interest, and the call for an elite to lead and act in conformity with this national interest. It emphasized conformity, unity, and authority over the individual for a common national foundation.<sup>5</sup> Implicit in the writings of De Maistre and Taine is the concept of the nation as a living physical being, an organism developing from historical traditions that embodied a community and a nation. Both theoreticians also noted the disease affecting the national organism draining the moral, cultural, and political vigour of France. She was undermined with the predominance of the *pays légal* over the *pays réel* in a political sense, the predominance of *égalité* that destroyed *fraternité* in a social sense, and by an objective *raison* supreme over a subjective *raison*. The figure of these ills was the Third Republic.

The French Right assumed the role of ridding France of her political disease. The Boulanger crisis was one such instance of the attempt to replace the democratic principle with the authoritarian principle. The authoritarian doctrine stressed a military, political, and national leader. The leader would unite the nation under a single individual, conciliate class differences, and abolish parliamentary indecision and political corruption. The attempted coup against the Republic failed only because of the lack of resolution by Boulanger who balked and fled from Paris. The Republic had won by default. However, the authoritarian mystique remained in spite of the coup's failure

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Curtis, *Three Against the Third Republic: Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 149.

enabling the Right to maintain the ideal without the harsh reality of political practise. The authoritarian leader represented a mystique to those who wished to believe in it. The figure embodied the national will uniting classes rather than dividing them. He was a figure above classes who would act only in the national interest embodied in his will. He would restore the lost vision of grandeur that the Republic lacked since its birth.

The Dreyfus Affair has been rightly considered the *crise de conscience* for the further development of the intellectual's engagement in the future of France. The role of the intellectual was paramount in the affair. The case became a national issue with a fundamental conflict of the vision of France. The French intelligentsia responded to the crisis, adopting a Dreyfusard position in defense of the individual or an anti-Dreyfusard position in defense of the nation. Typical of this intellectual engagement was Paul Brulat who stressed the imperative of engagement. The intellectual must remain distinct no longer but must direct and articulate the goals of the French people. No longer should he remain aloof in the national crisis but he must make France conscious of the gravity of such issues that would influence her future.

The Dreyfus Affair provided intellectuals with a sense of mission. They were responsible individuals who, by their profession, could perceive the course which France followed approving or condemning the ultimate goal. They represented a vocal conscience of the events that would determine the future of France. Brulat noted: "The writer must not seek refuge in the exclusive cult of his art, when the great

interests of humanity are at stake. The great task to ennoble society, to seek truth, to work for progress is especially incumbent upon him."<sup>6</sup> Intellectuals refused any middle ground in the Dreyfus Affair, gravitating either to the Right or Left. The French Right was nationalist and Catholic defending an aesthetic concept of France's historical tradition against the parliamentary democracy of the Third Republic. The French Left worked for revolutionary change. However, the defense of Dreyfus and consequently of the Republic forced revolutionary principles to adopt an evolutionary compromise with bourgeois politics. The subsequent rehabilitation of Alfred Dreyfus was a victory for the Republic and the Left. But it was a victory that created a further polarization between the Left, whose interests lay in the Republic defended, and the Right, whose interests lay in the Republic condemned.

The Dreyfus Affair was a watershed for the development of the radical Right. A romantic, vibrant, chauvinistic patriotism had been the prerogative of the revolutionary Left.<sup>7</sup> However, with the defense of the Republic by the moderate and extreme Left in the Dreyfus Affair, the radical Right gained both the nationalist and revolutionary banner. It did so without defending the Republic which it distinguished from the Nation. The Republic stood at the expense of the Nation and the Right expressed the revolutionary appeal advocating the overthrow of democracy. Nationalism assumed a violent anti-parliamentarian attitude.

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<sup>6</sup>Paul Brulat, *Violence et raison* (Paris: Librairie Tresse et Stock, 1898), p. 52.

<sup>7</sup>René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France: From 1815 to de Gaulle* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), p. 205.

Further elements contributing to the development of extremes in the French Right were found in the period characterized as *fin de siècle*. This period witnessed the effort in particular that sought to overcome a growing profound cultural decay in European society. The perceptions of Charles Maurras, Maurice Barrès, and Georges Sorel reflected a basic preoccupation in the search for the means of regeneration in the face of a growing disease or malaise within their society. All perceived in their society an agent of dehumanization implicit in rational intelligence and objective politics. This decay was the essence of modernity and was greeted by them with a pessimism bordering on despair. Modernity represented cultural decay and moral bankruptcy in European society. The approach of the twentieth century revealed a general retreat from morality, a growing decline in excellence, the rise of mass mediocrity, and a general European stagnation.<sup>8</sup>

The *fin de siècle* crisis and resolution focused on the impasse of human reason. If rationalism was the source of moral, cultural, and political ills, irrationalism was advanced as the alternative. It was necessary for the will to assert its moral supremacy over reason. Reason, characterized as inert and passive, was the source of decay. Instinct was the source of creative freedom inspiring will and action. The moral and cultural pessimism in reason and the faith placed in the creative forces of instinct was a leap from despair to optimism, from the analysis of doom to a prophecy of regeneration. The cultural despair provided the

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<sup>8</sup>Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1961), p. 57.

impetus for a mystical theory of spiritual individualism as the basis for a politics of national regeneration.<sup>9</sup> This ascendancy of instinct over reason created the elements of a future fascism.

The *fin de siècle* period can be characterized generally by the philosophy of Henri Bergson. He advanced the idea of intuition, or the subjective unconscious as a spontaneous force of spiritual creation embodied in the concept of *élan vital*. This unconscious *élan* was the character, independent of rational mechanical laws of behaviour, that created both its cause and effect. The doctrine of *élan vital* found a welcome audience in intellectuals seeking a new essence of creation with which the individual and his society could overcome the problems of modernity.

The new philosophy exerted a profound influence in the individual and political sphere. The basis for the philosophy of *élan* lay in its stress upon spiritual individualism. Maurice Barrès, a leading figure and spokesman for a new generation, evoked the *culte du moi* to preserve the individual from the malaise of his society. The *moi* or self, was the individual unconscious seeking an *élan* in order to prevent itself from being overcome by the stagnation of its society. The task of the individual was to preserve the integrity of his spirit. Barrès noted: "our morality, our religion, our national feeling have collapsed. . . . While we wait for our masters to create new certainties for us, it is

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<sup>9</sup>Irving Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason: The Social Theories of Georges Sorel* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1961), p. 159.

proper that we should hold on to the one reality we have: the Self."<sup>10</sup>

The *moi* sought expression in reality through passions. Freedom and will in the passions of subjective instinct translated into action revitalized the dynamics of spontaneous energy. The individual created a cult of action, force, and energy expressed first in consciousness and then in reality. He was inspired by a cult of historic heroes, professors of energy, pursuing the highest expression of being in a fulfilled existence.<sup>11</sup>

The cult of energy expressed in violent, revolutionary action was the new doctrine of motivation and a new ethic of morality. Violence was the principle of the revolutionary act and morality. It was a purifying force absent of hatred or vengeance in heroic action. Georges Sorel stated that men engaged in a revolutionary conflict had placed their future in the balance in triumph or defeat. Their violence was the assertion of the dignity of man—"to be ready to defend that dignity in every circumstance with energy, and, if necessary, against oneself, that is Justice."<sup>12</sup> The effort to express an heroic morality in violent action was a movement towards greatness while the lack of effort in passivity was a movement towards decadence.

The cult of energy comprised elements of individualism, amoral action, anti-rationalism and anti-materialism in a revolt by French

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<sup>10</sup>Tint, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Soucy, *Fascism in France: The Case of Maurice Barrès* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (London: Collier-MacMillan Ltd., 1950), p. 207.

youth. The cult stressed action, force, and realism antithetical to rationalism and abstract idealism as the criteria to arrest the decay of modernity in the individual. The cult also stressed the necessity of engagement, especially in the political sphere, to reform the political society that had encouraged these mistakes. It was imperative, therefore, to answer this decadence employing the forces that opposed it, not only philosophically, but also politically in the democracy of the Third Republic.

The attack against democracy in France was mounted because it lacked any basis for national cohesion or direction. The *pays légal* was the expression of the loss of a national ideal, a weakening of its character, and the loss of its capacity for action. In turn, the religious, political, and social structure dissolved, accompanied by a growing disunity in proportion to the loss of this ideal.<sup>13</sup> The democratic principle lacked a body and a soul, as it was without an historical tradition or political authority. Charles Maurras regarded the principle of liberty to be its fundamental mistake. Liberty challenged the authority of the Church and Nation, which was the foundation of the national society. Democracy had corrupted the nation by creating division and discord. It destroyed initiative in its citizens, leading to the decline of the nation. Maurras noted of democracy that it inflicted insidious comforts for the citizen. ". . . It weans him from the habit of thought or personal initiative. Thus, thanks to the state, the civic function of the citizen falls into disuse and atrophies. The

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<sup>13</sup>Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p. 143.



citizen becomes ignorant, lazy, and cowardly. He loses civic sense and civic spirit."<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to liberty, the radical Right advanced the principle of authority to restore a national discipline and a national unity. Authority was opposed to the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, offering instead a national figure to heal social and political divisions and direct the national efforts towards constructive goals. The figure of *l'homme national* in a nationalist hero for Barrès, or a monarch for Maurras, would restore France to her true path. France would possess a government based on historical tradition, which would stress national liberty over individual liberty; a national unity over parliamentary factionalism; a republic whose divisiveness and weakness would be supplanted by a national cohesiveness and vitality.<sup>15</sup>

An important complement to the authoritarian leader was the institution of Catholicism. The Catholic Church was a body ranged against revolution and anarchy. It disciplined the national energies by stressing order, tradition, discipline, hierarchy, and unity within the nation.<sup>16</sup> The Catholic Church had played an important role in France's national and historical progress. Its discipline of sacrifice and struggle gave France national unity. The Catholic Church and the authoritarian leader represented a national, religious, and secular ideal—the discipline and unity of the nation in a *faisceau*. This term

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<sup>14</sup>McClelland, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-218.

<sup>15</sup>Soucy, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

<sup>16</sup>Curtis, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-226.

represented the grouping of the national energies into a collective discipline in a self-imposed authority and a common will. It is not coincidental that the term fascism is derived from *faisceau*.

Another element developed in embryonic form in *fin de siècle* was the theory of a political elite. The political elite was considered capable of positive, direct action expressing a unity of will and doctrine to accomplish the necessary *coup de force* against the Republic. Individuals such as Charles Maurras and Georges Sorel conceived this elite as a revolutionary one. Sorel noted, in fact, that it was the nucleus of a revolution: ". . . the highest goal is the heroic (i.e. aggressive) action performed with a sense of impersonal consecration to the ends of a restricted, delimited group bound together in fervent solidarity and impelled by a passionate confidence in its ultimate triumph in some cataclysmic encounter."<sup>17</sup>

The means to resolve the dilemma posed by democracy was to mobilize against it. *Politique d'abord*, in Maurras' phrase, was the prerequisite for change in every other sphere. The intellectual problem, the social problem, the moral problem, all led back to the political problem.<sup>18</sup> The role of the *Action Française* was to undertake this political action against the Republic. The doctrine of disciplined order and stability, the authority of national leadership, the hierarchy of a mass majority and an elite minority, the role of heroic action as the means of revolutionary initiative, all combined to form the process

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<sup>17</sup>Sorel, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup>Curtis, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

of a regenerated France. These elements would comprise a doctrine of fascism for France. It envisioned a France restored to her classical grandeur, her historical roots, and the creative will of her race.

The philosophy of heroic individualism, the attack against the democracy of the Third Republic, the definition of a revolutionary elite, were the elements directed towards a specific goal—the national revolution. The national revolution would destroy the disease of democracy that France had suffered under since the inception of the Republic. Barrès characterized this malaise stating: ". . . our serious disease is the divisions troubled by a thousand separate wills and a thousand individualistic imaginations. We are crumbling, we do not have a collective knowledge of our goal, or our resources, or our soul."<sup>19</sup> Democracy and progress were antithetical; the former must be destroyed in favour of the latter. The nation had lost its historical ideal. The decline of this ideal was the origin of revolution. Revolutions swept away only what was cast aside but not completely abandoned. A revolution's origin lay in this loss of faith.<sup>20</sup>

The loss of faith heralded the dawn of revolution. Gustave Le Bon noted that the least permanent character of a nation was its institutions. The democratic institution could effect no real transformation in society for ". . . the destinies of peoples are determined by their character and not by their government."<sup>21</sup> The problem remained

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<sup>19</sup>McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>20</sup>Le Bon, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

as to what conditions would prepare the revolutionary atmosphere. Sorel solved this in the concept of revolutionary myth. The myth evoked a body of subjective, heroic images in the consciousness of a people, party, or class. The historical-revolutionary myth aroused images to inspire action: ". . . inclinations which recur to the mind with the insistence of instincts in all the circumstances of life; and which give an aspect of complete reality to the hopes of immediate action by which . . . men can reform their desires, passions, and mental activity."<sup>22</sup>

The atmosphere created by the myth would mobilize the masses and precipitate the revolution. The myth, invoked by an elite or leader, could not only spark revolutionary violence but also maintain it. Revolutionary violence would consume and cleanse a stagnant society embodied in the Republic. The revolutionary spirit of heroic action was the means to guarantee the national revolution. It would create a new set of social, political, and national values that would collectively unite and discipline the nation.

Pierre Drieu La Rochelle was born in 1893 in Paris. His family life was never cohesive. An uncertain childhood compounded his sensitivity into despair marked by the jealousy, arguments, and adultery of his parents. His family life imbued him with a sense of isolation and lack of love which led to his first attempted suicide at the age of seven.

This imposed isolation led to a character of independence and sensitivity that expressed itself in the search for companionship and

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<sup>22</sup>Sorel, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

fulfillment. To a certain extent he attributed his troubled childhood to the environment of his day. He viewed himself and his family trapped in a bourgeois age characterized by its mediocrity and stagnation. Drieu's society offered no outlet to express individual thought or action. "I doubted myself, my family, and my race. I am ashamed to say it before the judgement of my peers, but the effort of generations is incomplete . . . ." <sup>23</sup> This sentiment remained one of the key elements in Drieu's search for meaning for himself and his society. He sought to restore the pride and grandeur that his age lacked:

I occupied myself in the secret career of pride. It formed in me the most essential characteristic, the most homogeneous, an ideal agent that divided, ordered and directed my thoughts. . . . I was absolute master of myself. I attained total authority and expressed complete power. <sup>24</sup>

Drieu's political conscience developed when he attended the *Ecole des Sciences Politiques* in Paris. His studies comprised History, Geography, Law, and Politics. He was acquainted with such political theoreticians as Charles Maurras, Georges Sorel, and Maurice Barrès. They served to underline the nature of French society and offered a solution that served as the basis of Drieu's fascism. Drieu later acknowledged his intellectual precursors for his definition of French fascism. "France to a great extent [invented fascism]. The France of Sorel, Péguy, Barrès, Maurras, the France of Proudhon and of revolutionary syndicalism. The fact is there: all that moves and acts in

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<sup>23</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Etat Civil* (Paris: Gallimard, 1921), pp. 152-153.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 137.

the world takes the form of fascism."<sup>25</sup> He discovered an embryonic form of fascism in the *Cercle Proudhon* inspired by the *Action Française*. The circle attempted to unite the social authoritarian doctrine of Maurras with the revolutionary élan of Sorel. "I expected a great deal from the social directions of the *Action Française* that appeared as the sole solution open to us: the movement remained rich at times in either its anarchist or syndicalist origins: before the war in the *Cercle Proudhon*, in the *Ecole de Lyon*, . . . as this was the most original of fascist work."<sup>26</sup> The shared hostility of both radical nationalist and socialist movements combined against democracy to produce a national-socialist platform. Democracy was the enemy, which through its economic capitalism and philosophy of rationalism, dissolved the principles of the nation, the family, and morality.<sup>27</sup> The attempted synthesis of nationalism and socialism in the *Cercle Proudhon* failed because of its inherent contradictions which could not be resolved. However, the attempt served as a model for Drieu to unite historical nationalism and revolutionary socialism as a "lever of energies" to destroy the Third Republic.

Drieu discovered in *fin de siècle* the doctrines of action

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<sup>25</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Mourir en démocrates ou survivre en fascistes", 28 Oct. 1938, in *Chronique Politique 1934-1942* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 192.

<sup>26</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928), p. 25.

<sup>27</sup>Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: The New American Library, 1963), p. 71.

motivated by the unconscious, the critique of democracy, and the prerequisites for the national revolution. He was receptive to these currents in his nostalgia for a past historical beauty, an individualism in search of a moral discipline, and the dynamics of an heroic violence to destroy his society. He sought a relentless zeal, an heroic aestheticism, a desperate action, and a violent sacrifice to regenerate a crumbling Europe.<sup>28</sup>

The impact of such prominent *fin de siècle* theoreticians was traced in the inquiry conducted by Agathon (Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde) in *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui*. The generation of 1905 sought both an ideal and a faith in their intellectual, political, and national environment. Conscious of a profound limitation within themselves and their milieu, they perceived a world becoming petrified. They warmly received the new ideas of the intellectuals who delineated the dynamism of the individual and the nation. Agathon noted: ". . . the human spirit cannot live in the relative, and relativism must have aroused in this entire generation a profound moral misery, a sombre pessimism, a lack of confidence in our destiny, which practically committed it to impotence."<sup>29</sup> This generation, of which Drieu was a part, was more

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<sup>28</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup>Agathon (pseud. for Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde), *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1919), p. 75.

The Agathon survey was undertaken to mark student opinion in Paris in 1912. The survey was subjective in its approach as Massis and de Tarde were nationalist intellectuals who attempted to strengthen right-wing ideals among French youth especially in the Latin Quarter of Paris. The survey noted the guiding principles of 1905 generation in its search for great men rather than great ideas. Heroic action was the keynote of this generation's ideal.

impatient than its fathers. It sought something different, more affirmative and arresting, interpreting its intellectual precursors in a simplistic fashion. Youth no longer questioned the potentialities of reason but became frank irrationalists and even anti-rationalists.<sup>30</sup>

This generation cultivated a doctrine of individualism, instinct, action, and realism. It stressed the necessary unity of thought and action in a new élan. Agathon maintained: ". . . the rational consciousness tends to isolate and shackle us from the world. Alone emotion liberates us."<sup>31</sup> With the subjective consciousness as a basis, the pre-war generation sought a moral rule and discipline to individually orient their efforts towards a collective moral and national regeneration. Their enthusiastic idealism regarded the outbreak of war in 1914 as the release from passive bondage and the opportunity of heroic sacrifice that would usher in a new order by their efforts. The carnage of the trenches, however, destroyed any idealism they might have had in a brutal realism they had not imagined. Those who did return from the crucible of war found a world restored that they sought to destroy. And yet many regarded French society as living on borrowed time. Youth steeled by the war were determined to hasten it. They attacked its philosophy of rationalism, its politics of democracy, its bourgeois values, and expectantly awaited and prepared for the national revolution.

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<sup>31</sup>Agathon, *op. cit.*, p. 81.



## Chapter II

# THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE 'TWENTIES

Realism . . . is the effort to convert all ideas into action, to base the idea on action as much as the action on the idea, in order to live one must think it and to think one must live it. . . . In everything, to search for the soul and to seek it by a revealing sympathy that is the true intelligence, without dissolving thought in either dreams or speeches, without losing contact of the body nor the control of the critical intellect, and finally to seek the highest and truest reality of being: that is everywhere the life and profound aspiration of our time.

—Edouard Le Roy, *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui*

Drieu sought a means of liberation and fulfillment unsatiated until the outbreak of war in 1914. The experience of the First World War was crucial for Drieu's subsequent character and philosophy. He regarded it as his "fatal love of youth" that provided him with a freedom of expression in combat. He noted: ". . . one struggles in order to express something, in order to represent something, to give a representation." In the opening stages of the war, Drieu confronted the enemy with his division at Charleroi. He discovered an unconscious alliance between himself and his fellow warriors—a camaraderie which could initiate a collective action. Before the attack, he suffered from an inertia instilled by a fear that he was determined to overcome, both for himself and his compatriots:

My bravery drew them to me, uprooted something in them. They could refuse me nothing that I asked of them. Men can refuse nothing to a man who possesses a superior exalted nature. And even perhaps, deep within themselves, beneath their half-hearted inertia, they awaited only an appeal.<sup>1</sup>

Drieu resolved this dilemma of passive fear in active courage leading a bayonet charge against the Germans. He regarded his individual example as an inspiration producing a collective act. He discovered in this action a profound emotion. "I knew myself, I knew my life. So this was myself: strong, free, heroic. So this was my life: an élan that was not to stop, ever."<sup>2</sup> His élan sparked a spontaneous action resolving a dilemma born of fear by a courage to

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<sup>1</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *La Comédie de Charleroi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), pp. 33-34.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

conquer. He viewed the open plain as a field of judgment to be confronted in battle or avoided in retreat.

I dashed across the bullets in a strange happiness. Joy of being alone and separate, by distinguishing myself from others by an astonishing act. And undoubtedly, did I not need to act in order to avoid the pitfall of depression. Behind, I felt around me the overwhelming mediocrity that I considered the greatest punishment of the war—this mediocrity too frightened to flee, and also too frightened to conquer, consequently remaining there for four years between two solutions.<sup>3</sup>

The maxim of fear as a means of courage provided Drieu with the strength to push his mental and physical powers to their limit. Drieu "yearned to the extreme limits of yearning" and through action united with thought realized a sense of liberation and fulfillment. The principle of courage born of fear remained a key self-concept during and after the war as a means of self-awareness and fulfillment in action. Drieu noted in one of his war poems, *La Guerre et la Paix*:

I possess several truths  
There was this cry [of fear]  
And then this other cry [of courage] in the charge at Charleroi  
I possessed this venerable decision in courage from the first day.  
Confronting it, what was I?  
It humiliated me in my insignificance and overcame me in the  
Law of Grandeur.

.....  
Was it not in combat that it sprang forth, this harsh, taut will  
As harsh as the flashing burst of an exploding shell.<sup>4</sup>

Drieu discovered a means of personal affirmation and freedom conceived by thought and transmitted to action. "Freedom. Man is free

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Interrogation": *Ecrits de jeunesse 1917-1927* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1941), pp. 59-60.

and can be what he desires. Man is part of the world, and each part can, at a moment of complete intensity, at a moment of eternity, realize in it all the possible. Victory."<sup>5</sup> He not only considered himself transformed by his war experience, he believed all the other soldiers were transformed, also. Together, they represented a warrior elite of blood and action who had shared the communion of war. Drieu noted: "I fought in order to be with men. . . . I sought the equilibrium between themselves and myself, between my pride which they needed and their humility which is my foundation."<sup>6</sup> These warriors were the victors of the Marne and Verdun. Through their joy in sorrow, joy of strength, joy of triumph, they were the means of France's rebirth. They owed no debt to their fathers who had been defeated at Sedan. The elite was a genesis of a new nation. Drieu stressed the role and nature of this elite in *Chant de Guerre des Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*:

The dream is action and action is a dream.  
It allows us to experience a fulfillment  
We have not repudiated the device of our generation  
Our feet are solidly implanted in the debris of formulaes not our own.

