

The Art of Secrecy and Subversion: The Cagoule and French Politics in the 1930s

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the role that the *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire* (CSAR) played in French politics in the 1930s. This secret organisation, often referred to as the Cagoule, was a subversive element intent on overthrowing the Third Republic by means of societal destabilization and an eventual *coup de force*. While this particular goal of the group was always clear, contemporaries and historians since have had little success in determining the exact nature of the Cagoule. Often discussed within the context of European fascism, the organisation certainly did display some characteristics that made such a discussion valuable. Upon closer examination, however, the Cagoule also displays a distinctiveness that makes it impossible to neatly apply such a label. This fascinating organisation provides us with a unique intersection of various, and sometimes contradictory, political traditions.

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## INTRODUCTION

In his essay, *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies*, Georg Simmel wrote that the secret society seems to be dangerous simply because it is secret.<sup>1</sup> He discussed the exceptional position afforded by the shroud of secrecy: the ever-present tension involved in keeping a secret, the ability to exclude others, while, at the same time, enjoying the reciprocal confidence of the other secret holders, and the creation of a society within an already complete societal structure. Simmel's analysis of secrecy, while interesting, seems to ignore the real power that can be achieved by operating in the shadows of society. Unconstrained by legality and possessing the element of surprise, the secret society has a definite advantage over those who choose to operate openly for all to see. Granted, not all secret societies have goals which actually require secrecy to ensure success. But, for those secret societies whose goals would be considered treasonous by the existing power structure, secrecy becomes less of a choice and more of a necessity.

Thus, the men who formed the *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire* (CSAR) were, in a sense, given their rejection of electoral politics, forced into the depths of secrecy and terror. In hindsight, the creation of this secret society almost seems as though it was destined to occur. These men were experts in secrecy. Although their conspiracy ultimately failed, their secrets remain largely unknown. Contemporaries knew not what to make of the group; historians have been unable to penetrate fully the mysteries of this French secret society of the 1930s. However, what historians have been able to piece together is a picture of many determined men, seeking to overthrow the Third Republic and the whole French parliamentary system. Contrary to Simmel's

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies". *The American Journal of Sociology* 11:4 (Jan., 1906), 497.

assertion, this particular group was not dangerous because it was secret; rather it was secret because it was dangerous.

Interestingly enough, when historians have examined the many threats to the French Republic that existed in the 1930s, they have largely chosen to ignore the CSAR and have focused instead on the publicly vocal opponents of the regime. Perhaps this choice is an eminently reasonable one and represents a rather safe course of action. Illustrative of how difficult it has been to uncover the secrets of the organisation is the controversy over its very name. The group in question has had no less than four different names. Sometimes called the *Organisation secrète d'action révolutionnaire national* (OSARN), or *Organisation secrète d'action révolutionnaire* (OSAR), or *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire*, often simply referred to as the *Cagoule*, this group clearly mystified observers.<sup>2</sup> Although the name of the group is rather insignificant in the larger scheme of things, this confusion about the name is indicative of how few definitive statements can be made about the organisation. The few people to have explored the group have disagreed about many things, but most significantly, they have been unable to agree about the very nature of the secret society.

The first published accounts of the discovery of the Cagoule conspiracy were rather knee-jerk reactions to the whole affair. The first publication was a short book entitled *La Cagoule contre la France: Ses crimes, Son organisation, Ses chefs, Ses inspireurs* written in 1938 by Fernand Fontenay. The book itself was dedicated to Lucien Sampaix, a militant communist, which gives us some insight into the political

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<sup>2</sup> It seems logical to suggest that the name change could have occurred rather innocently, from OSARN the "N" could have been dropped to create OSAR, which then got changed into CSAR through a misprint at some point. But historians have clung to one name or another as representing the "true" name of the organisation. I have chosen CSAR and the *Cagoule* because this is what the group was called by its contemporaries and its own members.

leanings of the author. Fontenay wrote of the affair that it was "...la plus extraordinaire des affaires politiques qu'on ait vues sous la République, une affaire de sang, de ruines, de trahison, auprès de laquelle pâlissent les souvenirs lointains du carbonarisme, les attentats anarchistes d'avant la guerre..."<sup>3</sup> While Fontenay linked the Cagoule to foreign (fascist) powers, arguing that its members were acting on orders from outside France, his main attack was that the Cagoule conspiracy was really the work of the *grand patronat*. To support his assertion that the Cagoule was tied to the "wall of money", Fontenay pointed to the social positions of its leaders and the alleged fact that the group could not have existed without the assistance of well-placed (capitalist) individuals.<sup>4</sup> Fontenay concluded that the secret society was "[a]u service de l'Argent, contre la France."<sup>5</sup>

Eight years after Fontenay published his book, another account of the Cagoule conspiracy came to light as Joseph Désert published his own explanation of what the secret organisation stood for. In this book, entitled *Toute la vérité sur l'affaire de la Cagoule; Sa trahison, Ses crimes, Ses hommes*, Désert insisted that "[l]a Cagoule n'était rien autre qu'un complot fasciste visant à renverser la République et à la remplacer par un régime autoritaire."<sup>6</sup> Désert's exploration of the Cagoule is less than reliable, but what he lacks in evidence, he makes up in polemical ranting. Aside from arguing that the *cagouleurs* were the most active agents of Hitler and Mussolini in France, Désert "found" members of the organisation behind every door. He argued that the Cagoule had

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<sup>3</sup> Fernand Fontenay, *La Cagoule contre la France: Ses crimes, Son organisation, Ses chefs, Ses inspireurs*. (Paris: Éditions Sociales Internationales, 1938), 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-86.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Désert, *Toute la vérité sur l'affaire de la Cagoule; Sa trahison, Ses crimes, Ses hommes*. (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1946), 3.

infiltrated every ministry, every bank, every army regiment, and that Philippe Pétain was the real leader of the group.<sup>7</sup>

Scant attention was paid to the Cagoule in the decade after the publication of Désert's book. It was not until the 1960s that a renewed interest in the secret society led to further investigations. In 1962, J.R. Tournoux published his version of the Cagoule affair, which linked the *cagouleurs* of the 1930s to the secret military organisation of the 1950s, the *Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS), which had fought against Algerian independence. Tournoux argued that the initial goal of the Cagoule had been to establish a Latin Union, in opposition to the Red International, with the involvement of fascist Italy and Francoist Spain.<sup>8</sup> Tournoux's book, while journalistic in style and lacking evidence to back up the arguments within, was more balanced than the previous publications. Tournoux offered his readers a good deal of information regarding the organisational practices of the Cagoule and its members, most of which has since been confirmed by other scholars.

A rather similar account of the affair was published by Philippe Bourdrel in 1970. He, like Tournoux, saw a direct link between the Cagoule and the OAS and also focused on the Cagoule's relationship with Italy and Spain. While Bourdrel argued that the Cagoule had little to do with Hitler and the Nazis, he did see the conspiracy as one which relied on the ideological basis of fascism. Bourdrel summed up the affair as follows:

En dépit des tendances de certains de ses dirigeants à la naïveté et à la mythomanie, ce fut une entreprise subversive puissante, techniquement très bien faite. De ce point de vue, elle mérite une place importante dans l'histoire de nos conjurations. Elle offre un exemple unique en France d'une tentative intrinsèquement fasciste d'occupation de pouvoir.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> J.R. Tournoux, *L'Histoire Secrète*. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962), 113.

<sup>9</sup> Philippe Bourdrel, *La Cagoule: 30 Ans de Complots*. (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1970), 276.



Bourdrel's book is informative, but, like Tournoux, he did not identify the sources of his information, which makes most of it very difficult to evaluate.

Once again, the seemingly impenetrable secrets of the Cagoule were left untouched for several decades. After the publication of Bourdrel's book, interest in the group waned. It was not until the late 1990s that the Cagoule again became an object of scrutiny. This time, however, the task of uncovering the mysteries of the Cagoule rested with professional historians. Armed with the investigative skills of the trained historian, recent scholars have largely dismissed the work of Bourdrel and Tournoux as that of charlatans and have basically ignored the publications of Fontenay and Désert. Ironically, however, these scholars have come to many of the same conclusions as their "discredited" predecessors.

In 1998, Frédéric Monier published an entire book about conspiracies against the Third Republic. It is an excellent study and his chapters about the Cagoule are equally informative. Monier, more than any other scholar, focused on the contextual aspects of the Cagoule, which had a large impact on its creation and the form the group took. He wrote that "...la Cagoule est une conspiration de ligueurs activistes, et exclusivement d'anciens ligueurs, et ensuite que, sous la IIIe République, il est parfaitement inutile de parler de conspiration sans prendre en compte l'espace de légalité dont dispose un groupement politique."<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, Monier concluded that the Cagoule was a terrorist organisation planning for a putsch and that it was inspired by fascism for its political outlook and by the military for its organisation and the execution of the plan.<sup>11</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> Frédéric Monier, *Le Complot dans la République: Stratégies du secret, de Boulanger à la Cagoule*. (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1998), 268.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

conclusion is not all that different from previous ones. Monier continued to examine the Cagoule within the context of fascism, much like earlier scholars had done.

The only historian to arrive at a rather different conclusion about the Cagoule is Jean-Claude Valla, who insists that the organisation does not deserve the condescension that scholars have shown it. Valla's book, published in 2000, is a sympathetic account of the Cagoule affair. Valla argued that "[l]a Cagoule est d'abord, dans l'esprit de son fondateur, une organisation d'auto-défense, un mouvement de sauvegarde conçu pour intervenir aux côtés de l'Armée en cas d'insurrection bolchevique."<sup>12</sup> He emphasized the fact that the Cagoule was fundamentally germanophobic and influenced only by integral nationalism, not any foreign political ideology. Valla repeatedly pointed to the way in which the Cagoule was convinced of an imminent communist coup to explain its reason for existence. According to Valla, the secret organisation was truly trying to protect France, not destroy the Republic.

Valla's arguments, however, have not been accepted by any other scholar. The most recent study of the Cagoule, an article by Joel Blatt, frames the discussion of the organisation once again in the context of fascism. Blatt's study, published in 2002, concludes that the Cagoule was part of the ultra-right and essentially fascist.<sup>13</sup> He argues that the Cagoule, the Nazis, and the Blackshirts resembled each other more than they differed. All three, Blatt writes, "...advocated national revivals, entailing increased national power, excluding groups from the national community, and intense

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<sup>12</sup> Jean-Claude Valla, *La Cagoule, 1936-1937*. (Paris: Éditions de la Librairie Nationale, 2000), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Joel Blatt, "The Cagoule Plot, 1936-1937", *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918-1962*. Ed. Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 96.

dictatorships.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, while Blatt does recognize the influence of other French political traditions on the Cagoule, he finds its similarities to fascism much more striking.

As we can see from this brief discussion of the historiography, studies of the Cagoule have been rather limited.<sup>15</sup> Only three of the authors previously mentioned, Monier, Valla, and Blatt, have drawn from archival sources regarding the CSAR. Joel Blatt’s article is the only English language study of the organisation, which is surprising given the number of North American scholars who have taken a strong interest in the French interwar period. More significant than the limited quantity of these studies is their limited scope. Each author has seemingly examined the secret society with one main question in mind; was the Cagoule fascist or not? Rather than approaching the history of the organisation in an open, exploratory way, these historians have limited the questions and, thus, the answers that they might receive.

These comments are not meant to disparage the work of these historians, for it has been highly illuminating in many ways and I have drawn on that body of work many times because it is so valuable. Rather, I would simply like to suggest that there is still a good deal of room for further studies of the CSAR, contrary to Monier’s assertion that there can be no future revelations about the organisation because the sources have all been examined.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the sources have been examined, but certainly not exhaustively. The history of the Cagoule needs to be opened up, removed from the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> While full-length studies have been few, mentions of the Cagoule often appear in books about fascism and the extreme-right, but it is rarely analyzed with any depth in these sources. Sometimes the Cagoule pops up in unexpected places, however. One such example is found in P.L. Thyraud de Vosjoli’s memoirs of his resistance work within the Bureau central de renseignements et d’action (BCRA) where he argues that the Cagoule was an offspring of the Synarchy, which itself was an offspring of early freemasonry. De Vosjoli points out the fact that some of his colleagues, notably Duclos, were former *cagoulards*, but that they were devoted patriots during the war. P.L. Thyraud de Vosjoli, *Lamia*. Boston: Little, 1970.

<sup>16</sup> Monier, 272.

contextual limitations placed upon it by previous historians, and examined in a more holistic manner. This is the purpose of this thesis.

In removing contextual limitations from the history of the Cagoule, I have had to place other limitations on my examination. One such limit is temporal. My thesis explores the pre-war years of the Cagoule only, rather than following its members into their Second World War activities. Given the scope allowed for a work of this size, this decision seemed quite reasonable, even though the wartime story of the Cagoule is just as fascinating as its early history. A second limitation concerns the availability of archival source material. Judicial records in France, which are the main source of information about the Cagoule, are restricted for one hundred years after the conclusion of a trial. The permission to access these records came several months too late for this work, but these missing records simply forced me to become more imaginative in my search and was ultimately beneficial, as we shall see.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the context of the Cagoule – France in the 1930s – and to the Cagoule itself. We will see how the organisation went from being a small group of former political acquaintances to a rather extensive underground federation of political terrorists. In that discussion, we will also examine how the group was organized and explore what the *cagouleurs* were up to during the group's existence, from 1934 to 1937. Although the history of the Cagoule reads like a sordid mystery novel, with intrigue, crime, and passion, we should not be misled into imagining that its business was not a serious one.

While it was not shocking to discover the existence of another antiparliamentary group in the 1930s, the Cagoule affair astonished the public in 1937. Extensive arms

depots, murder, and sabotage were only a few aspects of the Cagoule's activities that came to light and they had all taken place within a Republic that clearly had not guarded itself well enough. The second chapter focuses on the public reaction to the plot, as it was revealed late in 1937. Public opinion about the organisation has been entirely ignored by previous historians, but is vital to our understanding of the group. By looking at newspapers from the 1930s, we can gain a fuller appreciation for what the group's contemporaries made of the *cagouleurs*.

Another aspect of the Cagoule which has been neglected is the way in which its members perceived the group and its mission. The third chapter focuses largely on how one central member, Aristide Corre, represented the Cagoule through his diaries and explores certain political opinions held by Corre and other members of the group. Unlike most of the *cagouleurs*, Corre was not as prudent as one might expect from a member of a secret society, in which the penalty for speaking of the group was death, and his writings reveal certain aspects of the Cagoule that have largely been ignored in earlier histories of the group. This chapter allows us to understand more fully what brought these men together and which politics shaped the organisation and its goals.

The fourth chapter looks at the Cagoule in light of other political traditions, including fascism, to determine which, if any, pre-existing political models influenced the secret society, either ideologically or practically. During its short existence, the CSAR proved itself to be a drastically different kind of group compared to other French political organisations and, indeed, was unwilling to cooperate with these other groups, even though such cooperation could have increased the chance of success. It is vital, therefore,

to ask what inspired the Cagoule to assume its final form, so distinct in structure and methods from the other French groups.

The Cagoule affair, although frequently ignored, was an integral part of the French interwar period. It illuminates both the strengths and weaknesses of the Third Republic and French society generally. It was the most extensive and determined attempt in the 1930s to rid France of its long-standing parliamentary tradition. Study of the conspiracy itself and the reaction to the conspiracy further adds to our sense that France in the 1930s was a politically polarized country, but may also help to explain how in 1939 the fate of France was not at all predetermined. The Republic had been weakened, there is no doubt, but it had also withstood the nefarious plot of the Cagoule. This thesis will, I hope, contribute to our knowledge of France in the 1930s and, more generally, illustrate the complexity of politics both then and now. The Cagoule deserves a more discerning examination than previous historians have allowed – their dismissiveness has robbed them and their readers of a fascinating glance into the heart of an elusive secret society.

*Chapter One*  
**CONTEXT AND CONSPIRACY**

“Le complot de la Cagoule qui bientôt surgira de l’ombre n’aurait pas été concevable en dehors de cette atmosphère perpétuellement chargée d’électricité, sursaturée de rancunes, d’appels à la violence. Son histoire est celle de toute une époque.”<sup>1</sup> If the history of the Cagoule, as Philippe Bourdrel maintains, is indeed the history of an entire era, we must understand that era to understand the Cagoule. France, in the 1930s, was in a period of malaise; politically, economically, and socially. The instability of the decade was a product of many factors – financial crises, political uncertainty, scandals, riots, extremists on the left and right, and worsening international relations. As with any complicated situation, it is difficult to know where to begin. Although many of these crises had their roots far before 1930, for the sake of brevity, it may be appropriate here to ignore the causes, which other talented historians have examined in great detail, and focus on the effects.

The beginning of the 1930s found France in a better economic situation than most other Western countries, which were already feeling the effects of the Depression. However, this period of calm before the storm did not last long. The arrival of the financial crisis was indeed delayed, but the Depression would last until 1938, much later than in most other European countries, which had stabilized by 1935. The crisis in France had a destructive effect on certain sectors, especially agriculture and the self-employed in industry and commerce, while never hitting the urban working classes on the same scale as it had in other countries.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the toll of this crisis was high. For example, bankruptcies rose from 6,500 in 1929 to 13,370 in 1935. Aside from production and

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<sup>1</sup> Philippe Bourdrel, *La Cagoule: 30 Ans de Complots*. (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1970), 29.

<sup>2</sup> James F. McMillan, *Dreyfus to De Gaulle: Politics and Society in France, 1898-1969*. (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1985), 99-100.

prices, perhaps the greatest victim of the Depression was the confidence and optimism of the French people. James McMillan writes that “[p]essimism, rancour and fear were rife throughout bourgeois France by the mid 1930s, producing a notable deterioration in the psychological and social climate...”.<sup>3</sup>

Adding to this fear, caused by financial instability, was the fact that the French government seemed unable to deal with the crisis. In fact, the government was as unstable as the world of finance. The decade began with a relatively strong head of government, André Tardieu, who, although unpopular with the left and untrusted by the centre, gave every sign of being active during his tenure as premier from 1930 to 1932. However, he was ousted by the Senate and a new reign of the Radicals began. In the following eighteen months, five Radical cabinets were in and, quickly, out of power. The rest of the decade was similar. Governments were built and dismantled at a ludicrous pace.

One reaction to the instability of the government and its inability to act was the rise and growth of extra-parliamentary leagues. Robert Paxton argues that the weakness of the Third Republic in the 1930s brought many new recruits to the *ligues*. He points to the fact that France had declined from its position of a great world power, the ambiguity of the 1918 victory, the suffering of the middle classes, and the threat of Marxism to explain why it was, in a sense, natural that people would turn away from inefficient politicians in search of something stronger.<sup>4</sup> There has been a great deal of debate about these *ligues* and whether or not they were fascist, or simply a new manifestation of the extreme right. It seems that this debate will not end in the near future and this study will

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Paxton, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*. (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 2002), 343-4.



not attempt to provide any definitive answers. However, it may help to keep in mind, as Peter Davies points out in his study of the extreme right, that each league had its own character and constituency.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is for this reason that historians have been unable to come to any consensus when they examine the *ligues* as a general phenomenon, rather than as individual groupings.

That having been said, it is possible to find some common characteristics amongst the leagues. They were all, first and foremost, anti-Marxist. As well, the leagues were anti-liberal, attached to the idea of a strong government, anti-parliamentarian, quick to use the mass media and street demonstrations to advance their ideology, able to exploit crises, and willing to use violence as a means to an end.<sup>6</sup> While the leagues had existed prior to the 1930s - for example, *L'Action Française* had been formed in 1898 - the size and number of *ligues* grew significantly in the decade of instability. Some of the biggest and most influential leagues included François de la Rocque's *Croix de feu*, the *Solidarité française* led by Jean Renaud, Marcel Bucard's *Francistes*, Pierre Taittinger's *Jeunesses patriotes*, and Georges Valois' *Faisceau*. Most of these groups had their own newspapers and different branches, especially youth branches, which were extremely popular. They had been, and continued to be in the 1930s, a rather subversive element in French politics.

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Davies, *The Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present: From de Maistre to Le Pen*. (London: Routledge, 2002), 90.

<sup>6</sup> Most historians have agreed that the *ligues* possessed all of these characteristics; it is simply the analysis of what these characteristics mean that differs. See for example, these historians who often differ in conclusions: Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924-1933*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986. and his *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.; René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France: From 1815 to de Gaulle*. Trans. James M. Laux. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966.; J.Plumyène & R. Lasierra, *Les Fascismes Français, 1923-63*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963. – among many others.

The prestige, if it can be called such, of these extraparlimentary leagues was increased by one of the most notorious scandals of the 1930s. While scandals had become almost a regular part of life in France, the Stavisky affair in 1934 had a more earth-shattering impact than most. Serge Stavisky was a crooked financier who seemed to have friends in high places within the Radical Party, as was demonstrated, according to the right, by the fact that he had managed to avoid going to trial nine times after the police had begun investigating him in 1927. In 1934 Stavisky was wanted for questioning in what was known as the “Bayonne affair”; he had founded the Crédit municipal de Bayonne, which had released over two hundred million dollars worth of fraudulent bonds.<sup>7</sup> The police did indeed find Stavisky, but they found him in his villa, dead of what was apparently a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

When news of the suicide broke, the right was quick to accuse the police and the Republic of having killed Stavisky to silence him. James McMillan argues that there was nothing new about the *ligues* throwing dirt at the Republic, but “...what gave added force to their accusations in 1934 was the by now generalized sense of crisis and the menace of ruin posed to the middle classes by the Depression and the incompetence of the politicians.”<sup>8</sup> With their newspapers and their street demonstrations, the leagues caused such an uproar about the scandal that Camille Chautemps, the then Prime Minister, was forced to resign and Edouard Daladier took over.

