



Chris Millington. *A History of Fascism in France: From the First World War to the National Front.* London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 248 pp. \$26.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-350-00653-9.

Reviewed by Kiersten Thamm (University of Delaware)

Published on H-Socialisms (March, 2021)

Commissioned by Gary Roth (Rutgers University - Newark)

Fascism in France

The body of literature that debates the existence of fascism in France has grown enormous in the past seventy years. Since René Rémond published the first significant work on the topic, *La Droite en France de 1815 à nos Jours: Continuité et Diversité d'une Tradition Politique* (1954), scholars have investigated political parties, governments, individuals, brands of conservatism, conceptions of gender and sexuality, and racist ideologies to write competing arguments. This literature uses extensive archival research to answer a series of central questions: If a version of fascism operated in France, where did it originate and what differentiated it from other brands of fascism? If fascism is not part of French history, why not? Is fascism inseparable from historical circumstances, or is it an ahistorical category?

In *A History of Fascism in France: From the First World War to the National Front*, however, Chris Millington turns away from these questions. Instead, he combines original research and a synthesis of current scholarship to write a history of French political groups with links, however tenuous, to fascism. This frame includes groups that professed an adherence to fascist politics or were identified by others—both at the time and in retrospect—as fascist in practice. The first five chapters

of the book focus on the Faisceau, Jeunesses Patriotes, Partie Social Française, and the Cagouards, along with mainstream right-wing groups and individuals with whom they interacted. Chapter 6 turns to the Vichy government, and the final chapter addresses the National Front. By refusing to answer the question of fascism's existence in France, Millington can demonstrate how transnational influences, colonial practices, internal disagreements and competition, and conservative beliefs about gender roles shaped these groups and the entire Far-Right constellation in France.

Millington helps readers navigate the significant number of groups and individuals by organizing his book into a clear structure. The seven chapters are divided chronologically and include well-defined subsections. He also provides concise summary paragraphs throughout the book. The final paragraph of each chapter, for example, synthesizes the history and historiography addressed in that chapter. The book's conclusion includes a series of paragraphs that summarizes the reoccurring characteristics of Far-Right groups, such as virile masculinity and antisemitism. These pages equip readers with the information they need to consider political groups they encounter in their own lives and compare them against those discussed in *A History of Fascism in France*.

This book is valuable not only as a history of the Far Right in France but also as a historiographical work. Throughout the book's first six chapters, Millington includes interpretations from the time period and historical analyses of Far-Right activities. He is particularly transparent about academic disagreements over interpretations of the most contested events, such as the Stavisky affair and the Vichy government's formation. Millington goes to great lengths to take the entire range of scholarship on fascism in France seriously. Throughout the book, he employs terms, tenses, and punctuation to create this space. In the conclusion, for example, quotation marks surround the terms "fascist" and "fascism" to refer to the Far-Right groups discussed in the book without formally labeling them as such. These quotation marks also assist Millington as he raises larger questions about the possibility of political theories existing in pure forms outside of specific historical instances. Perhaps a "fascist" group is the closest humans—with all of our complexity—can get to implementing fascist ideals. Through this effort, Millington skillfully alerts readers to the ongoing process of this history making. However, the author largely separates these two topics for the years following 1944 into the final chapter and a historiographical appendix.

The appendix articulates the scholarly groupings that advance conflicting arguments about the existence and shape of fascism in France. It presents the personal and social contexts for this emotional debate, which has taken and continues to take place through books, book reviews, and journal articles. The high stakes of the debate are also made evident. Millington demonstrates that France's relationship with fascism affects how France and other nations, chiefly the United States and Germany, understand their own culpability for the twentieth century's horrors. Although this historiographic appendix clarifies the difference between participating in Far-Right activities and writing about them, separating this material may have overstated the division and simplified the

political landscape after 1950. The richness provided in the first five chapters by the intersection of events and history making is lost in these two sections and leaves open questions about the connection between interwar Far-Right politics and those of the late twentieth century.

Histories that center the activities of one segment of society have their advantages and disadvantages. This approach's strength lies in its ability to offer sustained analyses of details and those details' interconnectivity. For example, Millington has the opportunity to spend an entire chapter on a single event—the riot of February 6, 1934. This concentration depends on an author's ability to establish the scope of the project for their readers. The minimal discussion of Far-Left parties in *A History of Fascism in France* is unsurprising; however, the book's geographic limitations is unexpected. The title suggests that the book covers all of France, but it includes little investigation of the political landscape outside of Paris. The greater inclusion of Far-Right groups operating in places like Alsace and Algiers would have only strengthened Millington's project.

To avoid missing these parts in the history of Far-Right activities in the French empire, readers would do well to explore the book's bibliography and invest in regional histories and analyses of cultural aspects of fascism, such as *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascism in Interwar Alsace* (1999) by Samuel Goodfellow and *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (2012) by Joan Tumblety. Nonetheless, Millington's book is a highly informative and admirably balanced resource for anyone interested in the Far-Right politics in France and more theoretical questions about fascism as a category or historical occurrence.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-socialisms>

Citation: Kiersten Thamm. Review of Millington, Chris. *A History of Fascism in France: From the First World War to the National Front*. H-Socialisms, H-Net Reviews. March, 2021.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=55594>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.