.....  
Fie on their tradition, Fie on their revolution  
We are tempted by every great dream and we forge it in great actions.  
We will know how to establish peace as we have conducted war.  
We brandish our cranes of steel  
With reinforced concrete we will erect the monument of our strength.<sup>7</sup>

Drieu's struggle was not only an affirmation of himself, but

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<sup>5</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Comédie de Charleroi*, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>7</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Interrogation": *Ecrits de Jeunesse*, p. 50

represented also an individual effort as a representation of a national effort. The individual soldier was dedicated to a national idea. Drieu noted that each warrior embodied a segment of the nation in arms and was responsible to her service in war and in peace. Thus, France would be defended and recreated through their national vision. "We are in the hands of a great strong individual who is nowhere and everywhere as God, who is in each one of us and more. . . . Mystery of this day. You and I no longer exist. But we are, France is."<sup>8</sup>

In war, Drieu discovered the mystical synthesis of "being" in life and in death, fear and courage, the dream and the act.<sup>9</sup> He praised the war for the active, instinctual, heroic values that he discovered in it. However, the exaltation of Charleroi was matched by the degradation of Verdun. Drieu, as poet, praised a war that cultivated an élan and individuality. Drieu, as realist, condemned a war of technology that relegated the individual to a superficial status. Disillusioned, Drieu wrote: "Yes, at Verdun, I thought of Marathon and wept. Oh my poor deceived youth. I was given an idea of war and *this* is what I received: this vague terrain upon which a senseless matter rained."<sup>10</sup> This was a war that negated the human element with barrages of indiscriminate artillery and suicidal advances before withering machine-gun fire. It was a war of science, not of art. A war of "industry and

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Pierre Andreu, *Drieu: témoin et visionnaire* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1952, p. 46.

<sup>10</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Comédie de Charleroi*, p. 204.

commerce, iron and gas, of politicians, monarchs, old men, women and young boys: a war made for everyone except those who fought in it." The individual warrior was the sacrificial offering to the blind mechanical forces of advanced civilization.

My men sat and waited. If it was necessary to evoke something in them, it was an active fear. And the absence of the enemy caused a perpetual disorientation of everything human in me—thus, the impossibility of giving a meaning to my courage, the paralysis of action and freedom.<sup>11</sup>

Drieu rebelled against the mechanization in war that destroyed the human element. This was the first explanation to Drieu of the forces of decay in modern life. The element of mechanization and its offspring of materialism was a symptom of decadence threatening to destroy creative human forces. He became acutely aware of the effects of decay in his society in a comparison of French and Scottish soldiers. The Scots appeared as thirty warriors while the French appeared as thirty militia men. The Scots possessed physical attributes of a savage civilization adapted to modern life, sacrificing none of its vitality. The French possessed only lost qualities of a savage peasant background that has atrophied in a petit bourgeois society.<sup>12</sup> Drieu equated physical qualities as symptomatic of an equal spiritual quality that he would use repeatedly in his future assessments.

The experience of the First World War remained the key experience for the young post-war intellectual. Drieu remained supraconscious of the elements in his world that pointed towards spiritual decay and

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 160.

those of spiritual regeneration. Drieu discovered that energy and action, courage and fear, were the means of achieving a higher plane of "being". This heightened consciousness of freedom and fulfillment was attainable only through a spiritual energy translated in a physical act. The conscious effort to affirm "being" was to overcome the forces of death within the individual and his society. He noted: "What purpose is life if one does not serve it in order to strike death as a rock. If death is not at the heart of life as a harsh nucleus, life as a soft fruit will soon rot."<sup>13</sup> Drieu emerged from the war conscious of his new found energies and determined to preserve them from decay. He stated that only by participating in the real world and exerting one's will against real obstacles could one's basic vitality be awakened and renewed.<sup>14</sup> Drieu was determined to preserve this *élan* not only for himself but to discover it for France. To retreat again into a world of illusions, of thought without action was a passive return towards decay and dissolution.

The post-war period in France was greeted with overtones of nihilism and revolution. Combattants returning from the trenches hoped to mould a new vision of France on the ruins of an old society. The nationalist and humanitarian mystiques were discredited. The cessation of hostilities revealed a national *crise de l'esprit* previously confined only to intellectual circles. France retained the loyalty of men like

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<sup>13</sup>Pierre-Henri Simon, *Procès du héros: Montherlant, Drieu La Rochelle, Jean Prévost* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1950), p. 123.

<sup>14</sup>Robert J. Soucy, *Fascism in France: The Case of Maurice Barrès* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 289.

Drieu but now they demanded that she render account. France's intellectual vanguard born in the war expressed a deep despair. The new order that they expected to arise from the ashes of war had not materialized. In the preface to the 1919 edition of *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui*, the authors noted a generation possessed by a new realism and responsibility. The realism was an intellectual sensibility that regarded "truth" as that conceived by thought and confirmed by action.<sup>15</sup> Combined with this was a responsibility by a generation, conscious of its energies and ideals, to effect a renewal in the nation. They confronted the problem of decadence in their society as their predecessors in *fin de siècle*. They perceived their world in decay in a spiritual corruption paralyzing all will and energy. They demanded the eradication of such elements that preyed on the general well-being.<sup>16</sup>

Drieu characterized France's decadence in the symbol of mechanization. Mechanization reduced the spiritual life of the individual to simple equations in the pursuit of meaningless, inhuman tasks. Mechanization produced a life dictated by consumption and acquisition in bourgeois society. This mechanical-industrial mentality was draining vigorous creativity channeling it into ossified pursuits of production, consumption, and life without pride. In his poem *Mechanisation* (1920), Drieu warned of the ravages of a world that he could neither submit to nor be inspired by.

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<sup>15</sup>Agathon, *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui*, p. k.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.



Man is a flying buttress of levers using his time to serve  
the beasts which compress atoms.  
These beasts that he bends escape him.  
These slack beasts crush everything of  
The creative power given to them.  
Beauty cannot emerge from their hold.  
The master's hands alone can form matter but he cannot  
transmit his power to the beasts he serves.  
The traitorous forces in man's service only destroy  
the creative powers.<sup>17</sup>

Drieu experienced the destruction of the human element in war and in peace. Both were the products of mechanical forces in advanced civilization. Drieu's isolation increased as he found no anchor whereby he could associate himself with his society and nation, both in decline. As so many others of this new vanguard, he was a son without a father. His generation had lost faith in the traditions of its predecessors. They lacked the devotion and romanticism of a Péguy or a Barrès. They expressed no republican zeal. They perceived their society in a state of decay. Consequently they questioned the existence of the Third Republic and the viability of democracy to arrest this decay.

Instead of faith, the post-war generation expressed a self-willed destruction of their society in such avant-garde movements as Dadaism and its successor in Surrealism. The Dada movement regarded social ideals as valueless. Dadaist intellectuals regarded their world as a collection of absurdities and civilization a fraud. Their nihilism denied every inherited value and moral demanding its overthrow. The *Manifeste Cannibale Dada* is an example of the depth of their pessimism.

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<sup>17</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Fond de Cantine": *Ecrits de Jeunesse*, pp. 92-93.

Dada . . . means nothing, it is nothing, nothing, nothing.  
It is like your hopes: nothing  
It is like your heaven: nothing  
It is like your idols: nothing  
It is like your politicians: nothing  
It is like your heroes: nothing  
It is like your artists: nothing  
It is like your religions: nothing.<sup>18</sup>

Within this atmosphere, Drieu published his most celebrated essay—*Mesure de la France* (1922). This work was fundamental as the embryo from which developed the fascist doctrine of a new elite in France. The work offered a critique of France alone and in Europe. It revealed the problem of France's spiritual malaise, the eclipse of France as a primary power, the ascendancy of continental empires over Europe, and the decline of national and political traditions. Drieu reproached an old order that tried to maintain itself unsuccessfully in the midst of change. He demanded a renewal of the individual, of France, and of Europe in a new order. Consequently this work requires discussion at some length to examine the foundations of Drieu's thought.

Drieu stated that the root of France's decadence revealed a lack of will, intelligence, and virility. Her people had lost the human qualities of the body and the soul. France's decline was due to the loss of her vision of grandeur. "The reality brutally contradicts us, but we conceal it. We have lost the sense of our grandeur and certain human values. We must experience first shame in order to rediscover

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<sup>18</sup>Micheline Tison-Braun, *La Crise de l'humanisme: le conflit de l'individu et de la société dans la littérature française moderne*, Vol. II: 1914-1939 (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1967), pp. 96-97.

nobility. Let us call things by their name."<sup>19</sup> Drieu's accusations were radical, especially at a time when France was the supreme power in Europe. In 1922, the temptation to regard France as dominant was easy to accept: France had contributed more to a victory restoring order in Europe; her regiments had stemmed the German advance at Verdun. She was regarded as supreme through her culture, combined with the strongest army in the world, the second largest colonial empire, and the third largest navy.<sup>20</sup> Drieu stated that this supremacy was illusory. France maintained her supremacy tenuously. Other factors revealed how tenuous this supremacy was.

One of the prominent indications of France's decline was her falling birth rate. In this respect, France, with a population of thirty-eight million, was led by Germany, England, and Italy. This did not include the demographic strength of America's 120 million or Russia's 150 million. Drieu equated the physical decline of France with what he considered as a spiritual decline. The figures of a declining birth rate were of the greatest moral and spiritual significance. A high birth rate in the physical sphere was indicative of a strong, virile nature in the spiritual sphere.

This great predominant number of our fathers was not a simple result, but a generative act, and a moral fact. These millions signified strength, confidence, and generosity. It is not only to the energy of their ideas, the vivacity of their élan, that the French owe their noble appeasement of their sublime emotions

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<sup>19</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Mesure de la France et Ecrits 1939-1940* (Paris: Editions Grasset, 1964), p. 45.

<sup>20</sup>Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

in Europe, but to the abundance, the magnificence of their sexual life, to the good nature that reigns in homes and which throws them into the world, many sons of many mothers.<sup>21</sup>

Drieu concluded that France had betrayed the human element by her failure to recognize the duality of the flesh and the spirit. France's physical decline was symptomatic of her spiritual poverty. The flesh was undermined for the predominance of the intellect. This separation entailed the regression of France towards a spiritual death.

The decline continued unabated. France's leaders refused to recognize the law of the flesh and the spirit. "This law declares that man must have the will to multiply or he will not be able to maintain himself at the lowest mark but he will further diminish as if possessed by a self-destructive determination."<sup>22</sup> The state had lost the values of economy of strength and respect of the flesh. French society revealed a sterile modernity devoid of any spiritual force pursuing a shoddy and cheap illusion.<sup>23</sup>

Drieu criticized French political parties as unprepared to deal with the problems of contemporary France. He noted that the traditional political spheres no longer existed. There was no longer a conservative position because there was nothing left to conserve. The principles of religion, family, and authority lay in ruins. There was no longer a liberal or radical programme because of the strength of growing economic interests imposing its voice on the political order. There was no longer

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<sup>21</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Mesure de la France*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

a socialist position because of a bourgeois predominance and a lack of leadership.<sup>24</sup> There were no longer classes or economic categories—all lost their traditional political distinctions. There were only moderns dominated by a materialism of wages and profit and prey to such elements of spiritual decadence as alcohol, homosexuality, and other escapes.<sup>25</sup> Internally, France was disintegrating politically, morally, and spiritually.

Added to these internal problems was also the troubled position of France in Europe. France failed as a leader of Europe. Instead of attempting to create a new order in Europe, France had restored the old one. France had perpetuated a further division of Europe with nineteenth century values, exemplified by respect for national integrity and national self-determination, that only enhanced the weaknesses of other European states. All this was done in order to maintain France's continental supremacy. The war's conclusion offered an opportunity to create a new Europe with the principle of the League of Nations. A European federation erected above nation-states, sovereignty, nationalism, and particularisms in a European government would have been a noble accomplishment of Versailles.<sup>26</sup> The attempt of a federation of Europe was renounced by a vindictive France which placed its faith and national strength in its army as a punitive European police force rather than in

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>26</sup>Maurice Martin Du Gard, *Les Mémorables*, Volume I (Paris: Flammarion, 1957), p. 219.

a European conciliation.<sup>27</sup>

Drieu perceived that Europe was entering the age of empires. This period began when Europe could not resolve the conflict during the Great War by herself, and thus was forced to draw upon the resources of the United States. This was a portent of the future when Europe would face the rise of continental powers, such as America and Russia, that would spell her decline. She could no longer consider herself a collection of nations, but had to realize the necessity of a federation of nations. The immediate necessity was to preserve national integrity, while at the same to effect a common unity. Europe was divided into four zones: the Entente of the West (France, England, Belgium, and Italy); Germany; the little Entente of Western Slavs and oriental Latins; and finally, Russia, astride both Europe and Asia. The latter carried an implicit threat due to her position and power that might engulf Europe. If Europe conceived herself as distinct, yet homogeneous, she could undertake federation. The principal force, both for and against this was the concept of the nation.<sup>28</sup>

The nation was the basis of equilibrium and equality vis-a-vis other nations. This common recognition of equality within Europe could enhance federation. However, this was counteracted by national distinctions and xenophobic characteristics preventing entente. Drieu noted that, while the role of the nation had not terminated, the role of

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<sup>27</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 82.83.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

alliances could serve as a prerequisite to federation.<sup>29</sup> Federation was not a dream, but an imperative. Europe's twenty-five nations threatened to become further fragmented by the national particularisms of each member. This could be avoided by the creation of a European council of nations devoted to a common unity rather than to national distinctions. The common European goal would be the restoration of the defunct soul of the Christian Europe of the thirteenth century and the aristocratic and intellectual Europe of the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> The failure to federate Europe, Drieu warned, would have disastrous consequences: ". . . Europe will federate herself, or she will devour herself, or she will be devoured. And this generation of the War, which does not appear to pursue this goal, will do so or it will be too late."<sup>31</sup>

The problems seen by Drieu were spiritual malaise, the loss of European leadership by France, and an increasing European dissolution. Drieu placed his faith in a moral regeneration in a self-conscious and active elite of youth. He regarded sport as the means to groom this elite. Sports groomed youth in action, discipline, and common goals. Sport was an integration of Drieu's maxims of the unity of *l'Esprit* and *le Corps* that he had discovered in war. The vitality of the body is exerted by the will to conceive and accomplish a goal. Youth motivated by the desire to transform resolution into action, to be directed through

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 76.

a collective effort, would implant the importance of concerted disciplined effort through force and action.<sup>32</sup> These qualities would train youth in tasks of a more important nature—the role of action to transform their society. Specifically, this goal was that of political action as a necessary prerequisite to introduce a spiritual renaissance and the elimination of the mechanical decadence of society. "It is not a question of revolutions, restorations, superficial social and political movements, but of something more profound, of a Renaissance."<sup>33</sup> The youth elite represented the nucleus for the creation of a Third Party, at once political, social and spiritual. The elite was to appeal to a nationally revitalized, socially reconciled France. A spiritual unity of bourgeoisie, workers, and peasants would resolve social and economic hostilities and discover the lost vision of grandeur.

The nation, reunited by the elite, would attack the debilitating forces of capitalism, and the mechanistic morality of production that negated the creative human goals of a national society. The example of the elite, groomed through sport, would instill a collective unity in a spiritual national goal.

In no matter what condition, so disfavoured for History and Nature, strong men who persist or renew their strength are invested with an integrity defying all restrictions. The nation can endure the worst insults in harsh periods with them, the worst checks, can suffer the worst decline, for they remain outside the shameful contagion. Their quality, their implacable virtue separates them from the contaminated body. They continue

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.



to live fully, nobly, as if nothing had happened. They carry themselves as pure in the milieu of decadence debacles; and if the Genius of the Species has not uttered its last word in favour of the cause they maintain, everything can be inflamed suddenly around them from the torch they have never ceased to hold high.<sup>34</sup>

Drieu's goals embodied elements both of nationalism and socialism. The goal of nationalism stressed the regeneration of the spiritual tradition of France and Europe threatened by an unbridled mechanism and materialism. The goal of socialism stressed the elimination of class conflicts and the restriction of capitalism's economic tyranny. This national-social unity continued to remain an ideal for Drieu.

Drieu presented a qualified optimism in the restoration of France's spiritual tradition. France remained in the shadow of modern industrial production, which was dominating America, England, and Germany. This was due to the lack of great resources of coal, iron, and oil, and also to the national temperament. "France's negligence in not following her rivals was something else other than inertia, there was a mistrust, an instinctive reflex."<sup>35</sup> This reflex was a spiritual *raison d'etre* rather than a material *raison d'etre*.<sup>36</sup> "Nations have a soul. When I think of France, I conceive of a healthy voluptuousness detached from the reproductive instinct which is its prolongation. This voluptuousness is an exercised strength not yet devoured by the loss of the

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

human."<sup>37</sup> The national duty of France lay in the preservation of this spiritual physical reflex, ignoring the temptations of materialism. Her European duty lay in leading the new nations of Europe, acting as a conciliator between England, France, and Germany, and providing the nucleus of federation.<sup>38</sup>

It should be mentioned at this point that Drieu's analyses of life and society were usually more lyrical than critical in their content. The lyrical, poetic element provides us with an indication of Drieu's concept of fascism. Drieu equated expressions of life with such characteristics as force, dynamism, action and vigour. Most of these traits render concrete definition difficult because of their poetic nature. It was this elusiveness that was one of the basic appeals of Drieu's fascism. And it was in this fascism that one could find the renaissance of the individual, of France, and of Europe.

*Mesure de la France* contained the seminal core of Drieu's thought. On the individual level, he stressed a philosophy of soul and body, the unity of thought linked to the act. On the political level, he advanced a theory of a political elite designed to create a national and social regeneration. It was based upon a spiritual revolution, encompassing first a destruction, followed by a renewal and creation. On the European level, he pointed to the colossi of America and Russia, the eclipse of France, the imminent dissolution of Europe, and the

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<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 79-84.

necessity of federation.<sup>39</sup> Drieu sought a discipline as a means to unity in the fulfillment of the individual against decadence on both a national and European level.

The development of the Surrealist movement also represented a major influence in Drieu's career. His affiliation with the avant-garde movement may be considered an important influence in his conception of fascism. The movement, led by André Breton, was a further development of Dadaism. Basically, Surrealism implied a philosophy, a morality, and a political approach towards society. Surrealist intellectuals asserted the primacy of the unconscious. They believed that a series of images could be evoked through the untapped resources of the unconscious. Their art was not a form of escapism, but an instrument of discovery.<sup>40</sup>

Surrealist intellectuals conceived a moral beauty in the instinctual and violent act. The most perfect act was nihilistic, anarchistic, and revolutionary. It consisted in "descending into the street with a revolver and firing aimlessly into a crowd." The act was morally pure, as it was a product of unconscious volition, independent of social traditions and mores. The act, by its violence, was morally pure and offered an elevated form of existence. Violent anarchy was a social, not a metaphysical revolt. Society was responsible for the servitude

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<sup>39</sup>Andreu, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>40</sup>Robert S. Short, "The Politics of Surrealism 1920-1936," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. I, 1966, p. 4.

of the human condition. Such social conventions as patriotism, traditionalism, and republicanism, were the maxims in whose name an entire generation was slaughtered. Bourgeois morality and society was a lie and a crime preserving a corrupt, decayed, social order.<sup>41</sup> The Surreal act was the only sacred value because it demanded the total destruction of bourgeois society. The use of violence implied its goal, not to reform, but to transform man and society, whereby anarchism would precipitate revolution.

Surrealists linked their art and revolution by arguing that the disparity of reality and the dream justified a sacred, morally pure violence. They regarded thought—the vision of the possible—united with the will as capable of eliminating the disparity. Through this transformation a new freedom and fraternity would usher the dawn of the complete man.<sup>42</sup> The poet would lead the struggle to raise man's spiritual and social desires to the level of his dreams.<sup>43</sup>

Drieu was drawn to the doctrines of Surrealism finding them compatible with his own individual revolt. He sought a new value system in the maxim of individual violence. Violence was a product of a subjective morality justifying an equally moral action. He saw in the principle of violence the means to transform his society through the

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<sup>41</sup>Tison-Braun, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>43</sup>Short, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

violent destruction of a lingering dead past."<sup>44</sup>

In 1925, André Breton linked the Surrealist movement to the Russian Communist Party. Both shared a common dedication to revolution but the Surrealists sought a spiritual revolution before a social revolution while their new allies stressed the consolidation of mass revolution in material wealth. Drieu, disappointed and disillusioned, severed his association. The intellectual vanguard of the Surrealists had comprised a spiritual freedom that would suffer under the dictates of party discipline. The duty of the elite was to construct a new system of values instead of obeying political-material values previously established. Drieu sought a revolution not through the masses, but through an elite. The Surrealist betrayal had forced him to sever his ties. His condemnation of the intellectual-political alliance revealed what he had gained from the movement and why he broke from it:

It is true that the sense of the absolute has lost entirely its meaning in Europe, and I hoped that your small group would direct the lost mass in order to reach this sole fertile source. Yes, I hoped strongly that you were better than litterateurs, men who write as a form of action, and all action as the search for salvation. But suddenly I perceive you disband, and from the new path, quickly return to the beaten path to precede the flood of the crowd ceding to its inclinations.<sup>45</sup>

Drieu noted that the rupture with the Surrealists was a profound turning point. It was a period of assessment and examination. He

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<sup>44</sup>Frederic J. Grover, *Drieu La Rochelle and the Fiction of Testimony* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1958), pp. 81-82.

<sup>45</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "La véritable erreur des surréalistes," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol. 25, 1925, p. 167.

returned to his studies of history and economics, which had been interrupted by the war. He remained isolated in search of a faith and a doctrine. He identified with Charles Lindbergh in his solo transatlantic flight, asserting his individuality and freedom. "He does not conceive of death: his blood is too strong."<sup>46</sup> Drieu continued to believe in the ideal of a spiritual revolution formed in *Mesure de la France* and developed with the Surrealists. He believed in a new order of spiritual values, rebirth and progress.