In an attempt to get the matter under control, Daladier decided to remove Jean Chiappe from his post as the Prefect of Police. Chiappe had associations with Stavisky and had also been indulgent towards the *ligues* while being quite brutal in his treatment

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Kergoat, *La France du Front Populaire*. (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1986), 33.

<sup>8</sup> McMillan, 102.

of the left. This dismissal, however, brought the right into the streets in an unprecedented show of strength. On February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1934 all the *ligues* and other right-wing demonstrators congregated outside the Chamber of Deputies in Paris, howling for the destruction of the Republic. The demonstration quickly turned into a veritable riot, as police attempted to repel the demonstrators from the Chamber, which they seemed intent on taking by force. Hundreds of people were wounded by the end of the day and twenty people were killed in the battle.

The events of February 6 have often been singled out by historians because of their significance for the right, the Republic, and the left. For the right, it was the first time that the *ligues* had collaborated to such an extent and presented what seemed like a real threat to the government. Their action seemed like a true attempt at a putsch; they were armed and dangerous. In retrospect, we know that the various organisations had not cooperated as much as was immediately thought at the time. All the *ligues* had been issued different instructions by their respective leaders – the hour to congregate was different league to league; they did not concentrate in the same areas, and in fact, the groups basically stayed clumped together according to affiliation.<sup>9</sup> And ultimately, the demonstration was called off by the leaders at the end of the day, even though it seemed likely that the masses would succeed in taking over the government offices.

Even though the mobilization of the extreme-right was ultimately a failure, the events of the day were still highly significant for the Republic. Daladier resigned from his position even though he had received the necessary vote of confidence from the National Assembly and Gaston Doumergue came out of retirement to form a government of national unity, a highly conservative grouping. As Joel Colton, among others, has

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<sup>9</sup> Kergoat, 35.

pointed out, “[i]t was the first time in the history of the Third Republic that a cabinet had fallen in response to pressure from the street.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the Republic had shown itself vulnerable to pressure from the extreme-right and could no longer consider itself secure from the kinds of events that had already taken place in Italy, Germany, and Austria.

Because of this fear that the extreme-right had made some significant gains on February 6, and the fear that France would become the next victim of a fascist coup, the events also had an effect on the left. The street demonstrations and their consequences acted as a catalyst for the formation of the Popular Front, a renewed effort by the left to present a united front against fascism. In its final form, the Popular Front was a coalition among the Socialists, the Communists, and the Radicals. The new *cartel* saw electoral success in 1936 mainly because of their stand-down approach to the double ballot system.<sup>11</sup> There have been many excellent studies of the Popular Front era, so it is not necessary to go into great detail here.<sup>12</sup> Suffice to say that the Popular Front presented the left with a new hope that France could be saved from any rightist trends, including the growth of the extreme right and fascism. In addition to this hope, the French Popular Front also provided a very real model for the formation of similar coalitions in many other countries.

However, the Popular Front proved to be a failure in the end and, in fact, added to France’s unstable and confused political situation in the 1930s. Upon forming the

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<sup>10</sup> Joel Colton, “The formation of the French Popular Front, 1934-6”. *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Martin S. Alexander & Helen Graham. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>11</sup> The double ballot system meant that if there was no majority in the first round of voting, voters would cast a second ballot. As for the Popular Front, all three parties would have their own candidate run, but if there was a second vote, the two candidates who had received fewer votes the first time around would stand down so the third could have the advantages of their votes.

<sup>12</sup> See for example: Kergoat; Alexander & Graham; Georges Lefranc, *Le Front Populaire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968; Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Popular Front government, headed by Léon Blum, the Communists immediately announced that they would not actually participate in the government, but would only support it in parliament. Furthermore, Blum's premiership began with massive strikes all over France. His first order of business was to end the campaigns that were being carried out by the very people who had brought him to power. More serious than either of these problems, however, were the many issues with which Blum and the Popular Front could simply not grapple, or dealt with improperly, during their two years in government. The declaration of the non-intervention policy in the case of the Spanish Civil War was seen by many of the Popular Front supporters as a betrayal of their commitment to fight fascism.<sup>13</sup> As well, the government did not have the support of the French financial and business community and was forced to renege on many of its initial economic goals. As French investors took their money abroad, the Blum government could not successfully solve the financial crisis in France. Most significant, however, was the Popular Front's inability to deal with the worsening international situation. The opportunity to conquer the fascist threat had indeed been lost.

By the time the Blum government assumed power in 1936, Hitler had already formed a new German air force, increased his army by means of a draft, and had remilitarized the Rhineland, all of which were clear repudiations of the Versailles treaty. The Popular Front, fundamentally an anti-fascist coalition, when faced with an increasingly strong Germany, actually did very little to protect itself against foreign fascism. Blum did nothing to revive what could have been a powerful Franco-Soviet alliance; he basically ignored the 1935 mutual assistance treaty and continued to refuse

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<sup>13</sup> McMillan, 110.

staff talks between the two countries.<sup>14</sup> France had also lost the potential support of Italy, after the conflict about the Ethiopian War of 1935/36. Ultimately, after Belgium declared its neutrality and the Eastern countries were further drawn into Hitler's orbit, France was left with Britain as its single powerful ally and even that relationship was frequently tenuous. Faced with Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the increasingly authoritarian Spain, the Popular Front had a very difficult time indeed and seemed to be on the losing end of the fight against fascism.

The story of the Cagoule really begins in 1934, after the failure of the extreme right manifestations in February. The decision to turn back from the initial mobilization and the lack of involvement in the riots of many extreme-right leaders led to disillusionment and dissent amongst the ranks of the *ligues*. This disillusion eventually led to mass resignations from many organisations, but this trend was felt most deeply by the monarchist *L'Action Française*. Eugen Weber notes: "[c]onvinced that the Republic could have been overthrown that day, young men like Guilan de Benouville and Jacques Renouvin, both of whom soon drifted to the Cagoule before finding their way into the Resistance, left the Action Française, persuaded that Maurras did not really believe in the revolution..."<sup>15</sup> What began as individual resignations from the *Action Française* soon turned into a veritable flood of activists fleeing the group in search of stronger leadership and better opportunities for action. Most of these activists, and future members of CSAR, came from the 17<sup>th</sup> cell of the *camelots du roi*, the *Action Française*'s shock troops. Led by Jean Filiol, the leader of this particular *équipe*, the men demonstrated

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<sup>14</sup> For an introduction to Franco-Soviet relations in the interwar see: Michael Jabara Carley, "Prelude to Defeat: Franco-Soviet Relations, 1919-1939". *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments*. Ed. Joel Blatt. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 340.

their anger by resigning *en masse*. In his interview with the police in 1937, Michel Bernollin, another future *cagoulard*, testified that he had belonged to the 17<sup>th</sup> cell and was encouraged to leave the group in support of Filiol. He states that “[l]orsque celui-ci [Filiol] s’est détaché de la ligue, à la suite de divergences politiques j’ai également donné ma démission en même temps que 95 autres camarades.”<sup>16</sup>

At this point in the story we find our future *cagoularde*s, having eschewed participation in parliamentary politics and having been seemingly betrayed by the extraparliamentary leagues, with few options. While it is difficult to establish what future rank and file members of the Cagoule did immediately after leaving the *ligues*, it is possible to trace the future leaders’ paths for the next two years. Initially, some of our men, notably Eugène Deloncle and Filiol, joined an organisation called the *Parti national révolutionnaire et social* (PNRS). While this group was never really active, Frédéric Monier suggests that it was there that the initial ideas for a clandestine anti-Communist group were born.<sup>17</sup> Here the story gets a bit more complicated.

One year after the PNRS was created, in 1936, a different group with similar goals was established. This group was the *Union des comités d’action défensive* (UCAD), created by the general Dusseigneur and Pozzo di Borgo to battle against Communism and protect the liberty of the French nation. While there is little doubt that the UCAD and the future *cagoularde*s were in contact, as was proven by the police in 1938, their actual relationship is not so clear. Monier argues that the CSAR was actually

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<sup>16</sup> Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), F7 14815, Ministère de L’Intérieur, police interview with Michel Bernollin, 10 November 1937.

<sup>17</sup> Frédéric Monier, *Le Complot dans la République: Stratégies du secret, de Boulanger à la Cagoule*. (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1998), 277.

the clandestine section of UCAD, which was used as a public front for the secret group.<sup>18</sup> Other historians have argued that the Cagoule was actually formed at the same time as the UCAD, and that they were separate yet compatible organisations.<sup>19</sup> In any event, our future leaders of the Cagoule did leave the PNRS and formally established the CSAR sometime in 1936.

Individuals were recruited to the Cagoule in two main ways. The first was by being a member of an already established group that was integrated into the CSAR. The most notable examples of this kind of integration are the *Société des enfants d'Auvergne* from Clermont-Ferrand and the *Chevaliers du glaive* from Nice, both clandestine groups about which little is known. Of the latter group, Frédéric Monier writes "...dont plusieurs membres sont en contact avec les fascistes italiens, est également sensible à la propagande nazie venue d'Allemagne."<sup>20</sup> Other than this, however, information about these groups remains scarce. Both groups established ties with the CSAR sometime in 1936, having given up their autonomy as organisations, but gaining membership in a potentially more powerful federation.

The second and more common way the Cagoule recruited its members was by word of mouth. This was a personal and direct approach; existing members of the CSAR would approach friends, family, or strangers who seemed sympathetic to their cause and invite them to meetings. This task was facilitated by the law of 1936 which ordered all the *ligues* to be dissolved immediately, leaving all those vehemently opposed to joining an actual political party with no outlet for their activism. The direct method of recruitment worked well for the Cagoule, as is evidenced in the police reports from 1937.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: Weber, 398.; Bourdrel, 51-52.

<sup>20</sup> Monier, 279.



Many of the suspected *cagouards* testified about their entrance into the group. For instance, Gaston Jeanniot, a mechanic, was approached by one of his clients after discovering that they had similar political opinions. This client was Pierre Proust, already a member of CSAR, who brought Jeanniot into the fold of the group by offering to rent a basement for “storage” purposes and inviting the mechanic to meet other like-minded people.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Charles Nicod testified in 1938 that “[e]n septembre ou octobre 1937, une personne que je ne connaissais pas est venue me trouver chez moi, m’a demandé si j’étais satisfait de la Solidarité Française et m’a proposé d’adhérer à un groupement secret destiné à s’opposer à un putsch communiste.”<sup>22</sup> This testimony, and others like it, certainly indicates that the CSAR was not interested in acting with other groups and, indeed, may have been trying to undermine the *ligues* by recruiting their members. Philippe Bourdrel, in his journalistic account of the Cagoule, certainly maintains that the group was subversive in this respect. He writes that “[l]es militants débouchent dans tous les azimuts, prospectent dans toutes les Ligues de droite et chez les anciens combattants.”<sup>23</sup>

Once invited to attend a meeting, the initiate would be taken, sometimes alone and sometimes with other initiates, to the predetermined meeting place. These meetings were not large gatherings; like many secret societies, the CSAR wanted to avoid having the rank and file members know much about the leaders of the group. Thus, members of the nucleus of the Cagoule went by their respective pseudonyms when in contact with

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<sup>21</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L’Intérieur, police interview with Gaston Jeanniot, 13 November 1937.

<sup>22</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L’Intérieur, police interview with Charles Nicod, 4 March 1938.

<sup>23</sup> Bourdrel, 62.

new members and there was usually only one leader present at the initiation meeting.<sup>24</sup> At these meetings, the new recruits were expected to pledge an oath to the group, accompanied by a ceremonial ritual. The pledge itself was for “fidélité, discipline, et secret absolu à l’association” and the stated punishment for not living up to the oath was death.<sup>25</sup> As for the ritual, Bourdrel has mentioned several in his study, arguing that it varied from cell to cell, but they usually involved secret passwords necessary to enter and some ceremony involving the tricolour flag.<sup>26</sup> One more thing about the ceremonies of the Cagoule must be made clear. The word “Cagoule” translated into English means “hood”, but the group neither wore any hoods, nor did they actually use the name Cagoule to describe themselves. This commonly used label was first used by the *Action Française* to describe the CSAR and to suggest that it was a rather ridiculous organisation, disguising its incompetence with puerile games of dress-up.

As well as recruitment, the other aspect upon which the leaders of CSAR focused between 1936 and 1937 was organisation. The group was clearly modeled on a traditional military hierarchy. The leadership of the group was divided into four different *bureaux*, much like the French military authorities. Eugène Deloncle, considered by all to be the driving force behind the Cagoule, was indeed the head of the group in charge of the *première bureau*. Dr. Felix Martin was the head of the *deuxième bureau*, which directed intelligence operations. The *troisième bureau*, operations and instruction of new recruits, was led by Georges Cachier. And finally, the *quatrième bureau*, in charge of transport

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

<sup>25</sup> Aside from being mentioned in any study of the Cagoule, the pledge was often referred to by *cagouleurs* being interviewed by the police. AN, F7 14815.

<sup>26</sup> Bourdrel, 61-62.

and supplies, was directed by Jean Moreau.<sup>27</sup> These men indubitably formed the nucleus of the Cagoule, along with other notables, such as Jacques Corrèze, Jean Filiol, Gabriel Jeantet, François Méténier, and Aristide Corre.<sup>28</sup>

The military-style organisation did not end with the leadership, however. Active members and less involved adherents were also grouped according to a similar kind of hierarchy.<sup>29</sup> At the most local level, the CSAR was organized by cells – either “light”, with seven men, or “heavy”, with twelve men. Three cells formed a unit, usually between twenty and thirty men. Three units formed a battalion (60-80 men); three battalions made up a regiment (250 men); three regiments a brigade (750 men); and at the most expansive level, three brigades made up a division of about 2000 men.<sup>30</sup> It seems that the cells were the most important of these groupings, both because it was only at that level that members would meet and become familiar with their fellow *cagouleurs* and because the cell represented the main combat group. The real significance of this style of organisation will become clear later in this discussion, when we examine the various political trends that shaped the Cagoule. For now, it is enough simply to understand how the group was organized from 1934 to 1937.

It is clear that by the beginning of 1937 the CSAR had basically finished recruiting. The actual number of men that they managed to recruit, however, is less clear.

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<sup>27</sup> Bourdrel, 59-60.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Claude Valla suggests that the initial nucleus was composed of the following men (and their pseudonyms): Eugène Deloncle (Marie), Aristide Corre (Dagore), Jean Filiol (Philippe ou Fifi), Jacques Corrèze (La Bûche), Henri Deloncle (Grasset), Gabriel Jeantet (Gabès), François Méténier, Dr. Martin (le Bib). Jean-Claude Valla, *La Cagoule, 1936-1937*. (Paris: Éditions de la Librairie Nationale, 2000), 35.

<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that not all the members were involved to the same degree. The leaders and what I have called “active members” were the ones who regularly took part in the Cagoule’s notorious activities. However, there were also men who could not fully participate, because of age or other reasons, and these men, I have called “adherents”. Frédéric Monier finds an interesting correlation between level of involvement and class positions among the CSAR. He argues that the leaders and active members came mainly from the bourgeoisie and the less involved adherents came from the petite bourgeoisie. Monier, 295.

<sup>30</sup> J.R. Tournoux, *L'Histoire Secrète*. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962), 48-9.

The difficulty in establishing a firm membership number is due, in part, to the fact that recruitment took place on such an informal level. Because word of the Cagoule passed “mouth to ear”, the police in 1937 and historians ever since have faced many obstacles in this search for a conclusive number. Monier’s study of the group, which is one of the most reliable examinations, looks to the *cagoulard* trial for information. The instruction period of the trial enabled investigators to establish that Paris was divided into two divisions of *cagouleurs*. Monier uses this information to conclude that the Cagoule had at least 3000 active members, but that this number is a minimum because it does not account for members in the suburbs of Paris or in the provinces, nor does it count the members who were charged with missions other than those of a combat nature.<sup>31</sup> Considering the success of some of the extreme right *ligues* in their recruitment, it is possible that the Cagoule membership could have been much higher than the estimated 3000.<sup>32</sup> This is especially true when we remember that there was no other option for extraparlimentary political action by 1937; the CSAR stood alone in this sense.

Having recruited a sufficient number of members and organized them into efficient combat groups, the Cagoule was ready to begin putting plans into action. Although the Cagoule has been blamed for numerous crimes, perhaps because a clandestine group makes a very convenient patsy for unsolved criminal activity, this examination will only briefly describe the major *cagoulard* crimes, and ones about which we can be relatively certain of the group’s involvement. These crimes all took place in 1937 and included the Clichy demonstration, the Rosselli murders, the destruction of

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<sup>31</sup> Monier, 289.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, it has been estimated that the *Croix de feu* had a million members at its height in the 1930s. c.f. Robert Paxton, *Europe in the Twentieth Century*, 344.

airplanes destined for Republican forces in Spain, and finally, two very public bombings. We will see that the Cagoule was indeed very active during the brief period before the group was infiltrated by the police and the members arrested.

The Clichy demonstration took place on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1937. What began as a protest, organized by cooperating Communists, Socialists, and Radicals, against a meeting of the *Parti social français* (PSF), quickly turned into a bloody struggle. The PSF was, in effect, a reorganized version of the former *ligue*, the *Croix de feu*. The new political party chose the Parisian working class suburb of Clichy as the location for one of its first meetings. In response, the local Popular Front committee staged a counter-demonstration. The police were called upon to restore order and ended up firing on the crowd. Five people were killed and some two hundred were wounded by the end of the day. At first glance, the Cagoule are nowhere to be found in this mêlée. However, this is not because they were not there. They were just well hidden.

Monier writes that “[l]a responsabilité de certains éléments du CSAR dans ces événements est peu niable.”<sup>33</sup> He points in particular to Jacques Corrèze, who, according to several witnesses, participated in the demonstration and played a central role in provoking the police to open fire on the demonstrators. Other people, however, have accused the CSAR of intervening on a much larger scale. Bourdrel discusses how the police later found, in the houses of the Cagoule leaders, armbands with the three letters of the CGT printed on them and others with the insignia of the S.F.I.O. Apparently, the *cagouleurs* had been wearing these while they were provoking the police. He argues that this was “[t]out ce qu’il fallait pour créer la confusion dans un rassemblement populaire,

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<sup>33</sup> Monier, 299.

pour organiser des bagarres entre la police et des manifestants.”<sup>34</sup> The Clichy demonstration is a magnificent example of Cagoule underhandedness and the potential success of such subversive methods. While the events of that day did not bring down the government, *per se*, it certainly caused some major ruptures in the unity of the Popular Front.<sup>35</sup>

The next Cagoule crime was by far the most notorious, both for its cold-bloodedness and for its significance. Three months after the Clichy demonstration, on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1937, several members of CSAR murdered the Rosselli brothers in full daylight. Carlo and Nello Rosselli were prominent Italian anti-fascists who had been living in exile in Paris since 1929. Because of a childhood health condition that plagued him throughout life, Carlo Rosselli left Paris for the Norman spa town of Bagnoles-de-l’Orne in May of 1937. His brother and wife joined him there shortly after. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, Marion Rosselli, who was returning to Paris, was dropped off at the train station by the brothers. On their return drive, the Rosselli brothers came across what appeared to be some motorists with a broken down car and they pulled over to lend a hand. In fact, these were *cagouleurs*, who then brutally murdered Carlo and Nello Rosselli.

Initially, the fascist press tried to link the assassination to conflicts within the anti-fascist community, as an Italian fascist dagger was left at the scene and, according to the press, was obviously an attempt at a set-up by non-fascists. However, it quickly became clear that the Cagoule was behind the crime. When members of the group were arrested

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<sup>34</sup> Bourdrel, 179. The CGT is the *Confédération Générale du Travail* and the S.F.I.O. is the *Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière* (Socialist party), both leftist organisations.

<sup>35</sup> Maxwell Adereth discusses how the Communist party demanded the resignation of Dormoy and even called Blum ‘the murderer of Clichy workers’. The decision to call in the police had been theirs to make and they were thus blamed for the police action. He argues that this event was the first serious rift in the PF alliance. M. Adereth, *The French Communist Party: a critical history (1920-84)*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 82.

later that year, Marion Rosselli was able to identify one of them, Fernand Ladislav Jakubiez, who had come to the couple's home posing as a carpet salesman and asking questions about Carlo.<sup>36</sup> The link between the murders and the Cagoule became even clearer after the war, when it was discovered that certain Italian army officers had met with the Cagoule in March of 1937 to exchange semi-automatic weapons for the "suppression of troublesome persons".<sup>37</sup> Apparently, word had gotten around to prominent Italian fascists, potentially even to Mussolini himself, that the CSAR was a strong organisation that admired the fascist regime across the Alps and would do anything to establish a connection and gain weaponry as part of the deal.<sup>38</sup>

Just as the Rosselli murders indicated links between the Cagoule and fascist Italy, their next crime also had international significance. On the night of July 29<sup>th</sup>, three American airplanes which were being held at an aerodrome close to Paris, and were destined for Republican forces in Spain, were sabotaged. An arson destroyed one plane and severely damaged two others. While there were no witnesses to this crime, it is clear that CSAR was behind the act. Papers seized from Henri Deloncle's desk later in 1937 indicated that the group had been keeping surveillance on the aerodrome with the intent of sabotaging it. As Monier points out, this evidence proves that the act itself was no spontaneous gesture; it had been carefully planned several weeks or months beforehand.<sup>39</sup> While we do not have the same kind of evidence to prove the link between the Cagoule and Franco's nationalists as we do in the case of the CSAR and Italy, it seems clear that the group did not want the Republican forces to succeed in Spain.

