From Liberalism to ‘l’Économie Dirigée’

The European project and the will to preserve the peace at all costs were important factors in the ‘fascist drift’ of Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce. We shall see in this chapter that elements linked to developments in French politics and the socio-economic ideas of the two intellectuals played at least as big a role. During the 1920s, Fabre-Luce adhered to free-market liberalism. Both intellectuals considered economic capitalism as intrinsically linked to democracy and political freedom, although Fabre-Luce was more insistent on this point than Jouvenel. Fabre-Luce criticised collectivist socialism, Italian Fascist corporatism and American Taylorism as incompatible with liberty.¹

In the summer of 1927, Fabre-Luce was invited for a one-and-a-half-month tour of the Soviet Union, a favour the regime only accorded to writers deemed to write sympathetically about the communist experiment. Following the directions of a typical Russian Grand Tour, Fabre-Luce travelled to Moscow and Leningrad by train, after which he descended the Volga on a boat almost to the shores of the Caspian Sea. Trains and cars took him from Stalingrad over the Caucasus to Tiflis, then to Batum where he crossed the Black Sea to Crimea and Odessa. The Soviet authorities probably selected Fabre-Luce because of his harsh criticism of French nationalism in La Victoire, but their faith could not have been more misplaced. In the introduction of his resulting book, Fabre-Luce criticised the failure of other overly positive travel accounts to stress ‘the profound, irreducible moral opposition separating liberal intelligence from communism’.² Fabre-Luce was even more outspoken in an article in L’Europe Nouvelle. He lumped Soviet Communism and American Taylorism together as materialistic enemies of human civilisation marked by ‘the same contempt of the person, the same suppression of liberty’. Both countries had abandoned all metaphysical and cultural attachments, believing in nothing but the ‘quantitative ideal’. The only inspiration that France could gain from communism was fear of this materialistic onslaught by a country as large as a continent, which had incorporated the technological discoveries of the West but not

¹ Fabre-Luce, Le 22 Avril, 69, 80.
² Fabre-Luce, Russie 1927, 7; idem, ‘Au Tombeau de Lénine’, Notre Temps (November 1927), 55.
its civilisation. Calling communism ‘the great sickness of the century’, Fabre-Luce concluded: ‘like the Japanese, like the Moroccans, the Russians will turn our inventions against us’.³

Jouvenel disagreed with Fabre-Luce’s view of the United States, which he considered essentially liberal and capitalist. In a comparison of the economic situation in the United States and the Soviet Union, he celebrated capitalism as clearly the most efficient economic system, since even ‘the proletariat agrees that the capitalist system’ provided ‘the strongest productivity and the biggest general prosperity’.⁴ By contrast, even if American capitalism were to momentarily grant a higher level of prosperity than Soviet communism, the young Jouvenel was unconvinced of the long-term viability of the capitalist system in post-1919 society. Already in 1927 in a contribution to *Notre Temps*, he associated laissez-faire liberalism with an old generation hypocritically clinging to an outdated model that no longer reflected economic reality: ‘Free competition? The liberty to conspire to put an end to competition. Free trade? An open door to all kinds of dumping. Private initiative? The right to lack initiative! The liberal system? A myth that is defended in theory because it has long been suffocated in reality!’⁵

From the mid-1920s, both intellectuals developed a critique of the excesses of the free market and envisaged the need for an organising authority able to rationalise it. Already while working on *La Victoire*, Fabre-Luce became interested in the ideas of John Maynard Keynes about the economic consequences of the 1919 peace treaties, but he later also read and discussed the Englishman’s publications on fiscal policy and monetary devaluation as an effective way to temper an economic crisis. In 1933, Fabre-Luce utilised a trip to London to meet Keynes in person.⁶ Jouvenel played a pioneering role through his first book, *L’Économie Dirigée*, thereby coining a French term that would have a prolific life. Ambitiously subtitled *Le Programme de la Nouvelle Génération*, the book first described a situation in which the state, instead of leading the economy, remains a passive element in the struggle between competing oligarchies in business and industry. To combat this situation, the state should directly intervene in the economy.