There is no use in attempting to save the system of values known and appreciated by men of today. One can hope to conserve what is still living, one cannot preserve what is dead. One cannot recruit youth for a funeral ceremony. All values that formerly inspired love of man are dead not only in their present form but also in their essence. Humanity progresses towards revolutions that will modify not only the political and economic structure, but which will renew the spiritual structure. . . .<sup>47</sup>

Drieu's sympathies with the radical French Right began to change. He drew further apart from Charles Maurras and the *Action Française*. The league had lost its pre-war élan and while it had initiated fascism, it grew more conservative and its loss of intellectual adherents confirmed this. Maurras remained the great political teacher but not a leader. Drieu could agree no longer with Maurras' distinction between the *pays réel* and the *pays légal*. France, the nation, was linked with France, the state. Furthermore, the pursuit of a punitive foreign

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<sup>46</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Lindbergh et ma vie," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol. 30, 1928, p. 610.

<sup>47</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1928), p. 216.

policy towards Germany destroyed any hopes for European federation.<sup>48</sup>

Drieu's nationalism also underwent a reorientation. He asserted the Barrèsian cult of individuality, but refused to link it with the doctrine of rootedness in tradition. He perceived that tradition could be a source of limitations and decay, rather than a source of strength and energy.<sup>49</sup> However admirable such a national grandeur remained, it was not a model for future progress. The spiritual impetus must not be relegated to old forms. The nation represented the definition of this spirit only in time and place and could not progress if it was defined in terms of these historical coordinates.

Certainly I sense in my being something changeless as a drop of essence that nothing can dissipate; implacable infinite subtlety of Nature coursing through the labyrinth of the soul. Is this Race? I sense rather the mysterious presence of spiritual families that unites the race linking its effort. . . . Every passion circulates in the unique heart of man. For if the passions are free, as ideas that are only images of passions, are they linked? If there was an identity between a race and a passion or idea, the group of the species would not stir; Humanity could remain inert . . . But this is not the case. What I sense is the changeless force of Freedom.<sup>50</sup>

Drieu's role was to create a philosophy of "being". He affirmed life, as opposed to mere existence, as the synthesis of the thought and the act. The only basis of knowledge was that acquired through experience. "I do not wish life to be mortal, I affirm myself with a fanatic cry of love for it and its dissolutions, in favour of its renewal. I

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<sup>48</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Itineraire," in *Socialisme Fasciste* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1934), p. 221.

<sup>49</sup>Soucy, *Fascism in France*, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 55.

know that despair is the sudden revelation of renaissances and this thought restores my equilibrium: thanks to it I can pass from asceticism to action, action to experience, and from there return to asceticism."<sup>51</sup> The beauty of this equilibrium of individual forces restored the elements of an individual, creative "being". Such a philosophy was Drieu's *raison d'être* as an intellectual. He prescribed a philosophy of life in action and a duty to commit oneself to action, realizing an individual aesthetic goal. Engagement was the goal demanding his total efforts to preserve his individual integrity in his life and literature.

One's work requires the experience of your life, demanding that you live good as well as evil. It is necessary for you because it renounces being a man but not a human. Beauty is not in the statue but in the man who walks in the streets and salutes the day with an affirmative gesture. I recognize beauty only in the full sense of a harmony of forces presiding in all our daily actions.<sup>52</sup>

*Le Jeune européen*, in Drieu's early works, sought this expression of grandeur and nobility. He confronted the malaise of his society and sought a means to transcend himself and his environment. Like Stendhal, Drieu advanced a cult of energy, the cult of individual freedom expressed in the vitality of instinct and emotion as a morality unto itself. The cult of energy was a response by both novelists in the gradual loss of faith in the unity of society or the redemptive power of its people. The cult is developed only through the exceptional individual,

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>52</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Le sang et l'encre," in *Ecrits de Jeunesse*, p. 198.



the hero who transcends history, rather than the people who bear it.<sup>53</sup> The cult exhibited a desperate need to assert personal values against a decaying society. Drieu stated that his task as an intellectual was to reveal the poetry within himself, to proclaim the event that would devour everything: the discovery of the world above oneself. In obvious parallel to Friedrich Nietzsche, Drieu stated that the individual must embody the saint and the hero, he must strive to become a man and a god. His thought was a profound revelation to him as he makes continuous reference to him as well as to the works of Blaise Pascal. During the war, he always carried two books with him: Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Pascal's *Pensées*.<sup>54</sup> These influences never left him as he noted: "Henceforth, my days would be filled with a perpetual offering of my knowledge, my divination, and my blood to individuals. Men would become transfigured as Gods."<sup>55</sup>

Drieu regarded himself as the spokesman for an elite of youth. The new elite, conscious of its own strengths and possessing the ideal and the realism to achieve it, would attack the forces of national and social decay. Drieu noted that in order to prove the life or death of a civilization, it was necessary to try to kill it. If society was devoid of its spiritual essence, it would only present a weak superstructure and the task of destruction would be accomplished quickly.

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<sup>53</sup>Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (New York: Horizon Press, 1957), p. 29.

<sup>54</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *La Comédie de Charleroi*, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Le sang et l'encre," p. 205.

On the other hand, if society retained its spiritual essence, it would reassert itself. Drieu possessed no doubts as to the nature of his civilization. It was dead, and the means to topple it was a barbaric violence as a purifying, destructive force to herald a renaissance.

When one has the sense of life and one perceives around him the weakening of life, the sincerest homage that one can still render to the high ideal of force and beauty which subsists in your heart, is to allow everything to drift, to not try to retain the loss of everything by stoic contractions, but on the contrary, to push the cycle towards the precipice, to utter a last cry as Isiah to call destruction or announce infinitely eternal renaissances. And after? Finally, to greet sloth as the sole fertile aspect of decadence. For decadence is the dissolution of forces, but also a preparation of future forces, then silence, omission, inexpressible fermentation, delightful detente, return to infancy.

The most beautiful aspect of decadence is to see barbarism reflourish.<sup>56</sup>

Barbarism embodied both the destructive and creative forces necessary for such a renaissance. Its violent moral beauty engaged in hastening the rebirth through the conclusion of one historical cycle and the beginning of another. The characteristic of youth in strength, act and will through violence gave birth to a higher form of being for the individual and his society.<sup>57</sup> Through barbarism's violence of destruction and energy of creation, France would be restored to its "richest roots" and the individual "thirst of the heart" would be slaked.

The post-war era of the 'Twenties was very influential in the formation and development of Drieu's thought, both as an individual,

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<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 213.

and as an intellectual. His war experience, his first major work, and his Surrealist period all contributed to his concept of fascism. Drieu openly expressed his view of fascism in the crises of the 'Thirties, but its origins lay in the war experience and the post war milieu. Drieu's development of fascist doctrine is deemed the most original contribution in fascist thought in France. He supported his philosophy of action with a philosophy of history and a national, political system. These will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

## Chapter III

# PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION AND HISTORY

Up! Up then bowed heads! Look up eyes bent towards the grave! Look up! Not to the empty heavens, but to the earth's horizon! Wherever your steps lead you, comrade, let your hope bear you on, regenerate, valiant, ready to quit these spots befouled with the stench of the dead. Let no love of the past hold you back. Hasten forward to the future. No longer transfer your poetry to your dreams; learn to see it in reality— And, if as yet you cannot— put it there.

—André Gide, *Fruits of the Earth*

As the 'Twenties drew to a close, many intellectuals realized that France faced a crisis characterized by a sense of doom known as the "inter-war" period. Its generation lived between the end of one catastrophe and the beginning of another. For Pierre Drieu La Rochelle the crisis increased his fears but also his hopes, both for himself and his society. The atmosphere of doom further contributed to his doctrine of fascism.

An atmosphere of tension and urgency pervaded French intellectual thought. Where their elders had found order in society, the young writers found incoherence. They considered history as the chronicle of the absurd. History had no secret law of progress, or divine scheme, but an evolution based on contingency. Hence, the atmosphere of pessimism—an anguish of the individual conscience in a society lacking meaning or goals. This atmosphere produced a literature of anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

The growing malaise of "les écrivains", as Tison-Braun notes, was not of the personality but of the soul. The individual personality remained intact in the cults of egoism and energy, but the soul expressed a "desire without remedy", that sought its fulfillment in reality rather than outside it. This implied a debate concerning the future of man alone in his political society. Intellectuals sought to express the essential human prerogatives in terms of a world that would guarantee these prerogatives.<sup>2</sup> Thierry Maulnier prophesied that the twentieth

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<sup>1</sup>H. S. Hughes, *The Obstructed Path: French Social Thought in the Years of Desperation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Tison-Braun, *op. cit.*, pp. 340-341.

century would announce the death of God, followed by the death of Man. Maulnier stated that man's fate was threatened by the forces of modernity in American Capitalism and Russian Communism. However the threat also lay in man himself. Maulnier stated in *La crise est dans l'homme*:

. . . If an entire civilization is today placed at stake, it is because it has ignored and blindly wounded the human soul in what can be called its eternal claim. Before erecting that which is against an inhuman society, perhaps it is necessary to discover what man is and what he wants.<sup>3</sup>

The problem of the Third Republic reached crisis proportions with the Great Depression. By 1934 the moral, political, social, and economic crisis was complete. The crisis was pregnant with threats with a falling franc, parliamentary indecision, and political radicalism. Fascism was its symptom. The response lay in the new social and political transformations beginning with the Russian Revolution followed by the experiment of Italian Fascism and later German National-Socialism. The radical political experiments also paralleled the growing decline of the traditional Right and Left and their inability to deal with the political and social problems of the period.

French intellectuals responded to the crisis demanding an equally profound spiritual and political transformation—a French renaissance. Their moral claims forced them to enter the political arena denying the established political order. They reproached the "bleu horizon" chamber of Poincaré's *Anciens Combattants* with having lost the peace in Europe

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<sup>3</sup>Cited in Pierre Andreu, "Les idées politiques de la jeunesse intellectuelle de 1927 à la guerre," *Revue des travaux de l'Académie des Sciences morales et politiques*, 1957, p. 19.

as a result of the policy of retribution toward Germany, both economically and politically. They perceived a society more and more inhuman and their moral intentions implied political and social pretensions. An example is the manifesto of the philosophic review *Esprit* founded in October, 1932 by Emmanuel Mounier. The review called for the restoration of human principles, against the incursions of materialism, industrialization, and statism. Man must become the primary consideration in his society, not subservient to it:

We detest them [the tyrannies of our period]: a science too often detached from wisdom, blockaded in utilitarian concerns; a shameful philosophy ignorant of its role and the problems which concern us, begging from science a truth that it has previously announced as relative, and justly capable of demonstrating that science cannot attain it; societies governed and functioning as houses of commerce, economics exhausted by adapting man to the machine and extracting only wealth from the human effort. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The crisis of the human goals was linked to political goals. Intellectuals realized that the separation of the spiritual from the political was possible no longer. The founding of *l'Ordre nouveau* by Arnaud Dandieu in 1933 attempted to define the New Order. It sought a society purged of the impersonal institutions of capitalism, bolshevism, and parliamentarism. The state must be subordinated to the citizen.<sup>5</sup> The manifestos of the new reviews reflected the demand for a renewal on the moral, political, and social planes. They sought a new discipline and

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<sup>4</sup>Jean Touchard, "l'Esprit des années 1930: une tentative de renouvellement de la pensée politique française," in *Tendances politiques dans la vie française depuis 1789* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1960), p. 92.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 94.

faith for the individual and the nation. They sought the means to define the nation in terms compatible with the individual.

Intellectuals of the Right possessed an aversion towards materialism and capitalism in society. They felt betrayed by parties and democracy in their nation. They cultivated the sense of the human values evoking a revolutionary will to realize their ideal. The desire to surpass the old order and create a new one was the intellectual theme of the 'Thirties. Pierre Andreu stated of his generation:

We knew only an intense desire to equal them then to surpass the most dynamic peoples of our old Europe. . . . We sympathized with the young Italians, the young Germans, the young Russians who attacked the same problems of grandeur as we, and who appeared to have preceded us victoriously, at least we felt, on the road to revolution. . . . In sum we projected before us the hope of a young Europe, a Europe of youth, having made its revolution against the worm-eaten cadres of the past.<sup>6</sup>

The crisis of the 'Thirties was the crisis of Drieu's generation in the 'post-war' period and the 'inter-war' period. While such works as *Ecrits de Jeunesse* (1927) and *Notes pour comprendre le siècle* (1941) respectively pre-date and post-date the period of the 'Thirties, they serve as the embryonic and refined form of Drieu's thought. Both are concerned with the problem of decadence and its eradication which remained paramount to Drieu throughout the 'Thirties.

Drieu's engagement was implicit in his novels and political essays. He sought an orientation to his concept of art and his heroic

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<sup>6</sup>Andreu, "Les idées politiques de la jeunesse intellectuelle . . .," pp. 29-30.



morality. He refused the guidelines of historical tradition stating that his individual principles were the sole value and guarantor of action for it remained a principle of his period.<sup>7</sup> He found an archetype to represent the "new man" in André Malraux who expressed the unity of art, life, and action. Malraux represented the synthesis of an art of heroism in a life of action. His appeal to Drieu lay in the former's ability to confront the fundamental question of life in death and transcend despair into exaltation.<sup>8</sup> The key to this lay in conflict and its resolution in action for the renewal of the individual. The "new man" must resolve the problem of decadence to achieve grandeur. The past served only as a model for a grandeur in life. The present must seek grandeur in life by competing and overcoming death in life:

I wandered, during the years of the furious hunger of my youth in its [Paris] avenues. I contemplated the monuments in their vast ensemble and their smallest details; I sought the sign that would assure my pride. It was only in those monuments not of my period that I found this sign of life, force, and beauty, alas entwined with the sign of death in a fatal form that marked my city. The strength of the race revealed itself only in old vestiges: it was necessary for me to scratch the dust in order to rediscover it.<sup>9</sup>

Drieu elaborated the problems of grandeur in his society "entwined with the sign of death" and presented the characteristics of his "new man" in search of a faith and a discipline. *Le Jeune européen* sought in himself the ideal synthesis of two professors of energy.

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<sup>7</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Malraux, l'homme nouveau," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol. 35, 1930, p. 879.

<sup>9</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *La Suite dans les idées: Ecrits de jeunesse*, p. 158.

"Rencontre de Goethe et de Napoleon. Je n'accepte la diminution ni de l'un ni de l'autre." The ideal of thought could be realized only through the reality of action. His body and soul must be one, healthy and vigorous. "For I hold as most profound of my instincts and my reflection on man's nature that if he does not triumph in his body, he will not triumph in his soul. Thus it is in the weakness of the body that is prepared the defeat of the soul."<sup>10</sup> Action conceived by subjective consciousness and disciplined through objective reflection was the source and endurance of Drieu's mystical élan. It was the individual method enabling the flesh to break free from its temporal and physical bonds as pure spirit and essence.<sup>11</sup>

The individual isolated from his environment possessed the source of grandeur. Europe, through her respective nations, had gradually exhausted her sources of grandeur and her races grew senile after their "grands siècles". Europe's grandeur lay only in past exploits. Her sense of existence was equated with the past and this reliance on history had saddled her with limitations. The dynamics of grandeur for Europe was frustrated because her gaze was directed from the present to the past. Even revolutionary efforts amounted to no more than efforts of conservation.<sup>12</sup> Such a reliance on historical tradition led Europe into a state of passivity, inertia, and decay. The young European grieved for his future: "Mechanism, egalitarianism . . . I see a

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Le Jeune européen: Ecrits de jeunesse*, p. 181.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 265.

horizon of prison bars."<sup>13</sup>

The isolated individual was conscious of the decadence of his civilization and his duty to destroy it. The dilemma was a choice between a postponement in reform or renewal in revolution. The latter was an obvious choice for Drieu as the method of destruction and creation. Drieu resolved the dilemma noting: "Today is bad, tomorrow is entirely included in today. It is necessary to destroy today and tomorrow will be reborn. Behind the preserver advances the reactor."<sup>14</sup>

The role of youth was crucial as the vessel of the European renaissance. They represented the elite of revolution uninfluenced by history or the present. "We cannot seek our *raison d'être* in history: we must liberate our period from ties that link it with other periods. The living generation is the eldest in relation to past or future generations. We are men, that is souls apart from the period. It is imperative to adopt a resolution against it."<sup>15</sup> The past revealed a lost grandeur, the present, an absent grandeur. Europe's progress, on her present course, meant death. The faith placed in a future denying the past and the present remained the sole force of progress. Revolution was the "beautiful flame" negating the past and creating the future.

We will destroy the last remnants of a civilization and what remains will be as beautiful as a flame. There will be nothing lost for nothing is only the shadow of what was. So much the better if the flame does not stop but consumes everything. It is we who condemn this sterile city. We deny this

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<sup>13</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Dialogue de Moi avec un Autre," in *Ecrits de jeunesse*, p. 238.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 266.

'beauty' which is not ours. What envy and jealousy grips us. The beauty was first with them and now it is ours.<sup>16</sup>

Drieu's concept of "l'homme nouveau" served to form the basis of his fascism. An examination of the ethics of Drieu's rebellion in the means invoked and the ends envisaged will serve to further define his doctrine. Drieu's ethic was the moral value given to any action that fulfilled one's sense of existence. The morality was based on the subjective conscience as the sole source whereby one could transcend the moral barriers of his society. The blind impulse of instinct through the cult of energy preserved the individual from the forces of decadence in a negative sense but implied also a search for a faith and a discipline in a positive sense. Drieu's goal was to transform his society in terms of the individual citizen.

Action, conflict, fear, and courage were the attributes of life—a consciousness of being—a passionate existence in sharp contrast to a passive world of inertia and decay. Drieu affirmed the necessity of struggle and passion to achieve a higher sense of existence. He exalted the unity of the ideal of thought and its fulfillment in action to individuals like himself trapped in a world they could not dominate. His literary figures assume roles analogous to what they symbolize. Females are presented as passive figures dependent upon a world of materialistic comforts. Woman was decadence as Drieu noted of one of his characters, Nelly: "No profound élan of being, no decisive spontaneity

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<sup>16</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *La Suite dans les idées: Ecrits de jeunesse*, p. 167.

in her. Nothing but the conscious, superficial quest of pleasure: nothing but a machine."<sup>17</sup> The woman figure was decadent because she was socially domesticated and thus alien to the forces of nature and the unconscious that preserved the dynamics of being.

In opposition to the female character of decadence was the male character of renaissance. The male character possessed the socially opposed qualities of conflict to preserve being. Drieu's moral values were provisional; there were no rights, only duties, and every right was undertaken as a duty. His morality was apparently existentialist. Action was the sole moral virtue resolving an either/or dilemma—either amoral activism or moral passivity. The existentialist moral system viewed human nature as unanswerable to preordained moral laws that demanded the submission of the individual to them. It regarded man as the product of his endeavours through a profound chosen act whereby he could realize the unmeasured possibilities of his being.<sup>18</sup> Drieu's existential choice was based on deciding for an active existence over a passive decay. This choice made, he employed the character of volition to confirm his decision in action. The law of conflict was the law of being, as Drieu discovered from his war experience. Man existed only in combat, he lived only if he risked death. Drieu discovered freedom through action. This quality was essential for Europe's spiritual renewal: ". . . To doubt the force of freedom is the trait of tired

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<sup>17</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Journal d'un homme trompé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), p. 35.

<sup>18</sup>Howe, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

men; to wish to reconstruct the foundations of a city on this doubt is to accept fatigue, it is to deliberately recognize that one marches towards death."<sup>19</sup>

In his most important work, *Gilles*, Drieu further explained the imperative of action in conflict that justified his personal ethic. The protagonist, Gilles, reached a stage where he discovered his dependence on the female figure. The symbol of civilized pleasures exerted initially a material dependence followed by a spiritual dependence. This limitation prevented him from expressing the primitive natural freedom hidden in the unconscious depths of his being. The obvious parallel was the transposition of woman as representative of civilization with its material and spiritual dependence on mechanism, materialism, and rationalism. Both symbolized decadence negating the sources of dynamic thought translated into heroic action. Gilles realized that he must break away from woman and society to preserve his freedom and seek to affirm his being through force and conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, the nature of one's life was defined in terms of an ethic of action. If in any struggle of war or revolution, Drieu concluded, the causes for which men suffer and die are equal and indifferent, then the only value lay in the passionate expression of existence. In effect, if there is no worthy end, all value must be in élan; if no cause enters into action, action alone possesses value. Action was the highest form

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<sup>19</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 201.

<sup>20</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 289-290.

of life and its expression was the supreme value. Heroic action, both passionate and egotistic, was the most intense blossoming of a powerful animal nature.<sup>21</sup> Drieu stated that this passionate, physical force expressed an élan of a higher stage of existence and thus assumed a higher moral value in Being. "Passion assumes the rank of eternity as soon as it is expressed; thus it is useless to prolong an explosion that will destroy the period and that consecrates to heaven a monument of the best of the human forever."<sup>22</sup> This egoism of the superior individual produced by experience and effort was no longer egoism but the necessity of life.<sup>23</sup>

Drieu was not a rebel without a cause for his articulation of a morality of heroic action for the individual was applicable also to his society. This morality was one foundation of his fascism. His moral doctrine was the basis for the spiritual transformation of the individual and the nation. Robert Soucy noted that one of the most dominant features of French fascism was its moralism, a righteous indignation at all it deemed decadent, i.e. weak, and its zealous determination to root out weakness wherever it was found. Fascism for Drieu was not conceived as a revolution of nihilism, but a revolution of moralism, but with morality defined in terms of force, action, and conflict.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Henri-Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>22</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Journal d'un homme trompé*, p. 96.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>24</sup>Soucy, *Fascism in France*, p. 295.

Drieu regarded his era in a period of historical transition in the conclusion of one historical cycle ending in death and the beginning of another historical cycle in rebirth. He felt that his civilization stood on the threshold of a return to the sources of life and regeneration. Decadence would pursue its end and ultimately exhaust itself. Drieu's hero, Gilles, experienced subtle hints in his sojourn in Rome of an age of rebirth. Rome was a city in its death throes. The brief existence of the individual could not reconcile contemporary oblivion as the sole result of human progress in history. The genius of the species perhaps had time to gradually reconstitute its strengths in proportion to its decline. As the forces of decay were expended, the forces of rebirth would reassert themselves.