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<sup>36</sup> Stanislaw G. Pugliese, "Death in Exile: The Assassination of Carlo Rosselli", *Journal of Contemporary History*. (32:3, July 1997), 313.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>38</sup> Tournoux, 63. We do not really know how the initial contact was made between Italy and the Cagoule.

<sup>39</sup> Monier, 301.

The last big Cagoule *coup* in 1937 was what is commonly referred to as the Étoile bombings. In the night of September 11<sup>th</sup>, two bombs exploded in the two most influential employers' organisations of the period. The *Confédération générale du patronat français* and the *Union des industries métallurgiques et minières*, both located in the Étoile area of Paris, were bombed and two security guards were killed. The author of this crime was a young *cagoulard*, René Locuty, who had a particular talent for working with explosives. It seems that Locuty was driven to the two locations by François Méténier and Jean Macon, and that he left a package at each building, delivered directly to the custodians before they left for the night.<sup>40</sup> The explosions of these “packages” rocked the entire neighbourhood.

Much like the Clichy demonstration, the Étoile bombings were based on a “principle of provocation”.<sup>41</sup> Who would think to blame a group of the extreme right for such a bombing? Indeed, suspicion was immediately directed towards the extreme left, for they were the ones ideologically opposed to employers' organisations. The CSAR had once again used a uniquely underhanded method to create problems for the left in France. However, the outcome was perhaps not quite what was intended. The very public and violent nature of this crime could not be ignored by the authorities, who were now determined to get to the bottom of this wave of unsolved crimes. Jean-Émile Néaumet, in his study of *Commissaire Charles Chenevier*, argues that it was the bombings that pushed Chenevier to step up his investigation of these crimes, which ultimately led to the infiltration of the group and its downfall.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Bourdrel, 185.

<sup>41</sup> Monier, 301.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Émile Néaumet, *Les grandes enquêtes du commissaire Chenevier: De la Cagoule à l'affaire Dominici*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 123.



Before we finish the story, a brief mention of two other aspects of the Cagoule's criminal activities is in order. These activities are unlike the others because they were not one-shot affairs; rather, they received constant attention from 1934 to 1937. The first is the CSAR's collection of arms. The police first uncovered some of these collections, hidden in depots all around Paris, in 1937. Aside from being massive in number, these weapons were often so technologically advanced that nobody in France, not even the army, had seen them before.<sup>43</sup> By the end of 1938, the police were able to count more than 7000 grenades, around 30 machine guns, 230 German and Italian automatic weapons, 150 guns, and more than 150 hunting rifles, all seized from *cagoulard* depots. To this, we must also add more than 300,000 cartridges and more than 150 kilos of explosives.<sup>44</sup>

The sheer magnitude of these collections was shocking to investigators and the general public, who learned about the discovery of new depots on a daily basis. We will later discuss this sense of shock in greater detail. What is even more outrageous, perhaps, is the fact that this number does not even represent all the weapons that the Cagoule possessed in 1937. The list presented above is from the Parisian region only, and does not include weapons that were hidden in the provinces. Moreover, not all the depots in Paris were found by the investigators.<sup>45</sup> The existence of these weapons leads us to the CSAR's second long-standing activity, the planning of some sort of mobilization.

In his *L'Histoire Secrète*, J.R. Tournoux argues that “[e]n un siècle et demi, depuis la Charbonnerie et les complots du règne de Louis-Philippe jusqu’à l’OAS, la

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<sup>43</sup> Bourdrel, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Monier, 290.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

Cagoule a été la plus vaste, et la mieux conçue des conjurations.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Philippe Bourdrel writes of the CSAR, that compared to other groups, “...peu d’organisations extrémistes de droite disposèrent d’une mécanique insurrectionnelle aussi bien huilée, de chefs aussi intelligents, d’agents d’exécution aussi décidés, de plans aussi poussés.”<sup>47</sup> It seems clear that the group was indeed preparing some kind of *coup*, the nature of which will be discussed at a later point. However, we must first establish how the investigators and, later, the historians of the CSAR could be so certain the group was getting ready for activity on a much larger scale than ever undertaken by a French underground conspiracy. Of course, the caches of weapons are the first indications of a larger plan. Why else would a clandestine group, organized into military combat groups, need such a massive amount of weaponry?

As well as finding arms during their searches, the police also found a great deal of other evidence indicating exactly what the Cagoule had been planning for several years. Some examples of this include extensive studies of how to paralyze Paris’ public services, which would effectively bring the city to a halt, and lists of political assassinations that the Cagoule hoped to carry out.<sup>48</sup> The details of these plans were frighteningly thorough; for example, Léon Blum was one of the first potential victims on the assassination list and the group was in possession of a detailed plan of his house. More damaging yet, however, was the fact that CSAR had actually prepared its troops to mobilize in November of 1937 –the day that the group referred to as *Jour <J>*.

During the first few weeks of November, rumours had been circulating about the imminence of a Communist *coup*. These rumours, Monier suggests, were most certainly

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<sup>46</sup> Tournoux, 113.

<sup>47</sup> Bourdrel, 51.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-74.

put forth and advanced by the Cagoule itself, in the hopes of providing a pretext for their own action.<sup>49</sup> In an ostensible response to these rumours, the group did indeed arrange for all their Parisian troops to mobilize on the morning of November 15<sup>th</sup>. The *cagouleurs* quickly and quietly met, armed themselves, and waited for the orders to begin their assault. Although the men were in place, they did not advance. Tournoux argues that Deloncle called a stop to the action that night because he was still unsure if the group had the support of the army and did not want to go forward without it.<sup>50</sup>

Ironically, this aborted attempt at action happened at the same time that the police finally had enough information about the Cagoule that they undertook several more searches and found many of the hidden weapons. The police had been on the trail of the Cagoule for some time, after finding evidence of arms trafficking and the numerous crimes that had the CSAR mark and by November 16<sup>th</sup>, they had found their men. The group had been infiltrated by the police and with all the evidence gathered, the *Sûreté* began arresting as many *cagouleurs* as they could. Within a week of these events, Marx Dormoy, the Minister of the Interior, publicly announced that the police had found evidence of a “véritable complot contre les institutions républicaines”.

As the initial arrests began, some *cagouleurs* fled the city. Corrèze, Jeantet, Filiol, Martin, and Darnand all managed to flee for a period, but all of them were apprehended by the end of 1938. Before a trial could begin, the instruction period needed to take place. This process took an exceptionally long time; it was not until July 1939 that the appointed judge, Bêteille, was able to sign on the Cagoule dossier, a report of six hundred

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<sup>49</sup> Monier, 316.

<sup>50</sup> Tournoux, 101.

pages.<sup>51</sup> After the information was collected and reviewed, the accused *cagouards* were charged with numerous crimes – over sixteen options for each accused man.<sup>52</sup> The beginning of the war put a halt to these proceedings, however, and the jailed Cagouards were liberated in order to enlist. Many of the men who had fled, and who had not been apprehended, also returned to join up.<sup>53</sup> It was not until October 1948 that the trial of the Cagoule could begin again at the *Cour d'Assises de la Seine*.

In these years leading up to the Second World War, France was in a rather difficult and turbulent situation, economically, politically, and socially. The men of the Cagoule saw in this turbulence a chance to further destabilize and polarize French society, through acts of terror and intrigue. This strategy of destabilization was quite successful for some time, as was demonstrated by crimes like the Clichy affair and the Étoile bombings, both of which widened existing rifts between the left and the right and even between various groups within each general political orientation. Ultimately, however, the Third Republic proved itself strong enough to withstand such attacks, surprising many people, most notably the men of the Cagoule.

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<sup>51</sup> This mention of the instruction period may cause some confusion in readers unfamiliar with French criminal law. In the case of serious crimes, the powers of investigation are sometimes given to a judge – the *juge d'instruction* – who has been delegated to investigate the crime. It is this judge who decides if the case will be referred to the public prosecutor after the instruction, or investigative, period is over.

<sup>52</sup> From what I can gather from the verdict that was read, these men were charged with various combinations of the following crimes: making deadly weapons, possessing arms depots containing weapons of war, distribution of weapons of war, resolving to commit an attack with the goal of overthrowing the government, resolving to commit an attack with the goal of inciting civil war, possessing explosives, Rosselli homicide, possession of war munitions, Étoile explosions, homicide, detonating deadly weapons, importation of arms and munitions, crimes against people and property, having given instructions relating to any of these crimes, belonging to an association of criminals, and after the war, the Dormoy homicide was added. Archives de Paris, 30W-0006.

<sup>53</sup> Bourdrel, 235.

*Chapter Two*  
**REVELATIONS AND REACTION**

While, as we have seen, much about the Cagoule remains shrouded in mystery, the public's reaction to the clandestine organisation remains even more unknown. The few historians who have examined the group have not focused on this aspect of the *cagoulard* affair, probably because they have been trying to get to the heart of the group itself. However, a look at what the French public of the 1930s thought about the CSAR is useful and important in many respects. First, the lack of archival material concerning the group makes it essential for the historian to turn elsewhere for supplemental information. The public reaction to the discovery of the affair illuminates both the nature of the Cagoule and that of French society in the 1930s. The second reason an examination of this sort is valuable concerns the kinds of questions historians have been asking about the Cagoule and other political groups of the 1930s. The question that inevitably arises in any discussion of politically oriented organisations is 'what kind of group are we examining?'

By comparing the Cagoule to existing political models, and foreign models at that, historians have placed the group into neat political categories. Rather than beginning with the assumption that the Cagoule could have represented a unique or new strand of politics, historians have used the comparative method too narrowly. I am not arguing that the method is a bad one, or even that the conclusions of these historians are wrong, simply that there is a need to take the group back to its place in history; we must try to see the Cagoule in the light of the 1930s before we apply to it our considerable powers of hindsight. It is especially vital to understand the role the Cagoule played on the French political scene and how the organisation was perceived by its fellow players.

This chapter, then, focuses on the way the Cagoule was seen by its contemporaries. I acknowledge that public opinion is notoriously difficult to pin down,

especially concerning something that took place almost seventy years ago. The temporal and cultural distance can seem overwhelming. To bridge this gap, I have chosen to use newspaper accounts of the Cagoule from late in 1937, when the police first began making their arrests. The reasons I have chosen newspaper sources are many. Unlike other sources, like memoirs or later interviews, the people reporting for these newspapers did not have the benefit of years in which to construct the story. Clearly, these accounts are by no means what we might consider “objective”; there is often an agenda behind the way the Cagoule was portrayed in the pages of the dailies. However, they still represent a more spontaneous construction of an opinion about the CSAR. Also, readership of many of these papers was enormous. Some, like the *Paris Soir*, had close to two million daily readers late in the decade. Others, while smaller, still represented the reading choice of a significant part of the French population in the 1930s. While this is not to say that all the readers simply passively accepted what their daily papers reported, French newspapers tended to have a very politically based readership. Each paper catered to a different political opinion and there is certainly a correlation between individual political views and how the Cagoule was perceived.<sup>1</sup>

This correlation is part of the last reason why I have chosen the sources that have been used in this chapter. I have tried to look at newspapers from many distinct points along the political spectrum. Ranging from the extremes of the left to those of the right, I have tried to cover as many political stances as possible. In this way, I have tried to widen the scope of investigation. The different ways that the newspapers portray the Cagoule and how they categorize the group can illuminate for us how the secret society

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent, and extensive, examination of the French press see: Claude Bellanger's *Histoire Générale de la Presse Française*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972, in particular, the third volume, which deals with the press from 1871 to 1940.

fit into the larger political tradition in France, as well as tell us how the public was reacting to the discovery of the affair. Ultimately, these revelations may help to answer the question “what kind of group was the CSAR?”

The communist newspaper *L'Humanité* was one of the first to break the story of the Cagoule plot, as discovered by the police late in 1937. Already, in October, the paper was gloating that it had long been warning the public about the presence of a powerful organisation and that few people had taken these warnings seriously. At that point, *L'Humanité* could say little about the group, except to link it with the Parti Social Français and the Parti Populaire Français and to caution their readers that it posed a great menace to France.<sup>2</sup> By the middle of November, the paper presented a much more developed story about the mysterious group and was also quite certain that the Cagoule was not what it claimed to be.

Under the headline of “Encore des armes fascistes et ce n'est pas fini!”, P.L. Darner wrote:

Oui, ces traîtres préparaient la guerre civile pour favoriser la guerre étrangère et aider l'invasion. Oui, les factieux en faisaient des armes, acquéraient des complicités...personne ne rit plus des révélations sur les armements fascistes, je pense? Ligue secrète de défense, de défense contre la révolution? Allons donc! Contre qui ces balles anti-tank que le ministre de l'intérieur montrait hier dans les couloirs de la Chambre – contre qui sinon contre l'armée de la République? Et que dire de ces bombes, semblables à celles d'attentats récents et dont il fallait aussi voir un échantillon saisi le jour même? C'est clair! L'Allemagne, l'Italie ont armé les traîtres. Avec quelle abondance!<sup>3</sup>

Skeptical of the Cagoule's public goal of organising to prevent a revolution, *L'Humanité* was convinced that the group was working hand in hand with fascist countries and that it had armed its members with weapons that were appropriate, not for private vigilantism,

<sup>2</sup> “Dépôts d'armes”. *L'Humanité* 3 October 1937: 1.

<sup>3</sup> P.L. Darner, “Encore des armes fascistes et ce n'est pas fini”. *L'Humanité* 19 November 1937: 2.

but for full-scale warfare. The way *L'Humanité* accused the Cagoule of being a fascist puppet organisation and its repeated calls for intensive investigations and punishments also distinguished the newspaper from its competition. The communist newspaper was indeed more extreme in reaction than many other papers, perhaps not without reason, but the Cagoule plot certainly gave contributors and editors an added chance to comment on the dangerous nature of extreme-right groups and to inspire a certain fear that the Cagoule was only a small part of a more widespread problem.

For instance, on 24 November, *L'Humanité* reported that “[l]es documents saisis établissent que les <<cagouleurs>> s’étaient assigné pour but de substituer à la forme républicaine que notre pays s’est librement donnée, un régime de dictature devant précéder la restauration de la monarchie.”<sup>4</sup> This statement about the goals of the CSAR clearly cut to the heart of republican fears of the extreme-right. By pointing out the double threat of both a dictatorship and the restoration of the monarchy, *L'Humanité* presented the Cagoule in such a way that there could be no question of its dangers. Of course, we must remember that unlike other political groups on the left, the communists were faced with the fact that the CSAR had claimed that its ultimate goal was to prevent a communist uprising. To combat any notion that they had indeed been preparing plans for a coup, *L'Humanité* was, in a sense, obliged to portray the Cagoule as a danger to all French citizens, not just as a danger to the left. This attempt to demonize the members of the CSAR and to deflect criticism from the communist party is evident in the newspaper’s repeated calls for swift and firm action against the secret society.

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<sup>4</sup> “Organisation secrète entièrement calquée sur les services de l’armée”. *L'Humanité* 24 November 1937: 1.



Along with informing the government that it was perhaps not too late to take action against the Cagoule, but that it must hit hard and high, *L'Humanité* explained to its readers why this justice had to be served and why, when one considered the dangers facing the French nation, the CSAR was a small fish in a big pond. Lucien Sampaix, a frequent contributor to the paper, revealed exactly what needed to be done at the end of November 1937.

En tout cas, il faut en finir! Nous ne nous lasserons pas de répéter qu'il ne suffit pas d'arrêter des comparses. Il faut porter le fer rouge dans l'abcès, procéder à l'arrestation des véritables chefs en même temps qu'au désarmement et à la dissolution des ligues factieuses secrètes ou de celles camouflées en partis. Les libertés du peuple, la sécurité du pays dépendent de la rapidité de ces mesures et de l'union du Front populaire devant le danger fasciste toujours plus menaçant.<sup>5</sup>

By constantly referring to "fascism" and fascist countries in their articles, contributors like Sampaix could appeal to a fear that was widespread across the political spectrum and thus escape any charge that the Cagoule had been a danger to the communist party alone. Similarly, references to personal freedoms and national security, used to describe the menace posed by the CSAR and other groups, were integral values that even non-communists held dear and allowed *L'Humanité* to further legitimize its calls for immediate measures against the right.

*L'Humanité*, however, was not the only newspaper to report on the Cagoule plot during the early phase of the police investigation. As early as 4 October, the socialist newspaper *Le Populaire* had informed its readers about the existence of the CSAR. The byline on that day read "[q]uelques renseignements sur les <<cagoulards>>, petite organisation de combat du grand capitalisme, et sur l'origine de leurs ressources", but

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<sup>5</sup> "En prison les vrais chefs du complot!". *L'Humanité* 26 November 1937: 2.

had little to say about the group except that it was reminiscent of other, unnamed, fascist leagues.<sup>6</sup> As we shall soon see, the reportage of *Le Populaire* was quite similar to that of *L'Humanité*, but the socialist paper was more concerned with who was backing the CSAR and the fact that the public seemed not to recognize the dangers of the extreme right. Ultimately, the editors wanted answers about the whole affair.

The financial backing of the Cagoule was an issue that plagued *Le Populaire* for the last three months of 1937. Clearly, the secret organisation had some means of raising capital, for they did have arsenals full of weapons and such weapons cost money. But, who, the socialist newspaper constantly asked, was paying the Cagoule's bills? Headlines like "D'Où vient l'argent?" and "Un Complot Insurrectionnel Préparé par Qui?"<sup>7</sup> clearly indicated how concerned *Le Populaire* was, not only with the *cagoulards* who had been arrested, but with the question of who was supporting the group. In mid-November the paper was able to speculate that "[u]ne puissance, ou plutôt des puissances étrangères ont dû participer au financement de l'entreprise", but it had no solid information.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the month, the newspaper still had nothing but speculation about the Cagoule's finances. The S.F.I.O. of the Seine and the Seine-et-Oise called a general meeting of all workers to discuss three main issues: "Qui paie les cagoulards? Qui les arme? Quels sont leur chefs?", but there were no leads to offer in the socialist newspaper.<sup>9</sup>

The second most notable aspect of *Le Populaire*'s coverage of the Cagoule plot was the socialist concern that the public was perhaps not taking it as seriously as they

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Maurice Herrman, "Armements de guerre civile". *Le Populaire* 4 October 1937: 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Le Populaire* 18 November 1937: 1 & 2.

<sup>8</sup> O. Rosenfeld, "Le fillet de la Sûreté Nationale se resserre autour des conjurés". *Le Populaire* 21 November 1937: 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Le Populaire* 30 November 1937: 1.

ought. In fact, this particular concern was highly insightful, inasmuch as it recognized that several other political groups and their respective newspapers, as we shall see shortly, were trying to play down the Cagoule affair by mocking it. Under the headline of “Presse de droite n’est pas presse adroite”, telling in and of itself, an author named Bracke wrote that “[d]éjà, quand il fut parlé des <<cagouleurs>>, selon le sobriquet inventé par l’Action française, ces journaux avaient affecté de rire comme d’une bonne blague ou d’une mystification”.<sup>10</sup> Bracke went on to write that these same newspapers seemed to treat the conspirators like children who did not know what they were doing.<sup>11</sup> The socialist press certainly felt very differently about the CSAR. Even before *Le Populaire* could report anything conclusive about the group or its dangers, Jean-Maurice Herrman warned the readers that “[l]es <<cagouleurs>> ne sont pas, nous l’avons vu, une plaisanterie ni une création de l’imagination.”<sup>12</sup>

The socialist press clearly did not think that the dangers presented by the CSAR were suitable objects of fun, nor that its members were playing a childish, innocent, game. Unlike *L’Humanité*, however, *Le Populaire* did not immediately believe it could identify what the real nature of the clandestine group was. There seems to have been a genuine attempt by the socialist newspaper to get to the bottom of the Cagoule plot, to discover what kind of group it was. The first description of the plot was advanced by O. Rosenfeld: “[c]’est l’œuvre d’une organisation secrète très camouflées, comprenant des hommes décidés – des cadres et des exécutants nombreux et disciplinés et disposant de

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<sup>10</sup> Bracke, “Presse de droite n’est pas presse adroite”. *Le Populaire* 22 November 1937: 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Maurice Herrman, “Armements de guerre civile”. *Le Populaire* 5 October 1937: 1.

capitaux énormes.”<sup>13</sup> Several days later, Rosenfeld elaborated upon his initial description with some very accurate facts.

[c]ette association comprend des hommes des partis de droite et d’extrême-droite ainsi que les éléments les plus actifs de certaines ligues dissoutes...Elle est organisée sur le modèle des <carbonari>, mais naturellement très modernisés et militarisés...Et le but de la conjuration? Aucun doute n’est possible: renverser la République pour instaurer un régime fasciste. Les factieux étaient prêts à commettre un <putsch> et à provoquer la guerre civile.<sup>14</sup>

Like the communist press, *Le Populaire* ultimately came to the conclusion that the Cagoule was a fascist organisation. The socialist newspaper eventually wrote, like the communist press, that the plan of the CSAR was to install a dictator and then restore the monarchy, but in the end, this was apparently still the plan of fascists.