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Jouvenel’s solution, however, did not go as far as a communist-style state-led economy. In his view, the state had to orient the economy by making use of its traditional tools, taxes and tariffs, in a rational way, based on an analysis of statistical material and making use of a trained elite of economic experts. In an article in The New York Times, Jouvenel argued that a capitalism enriched by state planning based on the systematic study of consumer needs was much more efficient than a communist system.

This insistence on the role played by economic and technical ‘experts’ rather than supposedly unqualified politicians was an important topic in the discourses of Jouvenel and other members of the Notre Temps group. It brings them close to a current that Jackie Clarke has analysed in her book France in the Age of Organization. In interwar France, an increasing number of young social scientists, industrialists and economists were proposing a similar programme of reforms in which techniciens had to play a leading role outside and partially against parliamentary politics. Rational economic organisation also became part of Jouvenel, Luchaire and Fabre-Luce’s idea of a future European Union, where large-scale planning would ensure a rise in prosperity for everyone. The prospect of a joint exploitation of the European colonial empire offered even more opportunities. At the second meeting of the Solhberg Circle in 1931 in the French town of Rethel, Jouvenel gave a lecture entitled ‘De l’Unité Économique Européenne à l’Économie Dirigée Mondiale’, in which he suggested studying ‘immense regions, like the entire African continent, that offer the occasion for immense projects to undertake collectively’. In 1934, Fabre-Luce enthusiastically discussed the possibility of large-scale settlement of white Europeans in French North and West Africa in preparation for ‘a political Federation of the European-African block’. Its triple benefits would be a new ‘élan’ for the European youth and a tool against overpopulation and unemployment, an economic impulse for Europe and Africa and a substantial reduction of the risk of European war.

8 Jouvenel, ‘Communism Contrasted with Modern Capitalism’.
9 Clarke, France in the Age of Organization, 8.
11 Plan du 9 juillet, 50.
At a more general level, interest in alternative economic models was strong during the early 1930s. Facing a malfunctioning laissez-faire capitalism and the frightful prospect of communist revolution, many young intellectuals were looking for a ‘third way’ between the two systems. The corporatist model of Fascist Italy represented a potentially attractive alternative, as it allowed – at least theoretically – for the continued existence of a degree of personal freedom while bringing employers and workers together at the negotiating table. The New Deal in the United States and the large-scale employment projects of Nazi Germany seemed to be almost as promising examples of state intervention to combat the unproductive chaos of fluctuations in the economy. In interwar France, the most popular alternative model was the ‘planism’ proposed by the Belgian socialist leader Hendrik de Man. Like his French counterpart Marcel Déat, De Man had delivered a fundamental critique of Marxism, stating that its principles failed to meet the economic development of its times. Instead of the mechanical doctrine of Marxism, De Man proposed an explicitly ‘moral’ socialism aimed at integrating the middle classes and ready to boost the national economy through state-led planning. De Man did not consider the proletariat a worthwhile agent of social change, as he found it to have essentially the same aspirations as the bourgeoisie, which meant that a proletarian revolution would necessarily be a shallow, hedonistic one. Instead of a class with a supposedly historical role, De Man considered the state as the only institution capable of revolutionary change. To achieve this transformation, the state depended on qualified experts, civil servants and techniciens. Based on their merit and their dedication to the common good, but independent from the fluctuations of parliamentary politics, they would be the natural elite of a planist economy.

Fabre-Luce and Jouvenel’s enthusiasm for planism seems to have been motivated by the linking of two main elements. At the national level, De Man’s ideas of social peace offered an alternative to both laissez-faire capitalism and Marxist class struggle, which could then be linked internationally to a project to reinforce European peace and reconciliation through large-scale projects of economic planning on a continental scale. In the minds of Fabre-Luce and Jouvenel, planning could permit the energy of the European youth to be directed away from warfare and towards more

13 Sternhell, Ni Droite, Ni Gauche, 136, 159.
14 Amzalak, Fascists and Honorable Men, 105.
constructive activities like public service, colonisation and engineering. Jouvenel played an active role in spreading De Man’s ideas in France. When Louise Weiss wanted to invite De Man to give a lecture at the Sorbonne in December 1934 as part of the lecture series of her Europeanist École de la Paix, Jouvenel brought her into contact with the Belgian politician. Jouvenel was quick to apply for tickets via the Groupe du 9 Juillet, even stressing that in the case of scarcity of tickets he ought to have priority over other candidates. A few months later, De Man became ‘minister of public works and absorption of unemployment’ in a Belgian government coalition that had embarked on a policy inspired by planism. Jouvenel travelled to Brussels to obtain an interview with him and had long conversations about his ideas for restarting the economy and about the Office of Economic Recovery that he wanted to create.