There [Rome] he felt himself near the renaissance that inevitably follows all death. That is why he discovered, walking through Rome as in Paris, the joy of perceiving the evident progress of decadence despite all the efforts of conservators. All the gold in America was incapable of supporting these standing old mummies.<sup>25</sup>

Drieu discovered the principle of historical rebirth in a rich medieval Catholicism. He considered history not as an upward evolution towards greater enlightenment but as a cyclical process of struggle and sacrifice with elements of death in life and life in death. The historical cycle offered a promise of renewal, or in religious terms, redemption. Historical Catholicism provided not only an historical philosophy but also a model for a faith and a discipline in secular

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<sup>25</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Journal d'un homme trompé*, p. 83.



rather than religious terms. History promised not a utopia in the reign of a more humane mankind but the renewal of man in his physical and spiritual sources. The Catholic philosophy of redemption served as Drieu's model:

. . . with the law of the transformation of energy and the circular conservation of all effort the daily life of the living is found enriched and magnified by the return made to it. . . . There again religious psychology, that records in its transposed themes, known and forgotten, all maxims of experience, has not failed in its task . . . Let us recognize that Catholicism has defined this process of coming and going—this system of communicating vessels—in the myth of the reversibility of grace: those who act, suffer, and expend profit from the accumulated wealth of those who dream, pray, and amass.<sup>26</sup>

Drieu's philosophy of history was cyclical rather than linear as the linear approach had proved itself invalid because of its false assumption of progress. Progress for Drieu had traced only the evolution towards a denial of the human spirit. As man gradually developed his intellectual powers, he gradually lost his physical powers. According to Drieu's maxim, the mind's spiritual health was dependent on the body's physical health. The decline of one faculty led to the decline of the other.<sup>27</sup> Drieu discovered an historical period serving as a model where both faculties of man were united—the Middle Ages.

Drieu regarded the medieval period as one of youth, vitality, and passion. Its cathedrals expressed an ardent extra-terrestrial faith in the future and an affirmation of life in the exuberance of the present.

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>27</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Notes pour comprendre le siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), pp. 27-28.

Life was accepted as both tragic and sublime. It was expressed through strength. Medieval man was civilized enough to refine his vigour, but not enough to destroy it. The age was symbolized with the double symbol of the warrior and the saint. Medieval Catholicism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cultivated this philosophy of the mutual nourishment of the body and soul. Catholicism recognized the contradictions of life in its beauty and horror, creation and dissolution, good and evil, and the redemptive power of grace. The medieval attitude was regarded by Drieu as the Christian rebirth of the Hellenic gods, Dionysius and Apollo. Christ was the symbol of a virile, marital Christianity as exemplified in the Crusades. The spiritual aspect of this form of faith was ". . . an affirmation of being, a frequent and powerful act of confidence in the accord of God and the world, of nature and man, of reason and faith."<sup>28</sup>

Drieu regarded the medieval period as an historical spring of youth in Europe's tradition. The dissolution of the Middle Ages heralded the Renaissance which Drieu divided into two phases: the Humanist phase and the Mechanist phase. The Humanist phase retained the spiritual and physical totality of the human faculties in their equilibrium. It continued the tradition of the medieval period in its recognition of the duality of the body and soul, faith and reason. The Mechanist phase produced the rise of industry, urbanization, and scientific rationalism. For Drieu, this was the historical origins of decadence because the

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

period supplanted spiritualism with intellectualism, mysticism with rationalism. It separated the body from the soul destroying man's link with nature and severing him from his source of energy.<sup>29</sup>

With the Reformation, the Catholic Church lost the leadership of Christian Europe by adopting the rationalist humanism of its attackers. The Church betrayed its mystical origins. Protestantism flourished only superficially by its piety but also lost its dynamism.

Drieu analyzed the contemporary historical period in three further developments of historical disequilibrium. The first development was the rise of rationalism followed by the second in the French Revolution and the final reaction in Romanticism. The predominance of each character combined to destroy any stable concept of man in relation to his universe. The predominant rationalism of the Enlightenment produced the fruits of doubt and inquietude. Man gave preeminence to only one of his faculties—that of reason—immediately isolating himself from his nature in pursuit of a rational, scientific ideal.

The French Revolution confirmed the ideas of both rationalism and romanticism in its concepts of a rationally constructed civil society and a romantic cult of the nation. The political convulsions of the revolutionary era provided a reality to the aforementioned principles in an opposed objective concept of society and a subjective concept of the nation. Both led to excesses with reason fostering a cult of rationalism, while individual sensibility fostered the cult of

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 47.

sentimentality. The total effect of such forces contributed to man's loss of the sense of the divine—a comprehension of the universe and his position within it: ". . . the universe was conceived no longer as a great being full of enigmatic resources, the secret immensity of infinity."<sup>30</sup> Drieu mourned the loss of the infinite replaced by the relative. Urban man became estranged from nature. He lost the faculties of the warrior through lack of conflict and lost his link with nature as he became urbanized. He lost the aesthetic sense of the sublime and the tragic in life and death.

At the moment where man no longer risked death, he could believe no longer in gods, for they represent the sentiment of life confronting and surmounting death. Man, losing the sense of glory, lost the sense of immortality, and in losing the sense of immortality, lost that of divinity.<sup>31</sup>

The two most influential nineteenth century thinkers for Drieu's fascism were Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Their thought was established by two equally important precursors, Charles Darwin and Georg Wilhelm Hegel. Drieu regarded the Hegelian dialectic as the philosophy of historical cycles where the dialectic showed a present and future seeking unity in the synthesis of the past. History revealed a progress towards a future by attempting to restore the synthesis of its past origins separated by divergent historical forces. For Drieu, this historical *Geist* was the medieval unity of the body and soul as the original dynamic of history. Added

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

to Hegel's historical determinism were the biological theories of Darwin who posited the principles of natural selection, struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest. Hegel's theory of the historical Spirit and Darwin's theory of the biological Species served to explain the forces of renewal in history and society. Both theories, Drieu asserted, destroyed rationalism and with it the bases of democratic equality and parliamentary democracy.<sup>32</sup>

Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche shared a common reaction against the excesses of rationalism and romanticism and announced a *tabula rasa* of traditional concepts of God, being, society, and their attendant values. Marx introduced a new theological-historical clock of dialectical materialism and the proletarian revolution. He condemned capitalist civilization as an abyss where man was crucified on the industrial machine.<sup>33</sup> However, Drieu contested Marxian economic determinism as the basis for the successive fulfillment of revolutionary factors. Drieu disagreed with Marx's assertion of revolutionary action as the last phase of the revolution. Marx stated that revolutionary action was dominated by material-economic conditions. Drieu denied this precept that would ultimately destroy the spontaneity of action.

Drieu characterized the philosophy of historical "becoming" as the dominant theme of Hegel and Marx. However, the philosophy remained too scientific and limiting. The doctrine ". . ." was confused in the

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

necessity that in order to give reality to the movement, it is necessary to mark points and moments, that it is necessary therefore to define and place 'becoming' and stop it. Revolutions tend to establish institutions and in institutions, 'becoming' posed for a moment tends to stop itself."<sup>34</sup> Marx confirmed Drieu's concept of the decay and death of one historical cycle culminating in revolution and the beginning of a new historical cycle. Capitalist society would destroy itself with its own forces.

Marx's doctrine was one of practical development whereby through the economic-social process of capitalism, economic classes would then be created and polarize in conflict. This process alienated the individual from traditional social ties and increased the strength of the proletariat in its revolution.<sup>35</sup> This practical development from bourgeois-capitalist society in revolution enabled the individual to regain his universality in terms of a self-sufficient cycle of political, social, and economic equality.

Friedrich Nietzsche, like Marx, rejected the entire moral system of his society. He exerted a strong influence on Drieu at an early age. Drieu stated that Nietzsche "... restored the body and its passions, its resistance, its demands, its disciplines, and its own strictness, its indispensable ascetism—in its place in the milieu of the life of the mind. He unmasked and cleared away all the tendencies of the 19th

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<sup>34</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Socialisme fasciste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), p. 74.

<sup>35</sup>Nolte, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

century and thus carried to the 20th century the directions for action."<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche provided a system of theoretical development based on the individual rather than the forces of history. The individual rather than the historical-material forces was the element to achieve a present "being" instead of a future "becoming". The individual was freed from the confines of his present society and could realize his own perfection. This awareness of an absolute, universal "horizon" made it possible for the individual to gain an insight into the operations of historical forces and direct them through himself.<sup>37</sup>

Drieu discovered volition in Nietzsche's *Will to Power*. Nietzsche stated that there was no deterministic historical force but were only accidents based on contingency. The world possessed no general meaning, only the sense that the individual gave it as a movement for the cultivation of emotion and the expression of action.<sup>38</sup> Drieu employed Nietzschean doctrine as a method of action and an alternative to Marxism. Nietzsche provided a limitless horizon opposed to the historical materialism of "progress" and the myth of the triumph of the proletariat revolution. While Marx placed action at the end of a graduated scale of historical development, Nietzsche placed action and passion as supreme in historical development. Action assumed, with

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<sup>36</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Notes pour comprendre le siècle*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>37</sup>Nolte, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

<sup>38</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Socialisme fasciste*, p. 70.

reflected thought, a primary position. Finally, Nietzsche announced the freedom of man's action and his autonomy from the forces of his environment. This indicated to Drieu that by consequence the primary focus as the nucleus of historical energy and social movement was the individual who was capable of maximum energy and action.<sup>39</sup>

. . . one is forced to admit that there is in this idea of the objective development of history an enormous temptation offered to fatalism and passivity. The Hegelian conceives—certainly in a deviation from his own system that events prove that he has understood it—that history marches alone. The Marxist conceives that capitalism of itself prepares its own destruction. . . . The Nietzschean believes, on the contrary, that in a contingent world, at the same instant, his action can precipitate an explosion and transfigure the face of the universe.<sup>40</sup>

Nietzsche constructed a philosophy of "being" oriented in the present, distinct from Marx's philosophy of "becoming" oriented in the future. Nietzsche's theme was the dialectic of individual energy while Marx's theme was a dialectic of historical rationalism. Nietzsche revealed another theme both mystical and tragic that perceived the history of humanity in the cycle of "eternal recurrence" submitted to the struggle of historical forces. He promised no utopia of peace, security, and material equality as did Marx. Nietzsche's and Drieu's utopia was the plane of action, force, and struggle of the *Übermensch* or higher man against decadence.<sup>41</sup> The *Übermensch* was the individual cultural-spiritual creator that would employ the physical and spiritual realities of his own being to rescue humanity from its death. Nietzsche

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<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup>Henri-Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 157.



affirmed:

. . . that new party of life which understands the greatest of all tasks . . . the improvement of mankind, including the ruthless destruction of all that is degenerate and parasitical, will make possible again that excess of life on earth from which the Dionysian condition must once more grow. I promise a tragic age: the supreme art is the affirmation of life, tragedy will be born again. . . .<sup>42</sup>

The doctrines of the nineteenth century found their expression in the methods of the twentieth century. Drieu dated the beginning of the twentieth century with the outbreak of war in 1914 and the revolution in 1917. The European war uprooted the last remnants of the mystical national concepts in a final spasm of destruction. Following the war, peace would be unable to preserve what was destroyed by mechanization.<sup>43</sup>

Drieu applauded the Russian Revolution of 1917 as the new sign of beauty and rebirth for Europe. Initially, he regarded the revolution as the expression of a people's youth and vitality surmounting decadence. However, his illusions were quickly shattered as the revolution became an abomination. Russia constructed her revolution with the models of materialism and production in state capitalism and trusts. The nation which had expressed its youth in revolution quickly adopted the forms of Western decadence acting contrary to the national concepts espoused by Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Nolte, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

<sup>43</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Le Jeune européen: Ecrits de jeunesse*, p. 186.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 188.

The industrial principles of mechanism, production, and materialism posed by America and Russia threatened to encompass Europe. Drieu warned that man attracted by the illusions of industrial production, pursued a path towards decadence. The dictators of Communism in Russia, Fascism in Italy, and Capitalism in America all pointed to the spiritual death of a society. The illusion of industrial production and social materialism were the surrogates of liberty promising the victory of Man over Nature through the Machine.<sup>45</sup> Drieu regarded this as the true servitude of modern man. Europe was caught in the middle between two industrial giants. Europe must affirm the traditions of individual liberty or relegate herself to oblivion.

The most promising effect of the World War and the Russian Revolution was the destruction of national and revolutionary romanticism. The mystique of the French revolution had maintained the revolutionary tension in Europe for a century. The excesses of '89, '48, '71 had proved insufficient to destroy this romanticism. European romanticism of the nineteenth century suddenly ended and the brutal realism of the twentieth century opened in war and revolution. The war, combined with the revolution destroyed every national and revolutionary illusion.<sup>46</sup> The sole revolutionary and national virtues were action and realism as the new faith and discipline for Europe.

The crisis of the 'Thirties, Drieu's morality of action, his

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<sup>45</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 195.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.* p. 190.

historical model of medieval Catholicism, his philosophy of history, and his analysis of the modern world contributed to define his concept of fascism as a moral, spiritual, and historical doctrine suited to the demands of the twentieth century. Analysis and interpretation of position within his period and his society served to formulate and base a doctrine for the renewal of France and Europe facing an historical threshold. Fascism was the method to ensure this transition.

Drieu's fascism was an individual spiritual and moral doctrine. It was expressed in rudimentary form in a period of cultural despair. It demanded the destruction of a decaying environment in violent revolution by a vanguard of heroic individuals. Its goal as a revolutionary force was to hasten an historical transition of renaissance returning a national society to its organic origins. Fascism conceived a dynamic future of regeneration rather than a conservation of the present order for the individual and his society. It was a theory negating the present, idealizing a specific historical period, and conceiving of a future dynamic period primarily in moral and spiritual terms.

Drieu conceived the "homo fascista" as the projection of his own character—a self-conscious youth confronting the fear of death both within himself and his society. There are also elements to overcome this death in the concepts of virility, action, and comradeship that formed the principles of fascism.<sup>47</sup> Drieu typified the new individual as ". . . a type of man who rejects culture, strengthens himself in

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<sup>47</sup>William R. Tucker, "Politics and Aesthetics: The Fascism of Robert Brasillach," *Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 15, 1962, p. 614.

the milieu of sexual and alcoholic depravity and who dreams of giving to the world a physical discipline with radical effects. He is a man who does not believe in ideas and thus not in doctrines. He is a man who believes only in acts. . . ."<sup>48</sup> The literary figure of Gilles, the character of Drieu's most important novel, was inspired by a painting of the same title by Watteau. Gilles expressed a complex, enigmatic figure of vigour, health, and nobility. He possessed a passionate consciousness sustaining a free expression of the heart. His passion embraced the totality of the earth.<sup>49</sup>

Drieu's fascism was a response to decadence—the forces of death in life. It presented the cult of individual freedom and action as the spiritual basis to effect a national transformation. The "homo fascista" embodied force and action, will and character, determining history rather than being determined by it. He was separated from his society and thus could act apart from its values in behalf of its interests. The fascist pursued the taste of risk in action, possessing a confidence in himself and the elite he was a part of. His goal was to introduce the lost national grandeur and the memory of the unanimous faiths that made possible the cathedrals and nation of France.<sup>50</sup>

The cult of force and energy was the fascist moral strength. The

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<sup>48</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Notes pour comprendre le siècle*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>50</sup>Robert J. Soucy, "The Nature of Fascism in France," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. I, 1966, pp. 51-52.

restoration of the physical force of the body to the mystical force of the soul would join action to thought. The strength of the body was indicative of the state of the soul. Fascism was a cult of energy but also a cult of discipline as a method of action. Drieu stressed the aspect of discipline noting: ". . . there are not two master moralities, there is only one which joins cynicism and hypocrisy, which corrects the cult of force by that of discipline to guarantee endurance. The cult of discipline restrains the license granted to the élans of egoism and ambition."<sup>51</sup> The virtues of courage, patience, force, endurance, resolution, and decision were physical as well as spiritual ones. Physical action for Drieu was the expression of spiritual grandeur to know, to seize, and to fulfill itself in the apprehension of a future.<sup>52</sup>

The cult of force and discipline in fascism was the means to root out France's decadence. Generally French fascists viewed this decadence as primarily a moral problem. France had lost her vision of grandeur as Drieu demonstrated in *Mesure de la France*. The onus for this loss of grandeur was due to rationalism which had created a rational liberal-democratic society. Drieu stated that France's spiritual grandeur combining reason and faith, the secret of being and creation lay in the medieval period and had been lost.

He had the emotion, so strong and savage, of France possessing the strength of youth and creation. It was not rationalism. Rationalism was the agony of reason. Yes, there was a French reason, but so alive, so profound, so naive and great, embracing all elements of being. Not only

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<sup>51</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Notes pour comprendre le siècle*, p. 137.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 168.

reason but the élan of faith; not only heaven but earth; not only the city but the country; not only the soul but the body—everything. France possessed the sense of everything and had lost it.<sup>53</sup>

Drieu envisaged a spiritual revolution for France through his fascist principles. His aesthetic, spiritual vision of an original grandeur had important political consequences. France was to be regenerated through fascism—a national élan and discipline of strength to abolish her decadence. The decadence of spiritual weakness was linked to the decadence of France's political weakness: the Third Republic was the focus for the politics and spirit of national-cultural despair. Robert Brasillach, a contemporary of Drieu, announced the motivation for the great undertaking: "across the vast world, those who still believe in the virtues of nation, race, and history, and who, at times touched, at times angered, think of the past and present of their nation and say, 'Why not us'."<sup>54</sup> The new generation was ready to begin the great experiment of fascism in a crucial decade.

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<sup>53</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*. p. 407.

<sup>54</sup>Robert Brasillach, *Notre avant guerre* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1941), p. 229. Brasillach was a member of the *Action Française*. He wrote reviews for the *Action Française* as a devoted follower of Charles Maurras. His fascism represented one thing, the spirit of youth, with its asceticism and purity.

Chapter IV

1934: THE ELITE, THE PARTY, AND  
THE NATIONAL REVOLUTION

I have found the formula but not the place.

—Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Socialisme  
fasciste*

Pierre Drieu La Rochelle sought a political discipline that would express the goals of the individual and the nation in a contemporary movement. Drieu regarded a new political elite as one of the basic levers to create a new France. The new political elite would encompass elements both of the nationalist right and socialist left. The political vanguard would represent a symbol to harmonize the political, social, and economic elements of France. It would erect a spiritual doctrine of moral regeneration, class conciliation, and national rebirth. This vision of new France was possible only with the destruction of the principles of the Third Republic. The modern party would dispense with parliamentary parties, opposition, and inertia. It would reconcile disillusioned elements of the left and right in a new dynamism and a spiritual, national-social synthesis:

The modern party does not oppose itself, it poses and absorbs everything, the totality of life of a human group that it comprises, and it can do this because being a method more than a doctrine, without falling into sterile eclecticism, it confronts old questions and, breaking fragmentary theses, it relinks them by a tie of flexibility, vigilance, and perpetual intellectual renewal.<sup>1</sup>

This spiritual and political doctrine must be explained in terms of the decline of the Third Republic and the rise of fascism. Drieu viewed France under the Third Republic as a nation in decline. Gilles' tutor, Carentan, personifying Maurice Barrès, perceived France in the winter of her civilization. Since the war she had lost the certainty in her future. Her spiritual inertia was due to a growing

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<sup>1</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 182.



loss of faith in her politicians. The Third Republic was considered indecisive, hypocritical, and obsolete. Parliamentary politics of indecision prevented France from securing her position within Europe, be it to destroy Germany or be it to disarm in favour of a European Federation. The ideal of the League of Nations, as Carentan noted, was the farce of the "modern world" with its foul hypocrisy of capitalism, free-masonry, the Jew, and social-democracy. Gilles' tutor labelled the contemporary period "decadent impotence".<sup>2</sup>

Drieu sympathized with the extreme political Right, under the leadership of the *Action Française*, because it offered dynamism rather than doctrine. The league of Charles Maurras remained the focus for extra-parliamentary Republican opposition. The *Action Française* condemned the parliamentary regime and democracy as synonymous with impotence, paralysis of the executive, the dissolution of power, and the deliverance of a nation defenseless to the machinations of its enemies. In opposition to parliamentary irresolution, Maurras demanded authority to reclaim the superior interest of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

In the elections of 1924, Maurras stated the need for a "Foch of Peace" as an example of moral discipline and political authority. Parliament was an anonymous dictatorship absent of authority. France required a leader independent of parliament and its caprices. Such a leader must perceive, plan, know, act, and endure. Maurras stated that

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<sup>2</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>3</sup>René Rémond, "Y'a-t-il un fascisme français?" *Terre humaine*, #7-8, 1952, p. 39.

France required this leadership and authority.<sup>4</sup> The *Action Française* provided the inspiration for fascism not only with the leader principle, the cult of action, the role of a political elite, and the doctrine of authority and discipline but also by its political rebellion. The movement which proclaimed its respect for authority scorned every authority. It embodied a singular mixture of authority and insubordination, of tradition and indiscipline.<sup>5</sup> The essential objective of the league was the taking of power by force. It rejected parliamentary principles and asserted the necessity of active, direct intervention in French politics. However, the league failed to destroy or even aspire to destroy the Republic in the inter-war period. Consequently, extreme elements having gained the impetus from it developed away from it.<sup>6</sup>

The first break was initiated by Georges Valois in the founding in 1925 of *Le Faisceau*.<sup>\*</sup> Valois attempted to offer a new direction that its predecessor failed to provide. The split between Valois and Maurras denotes a basic development of the radical Right presenting a revolutionary formula opposed to a conservative formula. The *Action Française* gravitated increasingly towards elements of order and

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<sup>4</sup>Herbert Tint, *The Decline of French Patriotism 1870-1940* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), p. 176.

<sup>5</sup>Rémond, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>Weber, *Action Française*, p. 207.

<sup>\*</sup>Georges Valois was an economist for the *Action Française*. He strongly admired Mussolini's experiment in Italy. *Le Faisceau*, financed by Francois Coty, attempted to reconcile the spirit of the heroic soldier and revolutionary worker. The movement ended in 1928 and Valois gravitated to the Left.

tradition thus negating its role as a revolutionary force. The founding of *Le Faisceau* represented the departure of Right-wing politics towards fascism. Valois stated that his party represented the principle of a new order for a new nation in a new century. He demanded the re-establishment of France's vision of grandeur in the heroic values born in the war. French unity was to be founded on the heroic plane and the practical plane in the figure of a national leader. The leader would assume the initiative against those financiers and decadent politicians who had diverted the national and social revolution fostered in the trenches away from its true course and back into the corrupt channels of the old order.<sup>7</sup> *Le Faisceau* sought a new collective unity in the nation under a leader. It maintained a vision of national grandeur opposed to individual self-interest. It embraced a national fraternity and a moral regeneration. It stressed the spirit rather than the letter of a new France:

As 2 August 1914 [Marne], we recognize only one party: that of France. We desire one politics: that of Victory.