Not surprisingly, another major left-of-centre newspaper, *L’Œuvre*, came to many similar conclusions about the CSAR and its goals. However, *L’Œuvre*, while open to leftist ideology, was mistrustful of both the communists and the socialists, which clearly influenced the way it reported upon the Cagoule affair. Its concerns were more in line with how the affair would affect the Republic proper, rather than more abstract issues of ideology. Ultimately, this emphasis meant that *L’Œuvre* was more moderate in its reportage, but there is also a genuine sense of fear that runs through the paper as its contributors try to understand what the Cagoule was all about.

So, how did *L’Œuvre* interpret the CSAR? In mid-November of 1937, when the Cagoule became front page news, the newspaper had quite a bit to say about the group.

“[L]es éléments les plus violentes des Ligues dissoutes...”, “...une organisation d’extrême-droite, puissante et secrète, dont le but est de

<sup>13</sup> O. Rosenfeld, “Un Complot contre la Sûreté de l’Etat”. *Le Populaire* 18 November 1937: 1.

<sup>14</sup> O. Rosenfeld, “Le fillet de la Sûreté Nationale se resserre autour des conjurés”. *Le Populaire* 21 November 1937: 1.

renverser les institutions républicaines”, “[i]l ne s’agit pas d’une affaire de <cagouleurs> ou de <chevaliers du glaive>, d’une réunion de petits jeunes gens boutonneux et exaltée. Il s’agirait d’une véritable société de terroristes...”<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, the newspaper had a fairly good sense of the makeup of the Cagoule. Reporters knew that its membership comprised former leaguers and that these men were serious about their goals – it was not a matter of child’s play. They did not yet know what the real name of the group was - that would not be clear until two days later - and they did not quite know what the goal of the group was. However, this lack of certainty did not prevent *L’Œuvre* from hazarding a guess.

Initially, the newspaper reported that “[l]es <miliciens> avaient trouvé un terrain d’entente pour une action directe en faveur de l’établissement d’un gouvernement fasciste à base raciste, anti-communiste et antisémite.”<sup>16</sup> Unlike the other papers we have examined, *L’Œuvre* emphasized the anti-communist nature of the CSAR and also seemed convinced that the group was antisemitic. As one article hinted, it was these characteristics of the CSAR that allowed it to be categorized as fascist. “Quels étaient les mots d’ordre des <milices secrètes révolutionnaires> sinon la lutte contre le <communisme>, les <juifs> et les <socialistes>? A quel programme ces mots d’ordre correspondent-ils? Le lecteur en décidera.”<sup>17</sup> Although the association of the Cagoule with fascism is the same in all three leftist newspapers, the tone of *L’Œuvre* was much more restrained than that of the other two. Throughout the month of November, each edition of the paper noted that there really was very little information about the CSAR

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<sup>15</sup> “Des milliers de terroristes: les <Milices Secrètes Révolutionnaires> préparaient depuis 16 mois un vaste coup de main contre les institutions républicaines”. *L’Œuvre* 17 November 1937: 1.

<sup>16</sup> “Des milliers de terroristes: les <Milices Secrètes Révolutionnaires> préparaient depuis 16 mois un vaste coup de main contre les institutions républicaines”. *L’Œuvre* 17 November 1937: 5.

<sup>17</sup> “Qui dirigeait qui payait qui armait les <Milices Secrètes>?”. *L’Œuvre* 19 November 1937: 5.

and that the public would be forced to wait for the results of the inquiry to know much more.

As was mentioned earlier, the other striking difference between *L'Œuvre* and the other papers already examined was its concern and support for the Republic, rather than a political programme or abstract notions. For example, when reporting that the CSAR had ostensibly organized to fight against a communist coup, *L'Œuvre* also discussed the fact that the group was planning to occupy public establishments and bring the city of Paris to a halt.<sup>18</sup> This piece of information, surprisingly accurate, fit into *L'Œuvre*'s constant emphasis on how the Cagoule was a danger to *republican* institutions. As well as reiterating the CSAR's true dangers, the paper also continuously praised the way the affair was being handled. The police, the justice system, and the government were all applauded for their efforts in getting to the bottom of the *cagoulard* plot. Indeed, *L'Œuvre* affirmed that "[l]e pays ne peut qu'applaudir à la vigilance gouvernementale et demander à ceux qui le représentent de frapper fort et haut, sans épargner personne."<sup>19</sup>

A more cautious reaction to the discovery of the Cagoule plot was presented in the pages of the *Paris-Soir*, an illustrated newspaper with no clearly defined political stance. While the contributors to the paper had many of the same questions about the CSAR as those seen in the other papers, the tone of the reports and the answers to the questions were quite different. *Paris-Soir* seemed to be quite confident that the police and the government were doing all they could to get to the bottom of the affair. Moreover, the paper, perhaps in an attempt to avoid wild speculation which could only

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<sup>18</sup> "L'Enquête de la Sûreté nationale se poursuit maintenant dans le plus grand secret". *L'Œuvre* 23 November 1937: 5.

<sup>19</sup> *L'Œuvre* 25 November 1937: 1.

inflare the situation, stuck mainly to what was actually known about the Cagoule at the time.

One of the first major articles in the *Paris-Soir* about the CSAR was published on 19 November, under the headline of “Qui commandait qui finançait les cagouleurs?”. This was a question that was posed in every major newspaper of the day, but the answer was quite different in *Paris-Soir*, especially compared to what was reported in the leftist papers. Of the membership of the Cagoule, the author wrote “...il apparaît que tous les conspirateurs ont appartenu aux ligues paramilitaire dissoutes, qu'ils avaient quittées avant même cette dissolution parce qu'ils les trouvaient trop <tièdes>.”<sup>20</sup> This was a remarkably accurate portrayal of the *cagouleur* membership and was clearly based on evidence available, rather than wild rumours. Similarly, when the author presented information about what the goals of the plot were, he honestly admitted that nobody yet knew, but that it was clear that the group was preparing for some direct and violent action.

Over the course of the next three weeks, the reports in the *Paris-Soir* varied little. Using the justification of not wanting to endanger the police investigations, the contributors mainly avoided speculation on who the leaders of the Cagoule were and who was financing the group. Only once, on 21 November, did the paper suggest that it seemed likely that a foreign influence had a role in the plot, but no specific country was ever identified. As for the goals of the Cagoule, the paper simply repeated what it had initially reported: the group was attached to the extreme-right in some way. The most detailed report was published on 26 November, after Eugène Deloncle had been arrested, and it concluded that:

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<sup>20</sup> “Qui commandait qui finançait les cagouleurs?”. *Paris-Soir* 19 November 1937: 1.

...le complot était l'œuvre d'un Comité Secret d'Action révolutionnaire (C.S.A.R.) dont on sait maintenant le plan d'action. On sait aussi que ce Comité était composé d'anciens membres des ligues dissoutes et se tenaient en contact constant avec certains groupements monarchistes.<sup>21</sup>

There is never any mention of fascism in the pages of *Paris-Soir*, nor, for that matter, any real mention of what kind of danger the Cagoule might have posed. The newspaper did take the affair rather seriously, especially concerning the weapons that were being found around Paris. However, there was a sense in the paper that any danger that may have existed had been prevented and indeed, that the CSAR may not have been an unusual aberration in the French political tradition. The paper situated the Cagoule affair within a history of conspiracies and secret societies, which perhaps made the whole thing more familiar and less frightening.

If we now turn to the more conservative newspapers of the 1930s, we will find that the reactions to the Cagoule affair were quite different from those of the various leftist papers and even differed quite a bit from the relatively neutral *Paris-Soir*. The two papers that represented the republican right, the *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* and *Le Temps*, approached the notion of a *cagoulard* plot with a good deal of skepticism. Both papers implied that the clandestine group was not as much of a danger as some other people would have had the public imagine and that the whole affair had been blown out of proportion to serve certain political agendas.

An example of this kind of suspicion is found in the *Journal des Débats* on 20 November. The author wrote that

M. Chiappe a dénoncé le vrai complot, le complot permanent contre l'Etat.  
Mais ce n'est pas celui-là qui occupe la police et qui semble intéresser les

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<sup>21</sup> "Le complot perd de son mystère et retrouve son véritable nom: la cagoule tombe et le <Csar> apparait." *Paris-Soir* 26 November 1937: 3.



pouvoirs publics. On en vient donc à penser que dans l'affaire des cagouleurs ce n'est pas seulement les caves qui sont truquées, c'est peut-être le complot lui-même et que ce qu'il y a de plus dangereux dans ce complot truqué c'est qu'il doit servir à faire oublier un complot authentique.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the real plot that Chiappe, former prefect of police, had denounced was the communist plot to overthrow the French government. Clearly, the *Journal* agreed that the Cagoule affair was only serving to distract the public's attention from the real dangers posed by the communists. In fact, the paper, at this point, still believed that the communists had been responsible for both the Clichy demonstration and for the Étoile bombings.

Both newspapers tried to indicate to their readers that the Cagoule had actually posed very little danger to the Republic. The *Journal* reported that "[i]l semble que toutes ces armes et munitions étaient de simples souvenirs de guerre dont les possesseurs, effrayés par les perquisitions, ont voulu se débarrasser."<sup>23</sup> Yes, as incredible as it seems, the paper actually tried to convince people that the hundreds of German and Italian automatic weapons found in the *cagouleur* caves were simply souvenirs from the war.

*Le Temps*, while not as skeptical as the *Journal*, argued that

[i]l y avait donc un peu de puérilité et beaucoup d'ignorance dans les projets et les plans des conspirateurs dont la police vient de surprendre les manœuvres, et peut-être le <communiqué> du ministère de l'intérieur a-t-il manqué de faire ressortir cet aspect de l'<affaire> qui produit tant de bruit.<sup>24</sup>

The author of that article wondered how the Cagoule could actually think that they would succeed against the army, the police, and the public. Because the plans of the Cagoule,

<sup>22</sup> "Les deux complots". *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* 20 November 1937: 1.

<sup>23</sup> "L'affaire des <cagouleurs>". *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires* 3 December 1937: 4.

<sup>24</sup> "Complots". *Le Temps* 25 November 1937: 1.

found by the police, were so farfetched and childish, *Le Temps* concluded that the group would never have succeeded even if the plot had not been discovered.

Because the *Journal* and *Le Temps* felt that the Cagoule affair was neither a danger, nor more of a concern than the perceived communist plots, the papers did not put much effort into explaining what the organisation was or who was part of it. In fact, of the two, *Le Temps* was alone in even mentioning the perceived goals of the Cagoule. The paper reported that the group consisted of eight or ten people who had been accumulating weapons in their garages. According to the paper, the plan of this small group of men “...était dirigé contre la République. Ils projetaient d’instaurer <un régime de dictature devant précéder la restauration de la monarchie>.”<sup>25</sup> However, even this admission did not make the paper believe that there had been any actual threat to the Republic. Just over a week later, the author of an article pointed out that the public was not fearful of the Cagoule; indeed, the public had been laughing and joking about the carnivalesque affair. He went on to wonder why the government was not laughing along with the rest at the stupid masquerade.<sup>26</sup>

*L’Echo de Paris*, a newspaper even further inclined towards the right, had many of the same opinions as the *Journal* and *Le Temps*, but was much more critical of the government and became quite inflammatory as the Cagoule affair progressed. *L’Echo* was not considered to be a paper of the extreme-right, but it was clearly more radical than the solidly republican rightist newspapers. Rather than seeing in the Cagoule affair any danger that could have affected the French Republic, *L’Echo* chose to use the whole

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<sup>25</sup> “Complots”. *Le Temps* 25 November 1937: 1.

<sup>26</sup> Etienne Fournoi, “Philosophie des Cagoulards”. *Le Temps* 5 December 1937: 1.

investigation as justification to identify all the other problems with the government, the police, and, of course, the communists.

The most violent of *L'Echo's* criticisms were directed towards the government, especially the minister of the interior, Dormoy. For example, a journalist named Martin-Mamy wrote that "[i]l y a en France un homme particulièrement dangereux. C'est M. Marx Dormoy, ministre de L'Intérieur."<sup>27</sup> Of Dormoy's revelations concerning the Cagoule, Phillipe Roques wrote under the headline "M. Dormoy prétend avoir découvert un complot contre la République" that

A l'en croire, les <Cagouleurs> n'avaient d'autre objet que le renversement de la République et le rétablissement de la monarchie... Tout cela ne paraît pas très sérieux. Peut-on imaginer une révolution monarchique s'effectuant dans les égouts de Paris et transformant les autobus de la S.T.C.R.P en camions blindés?... Il est difficile de penser que ces comparses étaient animés d'un autre désir que celui de se défendre contre le communisme et ses dangers, et qu'ils n'aient été inspirés que par la carence de l'autorité de l'Etat.<sup>28</sup>

Because of the clear loathing of Dormoy in particular, and the government in general, the author of this piece presented the Cagoule in quite a sympathetic light. Roques clearly believed that Dormoy was delusionally imagining that the Cagoule posed any danger and in fact, given the incompetence of the government and the presence of a communist danger, he hinted that the existence of the clandestine organisation was justified.

Dormoy and the French government were not the only ones to find themselves on the receiving end of *L'Echo's* attacks. The police were also included in the paper's violent criticisms. On the days when the police made no new revelations about the Cagoule, the paper wondered if they had finally run out of imaginary plots to investigate.

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<sup>27</sup> Martin-Mamy, "Des Conspirateurs? En Voila...". *L'Echo de Paris* 25 November: 1.

<sup>28</sup> Philippe Roques, "M. Dormoy prétend avoir découvert un complot contre la République". *L'Echo de Paris*. 24 November 1937: 1.

One author wrote that “[p]our aussi extraordinaire que cela puisse sembler, le porte-parole de la Sûreté nationale fut muet, hier soir, comme une carpe.”<sup>29</sup> However, when the police were actively investigating and arresting members of the Cagoule, the paper ranted about how they were arresting people without any pretext of legality, how they were ignoring basic civil liberties, and going after political personalities whose reputations were above any suspicion.<sup>30</sup> It seems that the police could do very little to please *L’Echo de Paris*. Ultimately, the paper concluded that “[c]ette affaire des cagouleurs aura eu au moins ceci de bon qu’elle aura démontré la médiocrité de notre Sûreté Nationale.”<sup>31</sup>

It seems that one of the central reasons behind *L’Echo*’s scathing attacks on the government and the police was that the paper saw in their persecution of the Cagoule a large-scale communist plot. Martin-Mamy wrote in the paper that

A ce même moment circule le bruit d’un complot communiste. Après un silence insolite, M. Dormoy, ministre de l’Intérieur, le dément. Mais le même M. Dormoy garnit les ministères de gardes mobiles et comme s’il voulait s’éviter de mettre les communistes en cause – M. Jean Chiappe a dit là-dessus, hier à la Chambre, et courageusement, ce qu’il fallait dire – il découvre – comme par hasard – un complot <fasciste> que sa police connaissait évidemment depuis longtemps, et il peut ainsi justifier ses mesures de force sans compromettre ses associés communistes contre lesquels, précisément, il les prend.<sup>32</sup>

Every move made by Dormoy and the police was seen by the paper as an attempt to please the communists and socialists. If we were to believe *L’Echo de Paris*, the Cagoule posed no danger to anybody but the communists and this danger was actually appropriate

<sup>29</sup> “La Sûreté nationale est-elle à bout de souffle dans l’affaire des <Cagouleurs>?”. *L’Echo de Paris* 23 November 1937: 1.

<sup>30</sup> “Du ridicule à l’arbitraire dans l’affaire des ‘Cagouleurs’”. *L’Echo de Paris* 27 November 1937: 1.; “Vacances de la légalité”. *L’Echo de Paris* 28 November 1937:1.

<sup>31</sup> “Le développement de l’affaire des ‘Cagouleurs’”. *L’Echo de Paris* 30 November 1937: 1.

<sup>32</sup> Martin-Mamy, “Du poteau de torture au poteau indicateur”. *L’Echo de Paris* 19 November 1937: 1.

given that the communists were planning their own revolutionary action. Every arrest that was made in the Cagoule affair was, according to the paper, another attempt to satisfy the “appétit moscovite” and to tarnish the reputation of true patriots.<sup>33</sup>

We find a similar line of argument in our last newspaper on the right, which was technically much more radical than *L'Echo*, but in reality had much less sympathy for the Cagoule. While many other papers may have believed that the group was involved with French monarchists, the largest monarchist organisation certainly felt differently. *L'Action Française* hated the Cagoule with a passion that was rivaled only by their hatred of the Republic and French communists. It was in their newspaper of the same name that *L'Action Française* had actually come up with the derogatory name of the “Cagoule” for the CSAR. In November 1937, when the news of the Cagoule plot broke, *L'Action Française* certainly took a hard line against their former members. The newspaper equally criticised the CSAR and the Republic which had allowed such a group to exist.

On 18 November, Maurice Pujo, a prominent monarchist and regular contributor to the paper, wrote that:

...si nous ne l'avions pas jugée capable de faire du mal – du mal non à nos adversaires communistes, non au régime, mais aux patriotes à la cause nationale, - nous n'aurions pas, chaque fois que cela avait été nécessaire, mis en garde nos amis contre cette confrérie de fous qui s'efforçait de les débaucher.<sup>34</sup>

As well as distancing the monarchist group from the Cagoule, Pujo also accused the police and the Minister of the Interior, Marx Dormoy, of actually having helped and harboured the *cagouleurs*. The reason for this accusation, Pujo pointed out, was because

<sup>33</sup> “La Sûreté nationale est-elle à bout de souffle dans l'affaire des <Cagouleurs>?”. *L'Echo de Paris* 23 November 1937: 1.

<sup>34</sup> Maurice Pujo, “Et voici de nouveau la Cagoule!”. *L'Action Française* 18 November 1937: 1.

the Cagoule, by its sheer incompetence and impertinence, was the best instrument to discredit all the other nationalist organisations, to ruin discipline and eliminate confidence in the *Action Française*.

The paper consistently assumed a mocking tone when discussing the Cagoule. There was, in the monarchist opinion, nothing to fear when it came to the secret organisation, except that it might discredit real patriots. For instance, in response to an article in *L'Humanité* that suggested that the *Action Française* was involved with the CSAR, the monarchists replied that "*L'Humanité* sait fort bien que *L'Action Française* a été la première à mettre en garde les patriotes contre les complots rocambolesques de la <cagoule>..."<sup>35</sup> A week later, after Dormoy had made his announcement about the discovery of a plot against republican institutions, *L'Action Française* ranted against the stupidity of both Dormoy and the Cagoule.

Cette situation ne saurait se prolonger plus longtemps sans que le fou Dormoy et son fanatique collègue Auriol, qui se sont couverts surtout de ridicule, tombent dans l'odieux. Tout le monde de Palais est révolté de ce mensonge juridique suivant lequel un complot est une association de kidnappeurs et de cambrioleurs.<sup>36</sup>

There could be no question: *L'Action Française* wanted nothing to do with the Cagoule. Even if they had shared the same political views at one point, all cooperation had finished with the resignation of the future *cagouards* from the *Action Française* ranks. The monarchist organisation did not even bother to speculate about the political leanings of the Cagoule, because it seemed to them that the *cagouards* had renounced all serious political tendencies in favour of childish, secretive behaviour. And, because of their emphasis on direct, thoughtless action, the Cagoule posed no danger to the actual

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<sup>35</sup> "L'Affaire des <cagouards>". *L'Action Française* 20 November 1937:1.

<sup>36</sup> "L'Affaire des <Cagouards>". *L'Action Française* 30 November 1937: 3.

enemies of the French – the communists and the Republicans – in the view of the *Action Française*.

As we have seen, reactions to the discovery of the Cagoule plot varied quite widely from newspaper to newspaper. The communist, socialist, and left-of-centre papers were quite concerned with the Cagoule because they saw in it the foreign influence of fascism, their most feared political opponent. The republican right, the more extreme right, and the largest monarchist organisation, on the contrary, felt that the Cagoule posed no danger except to blind the public to the more insidious plans of the communists. Clearly, the whole Cagoule affair lends itself quite nicely to illustrating existing tensions amongst the various French political parties. The information about the Cagoule presented to the public by these dailies was filtered through the lens of antagonism; each new report served as another opportunity for attacks on political opponents, both from right to left and vice versa.

However, this political opportunism must not blind us to the actual information that was being presented by the press. The public was informed of the massive stocks of weapons that the police continued to find all over Paris. They similarly witnessed the arrests of many prominent individuals in connection with the Cagoule affair. All the newspapers reported that the CSAR had been preparing some action against the Republic, though whether this action would have been a danger depended on which paper was doing the reporting. Many papers informed the readers that the ultimate goal of the clandestine organisation was to overthrow the government and replace it, first with a dictator and ultimately with a monarch. In short, there was a good deal for the public to worry about. Furthermore, the fact that the story of the Cagoule remained on the front

pages of these papers for over a month seems to indicate that interest in the affair did not wane quickly.