While Fabre-Luce’s visit to the Soviet Union increased his appreciation of liberal capitalism, a long trip by Jouvenel to the United States pointed him in the opposite direction. Leaving in October 1932 from a France in which the crisis was only just beginning to make itself felt, Jouvenel arrived in a United States at the depths of the Great Depression. During the eight months he spent travelling through the country, he was appalled by the misery of the masses of unemployed in Chicago and New York and also in the South, where the cotton industry had collapsed. Jouvenel had originally planned to use the trip to study American capitalism, much in the same way his compatriot Alexis de Tocqueville had studied American democracy one century before. But instead of studying its functioning, he felt he was witnessing its death throes. In the last chapter of the resulting book, *La Crise du Capitalisme Américain*, Jouvenel concluded that American ‘big capitalism’ had died. The Wall Street crash, the closing of the banks and the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt had delivered the final blow. The new president was taking energetic measures, replacing capitalism with ‘a vast experience of *économie dirigée*’. Jouvenel showed enthusiasm for the psychological aspects of the New Deal: Roosevelt had given the nation hope and contributed to the rise of a new civic patriotism, from which a new elite of young technicians would rise. If Roosevelt continued the chosen track, Jouvenel believed that his rule would mark ‘the greatest revolution of our times’.

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15 Correspondance of Louise Weiss and Hendrik de Man, BNF, FR Nouv. Acq. 17814.
17 Jouvenel, *Un Voyageur*, 222.
Fabre-Luce also became interested in ‘l’économie dirigée’, probably by reading Jouvenel’s book, and he paid shorter visits to all three countries that he considered to have taken this direction: The United States, Italy and Germany. At first, his conclusions were more mixed than Jouvenel’s. Compared to France, where state control of the economy was very weak, he estimated that Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany had a great advantage in their capacity to mobilise national wealth and reserves in the interest of the state and the regime, if necessary by ignoring personal freedoms and property rights. He praised the successes of all three governments in fighting unemployment through public works and in reducing salaries and working hours. He disagreed with Jouvenel on the revolutionary nature of Roosevelt’s achievements. Instead, he stated that Roosevelt had not gone far enough, which would have implied ‘to orient the American political system much more clearly towards fascism’. But he also signalled the inefficient interior chaos of the Nazi system, in which different overlapping institutions often defended contradictory policies. In March 1934, Fabre-Luce put his cards on the table when he announced that his economic point of view was very close to the corporatist fascist model: rather than Roosevelt’s New Deal or De Man’s ‘planism’, his ‘économie dirigée means Revolution’. Contrary to the communist model, fascist corporatism would still preserve elements of private initiative but in a disciplined way, within a corporation ‘under discreet government supervision’.

A National and Social Revolution

During the first half of the 1930s, political developments in France led to the two intellectuals drifting further away from conventional politics. The 1932 elections marked a return to power of the centre-left, but as in 1924 this led to a series of unstable minority governments dependent on the uncertain support of the Socialist Party. With a few years’ delay, the Great Depression started to hit France hard, and its governments found no effective way to respond to it, clinging to budget cuts and the gold standard. In 1933, the coming to power of Hitler and the growing exasperation with the inertia of the

French government led to increased activity among the anti-parliamentary right, which culminated in the Stavisky Affair and the Paris riots of 6 February 1934. In the direct aftermath of the riots, Daladier resigned as a prime minister. The establishment of a government of national union under Gaston Doumergue could bring back a certain degree of political tranquillity, but by that time events had already convinced many young intellectuals that, like in Germany and Italy, a revolution of the right was possible in France.