We desire its conditions: a National Leader, French Fraternity, a nation organized in its Families, its Professions, and its Provinces; the religious faith master of itself and its labours; the justice of all above all.<sup>8</sup>

Valois declared the *Le Faisceau* was the synthesis of national grandeur combined with social justice. Nationalism would incorporate socialism to preserve the true ideal of a society in both its national

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<sup>7</sup>J. Plumyène and R. Lasierra, *Les fascismes français 1923-1963* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1963), p. 25.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 35, quoted from *le Nouveau siècle*, 26 February, 1925.

and social aspects. The doctrine of national-socialism was regarded as the foundation for the regeneration of France.

A league representing the youth of the revolutionary Right was the *Jeunesses Patriotes* founded by Pierre Taittinger in 1924. The league was created as an anti-parliamentary force acting on public opinion by influencing the man on the street to exert pressure on the Chamber and the ministry. The recruits for the league were university students attracted to a movement offering direct, political action, a sense of their own importance, and a noble, patriotic ideal. The league hoped to initiate by its action the dream of reconciling the economic classes of France into a national unity.<sup>9</sup> The new politics of a militant youth would act to restore a national unity of authority and discipline. It underlined the role of a revolutionary elite to spark the forces for the national revolution. Its goal was a France reunited. Its enemy was a France divided under the Third Republic.

Another league approaching the militancy and dynamism of fascism was *Le Francisme* of Marcel Bucard. Bucard's movement stressed the combattant spirit of the war. The warrior spirit was "a common soul" alien to class distinctions in the trench virtues of the humility of sacrifice, solidarity raised above particular interest, and the heroism devoted to a national effort. The warrior spirit was the political basis of an elite whose self-conceived goal was to construct a national and social unity above classes in a politics of national grandeur and

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<sup>9</sup> René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France: From 1815 to de Gaulle* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), pp. 275-276.

social justice.<sup>10</sup> Bucard's *Francisme* opposed Communism, Capitalism, Democracy, and the traditional political opposition of the Right and the Left. Bucard exalted the spirit and political attitude of the war generation, noting in *Le Franciste* of February, 1934: ". . . Our fathers desired liberty; we claim order. . . . They preached fraternity; we demand the discipline of emotions. They professed equality; we affirm the hierarchy of values. . . . For them, the individual is a sacred entity, natural foundation of the State. For us the individual exists only as a function of his family and his birthplace."<sup>11</sup>

Leagues such as *Le Faisceau*, *Jeunesses Patriotes*, and *Le Francisme* reveal elements that distinguish them from their predecessor, the *Action Française*. However, the primary characteristic inspiring these leagues generally, and Drieu La Rochelle specifically, was "un grand mouvement de fièvre". It was a sense of need not for something more coherent, more logical, more theoretically perfect, but on the contrary, more incoherent, more attuned to the moment's complex demands. These movements conceived a dynamic revolutionary atmosphere unrestricted by a body of doctrines that would provide an immediate response to the needs of the nation.<sup>12</sup> The *fièvre* was a product of the crisis of modernity, the impasse of political democracy, and the threat of material decadence. It expressed a subjective, passionate spirit

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<sup>10</sup>Plumyène and Lasierra, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup>Eugen Weber, "Nationalism, Socialism, and National-Socialism in France," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 2, 1962, p. 288.

affirming the spirit of national grandeur and social justice. It revolted against the political democracy of the Third Republic with its absence of national élan and bourgeois politics and morals. It declared a dynamic spirit but also a discipline in its passion for order, a cult of force and the leader, and the dictatorship by a political elite.<sup>13</sup>

Fascism in France conceived itself as a revolutionary movement to effect a spiritual, moral, and national regeneration. It opposed a Republic divided into social-economic classes and conceived of a nation united. It opposed a debilitating rationalism and conceived of the subjective spiritual renewal of grandeur. It opposed a politics of indecision and corruption offering instead a political authority in the figure of a national leader. Furthermore, fascism did not deny the fruits of the Revolution but asserted the principle of popular sovereignty that Maurras denied. While the *Action Française* denied French history since the revolution, the political factions that broke with Maurras accepted this heritage. They incorporated the principle of a nation created by the assent of her people as one of their foundations. Popular sovereignty was the basis of legitimacy for fascism. It was the legitimacy gained from the people that gave the leader and the elite their mandate and power. Whereas Maurras conceived the *pays réel* in the traditional hierarchy and authority, the fascist leagues conceived the *pays réel* emanating from the will of the people. This

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<sup>13</sup>Rémond, *The Right Wing in France*, pp. 278-279.

principle was the foundation for the politics of fascist authority.<sup>14</sup> Popular sovereignty was assumed by the fascist elite to act in the interests of the nation but not necessarily to be accountable to it.

The event that transformed Drieu's pessimism into inspiration was the political crisis culminating in the riots of February 6, 1934. Indicative of this physical and spiritual decay, Drieu's protagonist, Gilles, possessed a physical disease symbolizing his spiritual malaise. One half of his body was athletic and muscular, while the other half was withered. His war wound suspended the current of life within his body. Gilles had flourished in the virile youthfulness of war, and decayed in the stagnant senility of peace.<sup>15</sup> In Paris, the winter of 1933-34 expressed the physical and spiritual winter of a civilization. The reality of winter was offset by the promise of spring:

The harsh longing of cycles was revealed to him, the sombre and painful moment of metamorphosis, the funeral march of renaissance. Then he perceived that life is nourished on death, that youth ushers from the coldest and most desperate meditation and that beauty is the product of confinement and patience.<sup>16</sup>

The Stavisky Affair was exposed in the midst of depression, implicating the Chautemps ministry in the public fraud. The belief grew that the career of the swindler was aided by complicity in the highest circles of the Radical party. This provided the leagues of the *Action Française*, *Croix de Feu*, and the *Jeunesses Patriotes* with

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<sup>14</sup>Rémond, "Y'a-t'il un fascisme français?" pp. 39-41.

<sup>15</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 364.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 353.

confirmation that the democratic rulers of France were not only incompetent but also corrupt. The leagues mobilized in the streets with the cry, "A bas les voleurs"—Down with the thieves! The Stavisky Case became the Stavisky Affair as the *crise de conscience* in the Third Republic. The corruption of the republic represented a grievous symptom of a nation undermined by its parliament. The public outcry and the action taken by the leagues assumed revolutionary proportions.<sup>17</sup>

On 11 January, 1934, riots broke out near the Palais-Bourbon. By the end of the month a bewildered Chautemps was forced to resign and his ministry was replaced by that of Edouard Daladier. On the evening of 6 February, 1934, while the Chamber of Deputies was in session protected by a police cordon, violence grew in the streets. Leagues of the Right and Left, joined by angered citizens, attempted to break through the cordon. One repulse led to more determined efforts, both sides increasing their numbers and the violence of their attacks. The rioters had one specific objective, the Palais-Bourbon. The mass attacks on the Place de la Concorde seemed to be transformed from a riot into the beginning of a revolution. The rioters attempted to break through the barricades, invade the Chamber of Deputies, and dissolve the Third Republic. The violent nature of 6 February seemed to gain further impetus, transforming an inert mass of protest into an active mass of revolution. The Third Republic itself became the enemy of the rioters of 6 February. Insurrection became the master in the streets. The

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<sup>17</sup>Laureat J. Bernard, *Democratic Crisis of 1934 in France* (unpublished dissertation, Univ. of Boston, 1957), p. 135.



government of Edouard Daladier resigned. The Socialist deputy, Compère-Morel noted: "For the first time in the history of the Third Republic, a parliamentary majority has capitulated and its government has abandoned power under the menace of the street and under the jeers of demonstrators mobilized by its opponents."<sup>18</sup>

The events of 6 February represented a watershed for the fascist revolution to succeed by a *coup de force*. For Drieu La Rochelle, the event was a profound turning point. France, he felt, had revived herself from the torpor of her decadence. He regarded the winter of her spiritual death as terminated. The evening of 6 February restored the emotional maxim of fear and courage. Paris and Parisians had not lost completely the pride of her blood. Her people had united against the old, corrupt radicalism. Her citizens had united in a new-found vigour and violence. The unity of action linking the Patriots and the Communists in the streets, the songs of the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale*, were joined in a revolutionary fervour on the Place de la Concorde. The deeds of these men remained a model of spirit and action that Drieu hoped would last forever.<sup>19</sup>

Drieu regarded the riots on the Place de la Concorde and the march on the Palais-Bourbon as the promise of a national revolution. The political leaders must unite as their followers in the street had, to transform the riot into a revolution. Gilles stated that if a man

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<sup>18</sup>Weber, *Action Française*, p. 327.

<sup>19</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Air de février 34," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol. 42, 1934, p. 568.

revolts and throws all of his future in the balance, he would succeed in his goal. Above all, the moment of action to precipitate the revolution must be initiated. France's turning point was dependent on the leaders of the Right and Left to establish a political-revolutionary unity and initiate the immediate action for the *coup de force*. Drieu implored, after the fact, in *Gilles*:

Depart at all costs the routine of old parties, of manifestos, meetings, articles, and speeches, and you will soon possess a power of formidable strength. The barriers will be broken forever between right and left and waves of life will precipitate in every sense. Do you not feel this moment of great possibility? The movement is there before us: we can launch it in the direction we want, but it is necessary to launch it immediately at all costs.<sup>20</sup>

The insurrection sparked mainly by the right-wing leagues of the *Action Française*, *Croix de Feu*, and *Jeunesses Patriotes* failed to consummate their revolt in the Commune tradition of proclaiming a revolutionary provisional government at the Hotel de Ville. The revolt of 6 February failed due to the mistrust of each league for the other and the consequent lack of unified leadership by Maurras, de la Rocque, and Taittinger. The leagues and their leaders were thus discredited as a focus for the national revolution.<sup>21</sup>

The riot of 6 February, 1934 was the inspiration for intellectuals such as Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Robert Brasillach. The event represented a point of departure from the orthodoxy of the *Action*

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<sup>20</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 436.

<sup>21</sup>Weber, *Action Française*, p. 388.

*Française* and a point of arrival for a revolution that Clemenceau had said was impossible as the bourgeoisie would not be motivated to revolt in the Place de la Concorde. Robert Brasillach explained the inspiration gained from the riot:

But if the sixth of February was a poor conspiracy, it was an instinctive and magnificent revolt, a night of sacrifice, which remains in our memory with its lingering smell, its harsh wind, its pale running figures, its human groups on the sidewalks, its invincible hope of a National Revolution, the precise birth of a social-nationalism of our nation. . . . One can never prevent what was from having been.<sup>22</sup>

The event marked Drieu's *prise de position* where he declared himself a fascist in spiritual outlook and political method. He sought a commitment in a new party which he hoped would link the extreme Left and Right as it had been briefly in the Place de la Concorde. He denounced the doctrinal opposition of political parties whose ideology prevented a joint action. He condemned the Royalists of Maurras as archaic because of their reactionary view and their support of the conservative Right. He condemned the Radicals and Socialists as parliamentarians who supported the link between capitalism and democracy. He condemned the Communists who limited themselves to the myth of the proletariat.<sup>23</sup> He appealed to a new political unity of all disillusioned members of the traditional political structure to create a modern party synthesizing elements of the left and right—the fascist party of the

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<sup>22</sup>Brasillach, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>23</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Contre la gauche et la droite," 11 March, 1934, in *Chronique Politique*, p. 15.

national revolution.

Drieu regarded the parties of the extreme Left and Right as possessing the same goals but remaining separate because of their traditional doctrinal opposition. Each group feared falling into the arms of the other or "getting their feet wet" in a mutual commitment. They shared similar goals as Drieu perceived them: the national framework, the establishment of an authoritarian government, a reinvigorated State supported by a great mass movement against capitalism. Furthermore, each respective group sought to recruit youth for an enterprise that would restore to Frenchmen their moral and physical strength.<sup>24</sup> If their programmes focused on the same goals, the extreme Left and Right could synthesize their position in fascism establishing a nationalism as a foundation for socialism.

The most important work that launched Drieu on his fascist adventure was *Socialisme fasciste* (1934), a work as important as *Mesure de la France* and an elaboration of some of its ideas. Drieu stated that at this point, intellectual neutrality was impossible, given the events developing in Europe—the corporative experiment in Italy, the Hitlerian experiment in Germany, and the spark of 6 February in France. Drieu explained that his fascist socialism was a "politics of fusion" in a national and social unity. The goal was to introduce the organic life of the nation in a synthesis of nationalism and socialism and a spiritual discipline. Drieu hoped to restore to his countrymen

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<sup>24</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "La République d'indécis," 10 June, 1934, *Ibid.*, p. 25.

". . . the sense of their prestige, elegance; the fear of losing the gift of our most intimate disciplines, previously so compromised, so fragile, and much more capable again of metamorphosis; this passion for revolution and nonetheless to progress—these are all emotions which nourished my soul in twenty years of immobility!"<sup>25</sup>

Drieu illustrated his doctrine of political fascism in a critique of Marxian myths. The first was the myth of the class struggle. Marx stated that history was governed by the conflict between one socio-economic class and a superior socio-economic class, i.e. between the bourgeoisie and the nobility and between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Drieu regarded this principle as naive explaining that the majority of a class does not represent one political right against those of another smaller class. Society is governed and political sovereignty is held by elites. Even in a period of political and social revolution, one governing class is not replaced by another governing class. One elite is substituted for another, animated by a new spirit and armed with a new technique.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, Drieu explained that a governing elite does not act in the interests of one class but for the interests and welfare of the nation. The governments following the Revolution of 1789 were dedicated to a politics of equilibrium between the rich bourgeoisie, the middle and petit bourgeoisie, and the proletariat and peasantry in

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<sup>25</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Socialisme fasciste*, p. 235.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

industry and agriculture. The neglect of one class in favour of another would destroy a national and social equilibrium.<sup>27</sup>

There was also the Marxian myth of the proletariat as the revolutionary class. Drieu observed that the conditions that necessitated a proletarian revolution were the factors that also prevented it. The condition and revolutionary virtues of the proletariat were drained by the assimilation of the proletariat to petit bourgeois status. Their misery of poverty was eased by a degree of wealth. Another factor blunting the revolutionary strength of the proletariat was automation making the proletariat and the bourgeoisie passive. Finally, the proletariat remained a very small minority class—one among several.<sup>28</sup>

Drieu concluded his analysis with some astute observations. First, an elite independent of its class exercised political power and represented political sovereignty because its power once delegated remained autonomous. An aristocratic, bourgeois, or proletarian class did not exercise this power. Consequently, the class struggle for political power was not only a naive principle, but its attainment was futile. Secondly, the presence of a complexity of social classes with as many gradations of wealth could not be reduced to a conscious struggle of one class against another or guarantee the triumph of one class over another. Third, as one elite replaced another, there was a fusion of old elements in a new formation leading a society towards new

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

directions that they held as goals. Social groups were usually stable and hierarchical. There was a governing circle, the supporting class, the intellectual and labouring classes. Consequently, revolutions "renewed the contained but not the container."<sup>29</sup> The role of the elite in revolution was a fact and a necessity to transform an embryonic revolt into a full revolution.

It is evident that at the moment there are no governing classes, there are no revolutionary classes. If the mass of a class does not retain this precise fact which is to govern, this mass cannot retain the equally precise fact, which consists in methodically modifying the political and social condition of a nation in view of establishing a new government. One class can revolt, yet it is imperative that it be called by an elite to revolt; alone can this elite make the revolt a consecutive revolution.<sup>30</sup>

Drieu regarded the contemporary political structure of France as self-limiting. The Right, represented by the *Action Française*, possessed its strengths and weaknesses in its emphasis on the nation above society. This orientation possessed a knowledge of the organic nervous system of the French body, but it lacked a living, internal complement in the nation's social problems. The Left, represented by the *Parti Communiste Française*, possessed its strengths and weaknesses in its emphasis on the society above the nation. Its demands for social justice were made at the expense of the nation. Both parties were incomplete because of their doctrinal myopia. Drieu resolved this political limitation with the establishment of a new party incorporating

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

both the principles of nationalism and socialism. The party of fascism would be animated by a dynamic force synthesizing the opposed forces.<sup>31</sup>

The national-socialist party would be above the democratic-parliamentary collaboration of the *Action Française* on the Right and the Comintern collaboration of the *P.C.F.* on the Left. The new party was not an intermediary of the traditional Right and Left. Its method was not a politics of equilibrium, but one of fusion similar to the experiments in Rome and Berlin. The political method was to achieve political power in the State and infuse it with the principles of the Nation. Drieu maintained that the *pays légal* would be transformed into the *pays réel*. Statism was an evil that could be exploited by exhausting its elements. The first step was the complete control of the State. Drieu elaborated on the transformation of the State into the Nation:

"... To destroy statism one is forced to use the state, place everything in the state, so that the State becomes the Nation. It will profit from the instincts that it has encompassed. One can kill a part of life but not all life. Gradually, the totalitarian state dissolves, becoming supple and alive."<sup>32</sup>

The essential element for the new directions to be given to the State was the elite—an authoritarian vanguard. Drieu characterized this elite as "bourgeois" not in the sense of class, but in the sense of a common point of conciliation. The elite was the dispossessed class

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<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 106.



possessing the consciousness of the worker, the responsibility of the bourgeoisie, and the values of the peasant. The elite was above the politics of "patriotic" capitalists who profited at the expense of the nation; and the communists who acted on orders from the Comintern again at the nation's expense. The elite was above parties embodying the national and social interest as its goal and in its method of opportunistic action.

Men such as I are, in the true order of thought, the counterpart of the true men of action, transcending the parties from which they leave in a higher opportunism. Nothing is more hesitant than the man of action—until the last moment. His thought is as ambiguous as the act. The single individuals are sure: their theories alone are law.<sup>33</sup>

The elite would present the symbol of leadership in the figure of the leader. The leader was required for a transitional stage in the national revolution. He was to be the consequence of the revolution created by the elite, not its cause. He was required less to begin a revolution than to fix its results. Drieu warned against the folly of submitting to the "man on horseback" figure. Such a personal abandonment revealed the inability to govern oneself. This submission was alien to Drieu's fascism. Men must not abandon themselves to the passive weakness of submission to the authoritarian leader, but must assert themselves in order to concentrate their individual efforts complemented and embodied by the leader. The heroic leader was superior in intellect and will but was never superior to his time. He represented both its

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<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

strengths and weaknesses. He was a figure of reason and faith raised by the elite on a basis of mutual support in the combined creation of the national revolution.

Fascism does not produce the dictator, but the dictator produces fascism. . . . In Italy, there was all the movement, all the effort of a generation who sought and found fascism and who, at the same time, sought and found Mussolini. An individual can begin nothing, he cannot establish everywhere a political machine: he can only embody a collective elan, clasp and project it. For an elected individual requires many appeals. It is required that many men seek, reflect, question in order to raise the best among them, who in his turn reciprocates.<sup>34</sup>

The abortive revolution of 6 February provided Drieu with a new hope in France's renewal. His justification was that the people had acted. Drieu's goal was to define the method and spirit of the national revolution. This dynamism he entitled the "spirit of war in revolution." He explained that the warrior spirit was the fundamental character in either war or revolution. The spirit contained violence and force in its expression of courage. Its spirit was not only an individual response but also a national collective one. ". . . In a more profound manner, courage is much more, it is everything. It is self-knowledge and self-affirmation, to be something and someone despite all dangers and obstacles. It is the fullness of responsibility."<sup>35</sup> Insurrectionary violence was an imperative at a time when the nation was in a state of decay. It was a key factor to renew the state, society, and the

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 143.

individual.<sup>36</sup>

Drieu regarded a permanent state of revolutionary dynamism as fundamental for the progress conceived by the spiritual doctrine of fascism and its political expression in national-socialism. The warrior spirit was the means to preserve the conscious dynamic effort of national fusion against dissolution. The dynamism affirmed a consciousness of "being" threatened by its opposite, "non-being". It restored the individual to life and youth, the balance of reason and faith, the interaction between the authoritarian leader and the free individual. Politically, the synthesis of the "politics of fusion" was designed to transform the citizen into an active participant in the future of the nation. Drieu stated that fascism served nationalism by restraining capitalism and equating it with the united social classes of the nation. Thus, capitalism was to be restrained and developed into a form of socialism. The State would impose new directions on capitalism employing it not for individual goals, but for the collective, national goals—hence, national-socialism.<sup>37</sup>

However, the political and economic methods of fascist socialism were only of secondary importance to the primary national spiritual revolution. Drieu hoped that France would follow the examples of Russia, Italy, and Germany in their experiments. Many of Drieu's models were derived from the precedent of the Russian Revolution. But whereas the

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 208.

Communist revolution was directed towards a material goal, the fascist revolution would be directed towards a spiritual goal. Drieu regarded the orientation of the Russian Revolution as alien to European needs. Russia already possessed the spiritual foundation and expressed this strength in material production. Europe possessed the material conditions but had lost the spiritual foundation. Consequently, Drieu regarded the methods of the fascist revolution to be similar to Russia in national-socialism but its goal different in the orientation towards the spiritual.

Russia does not have material; it is imperative for her to establish it. For her, mechanization is a necessary faith, the suitable lyricism of the actual effort. She has precipitated her spiritual treasure in a material mystique. If that appears excessive to us, it is that in Europe, on the contrary, we are saturated with matter, material, and materialism. Our social construction must therefore assume another aspect of consolidation, conservation, restoration of the spiritual.<sup>38</sup>

Fascist national-socialism as conceived by Drieu was distinct from Russian Communism or German National-Socialism. Obviously this was due to the implementation of theory into practice in the respective nations. As Russia remained alien to Drieu's principle of spiritual regeneration, Germany also had compromised her national-socialist ideal. The Nazi revolution held the spiritual values above economic society. It hoped to replace the motive of profit with the motive of national duty. Hitler had imposed an ordered, hierarchical system to achieve this and thus had defeated his movement by making it static. Hitler

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<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 209.

negated the principle of movement and flux that was fascist dynamism.<sup>39</sup> The dynamics of fascism presented a moral force in the spirit of sacrifice and will for combat. It united with a vigorous pre-war syndicalism to effect a moral, political, and social revolution. It must never be restrained by a deterministic framework. It was opportunism that characterized the twentieth century revolutions in Russia, Italy, and Germany.<sup>40</sup> However, it appeared that they had lost the original strengths that had precipitated their revolutions.