What can these reports tell us about the Cagoule itself? To contemporary observers, there was reason to believe that the group was linked to foreign countries, especially fascist countries. This speculation was not hyperbole on the part of parties inclined towards the left, since the Cagoule did have links to Italy. Similarly, the French public was concerned about the Cagoule and their perceived plans to restore the monarchy. Again, this concern was not unjustified, as many of the *cagouleurs* had come from the ranks of *L'Action Française* and there was little reason to suspect that they had since changed their political leanings. Both of these accusations implied, as was mentioned *ad nauseum*, a future overthrow of the Republican form of government. This, however, was the goal of many extraparliamentary groups in the 1930s. For this reason, the Cagoule was occasionally seen as simply another, yet more secretive, part of the extreme-right. We also see mention of secret societies, like the Carbonari, in these press reports. Fascist? Monarchist? Extreme-right? A new Carbonari or Freemasonry? These are not entirely compatible political paradigms, but the Cagoule was accused of bearing such contradictory characteristics.

It is this inconclusiveness, both past and present, that leads one to wonder if the Cagoule cannot be placed firmly in any one of these traditions. Perhaps the organisation drew from all these, and other, models. Before this discussion can take place, however, it may help to learn what the members of the Cagoule felt about the nature of the group. When they were solicited to join this clandestine organisation, what exactly did they imagine the purpose of the group was? What did the leaders of the Cagoule hope for in



forming this group? With which political tradition did these *cagouards* identify? The answers to these questions must complement the public's reaction to the group in our attempt to discover the nature of the Cagoule.

*Chapter Three*  
**CAGOULARD CHARACTERISTICS**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the French press took many different perspectives on the Cagoule affair. Not surprisingly, the press was disadvantaged by the fact that the *cagouleurs* themselves were not admitting anything in 1937. The resounding silence of the members of the organisation made it impossible for the press to gain any insight into what the *cagouleurs* themselves thought of their group and its plans. Fortunately, with the help of certain archival collections and the discovery and publication of a very valuable first-hand account of the Cagoule affair, we are now able to compare the public perception of the group with that of the members themselves. Perhaps we can clarify not only how the *cagouleurs* perceived the organisation, but also how they viewed politics in general and what political characteristics they might have had.

Immediately after the failed mobilization in November and the discovery of the Cagoule plot, Aristide Corre, a founding member of CSAR, wrote in his diary that “[l]es journaux sont remplis des détails fantastiques de l’affaire.”<sup>1</sup> Corre, from his villa in Saint-Sebastian, continued to take much pleasure in reading the French press reports about the affair and mocking them for their inaccuracies. His reactions to the daily revelations ranged from anger at being misrepresented to smugness about how successful the group had been in confounding the police and the public. His fascination with the press lasted much longer than the press’ fascination with the group, as Corre kept searching for stories about the Cagoule and commented on them quite frequently in his diaries well into 1938.

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Bernadac, *Dagore: Les carnets secrets de la Cagoule*. (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1977), 226.

Aristide Corre, born in 1895 in Brest, considered himself to be a man of letters. Writing was not only a passion for Corre, but was also his declared occupation, although there is no evidence that he was ever successful in this endeavor. He did indeed hold a degree from the Collège de France in the Faculty of Letters, but lived most of his life relying on the pension of his mother, with whom he lived.<sup>2</sup> Corre had been a childhood friend of Eugène Deloncle, also born in Brest, and they were later reunited in the 17<sup>th</sup> cell of the *Action Française's camelots du roi*. Corre was part of the *grand dissidence* in 1934 and eventually became the archivist and secretary of the Cagoule. This position allowed Corre to carry on with his own literary aspirations, as well as keeping records for the entire organisation.<sup>3</sup>

Corre's irrepressible need to write about every aspect of his life, including his involvement with the Cagoule, while ultimately unfortunate for him and the group, is a blessing for us. He managed to keep most of his diary entries out of the hands of the police in 1937 and clung to them throughout the beginning of the war years. Before he was shot by the Germans in 1942, Corre entrusted his treasured writings to a fellow Cagoulard, Father Joseph Fily. In the late 1960s, Fily was approached by Christian Bernadac, who was doing a story about clandestine religious life in German concentration camps. Fily had been incarcerated in Dachau and ended up giving Bernadac more than the story he had been looking for. Fily decided that it was time to give the diaries to somebody who could publish them, as Corre had asked for them to be made public after a certain amount of time had passed. Thus, Bernadac took the massive collection of papers and published the volumes from April 1937 to February 1940.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. See also: Joseph Désert, *Toute la vérité sur l'affaire de la Cagoule: Sa trahison, Ses crimes, Ses hommes*. (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1946), 64.

<sup>3</sup> Presumably, these records were destroyed by the *cagoulards*, but one can never be sure!

In his introduction, Bernadac made the excellent point that “à travers Aristide Corre, c’est un peu tous les <abonnés> de La Cagoule et leur siècle que nous découvrons.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Corre’s diaries provide us with an insight into the Cagoule that is unavailable by any other means. No other *cagoulard* has published such a candid or lengthy reflection about the clandestine organisation, as the written record is indeed compromising for any secret society and Corre did pay for his obsession with writing.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, because Corre was recording his thoughts on an almost daily basis, the diaries represent a more spontaneous and less guarded interpretation of the events of 1937. Once we wade through Corre’s many descriptions of his amorous liaisons and his often heated arguments with his mother, we are left with some incredibly interesting revelations about the Cagoule.

We must, however, approach Corre’s writings with some reservations. While he was indeed part of the Cagoule’s nucleus, and thus privy to the inner workings of the group, he did not always get along with the other founding members. In his diaries, he frequently complained about Jean Filiol, in particular, and suspected that Filiol’s influence over Deloncle was vast and disastrous. As well, because we have no other writing with which to compare Corre’s, it would be a mistake to assume that all the members of the Cagoule felt as he did. This is especially true given that the group was clearly not as united as it may have seemed on the surface. And finally, Corre had indeed been punished by the group for his indiscretions and was exiled to Saint-Sébastien (Spain) in October 1937. He remained in relatively close contact with the other

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<sup>4</sup> Bernadac, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Corre’s house was one of the first to be searched by the police, even before the mobilization attempt in November 1937. There the police found a quite extensive membership list, which led to further compromising discoveries.

*cagouards* and was actually joined in Spain by several of them, but we cannot ignore the fact that he was no longer at the heart of the Cagoule's operational base in Paris. Corre was, by his own admission, in semi-disgrace, and there is no way of knowing if he continued to hold a privileged place within the nucleus of the organisation.<sup>6</sup>

These cautions should not detract from the invaluable aspects of Corre's diaries. His writings covered a vast range of topics, all of which provide us with essential insights into Corre's life and the nature of the Cagoule. His reflections on foreign affairs and international politics clarify his own political stance and perhaps that of other *cagouards*, for, presumably, they had similar political views. His observations about the state of affairs in France do much of the same, but also indicate why he felt a group like the Cagoule was necessary. Finally, his frank ruminations about the organisation, its goals, and its relationship to other French groups is most revealing and allows us a glimpse into the character of the clandestine group; one which would not exist, had not Corre been so dedicated to his daily musings.

The CSAR, as we have seen, was suspected of having close links to all the more totalitarian, and sometimes, fascist countries. Most of the newspaper reports, especially those from the left of the political spectrum, imagined that the group was being funded and manipulated by Germany, Italy, and Spain. These suspected ties facilitated many accusations that the Cagoule was itself a fascist organisation. While Aristide Corre's reflections on these countries do not, by themselves, disprove such accusations, they

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<sup>6</sup> Corre wrote in his diary that he was semi-disgraced and actually worried about the penalty for his indiscretions; "...il n'est que trop vrai qu'il n'y a, chez nous, qu'une seule sanction pour une telle faute: c'est la mort!". Luckily for him, he was allowed to escape death by leaving the country and, curiously, still remained a prominent member of the group. Perhaps the group was sometimes not as fearsome as they claimed. Bernadac, 160.

certainly do indicate that the CSAR's links to foreign countries were much weaker than critics suspected.

According to Corre, the Cagoule did indeed receive weapons from Nazi Germany, but under conditions that may have surprised many if they had only known the circumstances. He wrote, at the end of 1937, that “[c]’est sous le couvert de l’Espagne que nous pûmes d’abord acquérir en Allemagne les premiers lots de fusils mitrailleurs. Les Allemands ne se montraient pas tout de suite disposés à nous vendre des armes.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, Corre bragged quite extensively about the way in which the Cagoule “tricked” Germany into selling them automatic weapons. It seems that the CSAR operatives went to Germany under the pretense of being businessmen, concerned with the fate of Spain and wishing to help Franco, and convinced the Germans that they could offer a safe passage for the weapons right through France.<sup>8</sup> Of course, these weapons never made it to Spain and ultimately made up a large part of the CSAR's stockpiles.

Aside from several mentions of getting weapons from Germany, Corre did not write about any further dealings with the Nazis in 1937. The rest of his observations about Germany were written in 1938 and 1939 and were much more detached; they had no bearing on the Cagoule, but were instead general commentaries on Hitler and his various political moves. Like many of his contemporaries, Corre seems to have recognized the danger that Germany posed to France. He wrote that “[n]ous nous retrouvons au point où nous étions en 1913 avec la terrible menace allemande de nouveau suspendue sur nos têtes. Menace infiniment plus grave qu’alors car l’Allemagne

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<sup>7</sup> Bernadac, 301.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

d'aujourd'hui, plus ramassée et sensiblement plus prête et plus redoutable qu'alors, a repris ses mêmes ambitions."<sup>9</sup>

Although Corre may have noticed, and even admired, the way in which Germany was orderly, powerful, and prepared to do anything to achieve its goals, he did not seem overly fond of Hitler. He gave the impression that the Western democracies were making too much out of Hitler as a phenomenon. In commenting on the continuous press coverage of every move that Hitler made, Corre wrote that "[c]'est déjà leur bande imbécile qui a fait Hitler, et c'est elle encore qui le sert, qui le hisse sur un piédestal et rassemble de la foule autour."<sup>10</sup> He went on, in the same entry, to ask "[l]e discours de Hitler est important?"<sup>11</sup> Corre was not impressed by Hitler and he felt that the only reason the Nazi leader was important was because non-fascist countries were making such a big deal about him. In fact, Corre was quite sympathetic to the populations of Austria, and especially Czechoslovakia, when Hitler invaded those states. Of course, his sympathy was mitigated by the fact that Corre felt that these countries should have had stronger governments to repel the invading forces and maintain national sovereignty. This sentiment had less to do with Hitler and Germany, however, and more to do with his hatred of weak, particularly republican, governments, which we will discuss shortly.

Corre's attitude towards Italy was much warmer. He generally respected Italy both for its own virtues and for its cooperation with the Cagoule. He seems to have been truly fascinated by the original fascist country and frequently compared France to Italy. Of Italy's dealings in Tunisia, Corre wrote "[m]ais il faut que nous ayons en France précisément un gouvernement de cette sorte pour que de pareils faits se puissent produire.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 449-450.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Ils sont assurément scandaleux, mais quelles libertés ne prendrait-on pas avec des gens d'une aussi piètre espèce?"<sup>12</sup> Corre respected Mussolini's government and many of its decisions. He applauded when Italy withdrew from the League of Nations in 1937. He commented on how, when Italy was expanding its power and Mussolini was visiting Germany in ceremonies of full splendour, France was disappearing into "l'ignominie bolchevique".<sup>13</sup>

As well as admiring Italy for its internal strength, Corre was very appreciative of the help that the Italians gave to the Cagoule. Unlike the suspected links between Germany and the CSAR, those between the group and Italy were indeed quite real. Aside from the Rosselli deal, which Corre discussed several times in his diary, there were also several other instances of Italy supplying the organisation with weapons and what appears to be moral support. Corre quite candidly wrote that "[e]n Italie, une entente avec les autorités italiennes nous assure de la livraison, dans excellentes conditions d'armes automatiques, grenades et le reste."<sup>14</sup> Corre always referred to his Italian contacts as "our friends" and only ever once criticized the Italians, specifically for being poor soldiers. Corre himself summed up his attitude towards Italy, by commenting that "[e]n Italie nous sommes d'ailleurs encore mieux qu'en pays ami."<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that Corre admired fascism. While reflecting about a new victory for Franco and how fearful the left was becoming of fascism, Corre wrote the following:

L'on a une peur réelle du fascisme que l'on a présenté au pays depuis quinze ans comme un sinistre épouvantail. Et les malheureux démocrates se voient de plus en plus entourés de nations fascistes. Ils n'en dorment plus. Quel dommage! Mais inquiets ou tranquilles, les tenants de la

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.



démocratie qui sont encore nombreux en France devront, par nos soins, perdre leurs dernières illusions. Il est vrai qu'ils verront du même coup que le fascisme est l'ordre, la dignité et la force et non point la ridicule caricature qu'on leur en fait.<sup>16</sup>

This admiration, however, should not be seen as an indication that Corre hoped France would follow the example of Germany or Italy. He certainly did not write anything to that effect in his diaries. Furthermore, he and Deloncle, according to Corre, were in perfect agreement as to how they ought to deal with the two fascist nations; with prudence, rather than wholehearted acceptance. Indeed, Corre seemed to feel that having links to these two countries, especially Germany, France's eternal enemy, was more dangerous than beneficial. He commented early on that "[c]'est, en effet, que le moindre rapport avec l'étranger et quel qu'il fût nous sera imputé à crime et si nos ennemis ou même d'autres le connaissent, l'on crierait partout à la trahison. De ce jour, les <cagouleurs> seront stigmatisés avec une vigueur et une fureur aveugles et quelle que fût la pureté de nos intentions, nous n'arriverions pas à nous justifier."<sup>17</sup>

The only country to which the Cagoule and Corre seemed to feel comfortable giving their full approval was Spain. Every victory for Franco was a victory for nationalists all over Europe, including the *cagouleurs*. The group supported Spain, as we have seen, through acts of sabotage in France; Spain was also the natural choice for *cagouleurs*, like Corre, who were forced to flee the country. He wrote, while there in exile, that "[i]l est stupéfiant que l'exemple espagnol ne serve pas en France."<sup>18</sup> Corre frequently mentioned the links between the Spanish authorities and the organisation,

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 99. This does not negate the suggestion that the Cagoule was a fascist organisation, but rather indicates that Corre had no intention of mimicking a foreign political model.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

mourned the fact that the republican forces there had caused so much destruction, and tried to learn Spanish to better communicate with his nationalist friends. Corre reported that Deloncle and the other *cagouleurs* still in Paris sent a congratulatory telegram to Franco upon his final victory and he celebrated the “memorable day” when France and England officially recognized the Nationalist government in Spain.<sup>19</sup> Although Spain may not have been as capable of helping the *cagouleurs* financially as Italy, it is clear that Corre, at least, supported the politics of the nationalist forces one hundred percent.

This praise for Spain commonly appeared beside virulent criticisms of France in Corre’s diaries. Like many other nationalists of the 1930s, Corre seemed to have great love for an Eternal France, a nation that had been besmirched by the revolution of 1789 and fully corrupted by the Third Republic. In 1939, during the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of what Corre called “...l’ignominieuse et funeste <Grand Révolution>”, he relayed how he could hear the festivities and “[j]’en ai pleuré de honte, de dégoût et de fureur.”<sup>20</sup> Corre’s complaints about the state of affairs in France were always mixed with sadness, pity, and anger that such a grand civilisation could find itself in such a degraded position. He tended to blame, of course, the government for the decline of France, but he also found a number of other scapegoats both within and outside France’s borders.

In his summary of 1937, Corre wrote “[d]irai-je ce fut une année terrible, une année tourmentée, une année guerrière, une année scandaleuse et décadente, filandreuse et chaotique? Elle fut tout cela. Elle fut encore une année funeste pour la France.”<sup>21</sup> He truly felt that his poor country was “sick” and often wondered if it would even be possible to restore her to her ancient splendor. The reasons for this sickness? They were

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

manifold. Corre especially focused on the Popular Front government as the major cancer of the nation. Of communist participation in the government, Corre concluded “[v]oilà à quel degré d’abjection le malheureux peuple français est tombé.”<sup>22</sup> He truly felt that the government was criminal and that the miserable people of France were paying for its crimes. In a lengthy diary entry about a rather minor event, Corre let loose his venomous tongue. He wrote

J’avais oublié de mentionner, hier, une chose vraiment atroce. Un petit garçon d’une huitaine d’années a été lapidé et tué à Lyon par un groupe de garnements de son âge. On devine les raisons: le petit garçon appartenant à une bonne famille était <fasciste>. Ce n’est pas en vain que l’on prêche la haine dans la race des hommes. Elle pousse et grandit avec une prodigieuse rapidité. Faire tendre le poing dès le plus jeune âge et faire crier: <X...au poteau>, sans parler du reste, porte les plus funestes fruits. Herriot, maire de Lyon, a condamné de tels actes d’une voix larmoyante, mais le grand coupable c’est lui et les siens. Ils ont fait alliance avec le Front Populaire, ils se sont promenés avec la racaille rouge sous le signe du poing tendu et sous les plis de l’Internationale. Les vrais coupables, les voilà. Ils sont aujourd’hui, mal fondés à se plaindre et à dénoncer en paroles les crimes que leurs agissements ont rendu possibles.<sup>23</sup>

The men of the Popular Front, who had, in Corre’s mind, come together under the red flag, were not the only people that Corre blamed for France’s disgrace. Corre attacked the “pretender” nationalists for being spineless and lazy, and named Herriot, Kérillis, Pujo, Taittinger, Chiappe, Maurras, Daudet and “a hundred others” as being the worst of the lot. He also criticized the people of France for being blind to their own reality and thus not doing anything to help themselves. Ultimately, however, Corre did not blame one group in particular, but the whole system that was bringing France down. In response to the non-intervention policy of the government during the Spanish Civil War, Corre wrote that “[i]l va sans dire que dans toute cette affaire [Spain] nous serons

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

bons derniers et bons dindons. La France républicaine et démocratique ne peut pas être autre chose.”<sup>24</sup> Of the people who were being hurt by the democratic and republican system, Corre forcefully concluded that “[l]eur dernière carte c’est nous, et nous les sauverons malgré eux s’ils peuvent encore être sauvés.”<sup>25</sup>

These last two quotes are indicative of what Corre thought the purpose of the Cagoule really was. His writings further emphasize the purpose and the nature of the Cagoule, at least in Corre’s mind, and at this point I would like to discuss some of the more definitive conclusions we can draw from Corre’s diary entries about the Cagoule and its character. Well aware of the caution we must use when examining his writing, as outlined in the introduction, I will compare some of Corre’s statements to the pertinent archival sources. Especially useful in this task are the statements made by the men who were arrested and interrogated by the police in 1937. These statements are currently held at the Archives Nationales in Paris and are helpful in establishing what some of the lower-ranking members of the Cagoule thought about the organisation.

It is clear that the CSAR was anti-republican. This point does not need to be belaboured, as it is quite apparent from the group’s actions, the members’ backgrounds, and Corre’s writings. However, it may be useful to reemphasize just how hostile the group was to the Third Republic. Corre, in a temper after the arrests of his fellow *cagouleurs*, warned “[m]essieurs de la fripouille gouvernementale, radicale et maçonne, vous n’avez pas fini de trembler.”<sup>26</sup> It is a mistake to assume that the group was simply reacting to the Popular Front and the more leftist aspects of democracy. Even the more conservative members of the government did not escape the scorn of Corre. On the eve

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

of the death of Gaston Doumergue, who was a more conservative member of the Radical Party and suspected of being a closet supporter of the *ligues*, Corre wrote that “[p]our nous, il a tout simplement sauvé cet affreux régime et protégé la Franc-Maçonnerie, contre des justes représailles.”<sup>27</sup> Even Pétain, long suspected of actually having been a member of the Cagoule, was criticized in a similar vein. In 1939, he wrote “Pétain? Mais on se sert de lui une fois de plus comme on s’en était servi en 1934 pour sauver le parti radical, la franc-maçonnerie et la crapule.”<sup>28</sup>

Anti-republican, absolutely. There can be no doubt about that trait of the Cagoule. As well, we can see that Corre and perhaps the entire group were anti-masonic. This should not come as a surprise, again considering the background of the *cagouleurs*. Most, if not all, of the extra-parliamentary groups of the 1930s were opposed to freemasonry.<sup>29</sup> Another quite prominent trait that comes out in Corre’s writing, and to a lesser extent in the police interrogations, is anti-semitism. Corre’s personal anti-semitism was quite clear in his diaries. He wrote that “[l]e Juif est l’ennemi qu’il faut abattre parce qu’il est d’abord l’armature du régime et parce que c’est le Juif...”<sup>30</sup> Corre quite obviously felt that the Jewish population, along with the freemasons, were the secret power behind the Third Republic; “[l]es Juifs cependant chez nous tenaient le haut de pavé, ils étaient, ils sont partout, ils commandent tout, ils dominent tout, ils nous feront faire la guerre pour eux.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this hatred of freemasonry was a continuation of the former rightist belief that it was the freemasons who had masterminded the 1789 revolution and the beginning of parliamentary democracy.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* In an excellent article about French conspiracy theories, D.L.L. Parry notes that “[t]he existence of an evil conspiracy also necessitated and justified the creation of a virtuous counter-conspiracy...” He tells us of how prevalent conspiracy theories were in the Third Republic, coming from many different political angles, and sees Deloncle’s conspiracy theory and counter-conspiracy as one of the most extreme. D.L.L.