Le Six Février, as the events came to be known in France, shocked Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce. Although at the time, both opposed the ‘reactionary’ right-wing leagues, their confidence in the parliamentary system, which was already far from solid to say the least, received a fatal blow. In 1933, Fabre-Luce anticipated the rising anti-parliamentary sentiment in the country and called for a ‘stronger’ regime. Dictatorships had already triumphed in most European and ‘in all American’ countries, while France was also on its way to a form of authoritarian rule. Most markedly, Fabre-Luce became convinced that the spirit of the times did not favour liberal democracy, which led him to argue that it was necessary to pull back from this political system. Whether one liked it or not, to be able to preserve certain freedoms in a profoundly non-liberal age, France would have to ‘discipline its liberty’ and make concessions to fascism. When discussing the menace of the fascist regimes to the position of France, he stated:

One upon a time, the whole of Europe has made concessions to democracy to fight against the French Revolution. Today, we must make concessions to fascism in order to fight against the foreign fascisms. In a certain sense, the defence of liberty and the limitation of liberty have become synonyms.

As agitation among the right grew in the wake of the Stavisky scandal, Fabre-Luce decided to keep a ‘Bulletin de la Révolution’ in the hopes that a revolution would soon break out. However, after three of these bulletins, he condemned the riots as a ‘reactionary revolt without leader, programme or social aspirations’. Similarly, Jouvenel was electrified by the ‘fermenting’ anger that filled the Paris air as the scandal ran its course. A visit to a meeting of the executive committee of the Radical Party left him disgusted.

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21 See the introduction for more background information.
22 Soucy, The Second Wave, 32.
23 Alfred Fabre-Luce, ‘Quel Remède?’, Pamphlet (28 April 1933), 12; idem, ‘Adaptations à la Démocratie’, Pamphlet (11 August 1933); idem, ‘Du Nouveau en France’, Pamphlet (11 August 1933).
with the party, where he suspected Stavisky’s protégés everywhere around him. The smell of clientelism and corruption had not only infested the Radicals but was also ‘poisoning our republic’. On the same day, during a demonstration in front of his house on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, Jouvenel tried to help a man who was being beaten up by the police, only to be mistreated himself and arrested by ‘half a dozen of cops’, who dragged him to the police station under the threat of further violence. Released thanks to the intervention of an influential friend, Jouvenel concluded that police brutality would never suffice to uphold a system that was rotten to the core.\(^\text{25}\) This did not lead Jouvenel to approve of the events of 6 February, however. In a letter, he dismissed the riots as a spontaneous but useless ‘agitation d’aveugles contre la nocivité du néant’.\(^\text{26}\)

For Jouvenel, the events had nothing but negative consequences: Daladier had proven himself incompetent as a leader, the demonstrators had achieved


\(^{26}\) Jouvenel to Pierre Andreu (undated but probably from 1953-1954), Fonds BdJ, Don 96 01 (294).
nothing they wanted, and the Doumergue government was set on a conservative course, doing nothing to address France’s financial, psychological and political problems. Fabre-Luce concluded that the only positive revolution could come not from the right or the left but from the ‘centre’, combining social and national elements. If during the following months a ‘chef’, a strong leader, could be found to unite the forces of Marcel Déat’s neosocialism and the Croix-de-Feu movement of Colonel François de la Rocque, this revolution would be possible: ‘Revolution of the Centre, Left-wing Fascism, or just simply the extra-parliamentary resurrection of the old ideal of a Controlled Economy’. The board of Fabre-Luce’s journal Pamphlet was split on the issue, with Fabre-Luce and Jean Prévost opposing the riots and Pierre Dominique considering them a worthwhile contribution to the fall of the republican system.27

Jouvenel’s conclusions were not very different, but they had more radical consequences. Furious with established politics, parliamentarianism and Daladier, who had not dared to compose a strong reformist government in response to the riots, he left the Parti Radical and founded La Lutte des Jeunes. This weekly, which Jouvenel edited and published together with a small group of non-conformist intellectuals – Drieu figured prominently, along with Pierre Andreu, Jacques Arthuys, Philippe Boegner and Georges Roditi – rejected all established political parties. Very much against parliamentary politics, it wanted to unite French youth to establish ‘a regime in which all particular interests are mercilessly subjected to the general interest’.28 In Jouvenel’s eyes, the riots had marked the beginning of a national revolution that would result in a ‘new state, cleansed of parliamentarianism and capitalism’.29 He grouped these two enemies systematically together to stress the social dimension that his anti-parliamentarianism had taken. In a long article in which he gave a generally positive analysis of the Italian economic system, Jouvenel announced that he refused to take a principled stance on the character of France’s future regime: ‘I will accept any [regime], under the sole and explicit condition that it has as an objective to profoundly transform the living conditions of the working classes’.30 Jouvenel announced that the Depression would lead to the end of