The constitution and development of fascism in France could profit from the successes and failures of its European predecessors. For Drieu, fascism represented the goals of a generation that sought to establish a new order on the ruins of the old one. It maintained a spiritual dynamism enabling it to build a national-social order of individual equality and national strength. The goal in political terms, was to found socialism by restraining the economically irresponsible capitalists and politically irresponsible politicians. They would be replaced by responsible leaders in both fields. France must conceive and initiate the change by herself, independent of foreign doctrines, with the leadership of an elite:

Finally we will destroy capitalism because the preceding struggle [World War I] has rendered us energetic and proud, because we are men whom the bourgeoisie cannot refuse to do what we want [introduce socialism], and because we are French patriots whom other Frenchmen cannot reproach with constructing

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<sup>39</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Mesure de l'Allemagne," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol. 42, 1934, pp. 458-459.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 451-452.

a socialist society that will better serve nationalism.<sup>41</sup>

The fascist elite would represent the social class unity in the nation and the ideal of the moral-spiritual doctrine of the national revolution. It would, by its leadership, resolve the economic class struggle in socialism and redirect it into a class collaboration on a national level. Finally, the fascist revolution, at once unique to France but similar to other European fascisms, would work towards a European federation. A "Geneva of fascisms" would be a federation of fascist nations where each nation would present a specific concept of national-socialism concurrent with its unique national traditions. This basis would provide a general consensus of a European national-socialism enabling it to align itself with nations of a similar ideology.<sup>42</sup>

The political doctrine of Drieu's fascist socialism possessed strong totalitarian overtones. He conceived the nation united by class collaboration under the national-socialist elite. The party would unite all elements of the political Left and Right dispensing with other political oppositions. He equated the State with the Nation, one inseparable from the other. The elite remained the vanguard of national leadership in authority, discipline, action, and courage. It would impose the revolution from the top rather than allow a spontaneous revolution from the people. Perhaps Drieu felt that the elite was the

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<sup>41</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "l'Homme mûr et le jeune homme," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol. 44, 1935, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

only body that could transform a popular revolt into a successful revolution. But one cannot discount the fact that once the revolution appeared, it would be controlled and directed. Finally, there was the leader principle possessing the characteristics of the elite and embodying the authoritarian symbol of a disciplined national revolution. The characteristics of this revolution attempted to unite freedom with authority in order that the discipline of authority could consolidate the gains made by individual freedom. Freedom without disciplined authority in the spiritual fascist revolution was only a regression back to the order it had destroyed. Authority without freedom would destroy the dynamic principle of the spiritual revolution to a static form. Drieu's attempt to reconcile a system of opposites would lead ultimately to one moral value—discipline as the sole freedom.

The spiritual doctrine of fascism remained the essence and justification of the new political approach. The spiritual element appeared to assume the form of a secularized religion in its synthesis of contradictions and the affirmation of "being" as entailed by Drieu's model of medieval Catholicism. The spiritual element was of this affirmative nature in its ability to reconcile freedom and authority, nationalism, and socialism. It would unite all classes of a national society under a common discipline and a strengthened morality in a spiritual-political doctrine of faith and reason. The doctrine sought a national society of pride, courage, and strength; the creation of an aristocracy of action and moral strength; a political system of freedom and authority in the national revolution. The spiritual doctrine of fascism, dynamic

and alien to classification, held the strongest appeal as explained by Robert Brasillach.

Fascism for us is not a political doctrine, nor is it an economic doctrine. It is not an imitation, and our confrontation with foreign fascisms only convinces us more of our national originalities; therefore of our own. But fascism is a spirit. First it is anti-conformist, anti-bourgeois, and disrespect has a role. It is a spirit opposed to prejudices, to those of class as any other. It is the same spirit of friendship that we desire to be raised to national fraternity.<sup>43</sup>

The fascism of French intellectuals such as Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and Robert Brasillach was a spiritual-political philosophy in its desire to affirm the individual and mould society to individual and national goals. To the *enraciné* of the post-war generation, fascism offered a promise of community and commitment in a spiritual-national affirmation. The goal was to restore the human condition to the passions of life. In fascism, Drieu believed he had discovered a type of socialism concerned with more than material progress. He was not concerned with the economic welfare of the nation, but its spiritual welfare. Drieu's spiritual goal in fascism was to remove the capitalist dominance and decadence of society that engendered this moral decay. He was anti-Marxist, in his emphasis on the "restoration of the spiritual" and anti-capitalist in his condemnation of the "appetite of lucre".<sup>44</sup>

The moral and spiritual regeneration embodied in Drieu's fascism

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<sup>43</sup>Brasillach, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>44</sup>Robert Soucy, "Le fascisme de Drieu La Rochelle," *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*, Vol. 17, 1967, p. 73.



was the use of amoral means to achieve moral ends. Drieu's morality was not a Christian morality but a warrior morality. The virtues of this morality were force, courage, and will expressed by the elite and directed against the decadent order. The military virtues were a revolt against the morals of bourgeois society and the creation of a community of men devoted to the nation and disciplined by their wills. Fascism adopted a spiritual goal and a political-social ideology directed against a society of bourgeois moral decadence and its political counterpart, the anemic democracy of the Third Republic. The positions were clear for the struggle of ideologies in the 'Thirties: better fascism than communism, but anything rather than democracy.<sup>45</sup> Drieu concluded *Socialisme fasciste*: "I have found the formula, but not the place."

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<sup>45</sup>Tison-Braun, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

Chapter V

ENGAGEMENT: THE P.P.F. AND NATIONAL FASCISM

In the name of the people and the nation, I swear fidelity and devotion to the Parti Populaire Français, to its ideal,

I swear to consecrate all my efforts to the struggle against Communism and social egoism.

I swear to serve until the supreme sacrifice the cause of the Popular and National Revolution from which a new France will usher, free and independent.

—Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Avec Doriot*

While 6 February 1934 was considered the prelude to the National Revolution by the French Right, it was viewed as the spectre of fascism by the French Left. In the face of this threat, the foundations of the *Front populaire* were laid. Leon Blum regarded the February riots as the result of a serious attempt by "fascist" organizations to overthrow the Republic and establish a dictatorship. The French Left, alarmed by the riots, supported by the new Comintern policy of Left-wing united action began to unite against the internal and external threat of fascism. The National Council of the Socialist Party of 15 July 1934 agreed to accept the Communist offer of united action "against war and fascism."

The four bases of agreement for the creation of the Popular Front were formulated to present a united political front against fascism and work for the defense and reform of democracy both politically and socially. On 11 January 1936, the Popular Front published its programme under three platforms: Defense of Liberty, Defense of Peace, and a Social-Economic programme. Defense of Liberty provided for the dissolution of extra-parliamentary fascist leagues, measures to eliminate corruption in the press and politics, complete freedom for trade unions, and complete freedom of conscience in education. Defence of Peace provided for disarmament, international cooperation within the League of Nations, nationalization of the armaments industry, abolition of secret diplomacy, and the extension of alliances including the maintenance of the Franco-Soviet pact ratified by the Laval ministry on 2 May, 1935. The Social-Economic programme was to provide a "New Deal" for France

that was at once bold and original. It provided for the reduction of the work week without a reduction in wages, a large public works programme, workers' pensions and a national unemployment fund, a reform of the Bank of France, and a graduated income tax.<sup>1</sup>

The solidarity of the Left grew with the rising threat of national and international fascism preceding the elections of May 1936. On 13 February, Blum was attacked by youths of the *Action Française* during the funeral of the historian, Jacques Bainville. The internal threat of fascism in this attack was compounded by the threat of Germany and her occupation of the Rhineland on 7 March, 1936. The Saurrat ministry was a "caretaker" government awaiting replacement in the coming elections. The ministry was incapable of calling a general mobilization in response to the German action. It lacked strong political support, and suffered from an unstable financial situation which a general mobilization would further disrupt. Its primary consideration, however, was the pacifism of France that would respond negatively to general mobilization.

Against the threatening spectre of national and international fascism the French populace voted. The overwhelming victory of 2 May, 1936 gave the Popular Front 380 seats to 237 for the opposition. Its mandate was the social and economic reform of France under the banner 'against war and fascism.' Blum stated that it was necessary to act immediately:

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<sup>1</sup>James Joll, "The Making of the Popular Front," in *The Decline of the Third Republic*, ed. by James Joll (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), pp. 59-60.

". . . In the eyes of the electors, the Popular Front means cohesion against a possible attack by Fascism. It means a joint effort to govern and to govern at once, immediately after the electoral victory so as to be able to lessen the miseries and injustices in which Fascism finds its breeding ground."<sup>2</sup> Blum faced problems from the beginning starting with a wave of wildcat strikes. Many workers misunderstood the electoral victory as the beginning of the revolution itself. Furthermore, the Communists refused to participate in the ministry but promised to support Blum in his endeavours. A basic conflict of ideals arose to underline the division at work in the united Left. For the Radicals and Socialists the ideal was 1789 and the National Assembly of Liberals. For the Communists the ideal was 1793 and the Committee of Public Safety of the Jacobins. According to Joll, the weakness of the Popular Front could not be summarized better.<sup>3</sup>

The Blum ministry assumed office on 3 June, 1936, determined to implement its programme of launching a social revolution within the existing constitutional framework. The strikes were resolved by the Matignon agreements providing for the right to unionize, collective contracts, an increase in wages, and employer cooperation in governmental legislation. The Blum ministry legislated the forty-hour work week, paid holidays, a public works programme, nationalization of the armaments industry and reform of the Bank of France. However, the ministry, after

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<sup>2</sup>James Joll, *Intellectuals in Politics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1960), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>Joll, "The Making of the Popular Front," p. 64.

initial successes, began to lose its momentum. Blum stated on 24 February, 1937 at St.-Nazaire that a "pause" was required to consolidate the legislative gains. The pause soon became a retreat.

The French political system was by 1936 dominated by a growing struggle of national politics linked with international ideologies. Political factions polarized ideologically with the growing threat of war. This atmosphere was to remain dominant from 1936 until 1939. During the 1936 elections, the Communists stated that those parties against the Popular Front were pro-Hitler, and Hitler meant war. The Right countered that a vote for the Popular Front, supported by Moscow, would antagonize Germany and precipitate war. Each side emphasized the most extreme aspect of their opponents' ideology presenting an anti-fascist or anti-communist position forcing the electorate to choose one or the other.<sup>4</sup> This ideological polarization was heightened with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on 18 July, 1936. The crisis caught the Blum ministry in a political dilemma: (1) to intervene on behalf of the republican *Frente Popular* against Franco's military insurrection would incur the wrath of the French Right; or (2) to support Franco and incur the wrath of the French Left and the dissolution of the Popular Front. Blum's sympathies lay with the Spanish republicans but he was forced to give a firm 'non' to intervention under mounting political and ideological pressure.

Blum's refusal was based on the threat of civil war in France.

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<sup>4</sup>Weber, *Action Française*, p. 371.

The French Right regarded events in Spain as a struggle between pro-communist and anti-communist forces. In its opinion a Soviet engineered victory in Spain would mean Communism in France, while French intervention against Franco would precipitate the European conflagration engineered by the Comintern.<sup>5</sup> The Spanish Civil War assumed proportions of a European crusade with Russian support of the Republicans and Italian and German support of the Nationalists. French sympathies for either group reflected a social philosophy in which allies were selected in the light of what France herself should be. Blum's neutrality, denounced as indecision, aggravated the growing crisis in politics and ideologies, hastening the disintegration of the Popular Front and with it the morale of the entire nation.<sup>6</sup> France divided into two political, ideological camps, a division originating in the Italo-Ethiopian war and increased by the Spanish Civil War.

Division between political extremes in French politics was apparent within the ranks of the Left, as well as the Right. A schism developed within the ranks of the *Parti Communiste Français* (P.C.F.) between Jacques Doriot, the leader of the *Jeunesses Communistes* and Maurice Thorez, the national party leader. Jacques Doriot presented a dynamic, imposing figure as a man of revolutionary action by his vigour, rhetoric, and his youthful peasant appearance. Doriot's break with the party originated in the events of the sixth and ninth of February,

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<sup>5</sup>Samuel M. Osgood, "The Front populaire: Views from the Right," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. IX, 1964, p. 195.

<sup>6</sup>Weber, *Action Française*, p. 382.

1934.\* Doriot had insisted that the February riots were the development of a revolutionary atmosphere. He appealed for a "unity of mass action" but was frustrated by Thorez's stress on the primacy of organization and discipline. Like Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Jacques Doriot perceived the situation as demanding immediate united action. The impetus of the February days was lost because of Thorez's refusal to act, a decision which was later approved by the Central Committee in Moscow. Doriot began to shift further afield of party discipline and was censured by Moscow on the charge of destroying class unity by his disruptive indiscipline within the P.C.F. His actions once deemed opportunistic were now defined as schismatic.<sup>7</sup>

Doriot's heresies continued. He resumed his struggle against party bureaucracy proposing the creation of a united proletarian party. He stressed unity in action of the Left as a defensive alliance against fascism and unity in organization of its political parties carrying the proletariat to the offensive with "one class, one party, one C.G.T." The new coalition, Doriot conceived, would be a higher synthesis of revolutionary Bolshevism and parliamentary Socialism—a party internally democratic and externally militant.<sup>8</sup> Doriot had anticipated the platform to form the Popular Front uniting the Left. Doriot's doctrines were

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\*The reference to ninth of February was the Left response to the supposedly attempted coup by the French fascist Right on the sixth February. The Left demonstration of solidarity on ninth February was followed by a general strike on twelfth February, 1934.

<sup>7</sup>Gilbert D. Allardyce, *The Political Transition of Jacques Doriot, 1926-1936* (unpublished dissertation: Univ. of Iowa, 1966), p. 221.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 237.



regarded as heretical and schismatic before its proposal by the Comintern and the adoption by the French Left. The heresies of unity in action and unity in organization were made orthodox and implemented, but not before the expulsion of Doriot from the P.C.F. The party had repeatedly stolen his initiative and the attacks by Thorez and Moscow were unforgivable. Doriot refused to remain politically exiled and anonymous. He became a renegade.

Forced out of the party, Jacques Doriot became a virulent critic of the new political front formed by the Left. The ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact of 16 May, 1935 and its support of the idea by the Popular Front led to Doriot's severance with the Left. Stalin's approval that the French Left must adopt a policy of national defense for France convinced Doriot that the P.C.F. would be the war-party with the alliance of imperialist France to revolutionary Russia. It appeared to Doriot that the struggle against war was incompatible with the struggle against fascism. The goal of peace was jeopardized by the new political ideology that approved the imperialist-revolutionary alliance. The Franco-Soviet alliance possessed antagonistic, if not aggressive implications towards Germany. The Popular Front, especially the Communists, had destroyed the most cherished ideal, revolutionary defeatism in such measures as the general strike by workers against imperialist powers. The *rassemblement* strategy of proletarian unity in the united Left to combat the fascist threat nationally also implied the combat of fascism abroad. The antagonism towards Germany implied by the alliance jeopardized the peace of Europe, abandoning revolutionary defeatism against imperialist

aggression.<sup>9</sup>

On 1 December, 1935, Doriot announced in St. Denis the initial programme of a new party that would stand above the existing party structure accommodating youth and disgruntled elements of the Right and Left. The new party, the *Parti Populaire Français* (P.P.F.), declared itself a "socially-minded nationalist party" whose goal was to prepare "a revolution in France with French materials." The envisaged social revolution would also be a national revolution directed against the Communists and the Two Hundred Capitalist Families supposedly controlling the French economy.<sup>10</sup> The new party was conceived as one of action, led by a vigorous leader appealing to national opinion and promising social justice. The motto, "Peace and Social Justice," was to create a national class conciliation, a peace to conciliate France and Germany, eliminate the dictates of Moscow, and confront any aggressive threat.

Doriot gave two figure-heads of the party symbolizing a national class conciliation above political or class interests. The ideals were the nationalist figure of Joan of Arc and the revolutionary symbol of the Commune. Joan of Arc symbolized France united to the soil, liberties, and the nation of fathers, artisans, and peasants uniting in a single affirmation against the foreign threat. The Paris Commune of 1871 symbolized France united as a single class in a social-revolutionary movement dedicated to the ideal of a new order. The P.P.F. affirmed the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

creation of a new France on the foundation of a national faith and a social equality.<sup>11</sup>

The goal of the national revolution was to erect a national duty above private interest. The P.P.F. was the nucleus of this revolution. The leader was neither a "commandant" nor a representative, but an emanation of the national will. Doriot cut an attractive figure of the new France by his height, and his voice exhorting images of health, strength, will, and energy. His vigour exerted an appeal to Frenchmen who sought an active, strong leader. Combined with the appeal of national class conciliation, the party called for a moral restoration that would stem the moral decline reflected in the falling birth-rate. Doriot stressed that this decline was due to individual selfishness irresponsible of national duty: ". . . The causes of this lamentable situation are due to certain philosophic moral concepts that the Frenchman believed it was sufficient to assure his own existence in order to fulfill his social duty. He has been allowed to forget that man's essential duty is to assure his descendance."<sup>12</sup>

Doriot's vision of a national-social revolution elicited a strong approval from Pierre Drieu La Rochelle and an admiration from Robert Brasillach. France, under the Popular Front, was characterized by Brasillach as the *drole d'epoque*. France appeared to many of her intellectuals to be at a crucial turning point where she was failing to turn.

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<sup>11</sup>Plumyène and Lasierra, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>12</sup>Jacques Doriot, *Refaire la France* (Paris: Grasset, 1938), p. 51.

The mounting crises of national politics and international ideologies rendered the nation unable to resolve her difficulties, at least under the social-democratic system of the Popular Front. The crisis experienced by France could be resolved only in a national unity inspired by the new doctrine of fascism. The spiritual-political momentum of a youthful fascism born of the moral and political crises of the 'Thirties demanded a national unity but one deemed impossible under the Third Republic. Brasillach noted:

They [fascist youth] know what their nation and its role is, they want to believe in its future. They see the strong gleam of imperial rebirth before them. They want a pure nation, a pure race. . . . They do not believe in the promises of liberalism, the equality of men, the will of the people. But they do believe . . . a nation is *one*, precisely as *one* in a team. They do not believe in justice declared by speeches, but they call that justice which reigns by force. And they know that this force will give birth to joy.<sup>13</sup>

The goal of the P.P.F. was to recreate France as a national organic society to counteract her political and moral decadence. France required a unity of command in the leader and a unity of action in the party. The fascist individual must accept a collective duty towards the nation rather than demand individual rights from it. Paul Marion wrote in 1938 that the P.P.F. would destroy the "shell of egoism" that characterized France's decadence. The party would restore the lost authority and lead France collectively toward a national unity and faith in discipline and cohesion.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Brasillach, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

<sup>14</sup>Soucy, *Fascism in France: The Case of Maurice Barrès*, pp. 285-286.

Doriot noted that the fundamental social unit for France's regeneration was the family. It was the nucleus of the nation as the basis for paternalism, authority, and discipline. This nucleus was to be complemented by the organization of professions and corporations abolishing political strikes and workers' unions. The working class was to be organized in a Council of Corporations where individual profit and economic enterprise were to remain the "motor of production," and undertaken with the collaboration of management, workers, and technicians. Working-class solidarity would become a professional class solidarity united in common interests. A Council of Provinces would replace centralization with an administrative, cultural, and economic autonomy. The dual combination of traditionalism and modernism would cultivate the historical traditions and political sentiments of the French provinces contributing towards the collective identity of the nation. A Council of Empire would assert and strengthen the authority and power of France thus preserving her colonial possessions. The body animating a revitalized France and to which the various councils would answer would be a strong executive maintaining and directing the national effort.<sup>15</sup> An authoritarian leadership would resolve the inertia and impotence of parliamentary democracy.

The collective "national egoism" was the goal based on the economic and social status quo. The P.P.F.'s fascist socialism was a mild brand of welfare capitalism retaining individual profit as the motor of production. The economic goal was working class collaboration with

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<sup>15</sup>Doriot, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-104.

with management in private industry. The party held the preservation of the peasantry as the guardians of precious tradition but the defence of economic interests belonged to the private entrepreneurs.<sup>16</sup> This corporatist orientation of French fascism was a new social doctrine whose goal was less to fulfill rather than channel and control the demands of workers in society. The party regarded the *bien-pensant* worker as a national, as well as a social factor, ready to join the national crusade but who knew his place in society.<sup>17</sup> The principle of class conciliation on the basis of the socio-economic status quo was conceivable only within the fascist doctrine of a higher duty motivated by the ideal of a spiritual national egoism.

The P.P.F. was directed against Communism and Socialism in the Popular Front coalition. It held the "spirit of victory" as the sole method to reassert the principle of the nation and resolve the class struggle. The spiritual doctrine of fascism placed the spirit of national pride and duty above the individual interest and rights and advanced the spirit of a disciplined unity which overrode class differences and political divisions. It demanded national loyalty above class loyalty, embracing the traditional values of the peasantry, the political values of the proletariat, and the economic values of the bourgeoisie. Fascism, in asserting the collective moral and national virtues could unite the

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<sup>16</sup>Robert J. Soucy, "French Fascism as Class Conciliation and Moral Regeneration," *Societas*, Vol. I, 1971, pp. 292-293.

<sup>17</sup>Osgood, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

national society in its spirit rather than its politics or economics. Consequently it could state that while parliament divided, fascism united; where socialism taught class division, fascism taught class conciliation; where democracy weakened the nation, fascism strengthened it.<sup>18</sup>

The fascist mystique served as the key element of the P.P.F. An underlying theme of the fascist movement was that of active pessimism, a deep sense of despair that revealed the individual lost in his political and social environment. The party appealed to the dispossessed of France calling them to form the new elite and create the spirit of the national revolution. Doriot stated that the programme of peace and social justice drew members from old traditional political formations: old Communists, young national volunteers, the combattant of the sixth of February and the combattant of the ninth of February.<sup>19</sup> This new elite possessed the idea of a renaissance of France who, in the words of Maurice Barrès, appealed to France: ". . . Revive yourself old race and regain possession of yourselves since your masters have failed." The elite presented the symbol of the new man possessing self-confidence, a group consciousness, and the élan that had once created the magnificence of cathedrals. The mystique glorified the soil of the French nation and the new Frenchmen whose traditional values and revolutionary élan would create the

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<sup>18</sup>Soucy, "French Fascism as Class Conciliation and Moral Regeneration," p. 282.

<sup>19</sup>Doriot, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

national revolution.