Corre did not only hate the Jews, he had plans for them. While discussing Céline's *Bagatelle pour un massacre*, Corre outlined his opinion of the book and the steps that were necessary to take against the Jews. "C'est un livre que nous devons répandre partout à profusion. J'espère qu'on y songera à Paris. Il faudra extirper cette racaille de notre patrie qu'ils souillent et qu'ils sucent, et il faudra se partager leurs dépouilles fruits de leurs rapines."<sup>32</sup> The plan may sound familiar; Corre certainly had no protests when the Nazis began burning synagogues in Berlin.

This anti-semitism does not come up often in the testimony of the arrested *cagouleurs*, although there are a couple of sources that reflect Corre's writings.<sup>33</sup> Two brothers, Jean and Elie Doquin de Saint Preux, actually ended their relationship with the CSAR because of their Jewish ancestry. Jean told the police that he had been brought to the group by Filiol, who had informed him that "cette organisation avait pour but d'abord la lutte anti-communiste mais également en cas de succès de renverser le régime actuel et d'instaurer un régime autoritaire, dictature militaire je crois, suppression des chefs des groupements de gauche et lutte anti-sémite à outrance."<sup>34</sup> This information was seconded by his brother, Elie, who told the police that the group had planned to suppress the leaders of the left "ainsi que les Israélites, quels qu'ils soient."<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, in a lengthy letter from the Governor General of Algeria to the Minister of the Interior, which lists some of the more prominent active members of the

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Parry, "Articulating the Third Republic by Conspiracy Theory", *European History Quarterly* 28:2 (1998), 181.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>33</sup> Although I think the anti-semitism of the Cagoule is an important characteristic, I do not think it was a central part of their politics. This may explain why most of the arrested Cagouleurs did not bother to mention it.

<sup>34</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L'Intérieur, police interview with Jean Doquin de Saint Preux, 28 October 1938.

<sup>35</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L'Intérieur, police interview with Elie Doquin de Saint Preux, 19 December 1938.

Cagoule in Algeria, there is a clear indication of the anti-semitic character of the group. Beside each member's name the Governor General provided a short description of their activities in Algeria. The most common description is "antisémite notoire". Sometimes the notes are more descriptive. For example, Edouard Chanut is described as a "[p]rototype de l'antisémite irréductible..."<sup>36</sup> Several of the men were described as having been members also of an organisation called the "Unions Latines", which the Governor General characterized as an anti-semitic group passionately devoted to Franco. Other men were simply "active anti-semites", like Marcel Bellier, who was also seen as an "adversaire déterminé de tous les Gouvernements républicains."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, while we cannot say that the Cagoule had an anti-semitic policy, *per se*, it is quite clear that many of the members, both within the nucleus of the group and in lesser positions, were themselves anti-semitic.<sup>38</sup> Another striking feature of Corre and the Cagoule was a certain elitism within the membership. Corre himself was unsympathetic to the workers of France, a sentiment which, of course, had something to do with their purported leftist leanings, but also with their very nature. Of the workers, Corre wrote "[q]uelle politique! Quelles vues tantôt misérables et tantôt imbéciles, quelle basse flatterie à l'égard des foules qui ne sont guère dignes que la trique. Car il faut voir les gueules de ces gens-là, leur haine, leur paresse et tous les vices de l'humanité qu'ils ont

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<sup>36</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L'Intérieur, letter from the Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie to the Minister of the Interior, 29 March 1938.

<sup>37</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L'Intérieur, letter from the Gouverneur Général de l'Algérie to the Minister of the Interior, 29 March 1938.

<sup>38</sup> It is very important to note that, while the Cagoulards may have been anti-semitic, there is no indication of any racial policy. In fact, native Algerians were invited to join the Cagoule and had their own cell, *L'Algérie française*, led by Mohoumed El Maadi.

gravés sur leur visage.”<sup>39</sup> These comments, surrounded as they were, by other, more implicit, anti-worker remarks, reinforce Corre’s disdain for the working class.

The other indication of the Cagoule’s potential elitism is the actual makeup of the organisation. Of course, the extensive membership lists are unavailable for perusal, so it is difficult to make strong generalizations. However, the information about the 79 *cagouards* who were put back on trial in 1948 tells us quite a bit about what kind of men joined the Cagoule. The majority of these men did not belong to what could be considered the working class. Over ten percent of these members, including Deloncle, were engineers. Corre’s profession was listed as “hommes de lettres”. Included within this membership were two doctors, several insurance agents, many men involved in commerce, an architect, and various other professionals. In fact, the only representatives of more manual work were several mechanics. The men of the Cagoule may not have been *la crème de la crème* of French society, but they were not part of the depressed social groups either. We cannot assume that these men represent *all* the members of the organisation, but their social positions are significant.<sup>40</sup>

As well as being anti-republican, anti-masonic, anti-semitic, and elitist, Corre and the rest of the *cagouards* were fervent anti-communists. This central part of the Cagoule ideology has never been questioned, as it was so clearly evident to both contemporaries and historians. In fact, the anti-communist nature of the Cagoule is one of the very few aspects of the group that we can speak of definitively. Proven by their actions and their statements, the *cagouards*’ hatred of the French communists was indeed genuine and

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<sup>39</sup> Bernadac, 79.

<sup>40</sup> All this information comes from the Archives de Paris, 30W 0006, Cour d’Assises de la Seine, 16 January to 31 December 1948. It is difficult to say whether the group did not recruit among the working classes, or if it was unsuccessful in doing so. Nonetheless, the social composition of the membership, presumably, would have lent a certain flavour to the organisation.



very intense. It is useful, however, to examine briefly what Corre and the other members had to say about the communists.

Corre, as is to be expected, had much to say about the communists in France. While most of his comments are not worth repeating, it is instructive to note how he handily linked the communists to all the other aspects of French society that he found distasteful. For example, he believed the communist party to be a front for Jewish influence. Corre ranted about the communists and socialists, the same vermin in his mind, “[r]assemblés devant l’immeuble du *Populaire*, une bande de fripouillards, aux trois quarts composée de Juifs, salua en tendant le poing.”<sup>41</sup> He similarly wrote frequently about the links between the communists, both French and Soviet, and the government of France, often arguing that the Soviets were actually controlling France’s foreign policy. Corre, however, did not find all aspects of communist behaviour to his dislike. He quite enjoyed witnessing the in-fighting that went on in the party, as is evidenced by this statement to that effect: “D’abord c’est tous bénéfice si les rouges se détruisent eux-mêmes. Ensuite, pour les foules d’imbéciles qui n’ont pas encore compris, c’est une bonne démonstration que les rouges c’est l’anarchie et l’extrême désordre.”<sup>42</sup>

Corre’s most frequent writings regarding the communists concerned, however, their plans for a potential *coup d’état*. Every few weeks, Corre made mention of such plans in his diaries. He often referred to an unnamed source who had been passing information about the communist plans to the *cagoullards*. Such information was sometimes vague, such as the suggestion that the new Soviet ambassador had been

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<sup>41</sup> Bernadac, 155.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

instructed to heighten and quicken revolutionary activity in France.<sup>43</sup> Other times, the information that Corre wrote about was quite specific. Several times, Corre mentioned that the communists had actually set a date for their insurrection and the Cagoule was well aware of said date. Corre also summarized, in his diaries, the very specific communist plans for taking over the country. He wrote “[n]ous savions déjà que les communistes avaient choisi quatre points stratégiques pour la concentration de leurs troupes de combat” and outlined the plans in great detail.<sup>44</sup> Corre knew the Cagoule would have to hit the communists hard and sometimes worried that the outnumbered *cagouleurs* might not succeed.

This anti-communism was shared by all the members of the organisation. It was no secret, as it was one of the first aspects of the group to be made public. Every member of the group who risked the punishment of death by speaking to the police about the secret organisation emphasized the purpose of the CSAR as an anti-communist group. Gerard Le Roy testified that “Durand...est venu me solliciter à un groupement secret anticommunistes, possédant des armes pour se défendre.”<sup>45</sup> André Revol similarly told the police that “[c]’est en octobre ou novembre 1936 que pressenti par un comrade, j’ai accepté d’adhérer à un groupement secret ayant uniquement pour but la résistance à un coup d’Etat communiste. J’ai prêté serment de fidélité, discipline et secret au Comité Secret d’Action Révolutionnaire...”<sup>46</sup> Over and over again, the police were told the same thing; these members had joined the CSAR to fight against a potential communist insurrection.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>45</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L’Intérieur, police interview with Gerard Georges Luc Le Roy, 8 January 1938.

<sup>46</sup> AN, F7 14815, Ministère de L’Intérieur, police interview with André Revol, 8 January 1938.

Nobody has doubted the reality of the Cagoule's anti-communist stance. Even the historians who have speculated that the Cagoule had other plans alongside their hopes to rid France of the communists maintain that the group, like so many others of the extreme-right in the 1930s, was genuinely worried about a communist coup. While this may be true of many *cagouleurs*, Corre's writings offer us a vastly different impression. He wrote, a full two weeks before the Cagoule's mobilization in November, "[a]près tout, il nous importe peu que les communistes fassent ou ne fassent pas leur coup. Ce que nous voulons c'est que, à un moment donné, ils en aient l'intention de manière à justifier, au moins en apparence, notre opération préventive."<sup>47</sup>

Corre became even more candid after the failed *cagouleur* action. On the one year anniversary of that fateful November night, Corre reminisced about the groups' movements. He explained his own opinions in a shocking revelation.

Pour moi j'ai toujours été intimement persuadé que les rouges étaient incapables de jamais rien faire. Il eût fallu partir toujours de cette hypothèse, tout en feignant de croire le contraire, et alors on avait beau jeu, le lendemain, de faire voir au peuple français de quel danger on l'avait sauvé.<sup>48</sup>

Never convinced of the communists' ability to act! Always claiming to believe otherwise to convince the public that the Cagoule had saved them from a revolution! The paucity of sources concerning the Cagoule makes it almost impossible to know whether other members felt as Corre did. However, these statements are not insignificant. Perhaps too much credit has been given to the statements made by *cagouleurs* who, in an act of self-preservation, claimed that their only goal was to fight the communists. Members of the Cagoule interviewed by the police would have been between a rock and a hard place.

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<sup>47</sup> Bernadac, 194.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

Penalty of death for speaking about the organisation on one hand, but on the other, a penalty of death for conspiring to overthrow the government!

These revelations bring us to a final characteristic of Corre and perhaps the Cagoule as a whole. Corre was revolutionary, both philosophically and practically. He had given quite a bit of thought to the more abstract aspects of revolution and took into account all the measures he thought would be necessary for success. Of such measures he wrote "...qu'il n'y avait d'autre solution que le terrorisme. Mais un terrorisme savant, étudié, transcendant, qui ne frapperait que les têtes du régime, mais les frapperait sans répit, ni relâche, toutes, à tout heure, en toute circonstance. De sorte à leur rendre par la terreur tout gouvernement impossible et à les obliger à passer la main."<sup>49</sup> Corre also knew that secrecy, swiftness of action, a complete arsenal of weapons, and illegality were essential to the success of revolutionaries. He mocked *Le Temps*, who, he argued, "...aimerait mieux être dévoré vivant que de lever le petit doigt illégalement. La peur est la grande caractéristique de ce grand peuple."<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, Corre's intentions were revolutionary. He clearly believed the Cagoule to be an instrument of revolution. Rather than seeing the CSAR as a reactionary force working against distasteful elements of French society, Corre focused on the more "proactive" aspects of the group, such as opening the doors for a new order. He frequently complained about how little time he had for himself, as he was so busy with the Cagoule's affairs, but wrote "[m]ais nous sommes à préparer une révolution, n'est-ce pas? et ce n'est pas le moment de songer à Platon. Plus tard, si l'on n'est pas mort, l'on

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

pourra toujours se rattraper.”<sup>51</sup> Corre even looked forward to the day when the Cagoule would rule France and imagined the various things they would change. These projected changes ranged from major ones, like changing the social laws, to Corre’s musings about the drivel that was published in the newspapers. “Si jamais un jour nous devenons les maîtres, je promets que les journaux ne publieront pas sur six colonnes les exploits d’individus de cette espèce.”<sup>52</sup>

The most revealing aspect of Corre’s writings concerning the revolutionary intent of the Cagoule was the plan of reorganisation that Corre, Jeantet, and Corrèze concocted in December 1937, from Saint-Sebastian. Jean-Claude Valla dismissed this plan as the work of the most fanatical elements of the Cagoule. He wrote, in his 2000 book, “...[c]oupés des réalités et trop contents de prendre leurs désirs pour des réalités, les exilés de San Sebastian se radicalisent. A moins que le hasard ait rassemblé sur le même lieu des hommes ayant toujours été des éléments extrémistes de l’organisation.”<sup>53</sup> Valla’s argument is not overly convincing, considering that these three men made up half of the initial nucleus of the Cagoule. They may have been more radical than the other leaders indeed, but we cannot ignore the influence that they would have had on the group, nor can we dismiss them out of hand, as we have no evidence to prove that the other leaders were less wedded to the idea of revolution.

Corre’s description of the reorganisation plan for the Cagoule tells us a great deal about how he, and the other men who collaborated on the project, envisaged the way in which the organisation could succeed, even though they were at a disadvantage. This

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>53</sup> Jean-Claude Valla, *La Cagoule, 1936-1937*. (Paris: Éditions de la Librairie Nationale, 2000), 111.

plan, in Corre's words, was a "[p]lan offensif seulement. Toute autre variante exclue."<sup>54</sup>

The old plan had relied heavily on the troops in Paris and was, as we saw, reliant on a public acceptance of the imminent communist coup. The new plan was to make use of the provincial cells of the group and create a situation of simultaneous offensives in centres around France. These cells would be charged with taking control of strategic points in each city and neutralising any resistance, all the while staying in constant contact with the provisional government that would be formed by the leaders of the group.<sup>55</sup> Corre considered Orleans as the seat of the new government and Paris "...sous l'état de siège sera dirigé par un commandant militaire en liaison constante et directement sous les ordres du pouvoir central."<sup>56</sup>

Corre also discussed the possibilities of both success and failure of the new plan. He worried that, in the event of success, the new government might find itself in a dire financial situation. However, their failure would, according to Corre, mean the creation of a dictatorial government of the extreme left. Yet, Corre was not entirely discouraged by the troubles that seemed to be plaguing the Cagoule. He wrote

Hitler n'a pas attendu moins de dix années entre son coup de Munich et son accession au pouvoir. Mussolini lui-même, dut attendre plus de trois ans après la formation des faisceaux. Les révolutionnaires russes ont lutté pendant quarante ans et plus, entrecoupés de sanglantes tentatives, pour réaliser leur idéal, au demeurant catastrophique. Nous traversons une période d'épreuve et d'attente, période dure, âpre.<sup>57</sup>

These writings are not those of an uninspired man. Corre was a determined revolutionary, as is demonstrated by his continued devotion to the Cagoule, its plans, and

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<sup>54</sup> Bernadac, 280. Corre himself used the italics to emphasize the nature of the plan.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 283. Orleans was chosen because of its "calmness" – Corre imagined that because it was not very industrial, there would be less leftist resistance to their coup. Also, it was close to Paris, central enough to maintain contact with other friendly nations, it was agriculturally rich, and had both an airfield and a broadcasting post.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

its eventual success even though, for all intents and purposes, the group seemed to be on the verge of extinction. He, Jeantet, and Corrèze had a clear plan in mind for the future, involving the Cagoule at the head of France after an offensive move to rid the country of the republican *racaille*. While it is likely that many *cagouleurs* knew nothing, or very little, about these revolutionary plans, the very fact that these leaders were so inclined towards overthrowing the Third Republic is significant. Their revolutionary bent had to have influenced the plans and actions of the entire organisation. Presumably, if the rest of the leaders were not at least somewhat interested in the same kind of action as these three, they would have left the group, as they had done with the *Action Française* previously.

Corre's diaries and the testimony of other *cagouleurs* illuminate more clearly what the members themselves thought of the organisation. These sources also provide insight into certain characteristics of the group that may not have constituted a program, so to speak, but shaped the nature of the Cagoule nonetheless. Practically speaking, Corre's writings show how the Cagoule had limited contact with Germany, a working relationship with Italy, and great admiration for Franco and the nationalists in Spain. We also see Corre as a man with heightened nationalistic feeling for his country, saddened by what he saw as its decadence and the sick state of affairs. Ideologically, Corre and his cohort clearly held anti-republican, anti-semitic, anti-masonic, elitist, and anti-communist sentiments. Moreover, there was a revolutionary aspect to the Cagoule that has been overlooked by many people. For all their more outlandish rhetoric, the leftist critics of the Cagoule were actually correct in arguing that underneath all the veneer of anti-communism, the organisation definitely had some more nefarious traits.

The task which now remains is to examine whether the Cagoule can properly be said to belong to a more general political trend. Do the characteristics of the CSAR place it firmly in one political category? From which other political groups did the leaders of the group draw their inspiration? Or, is the Cagoule an example of a new kind of politics; an intersection, perhaps, of many different political strands? These are all questions that must be addressed and they must be examined with a discerning eye, for the waters have been muddied by conflicting interpretations.



*Chapter Four*  
**INFLUENCES AND INTERSECTIONS**

For more than sixty years the secrets of the Cagoule have withstood a great deal of scrutiny. In particular, the nature of the *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire* has escaped both contemporaries of the organisation and historians searching to find an appropriate label for the group. In part, this confusion springs from the ambiguous nature of the group itself. Without a stated ideology or political programme to analyze, historians have been forced to rely almost solely on the actions of the Cagoule to determine where its political sympathies may have rested. Largely, however, the inability to place the Cagoule in a clearly defined political category is a consequence of the parameters of the discussion itself. From the discovery of the conspiracy to the most recent study of the Cagoule, the organisation has always been considered within the larger discussion of fascism. Given that fascism is one of, if not *the*, most significant political developments of the twentieth century, it should not be surprising that the Cagoule is always explored within the context of fascist movements.

However, this near obsession with determining whether or not the Cagoule was fascist has created a narrowness of vision which is ultimately detrimental to historical studies. This is not meant to suggest that we ought to ignore fascism as a category of political orientation with which we can compare the Cagoule. But in addition to considering fascism as a potential influence on the CSAR, we must also allow the possibility that other political phenomena may have also influenced the methods and goals of the Cagoule.

## GENERIC FASCISM

The discussion of generic fascism is, as Roger Griffin so aptly puts it, a ‘conceptual labyrinth’.<sup>1</sup> It seems that the most the historian can hope for with a definition of fascism is one that is heuristically useful, rather than one which could serve to account for all the similarities and differences among fascist movements. However, even with these rather flexible parameters, historians have yet to come to any consensus on the nature of fascism. Does fascism have historical and cultural boundaries or can it exist anywhere at any time? Is it a movement of the left or the right? Is it revolutionary or fundamentally conservative? Is it populist or elitist? Is it nihilistic or idealistic? These are all hotly contested issues in defining fascism. While some scholars feel perfectly comfortable slotting their colleagues into various “schools” of thought regarding fascism, for instance Robert Soucy, who argues that there are two, and Stanley Payne, who finds thirteen main categories of conceptual interpretation, the situation is not so clear in my mind.<sup>2</sup>

It seems more appropriate briefly to discuss both the contested and the non-contested characterizations of fascism. Rather than creating any “schools” of thought, for the purpose of comparison to the Cagoule, it may be more worthwhile to discuss the issues as individual descriptive categories. Many scholars may disagree with this methodology, although given the nature and the goals of this study, it would be impossible to examine all the authorities with the depth of consideration that they actually deserve. The first, and perhaps most central issue, is where on the political

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 3-6. Soucy sees the issue broken down between the “consensus school of thought”, which includes scholars like Weber, Nolte, Milza, Sternhell, and Rémond, who apparently all see fascism as left-wing radicalism, revolutionary, populist and plebian, as compared to the non-consensus school, including Soucy himself, which sees fascism as fundamentally conservative; Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 443-461. As is indicated in his 13 categories, Payne finds much more disagreement among scholars than Soucy.

spectrum we can fit fascism. Does it belong to the left, the right, the center, or none of the above?

Zeev Sternhell is the most vocal supporter of the idea that fascism was a political synthesis of formally opposed tendencies; that it was neither right nor left, as the title of his 1986 book suggests. Sternhell may locate fascism in a new and unique place on the political spectrum, but he does attribute the creation of this new space mainly to left-wing radicals. He wrote that "...it was the revision of Marxism that constituted the most significant ideological aspect of fascism."<sup>3</sup> Sternhell described the process of this revision as having been led by socially aware individuals finding a common enemy with nationalists in the bourgeois structure of liberal democracy. While most scholars have criticized Sternhell for his emphasis on ideas alone, many have similarly come to the conclusion that fascism is a form of leftist politics.

Pierre Milza, Robert Paxton, Stanley Payne, and Renzo de Felice represent, among many others, the historians who locate fascism on the left of the political spectrum. The reasons for this kind of characterization are many, but the most central ones seem to be found both in the origins of fascism and in its ideology. For instance, Milza, like Sternhell, finds the origins of fascism rooted firmly in a synthesis between nationalists and syndicalists, basically a revised Marxism.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that this view is encouraged by the many examples of fascists who began their political careers as Marxists, like Mussolini, the original fascist *par excellence*. Other historians, like Paxton, have emphasized the anticapitalist aspect of fascism as evidence of its leftist nature.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. Trans. David Maisel. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986 (1983).), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Milza, *Les Fascismes*. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1985), 40.

<sup>5</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.), 7.

