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Chris Millington. *Fighting for France: Violence in Interwar French Politics.* British Academy Monographs Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 250 pp. $64.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-726627-4.

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France's revolutionary heritage means that violence has long been an integral part of its political culture. Yet while France's Third Republic (1870-1940) was born amid the violence of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune of 1871, it did not follow its predecessors in rapidly giving way to revolutionary upheaval. Historians have often debated whether the Third Republic should be characterized as divided and unstable or as unified and resilient or somewhere in between, but there has been relatively little research into the significance of political violence during this period. In *Fighting for France*, Chris Millington sets out to address this, focusing on the interwar years. In so doing, he seeks to tackle wider questions about whether democracy serves to diminish levels of political violence by moving conflict from the street to the ballot box and by persuading citizens that democratic institutions are the only legitimate channels through which to resolve political disagreements.

The starting point for this book is Millington's observation that when compared with other European states, such as Germany and Italy, interwar French politics appear to have been relatively peaceful. In total, just over one hundred people died as a consequence of acts of violence involving political groups between 1918 and 1940. However, when compared with the United Kingdom, where there were no such deaths apart from in Ireland, the levels of political violence in France appear significant. Bringing together significant empirical evidence ranging from small confrontations to full-scale riots, *Fighting for France* suggests that verbal and symbolic violence and their physical manifestations were intertwined and that the former did not act as a kind of safety valve for the latter. It therefore challenges the work of such historians as Serge Berstein who insist that confrontational discourse and symbolism were cathartic and that French democratic culture left no room for the violence that paved the way for fascism elsewhere.[1]

The book begins by exploring street violence, in particular by addressing the cycles of provocation and revenge between opposing groups and their defense of territory. Between rival claims, the streets could become like theaters; at the same time, however, displays of strength and intimidation sometimes spilled over into physical acts of violence. While it was not an exclusively male preserve, military-influenced masculine codes of conduct set the parameters of legitimate conduct. Moving on to explore confrontations in meeting halls, the book examines how gatherings became tests of strength in which the peaceful democratic exchange of ideas became virtually impossible. While police were permitted to intervene in

breaches of the peace, in reality, a certain degree of violence was widely accepted. The interwar period saw a proliferation of street marches: as the right-wing leagues turned to challenge the left's domination of public spaces, the left sought to teach the workers about what they claimed was the bourgeois repression of the proletariat. Mass violence on the streets was, however, relatively rare. By contrast, police violence to maintain public order resulted in some of the deadliest confrontations. The establishment of the mobile republican guard brought significant changes with the army's handling of strikes and demonstrations before the First World War. Yet despite being trained to limit the use of violence, police clashes with left-wing demonstrators in Clichy in 1937 resulted in the deaths of six people and hundreds more being injured. The final chapter focuses on the culture and topography of strikes and the conditions in which violent confrontations erupted in the workplace. While the interwar years saw reduced levels of violence in industrial action compared with the pre-1914 period, the workplace was often a site of conflict, with women tending to feature more prominently than in other areas.

Millington concludes that ultimately, the "latent French civil war that climaxed between 1934 and 1937" did not erupt into full-scale conflict because political violence coexisted with the exercise of democratic politics (p. 184). Thus while French democracy remained robust, anti-democratic practices were at its heart. Millington presents a persuasive and nuanced case that ideology was often a less significant factor in political violence than defending territory, proving oneself, and winning respect. Yet while Millington concedes that it is often difficult to identify the origins of confrontations, the book's analysis of the relationship between the opposition of ideas and violent clashes might have been further developed. The extensive evidence drawn from the Archives Nationales and the Archives de la Préfecture de Police presents a national picture, but in so doing, it raises questions about regional variations. If patterns of violence were not uniform across the country, to what extent did local political cultures shape experiences? Were there any correlations between the levels of political violence and the broader picture of criminal violence? Overall, however, this is an important piece of research that will help historians gain a greater understanding not just of French political culture in this period but also of the relationship between violence and democratic political culture in Europe more broadly.

Note

[1]. Serge Berstein, "Consensus politique et violences civiles dans la France du 20e siècle," *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire* 69 (2001): 51-60.

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