Drieu's adherence to the P.P.F. was due more to a sense of desperation than to a positive engagement. The commitment that he embraced was a product of his own character. Two central themes of his engagement were his pessimism in his society and his belief in the value of action. His active pessimism maintained that in order to escape self-destruction of his being, he must make direct contact with the realities of life in action. He concluded that if he was to act in the world, especially the political world, he could not avoid what Sartre called "dirty hands."<sup>20</sup> Drieu chose amoral activism over moral passivity and erected an ideal for his society and himself whose goal justified any means taken to achieve it. He envisaged a society limited in production of material benefits led by an elite of aristocratic virtues. The new elite would lead rather than be led by a political crowd intoxicated by material needs and mediocre satisfactions:

. . . He thought, as Plato in *The Laws*, that contemplation can be full and creative only when supported by gestures and actions that engage all society. The only beauty is in thought and there is beauty only by the concourse of all society led to the holy law of measure and equilibrium. Restriction of needs for the elite, equilibrium of material forces on one hand, corporal and spiritual on the other. Asceticism of the religious, but also the athlete and the warrior.<sup>21</sup>

On 28 June, 1936 Drieu became a member and spokesman for Doriot's

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<sup>20</sup>Robert J. Soucy, "Romanticism and Realism in the Fascism of Drieu La Rochelle," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 31, 1970, p. 81.

<sup>21</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 378.



P.P.F. The new party was a synthesis: a national party without the routines and prejudices of the Right and a social party without the restrictions of the Left.\* Drieu found in the party itself a camaraderie of combat, a fraternal friendship, and a will to destroy a decadent moral and political France. The major appeal to Drieu lay in the figure of Doriot and the party elite. Doriot represented the figure of *le chef*, the living incarnation of the St. Denis party, the workers reconciled with the veterans, the men of 6 February with those of 9 February. He provided the smell of the streets and the sagacity of an experienced politician to a party consisting of nationalists from the disbanded leagues, communists who remained loyal to Doriot, and intellectuals seeking a political party compatible with their philosophy. All elements were embodied in the leader representing the elite.<sup>22</sup> Drieu regarded Doriot as a leader dependent on the efforts of those he represented, for ". . . the efficiency of a group can be sharpened and fulfilled only by their mutual assistance. The triumph of a generation can be assured only in the strength of devotion that erects above its ranks an irrefutable personal success."<sup>23</sup>

The role and nature of the elite, as Drieu noted in *Socialisme fasciste*, was the essential element for political success. The P.P.F.,

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\*Drieu became one of the leading spokesman for the P.P.F. The party's social and economic programme was devised by Robert Loustau of the *Ordre Nouveau*. Other leading intellectuals were Bertrand de Jouvenal and Paul Marion. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

<sup>22</sup>Allardyce, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>23</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 389.

elite gave Drieu the experience he had shared with his compatriots in the trenches: the camaraderie, the solidarity of risk and adventure, the consciousness of the faithful, and the proud separateness from the masses. Together they were grouped in defiance to a regime and order they could not accept. The elite possessed a specific concept of the nation to which they remained faithful.<sup>24</sup> French fascism was an elitist doctrine due in part because of its failure to become a mass movement but also because of the intellectuals' superior distaste towards the masses.<sup>25</sup> Drieu stressed the elitism of the leader and the party elite as the agent to give France an authority and a direction:

We are leaders . . . not by privileges of wealth, but of honour and prestige; and in return we are seriously, imperiously concerned with you [Frenchmen], with all your life, not only material but spiritual. We oblige you to accomplish the great tasks that you dream; we are the demanding servants of your fancies and aspirations. You desire dignity in your factories, fields and life. To achieve this dignity requires an effort. This effort that you daily renounce, we leaders will impose it on you. And you will be recognized.<sup>26</sup>

The fascist would present the example of social and national unity. As a worker, he opposed the trade and syndicalist unions subservient to tyrannical political opportunists. As a bourgeois, he abandoned his class interest for the principle of national community and fraternity.<sup>27</sup> The French fascists were strong nationalists but they were not loyal to the Republic. The only way to love France was to hate

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<sup>24</sup>Raoul Girardet, "Notes sur l'esprit d'un fascisme français 1934-1939," *Revue Française de Science Politique*, Vol. V, 1955, p. 544.

<sup>25</sup>Soucy, "Nature of Fascism in France," p. 46.

<sup>26</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "La fondation du Parti Populaire Française," in *Avec Doriot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), pp. 15-16.

<sup>27</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Parmi nous," *ibid.*, p. 71.

what she had become. Fascism defined itself as a revolutionary force of rupture repudiating capitalism and parliamentary democracy in the present social order. The fascist doctrine of the national revolution was to achieve the spiritual vision of grandeur as revealed by her cathedrals, the monuments of a national faith. This goal required the acceptance of a superior national goal to which each individual must dedicate himself.

The party would seek power to realize its goals of erecting an authoritarian government to unite, as a *faisceau*, all the forces of the nation. The national authority would dedicate itself towards national goals. It would place the national interest above individual interest, imposing a discipline recognized and accepted as a national necessity.<sup>28</sup> Fascism would be a government "for the people" rather than "by the people" directed by the elite of merit dispensing with traditional hierarchies and authorities. A new type of national and political society was to be established in order to create a new nation and a new citizen. The dynamics for the national revolution lay in the fascism of the P.P.F. France must solve her political-national dilemma in the era of ideologies where Drieu noted that the question was to either become Communists in order not to become Germans, or to become Germans in order not to become Communists. The motto of the P.P.F. in response to the European dilemma of "Either Moscow or Berlin" was *Ni Moscow ni*

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<sup>28</sup>Maurice Barèdeche, *Qu'est-ce que le Fascisme* (Paris: Les Sept Couleurs, 1961), p. 182.

*Berlin*. To resist the pressures of foreign ideologies, France must affirm her separation from them and focus on her own strengths to create her own doctrine. Doriot's response of "Neither Moscow nor Berlin" required the political and social unity of the nation under one party to preserve the autonomy of France.<sup>29</sup>

The model employed by Drieu for the national revolution was the medieval history of France. There remained a sense of immediacy in Drieu's articles when he stated that France must act quickly to regain her grandeur destroyed by her political divisions:

Ah, if France knew what she was in the twelfth century, greater even than the seventeenth century, so simple, so dense, so united, creating everything, all Medieval poetry, all Medieval architecture (including the basilica of St. Denis) and all its philosophy, not including the First Empire of the Crusades. From this traditional point of view, the word "populaire" that designated our nation is not a vain word, we owe to it to give its full sense of truth and simplicity. . . . A nation is a community where all men are interdependent on each other, and assured by the strength of institutions, the strength of the principle of solidarity. A nation is a government.<sup>30</sup>

France had lost this vision and had even failed to respond to the great transformations of the twentieth century. She remained behind in the revolutions in morality, politics, and society. Her inertia was illustrated by the Popular Front in its inability to recognize the necessities of the modern age. The government perpetuated a petty, blind politics in democracy absent of any paternal foresight. An

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<sup>29</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "La Courage des français est avec Doriot," 19 December, 1936, in *Avec Doriot*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>30</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Les Miliciens à St. Denis," 15 January, 1937, *ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

important factor in the decline of France was her philosophy complementing her political democracy. Drieu noted that the Popular Front ". . . has left France encrusted in a petty, antiphysical, and inhuman rationalism."<sup>31</sup> The malaise of rationalism was expressed by utilitarian pleasure-seeking in morality, self-interest in economics, and democracy in politics. This rationalism was to be replaced by the principles of duty in morality, authority in politics, and national-socialism in society.<sup>32</sup>

It is interesting to note that while Drieu condemned the Popular Front led by Blum, he did not attack the leader of the coalition with a favourite weapon employed by the French Right—anti-semitism. Racism played an insignificant role in Drieu's fascism. The Jew was only a manifestation of a decadent world of rationalism, materialism, and capitalism, not its cause. Drieu did not subscribe to a theory of conspiracy. France's decadence lay not in the Jew but within the French themselves. The French were not superior racial beings who would regain their lost vision of grandeur because of an historical-racial superiority. Racial determinism and messianism were alien to Drieu's renaissance of France. What would guarantee the restoration of French vitality was an affirmation of will. He insisted repeatedly on the maxim that men, as well as nations, were capable of fashioning themselves to their destiny

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<sup>31</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Nous et la Front Populaire," 30 January, 1937, *ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>32</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Nous et l'Empire," 27 February, 1937, *ibid.*, p. 157.

through the forces of volition.<sup>33</sup> The elite of the Party would make the nation conscious of their will and direct them towards grandeur.

The P.P.F. was the political force dedicated to the restoration of the moral and physical health of France. Drieu claimed that the party was the *Parti du corps vivant*—the party of the living body—that would imbue France with the spiritual and physical élan in fascism. In an important reflection, he stressed what fascism entailed, but as usual in a poetic rather than a political definition:

The most profound definition of fascism is this: it is the political movement that offers the most sincere and most radical movement in the sense of the great revolution of traditions, in the sense of the restoration of the body—health, dignity, plenitude, heroism, in the sense of the defense of man against the city and the machine. Fascism which furthermore assimilates that which is possible of socialism without succumbing to utopia, surpasses socialism by its sense of man.<sup>34</sup>

It is apparent that Drieu's concept of fascism contained his own values which he ascribed to the P.P.F. He portrayed Jacques Doriot in this light as the figure who would establish the "choral sense" of a united France. He compared Doriot to Joan of Arc and Henry II, both of peasant origins, possessing strong bodies capable of carrying the heavy responsibility and authority of national reconciliation. All represented national figures ". . . who by the profound peace cured the wounds of civil war, the war of ideologies . . . and who reunified the nation,

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<sup>33</sup>Robert J. Soucy, "Le fascisme de Drieu La Rochelle," *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*, Vol. 17, 1967, p. 68.

<sup>34</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Le Parti Populaire Français: Parti du corps vivant," 13 August, 1937 in *Chronique Politique*, p. 50.

raised it in a magnificent current of healthy affirmation, of good strong conditions, of continuous creation."<sup>35</sup> French history must be accepted as a national source of unity instead of division. The P.P.F. held this unity above either the Right who negated French history after 1789, or the Left who negated French history before 1789. The tradition of a spiritually and physically complete France would again forge the weapon of national defense and grandeur.

The model for achieving political power, according to Drieu, was the Jacobin dictatorship. The Jacobin model was the authoritarian principle that would supplant the Third Republic. The Republic exhibited all the disadvantages of democratic liberalism in a Chamber where parties no longer deliberated. All the discussions, hesitations, dissensions were in the hands of leaders who lacked authority and failed to provide leadership in a crisis that made authority and leadership imperative. Drieu's criticisms were justified and revealed the growing decline of the Third Republic that could spark a *coup d'état*. Such a measure was in fact conceived by a group led by Eugène Deloncle called the Cagoule (Comité Secret d'Action Revolutionnaire). The plot was discovered in 1937 by the police and a cache of weapons revealed the gravity of the conspiracy to overthrow the Republic.<sup>36</sup> The goal of the Jacobin conquest of power apparently was held by organizations other than the P.P.F. The goal was similar in that the conquest of power would establish *one*

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<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 August, 1937, p. 55.

<sup>36</sup>Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism 1919-1945* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1971), pp. 222-223.

hierarchical, strongly organized party dispensing with democratic liberalism. The Jacobin elite would govern with the leader directing the "revolution from the top." The Jacobin model was the authoritarian political framework that would ". . . conserve for us this French treasure—this tradition of liberties—measured and balanced, that all our hope is preserved there for France to give it back to her one day."<sup>37</sup>

Drieu stated that the party did not desire an electoral victory but desired a revolution. However, this national revolution was based on conservative principles. The revolution, Drieu noted, would translate itself in the political reform of the State so as to strengthen the executive power before enabling it to distribute liberties to the nation. Social and economic reform would occur within the status quo. The fundamental unit of French society was to be the family.<sup>38</sup>

Drieu condemned political democracy on conservative lines; stating that democracy provided freedoms without purpose and this condition dissolved the national energy. "The freedom which we possess is much less a positive, active, creative principle than a negative state. There is a licence of customs and thought concealing the great secret fact of political and social life: that all energies are neutralized and annulled."<sup>39</sup> Fascism stressed the morality of disciplined freedoms, individual will and energy directed towards national goals. The

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<sup>37</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Jacobinisme et nous," 4 February, 1938, in *Chronique Politique*, p. 105.

<sup>38</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Le fond philosophique de notre doctrine," 12 August, 1938, *ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>39</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "A propos de cent cinquante ans de la Révolution française," 7 April, 1938, *ibid.*, p. 39.



qualities that forged and maintained the national energy were those of discipline, work, duty, and honour. The morality emphasized a sense of responsibility, solidarity, the recognition of duties, and the acceptance of a position in an accepted order.<sup>40</sup>

A further indication of the conservative nature of fascism, as well as a characteristic that made it unique to France, was Drieu's emphasis on Catholicism. Drieu linked his concept of medieval Catholicism to his fascism, giving it properties of a secular and national faith. Catholicism inspired many qualities of fascism. It represented the repository of the experience and wisdom of European civilization. Its doctrines served as a model and inspiration for the spiritual element of fascism:

The Christianity of the *grand siècle* was virile, comprehensive, yet, affirmative carrying all the world's contradictions and resolving them by the complex organization of mind and matter offered to men. This form of Christianity providentially came to serve our race and climate, inscribed in our cathedrals, in the vigorous, youthful, and powerful figure of the triumphant Christ, and beside Him the Virgin Mary. There is nothing to cede in virility and health to the gods of Olympus or Valhalla, in being richer in the subtle secrets of the gods of Asia.<sup>41</sup>

Catholicism revealed to Drieu the virility of Christ and how man could become in His image. Catholicism restored the link of the body and soul in a Nietzschean symbol of transcendentalism. Its philosophy was one opposed to rationalism, cultivating the subjective spirituality of vigour and strength. Drieu stated that this vigorous morality,

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<sup>40</sup>Barèdeche, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>41</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Reflections sur Catholicisme," 24 June, 1938 in *Chronique Politique*, pp. 141-142.

first embodied in Catholicism, was an individual model for a unique "humanism." Drieu explained that ". . . a true humanism is that which recognizes the superhuman, the divine. That which does not recognize gods, does not conceive beyond God, strikes death to humanity. The sources of humanity are too profound to be cultivated, safeguarded, venerated by those methods of a superficial and narrow rationalism. . . ."<sup>42</sup> Consequently, the model of medieval Catholicism served as an individual philosophy and national philosophy of regeneration. It could serve also as the basis for European federation to be discussed in the following chapter.

Drieu had noted previously in *Mesure de la France* that the era of nations had not terminated but the era of alliances remained open. Europe must federate to strengthen her position vis-a-vis the new continental blocs and maintain her predominance in Asia and Africa. If she failed to realize this, she would devour herself or be devoured in another European war. The growing threat of Nazi Germany posed a new problem that made the regeneration of France even more crucial. The adoption of fascism would defend France from aggression from both fascist and communist nations. As the possibilities of war increased, Drieu reproached Hitler's territorial ambitions which, he felt, destroyed the promise of European federation in favour of German imperialism. Drieu elaborated: "Hitler has fallen into the folly of Charles V, Louis XIV, and Napoleon I. Instead of continuing the idea of Geneva and assuring

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<sup>42</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, "Le fond philosophique de notre doctrine," p. 161.

a supple and acceptable form of the central and capital position of Germanism in the middle of Europe which must federate in order to maintain her predominance over Asia, Islam, and Africa . . . ."43 It now appeared that Europe would not federate but head towards another tragic war.

France must prepare herself to confront the growing threat of Germany. France's democracy was totally inadequate to deal with this threat and Drieu urged France to adopt a semblance of fascism—a new spiritual force of national strength. "Our democratic conscience was barely enough at Verdun against the Prussian discipline. I believe that the new Hitlerian discipline will be too much for us to stand up to. Because, contrary to what you believe, it is not a military discipline but much more than that. It is a spiritual discipline."<44 Thus the only way to save France was to assert herself by adopting the methods of her adversary.

Attempts to create a united political Right formation under the *Front de la Liberté* failed to materialize because of the mistrust between the P.P.F. of Doriot and the P.S.F. (*Parti Social Français*) of Colonel de la Rocque. The Front was designed to serve as a political coalition to confront the Popular Front. However, the failure to gain the adherence of the entire Right-wing doomed the coalition. Interestingly enough, the refusal of the P.S.F. to join the Doriot-inspired front was due to

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<sup>43</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *L'Europe s'engage sur le chemin des derniers jours*, 26 November, 1937, *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>44</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Dures vérités," *ibid.*, p. 137.

the identical reasons uniting the Right. M. Creysell, a P.S.F. deputy, communicated the refusal to join the P.P.F. front because of its anti-Marxist platform: ". . . The struggle against Marxism, a necessary but negative struggle, is not the essential point. The essence of our action is a positive revolution in the political, social, and moral order tending to eliminate the class struggle, establish a civic discipline of devotion, to organize labour in the professions and to adapt the Republican state to the expression of this new structure to its economic role."<sup>45</sup> All the above reasons ring true for a French fascism but the P.S.F. conceived a more moderate goal than the extremes envisaged by the P.P.F. Also, the P.S.F. feared the loss of leadership of its members under a P.P.F. inspired coalition. The moderate and fascist Right could only present its doctrine in such generalities and this is where its appeal lay. However, it also revealed the lack of concrete programmes and consequently a loss of ever-diminishing support by the French electorate.

By 1938, Drieu had lost faith in Doriot, the leader he endowed with so many romantic qualities. Doriot now appeared lacking in the peasant vigour and strength but seemed more like a fat bourgeois in his leadership and his politics. Drieu's attraction to Doriot was in the latter's emphasis on élan and action, the almost natural property of the Right, combined with a social programme incorporated from the Left. Drieu now viewed Doriot as incapable of leadership and action. The

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<sup>45</sup>Philippe Machefer, "L'Union des Droites: Le P.S.F. et le Front de la liberté 1936-1937," *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, Vol. 17, 1970, p. 120.

doctrine of "Peace and Social Justice" now appeared as a politics for the status quo rather than a politics of national revolution. His final illusion was dispelled when Doriot continued to favour appeasement of Germany after the Allied "sell-out" at Munich. Doriot's pro-German position was a betrayal of French fascism as Drieu conceived it. Drieu revealed his disillusionment with his political engagement, noting of French politicians, including Doriot, that:

They would abdicate their noble pretention to be revolutionaries and gradually they would become a shadow of themselves, poor lost soldiers in an impotent strategy. They would sink gradually with all other Frenchmen into a paralytic conformity, into a senile automatism, they would fall towards a dismal war as the sole deliverance from the torment of being unable to recreate.<sup>46</sup>

Drieu's political engagement was conditioned by his personal philosophy which he attempted to translate in terms of the restoration of the spiritual grandeur to France. Above all, his concept of fascism and his attempt to apply it in the political sphere reflected a will to dominate rather than to be dominated by the successive crises of the 'Thirties. He attacked the philosophic foundation of rationalism embodied in the Third Republic. In a scathing public letter addressed to Edouard Daladier after his return from the Munich conference, Drieu accused him of returning covered in the shame of France. This shame lay not only in the appeasement of Hitler but also in the inability to confront the dictator on his own terms. France's energies were dissipated by her philosophic rationalism and her political democracy. France had

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<sup>46</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, pp. 441-442.

weakened herself because she lacked the complement to reason—a national faith. Drieu accused Daladier of ". . . destroying the just views of life and death, you have destroyed the courage before life and death. You have destroyed the spirit of the army and the family. You have also destroyed religion, protector of these two foundations."<sup>47</sup>

The secular adaptation of the philosophy of medieval Catholicism was the principal construct of Drieu's fascism. It perceived a life based on good and evil, it taught of freedom disciplined by authority, it presented a morality of duty and discipline, and maintained the necessity of struggle. Drieu's break with the P.P.F. and his retreat into isolation to await an inevitable war further increased his despair for France. Both France and England had failed to respond to the great experiment of the 'Thirties. They had failed to become fascist, to exist swift and strong, to prevent and divert the expansion of fascist nations. The democracies faced a choice posed by Drieu, to die as democrats and liberals or to surge, revive, and triumph as fascists.<sup>48</sup> By the end of 1938 it was obvious what path they had chosen.

Fascism failed to gain any appreciable following in France due to several factors. First, it failed to unite under one leader and one party. Second, the military morality adopted by fascist parties exerted little appeal to a nation whose pacifism was enforced with the memories

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<sup>47</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Lettre à Edouard Daladier," 14 October, 1938, in *Chronique Politique*, p. 189.

<sup>48</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Mourir en démocrates ou survivre en fascistes," 28 October, 1938, *ibid.*, p. 193.

of the carnage of World War I. Third, France did not suffer the economic dislocations of Germany and the Popular Front managed to conciliate social discontent. Fourth, fascism in Germany and Italy looked less attractive in power and these predecessors of fascism in Europe cast a negative appeal on the experiment in France.<sup>49</sup> Finally, and probably the most important factor, was the republican institution and philosophy which Drieu condemned so vehemently that seemed to be France's greatest strength. The democratic system and electorate prevented a radical minority from seizing power and dictating its concept of the nation at the expense of fundamental democratic freedoms. France had experienced her revolution and the democratic experience maintained this loyalty in the last years of the Third Republic.

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<sup>49</sup>Soucy, "French Fascism as Class Conciliation and Moral Regeneration," p. 297.

Chapter VI

ENGAGEMENT: COLLABORATION AND EUROPEAN FASCISM

Fascism demands too much from a man; at the same time that it restores life to him, the pride of his youth, it prepares him for a hideous and sterile death.

—Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Socialisme fasciste*



There remains the final concept of Drieu's fascism in his principle of the nation as the basis for the creation of a federated Europe. The origin of this concept of Europe, as well as his ideas on the individual all date from *Mesure de la France*. Drieu's fascism comprised all these spheres. As an individual regeneration, it comprised the assertion of thought united to action, duty and sacrifice in a virile affirmation of life. As a national regeneration, it comprised the unity of the nation founded upon traditional historic values under a modern political authority and discipline to express its strength and defend its autonomy. As a European regeneration, it comprised the federation of European nations in a specific alliance of defense and a general entente of unity to preserve the spiritual and cultural values of Europe threatened by the materialist empires of Russia and the United States of America.