While recognizing that fascists often united with capitalist interests in their attempt to gain power, these historians maintain that fascists borrowed heavily from the ideology of the left. Indeed, Renzo de Felice maintains that, while it seems almost blasphemous to suggest, fascism had certain ideological and moral roots in the soil of the French Revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Very few scholars would argue that fascism is a movement of the center. The very extremist nature of fascism makes it almost counterintuitive to suggest that it can be placed in the center of the political spectrum. However, Seymour Martin Lipset maintains that extremist ideologies and groups can be classified and analyzed in the same terms as democratic groups; i.e.: left, right, and center. In this vein of analysis, Lipset argues that classic fascist movements have represented an extremism of the center, similar to liberalism in their opposition to big business, trade-unions, and socialism, their distaste for religion, and other forms of traditionalism.<sup>7</sup> He supports this argument with an examination of the social composition of fascist movements, which demonstrates a solid middle-class backing for fascism.

Finally, there are some scholars who argue that fascism is simply another form of rightist politics. Robert Soucy wrote that “[f]ascism was primarily a new variety of authoritarian conservatism and right-wing nationalism that sought to defeat the Marxist threat and the political liberalism that allowed it to exist in the first place.”<sup>8</sup> Martin Blinkhorn comes to a similar conclusion, as he places fascism on the radical right,

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<sup>6</sup> Renzo de Felice, *Fascism: An informal introduction to its theory and practice*. (New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1976), 106. Renzo de Felice, however, really differs from these other historians in the way that he firmly maintains that “fascism” was a uniquely Italian phenomenon.

<sup>7</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1960), 133.

<sup>8</sup> Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939*, 17.

whereas scholars who believe fascism to be a left-wing phenomenon usually identify the radical right as being more “rightist” than fascism. Blinkhorn does distinguish between the radical right and the conservative right, but focuses on the frequent cooperation between the two.<sup>9</sup> Another scholar in this school of thought is Roger Griffin, who portrays fascism as a sub-category of the ultra-right because of its goal of breaking from both liberal democracy and the conservative right.<sup>10</sup>

Closely linked to the discussion of where fascism belongs on the political spectrum is the question of the revolutionary character of fascism. Scholars of fascism have similarly been unable to agree completely on whether it was revolutionary or fundamentally conservative and counterrevolutionary. The very term “revolutionary” seems as convoluted and misused as that of “fascism” and very few scholars actually define what they mean by it. Ultimately, however, this discussion seems to revolve around the notion of looking forward and the creation of a new order as “revolutionary”; a sort of progressivist view of the world. Thus, scholars who see in fascism a desire for a return to some pre-existing state or a cyclical view of history have labeled the movement as counterrevolutionary.

By and large, most historians have argued that fascism is revolutionary in one way or another. Some scholars, such as Stanley Payne, have focused on the revolutionary tactics of the fascists. He wrote in 1980, and continues to make this point, that “[w]hat the Fascists did was to imitate a common revolutionary style, including

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Blinkhorn, “Allies, rivals, or antagonists? Fascists and conservatives in modern Europe”, *Fascists and Conservatives: The radical right and the establishment in twentieth-century Europe*. Ed. Martin Blinkhorn. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Griffin, 50.

aspects of Bolshevik behavior and tactics.”<sup>11</sup> Other historians have focused on the revolutionary ideology of fascists, rather than their methods. One of the central points of Roger Griffin’s definition of fascism is the concept of a palingenetic myth. By using this palingenetic myth as a core of their political ideology, fascists, according to Griffin, envisage the emergence of a radically new beginning following a period of destruction or perceived dissolution.<sup>12</sup> Others still focus simply on the newness, or the uniqueness, of what fascism sought to accomplish as evidence of its inherent revolutionary character. Renzo de Felice makes an excellent point when he argues that “[w]hen it is said that the fascist regime was conservative, authoritarian, or reactionary, this may be true. However, it had nothing in common with the conservative regimes that existed prior to fascism...”<sup>13</sup>

One notable exception to this tenuous agreement amongst historians is Ernst Nolte. In his definition of fascism, the most fundamental characteristic is what he has called a resistance to transcendence. He describes transcendence as something which, “...looking back on what has been and forward to what is coming, reaches out toward the whole.”<sup>14</sup> This transcendence, Nolte argues, offers freedom towards the infinite, which threatens to destroy the familiar and the beloved. In response to this threat, fascism seeks to resist transcendence and to retain that which is familiar. In this way, fascism can be seen as fundamentally counterrevolutionary. While Nolte is not entirely alone in this

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<sup>11</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 47.

<sup>12</sup> Griffin, 33.

<sup>13</sup> de Felice, 54-5. Interestingly, this is one of the central reasons that he distinguishes between fascism and other right-wing authoritarian groups (including the Nazis). He argues that fascists had a very clear concept of historical progress, whereas the other right-wing radical groups were wedded to a more cyclical view of history.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*. Trans. Leila Vennewitz. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), 431.

stance, as some scholars like Soucy agree with this evaluation of fascism, it seems that this is a minority point of view.

Another contested characteristic of fascism is whether it is a populist movement or an elitist one. Many historians have pointed to the way in which the advent of mass politics was a precondition for fascism. Yet, scholars are still unsure as to whether fascism actually relied, practically and ideologically, on the participation of the masses. Roger Griffin, interestingly, argues that fascist movements were both populist and elitist. He maintains that fascism was populist in that it depended on 'people power' as the basis for its legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> However, Griffin also argues that fascism was elitist in its tactics for seizing power, as this was made possible by small cadres, and was elitist in its conception of society, as the masses' instincts were seen as having been corrupted by decadent forces.<sup>16</sup> Other historians might argue that this conception of society is actually what made fascism a populist movement. Witnessing the corruption of the masses made it essential for fascists to integrate the population into a new world view. George L. Mosse argues that it was the populism of fascism, its need to integrate the masses into a 'spiritual revolution', that allowed the movement to elaborate such a developed aesthetic.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, some historians have privileged the elitism of fascism over its mass appeal. For instance, even though he notes that fascism relies on mass mobilization, Stanley Payne argues that it was structured on extreme elitism.<sup>18</sup> In a rather similar manner, Pierre Milza, while recognizing that fascism did need a large social base

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<sup>15</sup> Griffin, 36-7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> George L. Mosse, "Fascist Aesthetics and Society: Some Considerations". *Journal of Contemporary History*. 31:2 (Apr., 1996), 247.

<sup>18</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 14.

for success, also argues that the roots of fascism are found in a moral crisis of the elite.<sup>19</sup> Milza further contends that it was an alliance between this elite and certain antipositivists that gave fascism a chance. It seems that in determining whether fascism was populist or elitist, the conclusions often depend on whether the historian is examining the roots, development, or final stages of fascism.

It is clear that many potential characteristics of fascism have been hotly contested by historians. Often the reasons for disagreement amongst scholars can be found in the parameters of their discussions. It is certainly difficult to establish a consensus when the terms of debate are themselves debatable. Discussions about fascism become practically impossible when one scholar finds fascism in Italy alone, others expand their investigation to include the Nazis, others may also include unsuccessful fascisms, like the Spanish example, others still may consider such “fascisms” as the Romanian Legion/Iron Guard, or the Szalasi ‘Hungarist’ movement. Agreement amongst historians may be difficult to come by, but thankfully there are several characteristics of fascism that have not been contested. Such characteristics can be found in each and every example of “fascism” that historians have discovered.

The most central of these non-contested characteristics is nationalism. No definition of fascism would be complete without including its adherence to an extremely nationalist ideology, a certain integral nationalism. H.R. Kedward describes it as “radical nationalism”; Philip Morgan as “aggrieved nationalism”; Roger Griffin as “ultra-nationalism”; Stanley Payne as “revolutionary ultra-nationalism”.<sup>20</sup> The common finding

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<sup>19</sup> Milza, 13.

<sup>20</sup> H.R. Kedward, *Fascism in Western Europe 1900-1945*. (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 239-40; Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 25; Griffin, 26; Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 14.



is that fascist nationalism goes above and beyond any former expression of nationalist thought. Like many other aspects of fascism, the characteristic of nationalism assumes a more extreme nature than it does in other forms of political ideology. The second non-contested characteristic is, without a doubt, the fundamental anticommunist nature of fascism. Even though fascist movements may have borrowed certain aspects of Marxist ideology, their own ideas and actions proved their inherent hatred for the communist left. The third aspect of fascism that is rarely, if ever, contested is its antiliberal character. Although fascists sometimes used electoral politics to further their own position, there is no doubt that they were ultimately seeking to do away with liberal democracy. Most historians of fascism use these three aspects, nationalism, anticommunism, and antiliberalism, as part of the so-called 'fascist minimum'.

There is one further characteristic of fascism that should perhaps be mentioned in connection with these other uncontested aspects. In response to perhaps an earlier suggestion that fascism had no inherent philosophy, most recent scholars have emphasized the fact that fascism did indeed have guiding principles. These guiding principles can possibly be called a philosophy of vitalism. Robert Paxton emphasizes what he calls "cults" of unity, energy, and purity as part of this philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Stanley Payne elaborates this philosophy even further and argues that it was a rejection of materialism, rationalism, and egalitarianism, principles which were replaced by philosophical vitalism, idealism, and a metaphysics of the will.<sup>22</sup> Closely related to these ideals was, as Payne argues, a principle which "...positively values violence as end as

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<sup>21</sup> Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 218.

<sup>22</sup> Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945*, 8.

well as means and tends to normatize war and/or the military virtues.”<sup>23</sup> Many historians have shifted their examination of fascism away from its negative aspects, that is to say, what fascists were against, to an analysis of what kind of philosophy sustained the movements.

### FASCISM IN PRACTICE

Obviously, there are several characteristics of fascism that could easily be applied to the Cagoule. In particular, the non-contested aspects of fascism are those that apply to the CSAR. Without a doubt, the Cagoule was anticommunist, antiliberal, and nationalist, as we saw in the last chapter. But these characteristics do not distinguish the secret society from almost every other group of the extreme right and, thus, do not prove a fascistic nature. Regarding the contested characteristics of fascism, our grounds for comparison are much shakier. The Cagoule appeared to be on the right of the political spectrum. It was revolutionary in the sense that it looked to overthrow the existing regime by violent means, but it seems that the group was looking to establish a military dictatorship in place of the Republic, which would hardly indicate a progressive world view. The CSAR did seem to be elitist, especially in its conception of who was needed to revolt successfully. Ultimately, however, it is difficult to conclude unquestionably whether the Cagoule was fascist or not. There simply is not enough evidence to support a conclusion about the ideology of the Cagoule, beyond what we have already concluded. The historian of this elusive organisation must, it seems, look to its appearances for clues about its nature.

Practically speaking, the Cagoule hardly resembled its foreign fascist neighbours. We have seen that the organisation did have limited connections to both Italy and Germany, but one would be hard pressed to argue that the CSAR actually attempted to

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

imitate, in methods or in organisational structure, these particular fascist examples. It may seem superficial even to discuss whether the Cagoule adopted the finery of fascism, but such consideration is significant in understanding the potential influences various political groups may have had on the *cagouleurs*.

Perhaps the most significant reason that there could be no outward similarities between Italian or German fascists and the Cagoule is the very nature of the organisation; it was secret. Therefore, *cagouleurs* did not sport any particular uniform that would distinguish them as belonging to an organisation, as did their fascist neighbours. Nor did they have public demonstrations showing their strength. In fact, the Cagoule managed to remain remarkably circumspect, even regarding its most effective measures of terror and subversion. The CSAR did not seem to adhere to any *Führerprinzip*. Although, Eugène Deloncle was ostensibly the “leader” of the organisation, it was the inner circle of members who shared the power. The pyramidal structure of the Cagoule more closely resembled other groups than the fascist movements in Italy and Germany, which will shortly be discussed.

These differences, however, do not mean that the Cagoule did not resemble any foreign fascist groups, just not the successful ones in Italy and Germany. For example, there are many similarities, both in structure and ideology, between the CSAR and the Falange in Spain. The Falange was founded in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the former Spanish dictator. In 1934, the group merged with another small organisation, the *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (JONS), which had been the first group in Spain to sport the national syndicalist title. José Antonio quickly took control of the group and brought together the various divergent currents of fascism in

Spain. Ultimately, because of its support for Franco during the Civil War, the Falange lost its autonomy as an organisation and became rather sterilized by more conservative forces in the country. Perhaps it is easier to see similarities between the Cagoule and the Falange because, unlike the Nazis or the *fasci*, neither organisation achieved success and thus, their situational context was always the same: one long struggle.<sup>24</sup>

Ideologically, there are some notable similarities between the Falange and the Cagoule. Perhaps these similarities are in large part due to the fact that neither organisation had a solid political philosophy. Stanley Payne argues that “[a]n aura of vagueness surrounded the political program of the Falange; it was commonly supposed to be Spanish fascism, but each member had his own notion of what that meant.”<sup>25</sup> However, the basic points of the Falange, which were published in the group’s newspaper in 1933, do tell us a little bit about its guiding ideology. The Falange, like the Cagoule, was firmly opposed to the parliamentary system and one of its prime goals was to abolish such a system as quickly as possible. The *Falange Española* outlined this opposition; “[p]olitical parties arise as the result of a false political organisation, namely the parliamentary system.”<sup>26</sup> Like the Cagoule, the Falange had no interest in becoming a political party and participating in parliamentary democracy. While this was a common claim advanced by all fascist parties, the Cagoule and the Falange were unique in that

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<sup>24</sup> Another aspect of defining fascism that has been contentious is the issue of whether fascism operated in the same way in opposition and in power. It seems that unsuccessful fascism had certain traits that the more successful organisations did not have, which might explain why it is easier to see similarities between the Falange and a group like the Cagoule, or even the Iron Guard in Rumania. All three groups were forced to operate illegally at certain points, which definitely influenced the methods they chose and set them apart from other groups.

<sup>25</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 42.

<sup>26</sup> Charles F. Delzell, Ed., *Mediterranean Fascism 1919-1945*. (New York: Walker and Company, 1970), 268.

neither organisation compromised this position by using the parliamentary system to assume power.

Aside from being antiparliamentary, the Falange, like other fascist groups and like the *cagoula*s, had some 'positive' principles woven into its philosophy. As Shlomo Ben-Ami argues, it was largely José Antonio who elaborated the physiognomy of the Falange. Some of the central characteristics of the group that Ben-Ami finds include a spirit of self-sacrifice, elements of 'style' and 'action', an ethos of struggle, and the concept of alienation between the *pays réel* and the *pays légal*.<sup>27</sup> These characteristics are not unfamiliar to us. The ethos of struggle and self-sacrifice was clearly present in the diaries of Corre, who frequently mentioned the things he was forced to surrender in the name of the organisation. Furthermore, it should hardly need to be mentioned by now that the Cagoule was basically built upon the element of 'action'.

More striking than any ideological similarities between the Cagoule and the Falange, which technically could be perceived in all fascist organisations, are the similarities of appearance between the two. The organisational structure of the Falange was dependent on two different kinds of members. Members who actively participated in all the Falange's activities were part of the first line. The second line consisted of members who were sympathetic to the Falange and adhered to the organisation, but largely remained in the background, unwilling to risk much for the group.<sup>28</sup> The structure of the Falange was further hierarchicized, with territorial leaders, provincial leaders, and local leaders. These cells were further divided when the Falange was declared an illegal

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<sup>27</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami, "The forerunners of Spanish fascism: Unión Patriótica and Unión Monárquica", *Spain in conflict 1931-1939: Democracy and Its Enemies*. Ed. Martin Blinkhorn. (London: SAGE publications Ltd., 1986), 119.

<sup>28</sup> Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism*, 81.

organisation in 1936 and José Antonio, from prison, ordered that the party sections should be reorganized into secret cells of three to be better able to carry on clandestine activities.<sup>29</sup>

One further similarity that might be noted about the Cagoule and the Falange is the fact that the Spanish fascists also had little to do with their German and Italian counterparts. It is true that the Falange received a monthly subsidy from Italy, though no help at all from the Nazis.<sup>30</sup> However, Stanley Payne argues that José Antonio had no respect for either Hitler or Mussolini. Instead, Payne argues, he was wedded to the notion that every nation had its own native style of political expression and thus felt that he had to establish a uniquely Spanish movement.<sup>31</sup> While we cannot be certain that the *cagouleurs* felt the same way about their own organisation, such a line of thinking may explain why the French group had little interest in strongly linking themselves to a foreign model. This brings us to wonder if there was a political model in France itself by which the Cagoule could have been influenced. And if so, was this model an example of fascism?

The topic of fascist movements in France has been just as hotly debated as that of fascism in general. As John Sweets has pointed out, the various interpretations of the issue have swung from envisaging France as a nation free of fascists to one full of fascists.<sup>32</sup> A brief analysis of the historiography of French fascism, as convoluted as it is, is in order, as the Cagoule cannot be removed from the context of the 1930s, when both

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Sheelagh M. Ellwood, "Falange Española, 1933-9: from fascism to Francoism", *Spain in conflict 1931-1939: Democracy and Its Enemies*. Ed. Martin Blinkhorn. (London: SAGE publications Ltd., 1986), 213.

<sup>31</sup> Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> John Sweets, "Hold that Pendulum! Redefining Fascism, Collaborationism and Resistance in France". *French Historical Studies* 15:4 (Autumn, 1988), 731-2.

fascist and non-fascist groups were active in France. Before we can establish whether the CSAR was influenced by any of its fellow organisations, it may help to have some understanding of who and what was on the French political scene.

Most historians do not deny that fascism did exist in France in the 1930s. The contentious issues are to what extent fascism spread in France and whether it was an indigenous movement, or simply an imitation of the foreign fascist models. Historians like Philippe Machefer, Pierre Milza, J. Pluymène and R. Lasier, and René Rémond are representative of the group of scholars who maintain that some of the *ligues* were fascist, or at a minimum, that they were influenced by fascism, and that these French fascist movements did not necessarily borrow everything from the Italian or German models. For instance, Milza argues that “[i]l y a eu sans aucun doute un fascisme français, et celui-ci ne revêt pas toujours la forme de ses homologues italien et allemand. Mais il n’est que l’un des visages adoptés par le nationalisme antiparlementaire et pas nécessairement le plus caractéristique, ni celui qui a connu le plus de succès.”<sup>33</sup> Most of these historians emphasize the fact that, while some organisations may have been inspired by fascism, none of them achieved any measure of success. The reason for this failure is often explained by examining other, non-fascist, political orientations that were entrenched in the French mentality to a point where fascism could not compete. Also, as weak as the Third Republic was in many ways, it was still strong enough to maintain a state apparatus that could be repressive when necessary.

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<sup>33</sup> Milza, 288. See also: Philippe Machefer, *Ligues et fascismes en France 1919-1939*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974; J. Pluymène & R. Lasier, *Les Fascismes Français, 1923-63*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963; René Rémond, *The Right Wing in France: From 1815 to de Gaulle*. Trans. James M. Laux. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966.

Zeev Sternhell and Robert Soucy represent the other side of the debate about French fascism. Sternhell is best known for his rather exaggerated argument that fascism, as a political ideology, originated in France and was exported to other countries. He concludes that pure fascists were always rare in number, but that "...the existence of quasi-fascist channels of transmission...created a certain intellectual climate which was to undermine the moral legitimacy of an entire civilization."<sup>34</sup> Soucy, like Sternhell, finds that French fascism had roots extending back much earlier than the German or Italian models.<sup>35</sup> Both scholars similarly label individuals and groups as fascist, even when the people in question vehemently denied being fascists.

When examining fascism in France, all of these historians, with the exception of Sternhell, focus on the leagues of the early twentieth century. Clearly, the Cagoule belongs, contextually, with these other leagues. The defining character of all these organisations was their antiparliamentarianism. However, whether the CSAR was further connected to these leagues is another question altogether. The most significant leagues include Pierre Taittinger's *Jeunesses patriotes* (founded 1924), Georges Valois' *Faisceau* (f.1925), François Coty's *Solidarité française* (f.1933), François de la Rocque's *Croix de feu* (f.1928), Jacques Doriot's *Parti Populaire Français* (f.1936), and Marcel Bucard's *Francisme* (f.1933). What is important to note about all of these groups is that, while they may have shared certain goals with the Cagoule, all of them were highly visible on the French political scene. Some, like the *Jeunesses patriotes* and the *Faisceau*, had their

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<sup>34</sup> Sternhell, 303.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The First Wave, 1924-1933*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 1.



own newspapers. Others, like the *Solidarité française*, adopted visible uniforms, salutes and other “ornaments” of fascism, as René Rémond puts it.<sup>36</sup>

What is even more important than the differences in appearance between the Cagoule and the other leagues is the fact that there was absolutely no cooperation between the CSAR and these other antiparliamentary organisations. We have already discussed how the Cagoule recruited their own members away from the other groups and through Corre’s diaries we find that there was no allowance for belonging to two groups at the same time. Corre was often suspicious of recruits and worried about their potentially continuing affiliations with this or that league.<sup>37</sup> Whatever similarities may have existed between the CSAR and other leagues are unimportant given that the leaders of the Cagoule clearly looked upon the other organisations with a certain measure of scorn. It is doubtful that the secret organisation would have looked to these groups for inspiration, as the chosen methods for achieving whatever end were vastly different and the *cagoulards* had already dismissed those of the other leagues.