Drieu's nationalism declined at an early stage when he separated the principle of the nation from the spirit of the nation. The national principle had declined as the state, the *pays légal*, had assimilated the spiritual nation, the *pays réel*. Drieu regarded this as the spiritual death of the nation and its loss of identity when it was incorporated with the physical expression of the state. However the spiritual tradition remained the essence of the national identity representing a creative force in Europe. Drieu noted: "Such is the evolution of the nation, it is no more than a name; but this name thrown as a seed in the Universe contains the force of expansion eternally reborn in an idea [Europe]."<sup>1</sup> The key element to continue the spiritual expansion of the

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<sup>1</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 48.

nation and its rebirth originated in the Catholic medieval period comprising a philosophy of unity in France and Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The nation as a spiritual entity found its birth in the medieval concept of the nation united to the principle of European Christendom. Contrasting this ideal to his present, Drieu analyzed: "No one yet thought to argue that the place they inhabited held a concept of God different from that of its neighbours. Each nation was occupied with itself, uniting, producing its own taste in order not to conceive of opposing others. The Nations were all positive; today they are negative; they define themselves by contrast and exclusion; they sustain themselves only by opposing each other."<sup>3</sup>

The nation became identified with the state, the latter assuming the aspirations and ideals of the former employing them for its own material gains. The republican mystique had fallen into disrepute beginning with the First World War. The State had presented its defense as concurrent with that of the Nation. The spiritual ideal of the Nation was used to assure the material victory in war. For Drieu, this was the fatality of the modern world. Europe must destroy the principle of war and the Nation's embodiment in the State. France and Germany must refuse the means of violent conquest and cultivate the ideas of spiritual national coexistence rather than material statist opposition. The era of European internecine conflict among the major powers must cease and seek a new means of conciliation and federation. Along with the

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<sup>2</sup>Martin du Gard, "Un soir avec Drieu," *Les Mémorables*, Vol. II, p. 370.

<sup>3</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

disasters implied by another European war was the birth and rise of the Slav nations. This implied the eclipse of the traditional power base of the five major powers. Old Europe could provide the leadership to Young Europe by dispensing with chauvanistic nationalism and cultivate the principle of a European democracy of nations in a federation.<sup>4</sup>

Drieu noted that nationalism presented the major threat to a European federation of nations. The nationality principle and its traditional expression of expansion would be detrimental to European peace and unity. The language-territory-sovereignty equation of nationalism could not be the basis for the New Europe. However, nationalism could be used to serve European ends if directed properly. Nationalism could create or destroy Europe. To create it, nationalism could be directed against non-European nations such as Russia or America, or both, which posed real threats for Drieu. These threats would inspire nations in a defensive economic federation among Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, and Germanic countries. It would assist the control of colonial possessions in the French and British Empires. The economic and political accords would establish the basis of federation of Europe conscious not so much on the basis of national defense among nations but European defense against the Continental Empires.<sup>5</sup>

The major European powers could provide this leadership of federation for the rest of Europe, allowing nationalisms of the new Central European nations to develop within the international system of

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<sup>4</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *L'Europe contre les patries* (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), pp. 106-107.

<sup>5</sup>Martin du Gard, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

European federation rather than against it. The concept of Europe represented a common destiny and defense for each nation. Europe must be erected as a principle superior to states whereby each nation could supplement its national principle as an integral component of the European principle. The spiritual nation detached from the temporal state could develop this higher unity, as Drieu argued, to reestablish the medieval model of a united, peaceful Christendom for its economic, national, but even more important, its spiritual and cultural preservation.<sup>6</sup>

The European federation was a regeneration of the nation within the context of a European community. It would enhance the renewal of European civilization threatened by the forces of decomposition in Russian materialism and American capitalism. This attitude had obvious ideological implications for Drieu's concept of Europe that excluded Russia. Drieu explained that Europe's focus for federation must be Geneva rather than Moscow ". . . for I do not believe in Moscow, that is in the existence of Moscow as the centre of the III Internationale, coherent and positive, communist and non-European, opposed to Geneva—capital of the capitalist and European world. I believe that Moscow is only the shadow of Geneva, that communism is only the shadow of capitalist civilization; it is the shadow of death attached to every living being and ends by assimilating this being into oblivion."<sup>7</sup>

The European nations, threatened by a new revolutionary materialism,

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<sup>6</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *L'Europe contre les patries*, p. 139.

<sup>7</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Genève ou Moscou*, p. 110.

were forced to confront this threat on equal ground. They must advance the principle of Europe above divisive nationalisms to defend themselves against Communism. This entailed erection of the historic foundation in Roman Catholicism enhanced with a revolutionary spiritualism in fascism.

By 1934, Drieu realized that Europe was threatened by war. He noted that this war would not be one of nations but of ideologies—between Russian Communism and German Fascism. France was caught between this ideological dilemma—becoming communist in order not to become fascist, or becoming fascist in order not to become communist. This dilemma was compounded further by the threat of war. If France mobilized to stem the German threat, an allied victory would destroy the power bloc which contained Russian expansion. A French victory against Germany would entail ultimately a French defeat by Russian Communism. This would include not only Germany but also France and England.<sup>8</sup> The danger implicit in a Franco-Russian war against Germany was not to be resolved by a Franco-German alliance against Russia. Neither alliance partner would support each other and Germany would be in an excellent bargaining position to play off France in order to acquire her objectives in the East and later turning to seek her objectives in the West.

Given these alternatives, the only position that France could adopt was one of neutrality supported by measures to preserve herself from both ideological-military threats. These measures to assert France's national autonomy were fascist in character. Drieu noted that the impending war would evoke fascist measures by all nations and France

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<sup>8</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Socialisme fasciste*, p. 168.

must adopt them immediately before it was too late. She must transform herself to the needs of the struggle in a socializing fascism as her defense and her regeneration.<sup>9</sup>

To a certain extent, the ideological blocs while presenting a divisiveness to Europe also presented a cohesion. Drieu interpreted them as a simplification that might assist European federation. "I have always sought formation blocs in Europe. And now I perceive joyfully Europe reduced to three blocs: Russian bloc, Central-European bloc, Periphery bloc. That will make Europe relatively simplified. . . . The blocs appear to me as an intermediary formation . . . between the stage of national states and the stage of federation."<sup>10</sup> Fascism, as a national character, stressing national-socialism, the restoration of man, and the warrior spirit would affirm the individual character of each nation. It would condition the national element towards a solidarity in a European federation of fascist nations.

Drieu's fascism was a philosophy and ideology to transform the individual, the nation, and Europe in a spiritual regeneration. Drieu regarded events in Europe as confirmation of his theory that fascism was the wave of the future. It had entrenched itself in Italy, Germany, and appeared now to be taking root in Spain. Fascism's spread throughout the continent appeared as the new principle to create Drieu's Europe and he hoped that France would follow suit. It was under illusions such as these that the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War—the pre-war

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

crusade—captured the imagination of fascist intellectuals. Robert Brasillach noted: "Spain thus transformed in a spiritual and material combat, in a veritable crusade, the long opposition which smouldered in the modern world. Her international brigades, from two sides, sealed in the blood of alliances. Men regarded the war as their own, their own victories and their own defeats. . . . Russians against Italians, the ideological contradictions were resolved in acts of faith and conquest, by suffering, by blood, by death. Spain gave the definitive consecration and nobility to the war of ideas."<sup>11</sup>

Although Drieu did not fight in Spain, his sympathies embodied in the character of Gilles did. Gilles left France after his severance with the fascist party of Clérences (Doriot), joining the Falange to defend Catholic civilization from the Communists. It is important to note here that Drieu looked to the struggle of fascism in Spain rather than its victory in Italy or Germany as compatible with his fascist ideals. The sympathies of the French fascists were not purely anti-Communist in nature. The struggle's outcome would determine the future regime in France and the ultimate victory or defeat of fascism in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

Gilles' struggle in Spain was a military-religious crusade as "Joan of Arc, catholic and warrior." Spain represented the crucible of ideas in conflict. Gilles rediscovered in Spain the long sought

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<sup>11</sup>Brasillach, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>12</sup>Charles A. Micaud, *The French Right and Nazi Germany 1933-1939* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1943), p. 116.

commitment and camaraderie that he experienced in the trenches of Charleroi and Verdun. "We savoured in common the sacrifice to something which, in the measure that it is prolonged, proves more and more intimate in each one's heart in being sensible to all. . . ." <sup>13</sup> Gilles' commitment and sacrifice was for the defense of European civilization with the banner of the saint and the warrior in Catholicism and Fascism in Europe. He united the archetype of the saint and warrior in the figures of Christ and Dionysius to embody his fascist individual. The religious virtues of the Christ and the warrior virtues of Dionysius transformed Gilles in his struggle for higher existence. "God who created, who suffered in His creation, who died and was reborn. Therefore I will be heretical. Gods who die and are reborn: Dionysius and Christ. A force is only a reality in blood. It is necessary to die unceasingly in order to be reborn unceasingly. The Christ of Cathedrals, the great, virtuous, and virile God." <sup>14</sup> Drieu's fascism represented a combination of the newest and the oldest. The traditional values of medieval Catholicism was a basis for the European renaissance. Upon this foundation, he placed the doctrine of fascism in a philosophy of individual energy and a politics of national authority, discipline, and unity as a complement to the spiritual-historical foundation of Catholicism. <sup>15</sup>

The Spanish Civil War represented the struggle of the forces of anarchism against the forces of authority. Drieu pointed out the link

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<sup>13</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 488.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 501.

<sup>15</sup>Andreu, *Drieu: témoin et visionnaire*, pp. 186-187.



of anarchism to the heretical teachings of Luther and Calvin, noting that these faiths were the origins of Europe's spiritual dissolution. "Recognize there also the elementary foundations of Luther and Calvin: the savage reaction against an hierarchical discipline, against a discipline graduated from high to low, against an expressed concensus by a personified authority. . . . The hate of the sacred, of the consecrated, of consciously usurped authority that crowns itself with the capital of Marx or the papal mitre."<sup>16</sup> Drieu referred to the threat of a state that destroyed religion but assumed its spiritual mantle. This implied both Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany threatening to engulf Europe. Drieu's goal was to see all European nations adopt fascism to preserve their autonomy and affirm their strength. On such a basis of equality only could Europe exist rather than under the aegis of one dominant power.

The European federation consisting of individual sovereign fascist nations sharing the Catholic legacy would favor Germany over Russia. Drieu's fascism was a guarantee of each nation's integrity. He noted that if France adopted fascism she could confront the German threat. This national strength offered in fascism would enable her to equal the strength of Germany, thus enabling them to collaborate in European federation. Drieu was not sympathetic to Germany, nor disloyal to France when he considered Germany as the natural focus of Europe.

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<sup>16</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Ce qui meurt en Espagne," *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Vol. 47, 1936, p. 921.

In the last century, the nationalities learned nationalism and democracy from France which has turned them against each other. We will turn fascism against Germany and Italy. . . . To counter the invasion of Europe by the Russian Army necessitates the birth of a spirit of European patriotism. This spirit will arise only if Germany provides a full moral guarantee for the integrity of nations, of all European nations. Only then will she be able to fulfill effectively the role invested in her by her strength and the tradition of the Holy Roman Germanic Empire to lead the European order of tomorrow.<sup>17</sup>

Drieu's faith placed in the new Germany of Hitler, as in the new France of Doriot, was soon destroyed. Hitler pursued the folly of aggrandizement as Louis XIV and Napoleon had, rather than the unity of Europe as Charlemagne had. However, Drieu pursued a policy of appeasement towards Germany as late as 1938. He vindicated Hitler's *Ostpolitik* during the Munich crisis with the double motive of German national self-determination and the directing of German aims towards the East to safeguard France. The cause of the last great war, according to Drieu, was not the Franco-German dispute over Alsace-Lorraine, nor the Anglo-German naval rivalry, but the Slav threat against the German Empire. Drieu favoured a temporary appeasement for what he considered a just German demand. Drieu condoned Hitler's demands in the light of national self-determination and the defense of Europe as a civilization from the Slav threat.

For the Middle Ages were in great part full of efforts made by the Germans to reconquer the lost terrain in the East. For the Germans, the march towards the East is a reconquest and a revenge—this is the first point that we ignore escaping our sensibility entirely. . . . What was for them an anguished

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<sup>17</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 492.

motive, an object of duty, is for us a goal of expansion free of charge.<sup>18</sup>

Germany's strength in realizing her goals only served to underline the weakness and humiliation of France. The shame of Munich was carried by France and England. Drieu noted that both were morally responsible, not only for Munich itself, but also for the twenty years that preceded it. He posed the question to both France and England, forced to decide their future in light of these events: to remain faithful to democracy, and go from concession to concession, from defeat to defeat, and the total destruction of their sovereignty and dignity; or to abandon the superficial expression of democracy for the political-national transformation in fascism. Drieu's response was bitter in its despair—"To live and die as democrats? No!" His reproach to France and England was that they had failed to respond to the political and national climate of post-war events. "The English and the French who still have pride, who feel themselves profoundly humiliated and stricken in their reason to live by recent events, can do nothing waiting for men and ideologies motivating their miserable situation today. They must seek elsewhere. With their enemies? In themselves. The English and French do not need to look to Rome and Berchtesgaden in order to find the lessons of vigour and strength, their history is full of it."<sup>19</sup>

Drieu despaired of France ever adopting a national fascism and

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<sup>18</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Le drame Germano-Slav," 9 September, 1938, *Chronique Politique*, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Vivre . . . et Mourir en Démocrates? Non," 23 September, 1938, *ibid.*, p. 177.

Germany's aggression destroyed any hopes for the European federation. Drieu's illusions of Germany as the lesser of evils, the prevention of war by appeasement, and his view of Germany as the bulwark against Slav expansion for the preservation of Europe as a civilization were all shattered with the announcement of the Nazi-Soviet pact and the promise of inevitable war. With the outbreak of war in the autumn of 1939, Drieu regarded the entire pre-war experiment of French fascism as a total failure. Drieu decided to abandon his mission and return to fight for France. She had failed to save herself and a French victory would be worthless.<sup>20</sup> Robert Brasillach went to war with the cry "Vive la France! A bas la guerre."

The debacle of June 1940 and the fall of the Third Republic with the German invasion convinced many that the republic was more rotten than many had thought. The signature of the armistice and the establishment of Vichy under Marshall Pétain seemed the occasion to implement the ideas of fascism developed over the past twenty years. Drieu reflected on France's stagnation with her embourgeoised nobility, crass bourgeoisie, bourgeois workers concerned only with wages and strikes, peasants ashamed of their plight, all classes striving for the acquisition of wealth and material gains—"all that was France and France is that no longer."<sup>21</sup> Drieu now regarded the idea of German hegemony as no longer frightening but as France's new opportunity to save herself from decadence and dissolution. This was the new historical cycle which Drieu

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<sup>20</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 494.

<sup>21</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Notes pour comprendre le siècle*, p. 175.

had anticipated throughout the 'Thirties. The death of a nation at the conclusion of one historical cycle preceded the birth of a nation in the beginning of another one. He regarded the defeat of France in 1940 as the death of France but also the origins of her rebirth as a revitalized nation in a new European order. The German victory over France, the new order imposed by history, brought to France what she herself had proved incapable of accomplishing—the national and European renaissance.

Drieu's collaboration was in the role of editor of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. A key article published in 1940 revealed that his career had come full circle with the article "Nouvelle Mesure de la France"—an assessment of France's role in collaboration. He tried to envisage what France could become as an integral part of the new European order implicit in the "German revolution." The German revolution was the new opportunity for France and Europe. It was perceived by Drieu:

. . . as a great movement that responds to two powerful appeals of European man in distress in our century. In the moral and spiritual plane the European abandons anarchic individualism engendered by excesses of liberalism and reclaims the safeguard which will be the restoration of authority. In the economic and social plane the European desperately protests against the intolerable situation of rampant capitalism and diverse nationalisms. He reclaims that which will permit him to work without being ransomed by the exactions of excessive profit and innumerable custom duties.<sup>22</sup>

The most appealing aspect of the "German revolution" was its power. This strength in war was symptomatic of a unified strength in the economic, social, and political framework in one nation. This power

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<sup>22</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, "Nouvelle Mesure de la France," September 1940, *Chronique Politique*, p. 248.

would lead Europe to a new unity and strength. Drieu viewed the war as a revolution on the march.<sup>23</sup>

The framework of the "revolution" of Authority, Socialism, and European unity imposed by the strength of Germany was France's opportunity to reconstruct and revive in a new Europe. This opportunity Drieu considered as the "metamorphosis" of France. He urged his countrymen to accept that death which would precede that resurrection and discover within themselves the sources capable of transforming themselves into a young, vigorous nation. "Metamorphosis, that is the important word. We must submit, admit, and appeal to a metamorphosis in a profound transformation. France will be no longer what she was. For two thousand years there were three or four France's and two Gaul's. And it is a beautiful dream to hope that France will be no longer what she was, being given what she can become."<sup>24</sup> This metamorphosis entailed a revolution of the spirit, a complete renewal of her national philosophy repudiating rationalism. A further element was the integration of French nationalism into a European nationalism in collaboration with Germany.<sup>25</sup> However, Drieu's metamorphosis for France in Europe appeared contradictory. On one hand, he stressed a national philosophy of body and soul to restore France's national strength. On the other hand, he noted that this national rebirth must not exceed the limits imposed by Germany's hegemony of Europe but only to integrate it within that

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 252.

hegemony.

France was to learn the discipline and strength of her victor in a national and European renewal with Germany as its focus. Germany was the base for a new Holy Roman Empire. Its formula was race and Empire. The Nordic race of Germany would act in collaboration with the Frankish race of France. The principle of Empire was designed to establish Europe in a unity of nations as a bloc for the defense of European civilization. Drieu noted that within this system Europe would revive under a new discipline and equality where each nation would assume an equal role with Germany in the creation of the European federation. Drieu stressed that the principle of collaboration was not one of submission: "Germany abused this diversity of nations, principalities, and cities; today she reacts. We, we must reverse our course in the opposite sense of hers. Germany must recognize the dangers of unification, of centralization. We must retrieve the remote forces of detente and diversity."<sup>26</sup>

Drieu's collaboration revealed a genuine belief that the German victory would usher in the new order of a strong, united, and peaceful Europe enabling each nation to play an equal role in mutual prosperity and progress. His collaboration implied that he was equally dedicated to France within the "new" Holy Roman Germanic Empire of Europe. France must renounce her spiritual poverty in order to be reborn in a new Europe discovering a continental role and a spiritual-national strength respectively in collaboration and fascism. The role of collaborative fascism

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 244.

was to trace a philosophy of historical tradition combined with the methods of political modernity in collaboration for the national revolution and European federation.

The expectations Drieu placed in Adolph Hitler were soon destroyed. Like Doriot's experiment, Hitler's experiment had ended in failure. As with Doriot, Drieu reproached Hitler for not being revolutionary enough. "Certainly the essential goal of Hitlerians as of Fascists was not to make a clean slate of everything, as did the Bolsheviks, to prevent the enormous destruction of good consecutive traditions to a harsh and total subversion, and to combine the survival of certain elements of the old life in the framework of the new life. However the conservative inflexion prevailed too much over the radical inflexion."<sup>27</sup> The national revolution under Hitler's Germany, as under Pétain's Vichy, proved abortive because instead of developing fascist dynamism it floundered upon conservative reaction. Drieu remained dutiful to the figure of Marshall Pétain, if not his politics, for Pétain represented the national unity but not the national revolution. The national revolution and the new Europe upon which Drieu staked his fascist ideals and his collaborationist fortunes proved only to be the last and greatest of his illusions. Robert Brasillach lamented the failure of the fascist experiment in France noting that ". . . the ideal regime would be that which would conciliate the ideas of grandeur, of national-socialism, of the exaltation of youth, of State authority,

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<sup>27</sup>Paul Sérant, *Le Romantisme fasciste* (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1959), p. 233.



which appeared to me included in fascism, with the respect of individual liberty. . . ."<sup>28</sup>

Drieu repeatedly sought a goal compatible with his ideal. Fascism was such an endeavour since it comprised a dynamic concept of being for the individual, his society, and his civilization. The key to his dynamic ideal was the expression of force in action as the guarantee of being versus non-being. Drieu described the essence of his individual truth by the name of Eulalie—the essence of truth in eternity. He discovered Eulalie in the trenches of war and sought to maintain it throughout his endeavours as his force of being:

The less his life had of a goal the more his life had meaning. He rediscovered the state of grace he had known in the trenches. . . . Then he had the emotion that this palpitation was the image of his soul. Revelation is this frightening position of the verity that each moment and each being possesses a particular, irreplaceable uniqueness. . . . At this instant marked by the firing of a cannon he discovered the intuition of a universe where the words 'particular, unique, irreplaceable,' could alone signify the profundity of truth.<sup>29</sup>

Drieu's truth was a subjective dynamic thought serving as the basis of an equally dynamic action. He conceived life as "being" through action, and "non-being" through passiveness. He did not conceive of human values in terms of abstract ideas, logical schemas, and rational principles because they lacked validity in experience. Drieu's concept of human values was carried to another extreme by his subversion of intellect to irrational and primitive forces of the unconscious.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>29</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Gilles*, p. 387.

<sup>30</sup>Henri-Simon, *Procès du héros*, p. 169.

Only in action could Drieu preserve and affirm his being. He translated this doctrine into a secular religion of fascism. Like so many others of his age, he experienced the need for religion in a secular society and satisfied this need by raising an individual philosophy into a spiritual-political doctrine. Fascism was a faith for Drieu in an affirmation of "being" in the joy of building, the joy of commitment, the joy of having loyally made the profession of man, as the anchor to root oneself.<sup>31</sup> Drieu noted that he would refuse trial on charges of treason for a belief that could not be placed on trial: ". . . but simply I am afraid, afraid of defeat, torn by the crowd—afraid of being humiliated by the police and judge, to explain to vile men my reasons, 'mes belles raisons.'"<sup>32</sup>

Drieu defended his faith as an intellectual, a Frenchman, and a European. His doctrine of fascism was designed to posit a new dynamism for his generation. It was not only an ideal concept but also a critique of liberal-democracy and nationalism. Fascism stressed a creative tension, a direct sense of authority, a vitalist notion of the national community, all lacking in Drieu's France. However, fascism was only a response, as Jacques Maritain observed, carried along in the material decomposition and mutation of capitalism which it was unable to dominate.<sup>33</sup> Drieu's fascist experiment for France and Europe had failed but

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<sup>31</sup>Barèdeche, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-5, 186.

<sup>32</sup>Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, *Récit Secret* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 44.

<sup>33</sup>Señant, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

he held himself responsible to the doctrine as one of its major spokesmen. "It is the role of the intellectual, at least certain ones among them, to carry themselves above the event and take chances which are risks, to try the path of History. . . . A nation is not a unique voice, it is a concert. It always requires a minority and we were that. We have lost and were declared traitors: that is just. You are traitors if your cause is defeated. And France was not less France and Europe not less Europe."<sup>34</sup>

Drieu refused to stand trial for his "belles raisons" in his vision of France and Europe. The ideals he conceived were destroyed by the impasse of the 'Thirties and the destruction of war. His fascist and collaborationist efforts lay in ruins but he did not deny his ideals nor his attempts to realize them. Drieu held himself responsible for his ideals that led to his collaboration. However they were subject to judgment by himself rather than by an objective tribunal. Drieu claimed before his suicide in 1945: "I am not only French, I am European. You are also without knowing or realizing it. But we have played, I have lost. I claim death."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Drieu La Rochelle, *Récit Secret*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 99.

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