The only other league of the early twentieth century that we can say definitively had an influence on the Cagoule would be the *Action Française*. The *Action Française* was a monarchist and integral nationalist organisation, controlled for most of its existence by Charles Maurras, perhaps the most influential philosopher of the right in the 1920s and ‘30s. Few historians would agree with Ernst Nolte’s assertion that the *Action Française* was a fascist organisation. Eugen Weber maintains that “...it [the A.F.] combined and almost reconciled the popular radicalism of nationalism with the

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<sup>36</sup> Rémond, 281.

<sup>37</sup> Christian Bernadac, *Dagore: Les carnets secrets de la Cagoule*. (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1977), 65.

reactionary elitism of the royalists.”<sup>38</sup> The *Action Française* doctrine was one of the most coherent of all those proposed by the antiparliamentary leagues and was based on ideas of reason, simplicity, order, tradition, will, and social unification.

However, to a younger generation of activists, the *Action Française* was also moribund. We have already explored *la grand dissidence* and the departure of many former *Action Française* members and future *cagouleurs*. These dissidents may have concluded that Maurras had lost the vital spirit for action, but presumably they would have initially been attracted to the *Action Française* because of compatible political sympathies. It is impossible to say how much of the Maurrasian philosophy the *cagouleurs* retained after their split from the group. However, we cannot ignore the influence the monarchist organisation would have had on the formative years of these activists.

The Cagoule and the *Action Française* shared many central characteristics. The anti-semitism of Corre and other *cagouleurs* was very similar as that of the old monarchist organisation. Anti-semitism of a what we might call ‘traditional’ or ‘Catholic’ nature was a hallmark of both groups. Neither organisation ever assumed the more racial and virulent anti-semitism of, say, the Nazis. As well, the nationalism of both groups took a similar form. Even the language that Corre used to describe the way France, the *pays réel*, was being destroyed seems to have been taken directly from the writings of Maurras. A third inheritance of *la maison mère* was its elitism.<sup>39</sup> The *Action Française* was generally unconcerned with mass politics, and the Cagoule entirely so. In fact, even the primary goal of both groups always remained the same: to rid France of

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<sup>38</sup> Eugen Weber, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 24.

<sup>39</sup> “*la maison mère*” was the way Corre referred to his former organisation, *L’Action Française*.

parliamentary democracy. It was, fundamentally, only the methods of the organisations that were in opposition.

### TECHNIQUES OF REVOLUTION

The Cagoule was created to subvert, terrorize, and ultimately, overthrow the Third Republic. Its structure and methods were always elaborated with that goal in mind. However, we are interested in knowing whether the Cagoule's form of political organisation can be slotted into pre-existing political models. We have seen that it is very unlikely that the Cagoule considered either the fascist organisations or their contemporary leagues as inspirational examples of how a revolution could be achieved. Interestingly enough, Hannah Arendt's description of totalitarian movements seems inadvertently to offer us a starting point for analyzing the Cagoule and its techniques of revolution.

Arendt describes the attraction to totalitarian movements as having been based upon their uniqueness. She argues that "[t]he pronounced activism of the totalitarian movements, their preference for terrorism over all other forms of political activity, attracted the intellectual elite and the mob alike, precisely because this terrorism was so utterly different than that of earlier revolutionary societies."<sup>40</sup> In addition to this preference for terrorism, Arendt points to the very organisation of totalitarian movements as something which was comparatively new. In particular, she identifies the distinction between party members and sympathizers as the most striking example of this new form of organisation.<sup>41</sup> She then goes on to argue that totalitarian movements actually imitate

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<sup>40</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 324. It should be noted that Arendt's examples of totalitarian regimes include only Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

secret societies in the dichotomy they establish between the inner circle and the external enemies and in the way they have an unsurpassed capacity to create fictitious worlds by means of their consistent lying.<sup>42</sup> Some of these qualities may sound familiar to the reader.

I would like to suggest that the Cagoule, rather than drawing inspiration from totalitarian movements or fascist regimes, was actually part of a French political tradition which itself inspired activists in other countries. This particular tradition can be traced back to the French Revolution and had been carried faithfully through the nineteenth century by the left. From the Jacobins, to the Carbonari, to the Blanquists, and finally appropriated by the *cagouleurs*, this tradition can only be labeled as one of insurrection. In its various permutations, this tradition was both Revolutionary and revolutionary, both leftist and conservative.<sup>43</sup> However, certain aspects of the tradition were retained throughout all the ebbs and flows of its political adherents.

One interesting aspect of this [R]evolutionary tradition is the way in which it was often largely goal oriented. Its adherents were often grouped together in politically ambiguous organisations. For instance, the French Carbonari, or *charbonnerie*, formed in opposition to the government of Louis XVIII, were bound together, as Alan Spitzer explains, in the ideological cement of their political methods.<sup>44</sup> Spitzer further elaborates this idea and argues that revolutionary tactics sometimes constituted a *political* alternative. He writes that French Carbonarism "...was the temporary convergence of

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 365-369.

<sup>43</sup> By using a capital [R] in "revolutionary", I mean to indicate a tradition born in 1789 which is essentially left-wing. The lower case "revolutionary" refers more to means than ends and, as such, can be applied to right-wing groups as well. This distinction was suggested to me by Robert Alexander and he uses it in his recent book on the Revolutionary tradition.

<sup>44</sup> Alan B. Spitzer, *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes: The French Carbonari against the Bourbon Restoration*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 279.

various political tendencies at a point where an illegal opposition seemed desirable to all of them.”<sup>45</sup> These different political tendencies do not indicate that there were no similarities between the Carbonari. Just as the *cagouards* shared some central political characteristics, but perhaps differed in the way they imagined such politics becoming a reality, so too did the Carbonari.<sup>46</sup> In this way, the French Carbonari were very similar to their counterparts in Italy, who similarly shared some ideology, but focused essentially on a particular goal. R. John Roth points out that almost each Italian lodge had a different idea of what kind of government was desirable; they were more concerned with ridding the country of foreign invaders.<sup>47</sup>

Drawing from his experience as a member of the French Carbonari, Louis Auguste Blanqui created several similar organisations, bringing people together in “...a comradeship of dedicated revolutionaries, bound by rites of initiation, a code of secrecy, and a commitment to the conception of a revolution as a coup d’état.”<sup>48</sup> The Blanquists, like the Carbonarists, managed to sustain cooperation based on a particular conception of revolution and the shared goal of allowing such a revolution to occur. The essence of this conception of revolution was, according to Spitzer, “[t]he certainty that political violence was a legitimate, honorable, and peculiarly effective mode of social change...”<sup>49</sup> In practical terms, this strategy of insurrection also included a reliance on secrecy and the

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Alexander writes that “...in doctrinal terms the Carbonari shared the ambiguous mix of republicanism, Bonapartism and liberalism typical of the Opposition” and goes on to point out that the Liberal Opposition was forced to appeal to a diverse range of interests and thus, “...searched for broad, common values and avoided potentially divisive clarity.” Robert Alexander, *Re-Writing the French Revolutionary Tradition: Liberal Opposition and the Fall of the Bourbon Monarchy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 184-185.

<sup>47</sup> R. John Roth, “The Carbonari: Their Origins, Initiation Rites, and Aims”, *The American Historical Review*. 69:2 (Jan., 1964), 367.

<sup>48</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864-1893*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 35.

<sup>49</sup> Alan B. Spitzer, *The Revolutionary Theories of Louis Auguste Blanqui*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 121-2.

notion that people would join the revolution once it was underway, but that it needed initially to be led by an elite of professional revolutionaries.<sup>50</sup>

Even the name of the CSAR indicates its commitment to action and revolutionary tactics. We know that the organisation relied on political violence and terrorism to prepare the way for the insurrection: "*jour <J>*". It is not implausible that the Cagoule adhered to this practice of cooperation for practical purposes at the expense of ideological homogeneity. This would explain why the Cagoule is rather theoretically arid and why the outer circle of members explained their adherence to the group in terms of anticommunism, when we know full well that the inner circle had goals that far surpassed that of combating communism. Beyond that, though, this postulation might explain, to a degree, why the *cagouleurs* chose vastly different political paths after the organisation crumbled.

The similarities between the Cagoule and this [R]evolutionary tradition do not end with their potentially shared conception of revolution. It is possible that the Cagoule adopted methods of organisation, structural lessons, from the Carbonari and the Blanquists. Aside from the most obvious similarity, that of secrecy, there are many aspects of the Cagoule that closely resemble those of this particular tradition. This is where Hannah Arendt is wrong in her analysis of totalitarian movements; the creation of a distinction between party members and sympathizers is not one of the twentieth century.

The Blanquists had followers of first and second degrees. The first degree was a small number of conspirators who were dedicated to overthrowing the existing regime. The second was a much larger group of sympathizers who were ultimately reluctant to be

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<sup>50</sup> Samuel Bernstein, *Auguste Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 9.

subversive. Patrick Hutton describes the creation of this network of followers as “...the Blanquist coterie, while seeking recruits for a wider conspiracy, created an inner circle – a kind of elite within the elite Blanquist comradeship.”<sup>51</sup> This method of organisation was used by the Cagoule almost a century later, but nothing had changed. The CSAR, like the Blanquists, relied on their inner circle to participate in its most nefarious affairs and largely kept the outer circle in the dark.

Another structural similarity was the organisation of members into cells. Hutton describes how, in 1867, the Blanquists had really finished their organisational tasks. The members were organized into secret paramilitary cells, each one composed of ten members, each unaware of the members in other groupings, and generally unaware of the size of the larger membership.<sup>52</sup> Each cell had training exercises and all orders were, of course, passed verbally through the inner circle, the only people who had a solid understanding of the entire network.<sup>53</sup> Again, the Cagoule picked up these very same methods of structuring their own group and attempted to use them in the same way, keeping all the cells separate until the word was given to begin their action.

Thus, it is possible that the Cagoule drew from this tradition, which began as a Revolutionary tradition, in the sense that its guardians used it mainly to uphold the principles of 1789, but it was ultimately appropriated by more conservative elements to become a revolutionary tradition, more concerned with revolution as means than ends. Patrick Hutton convincingly argues that this tradition, beginning with the Jacobins and

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<sup>51</sup> Hutton, 26.

<sup>52</sup> This method of organisation had also been used previously, and perhaps even more successfully, by the Carbonari. The Carbonari had also been a federation of small cells and was an example to other groups trying to escape the notice of the law. See Alexander, 320.

<sup>53</sup> Hutton., 31.

leading to the Blanquists, had a much greater impact on the right in the twentieth century than the left, which had abandoned it for a Marxist view of revolution. Hutton writes that

[i]n terms of direct influence, however, Blanquist ideology made its most immediate impact on the political Right...As a contribution to revolutionary thought, this legacy of the Blanquists, unsavory as it may be, ought not to be minimized. For in many ways, it was the Right, refurbished with a militant nationalist ideology and a belligerent political style, which emerged as the more revolutionary force in France in the years between the first and second world wars.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps this brings us full circle to the beginning of this chapter, where we discussed the historians who argue that revisions of leftist politics in the nineteenth century anticipated twentieth-century fascism. Does this mean that the Cagoule is fascist? I would suggest not. Their appropriation involved methods and a theorization of methods, not, as would be necessary for fascism, an ideology of politics. Are there similarities between the CSAR and fascist or totalitarian movements? Certainly, but these similarities, I would again suggest, come from having similar roots, not from representing the same outcome of those conditions. Can we argue definitively that the Cagoule is a mutation of one particular pre-existing political tendency? I would say not.

The CSAR possessed certain characteristics that set it apart from all these other political models. The most significant difference is the Cagoule's total disregard for mass politics. Unlike fascist organisations, which relied in many ways upon mass participation, and the Carbonari or the Blanquists, who intended to provoke *popular* insurrection, the Cagoule had no such goals. The CSAR hoped only for a passive acceptance of their coup on the part of the general population. In the absence of any popular support, which they did not even attempt to gain, the *cagouleurs* relied instead on

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.



a certain *agent provocateurism* to achieve their goals.<sup>55</sup> Like later-day political terrorists, the Cagoule actively sought to destabilize and divide French society to the point where resistance to a future coup would be nearly impossible. Thus, it seems more likely that the Cagoule represents a convergence of various political tendencies. The group may have borrowed from earlier political models, but there can be no doubt that the Cagoule was also unique in many ways. In any event, as William Irvine rightly asks, "...is finding the right 'label' ...the real task of historians?"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Joel Blatt calls this strategy of agent provocateurism audacious, but flimsy. It seems to me that it was more successful than Blatt allows for. Joel Blatt, "The Cagoule Plot, 1936-1937", *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918-1962*. Ed. Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 94.

<sup>56</sup> William D. Irvine, "Fascism in France and the Strange Case of the Croix de Feu". *The Journal of Modern History* 63:2, A Special Issue on Modern France (Jun., 1991), 294.

## CONCLUSION

The *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire* was a unique addition to the French political scene in the 1930s. Like many of the other antiparliamentary leagues, the Cagoule was determined to rid the country of its long-standing democratic traditions. Unlike these other groups, the secret organisation recognized that street demonstrations and public pressure were not going to be successful in overturning the Third Republic. It was this recognition, combined with the government limits placed upon extraparlimentary organisations, that led to the creation of a determined cadre of revolutionaries, intent on working in the shadows and embracing illegality and action as the only paths capable of saving France from herself.

Although in existence for only a short time, the Cagoule made much of the opportunities offered by the political and social instability of the decade. The criminal activities of the group were intended to promote destabilization and were frequently successful in that regard. The debacle at Clichy created a serious rift amongst the Popular Front; the murder of the Rosselli brothers sent shocks through the anti-fascist community; the Étoile bombings, thought to be the work of the communists, increased the existing tension between the left and the right; the airplane sabotage, clearly an act of anti-republican forces, further heightened leftist fears of the potential for a fascist coup in France. While each of these crimes had a practical result which was helpful to the Cagoule, their significance rests largely in the further political polarization which took place after each event.

This polarization, directly caused by the CSAR, carried on even after the discovery of the plot. The Cagoule affair lent itself very well to further political fighting in the daily press. As was evidenced by the varying interpretations of the conspiracy and

the flying accusations, the Cagoule's ability to confuse and subvert outlived the group's very existence. The leftist newspapers saw in the Cagoule conspiracy shades of fascism and believed that the CSAR was only a small part of a much larger problem, that of the treacherous and disloyal nature of France's right-wing organisations. Fernand Fontenay could have been speaking for all the left when he argued that "la suprême leçon de cette vaste affaire est sans doute qu'il convient de tout faire pour donner à la République des serviteurs exclusivement républicains."<sup>1</sup> The rightist newspapers responded with their own accusations, generally arguing that the Cagoule affair served only to distract from the nefarious plans of the communists. While some of the right-wing papers were sympathetic to the Cagoule, notably *L'Echo de Paris*, everybody on the right tried to distance themselves from the secret organisation as much as possible.

Although the Cagoule shared many characteristics with the other French *ligues* and right-wing groups, especially their antirepublicanism, anticommunism, and antisemitism, there could be no cooperation between them. The *cagouleurs* had already dismissed the other groups as potential collaborators because of their unwillingness to step over the line into illegality and pure action. From the diaries of Aristide Corre we see that the goals of the Cagoule went far beyond what the other groups hoped to achieve. There is a rather large difference between using public pressure to force a government to resign, which seemed to be the goal of many extraparlimentary groups, and actively and secretly weakening an entire society so that a forceful *coup d'état* would be perceived as a beneficial turn of events, which was the initial goal of the Cagoule.

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<sup>1</sup> Fernand Fontenay, *La Cagoule contre la France: Ses crimes, Son organisation, Ses chefs, Ses inspireurs*. (Paris: Éditions Sociales Internationales, 1938), 165.

While contemporaries of the group and some historians since have derided the Cagoule for what they perceived to have been a deluded plan to overthrow the Third Republic, one that was bound to fail, the conspiracy itself was very serious. The men who formed the nucleus of the Cagoule were determined and continued to plan even in the face of what seemed to be unconquerable obstacles. It seems that the contemporary press was entirely correct when it tentatively suggested that the CSAR belonged within a French insurrectionary tradition. The lessons that the *cagouleurs* borrowed from the Carbonari and the Blanquists were valuable ones indeed. Although this particular art of insurrection had been understood by other rightist organisations, the Cagoule was ultimately the first right-wing group to fully implement the methods and structural lessons of the nineteenth-century revolutionaries in the twentieth-century.<sup>2</sup>

The combination of this revolutionary tradition and the inheritance of the *Action Française* shaped the Cagoule into a unique, but indigenously French, organisation. Upon their departure from the old royalist organisation, the men of the CSAR took with them many political lessons. The *cagouleurs* dismissed the royalist privileging of ideology over action, but borrowed from the *Action Française* a certain rhetoric of nationalism, a particular antisemitism, and a strong sense of elitism. In addition to all this, Maurras also taught his students an excellent lesson in the manipulation of societal fears. The Cagoule's use of the communist "threat" was very similar indeed to Maurras' use of antisemitism; both of which provided a unifying element that could mask many

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<sup>2</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were several royalist organisations that used techniques of secrecy and organisational principles similar to those of the Carbonari, notably the *Chevaliers de la foi*. Also, as Patrick Hutton points out in his book, some former Blanquists ended up joining groups like the League of Patriots and the Anti-Semitic League (precursors to the Action Française) at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but they did not fully take advantage of the insurrectionary techniques that they had used previously. Patrick H. Hutton, *The Cult of the Revolutionary Tradition: The Blanquists in French Politics, 1864-1893*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

internal contradictions. As Maurras commented: “[a]ll seems impossible without this providential anti-semitism. With it all falls into place and becomes simplified.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the notion of a communist threat greatly contributed to the Cagoule’s achievements.

The fact that the CSAR failed in its insurrectionary goals should not diminish its importance, its seriousness, or its lasting influence. Of the six reasons that Joel Blatt offers for the failure of the conspiracy, only one was the fault of the group itself.<sup>4</sup> The *cagouards* did indeed make some fatal mistakes that led to their arrests, but ultimately the most significant reason for the failure was the fact that the Republic was still capable of protecting itself from such a threat. The police were quick to act once the conspiracy became known and the court took seriously its punitive role, even though the case was set aside for almost eight years. When the *cagouards* were put back on trial in 1948, the punishments for their roles in the plot were heavy indeed. At least eight men and one woman were given the death penalty for their participation; many men were deported, and others were sentenced to long terms of forced physical labour.<sup>5</sup> It seems clear that the *cagouards* had underestimated the power of a Republic with its back to the wall.

Yet, the spirit of the Cagoule did not perish with the group itself in 1937. After the French defeat of 1940, some former *cagouards* met to discuss the possibilities for future action. Eugène Deloncle, Gabriel Jeantet, and François Duclos met in Paris to

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<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Roger Magraw, *France 1815-1914: The Bourgeois Century*. (Oxford: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983), 263.

<sup>4</sup> Blatt lists the reasons as follows: mistakes made by members of the group, the fact that the group had to battle for turf with other organisations, no cooperation from traditional conservatives, no army support, timing, and the strength of the Third Republic. Joel Blatt, “The Cagoule Plot, 1936-1937”, *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918-1962*. Ed. Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 97-98.

<sup>5</sup> Information taken from the Archives de Paris, 30W 0006, Cour d’Assises de la Seine, 16 January to 31 December 1948.

decide whether the Cagoule could be resurrected. Ultimately, each man chose his own, very different, path. As Bourdrel wrote, perhaps exaggerating somewhat:

Nous allons les retrouver partout où se font les événements, où s'écrit l'histoire, jusqu'à nos jours. Dans la guerre, les complots, les prisons. A Vichy, Londres, Paris, ils seront les vedettes. Pour la "Révolution nationale", la résistance armée et la collaboration intégrale... Parmi les tout premiers compagnons de de Gaulle, mais aussi ministres du maréchal Pétain, fondateurs de la Légion française antibolchevique et chefs de la Milice!<sup>6</sup>

Although overstated, Bourdrel's point is a good one. The men of the Cagoule and their lust for action did not simply disappear. *Cagouleurs* were indeed found all over the place, in Paris, Vichy, and London.

Although there is not sufficient space to explore the war experience of the *cagouleurs* in great detail here, their choices during the war reinforce many of the suggestions I have advanced about the organisation, notably the argument that the men of the Cagoule were largely bound together by their common goals, rather than by a strong ideological connection. Paradoxically, once the democratic Republic had been overthrown by an external attack, the men of the Cagoule had more room to publicly express their real political expectations. As it turned out, many of them were not overly pleased with the authoritarian regime that replaced the much hated Republic.

Although this study has focused on the 1930s and the beginnings and formal end of the Cagoule, by no means does its story end there. Through the Second World War and well into the 1950s, our *cagouleurs* are still present in some form or another. Perhaps there is no actual end to the story of the Cagoule, in its most general sense. Their methods of structural organisation and their strategies of destabilization and terror are used by terrorist organisations around the world. We cannot say that the Cagoule was

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<sup>6</sup> Philippe Bourdrel, *La Cagoule: 30 Ans de Complots*. (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1970), 242.

necessarily a direct influence on such groups, but it is not implausible to suggest, as does Frédéric Monier, that the *cagouleurs* were the initial modern day terrorists. They were renegades – neither attached to a State, nor working in the name of a State, nor simply individuals acting in isolation – but terrorists nonetheless.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Frédéric Monier, *Le Complot dans la République: Stratégies du secret, de Boulanger à la Cagoule*. (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1998), 298.

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