27 Alfred Fabre-Luce, Pierre Dominique and Jean Prévost, ‘L’Avis de Pamphlet’, Pamphlet (23 February 1934); Alfred Fabre-Luce, ‘Si Daladier n’avait Pas Été Daladier’, Pamphlet (23 February 1934).
28 ‘Que Voulons-nous?’, La Lutte des Jeunes (25 February 1934).
democracy but expressed the hope that new, authoritarian leaders would use their strength to ‘break capitalism’ and install ‘a rational economic regime assuring the legitimate satisfaction of human needs’.  

Placing trust entirely in the young generation, *La Lutte des Jeunes* was another manifestation of the generational discourse from Jouvenel’s *Notre Temps* days. In his memoirs, Pierre Andreu recalled Jouvenel walking the boulevards of Paris, distributing leaflets that called upon ‘all youth, to constitute battle groups against misery and against the regime’. Below this text figured photographs of two political demonstrations, one of the left, the other of a right-wing demonstration. ‘Voyez-vous la différence? Non. Il n’y a qu’une jeunesse.’ In a contribution written for *Le Cahier Bleu*, a left-wing periodical directed by his half-brother Renaud de Jouvenel, Bertrand denounced the ‘bourgeois’ mentality that had for too long pressed French youth to be patient, save money and wait for rewards that would come with old age. He described ‘young intellectuals, arched over vile old papers, hoping to once be at the Institut de France so that glory will bring them the women they desire today’. Now a new youth was on the rise that was no longer willing to wait, burning to pursue its desires right here, right now. This generation was exasperated with the ‘extraordinary obstruction’ of the country: ‘from the Gambetta monument to the busts of Marianne, so many things to destroy!’ A ‘thorough clean-up’ was necessary to build a ‘new civilisation’:

Il faut rétablir un certain sens de l’espace. Nettoyer par le vide, édifier l’indispensable, travailler pour vivre et non pour accumuler, jouir des loisirs et non pas les rejeter à la fin de la vie, organiser une civilisation d’hommes libres et non pas d’ilotes ivres de travail, – le programme de la jeunesse est simple. Sa réalisation, croyons-nous, sera un coup de gomme dans la grisaille contemporaine.

At the same time and partially with contributions from the same people, Fabre-Luce engaged in a different attempt to bring his intellectual generation together and establish a common political programme through the Groupe du 9 Juillet. Containing young representatives of diverse political currents in France – syndicalists, socialists, agrarians, republicans,

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Croix-de-Feu, Jeunesse Patriote – the Groupe du 9 Juillet was inspired by the same generational ideas as Jouvenel’s weekly. Though present at the first meetings, Jouvenel dropped out of the group before it had agreed on a common programme. The pacifist writer Jules Romains, who was also a prominent member of Abetz’s Comité France-Allemagne, informally led the Groupe du 9 Juillet. The meetings of the group resulted in a Plan du 9 Juillet, probably written by Fabre-Luce,\textsuperscript{34} signed amongst others by Philippe Boegner, Jean Coutrot, Paul Marion, Georges Roditi and Romains (who also wrote the introduction) and edited as a book, which was widely discussed in the French press.\textsuperscript{35}

Though the political diversity of the group inevitably led to a certain vagueness, the general line of the plan was manifestly authoritarian and corporatist. First, the plan established the end of ‘decadent’ liberalism and called for stronger executive power. While warning against the danger of ‘totalitarianism’, the Groupe stated that liberty could only be safeguarded ‘through order’:

An unemployed man unable to find work, a worker erring from factory to factory according to the caprices of overproduction, a citizen informed by a corrupt press are not free men. To emancipate an individual means first to give him the means to live from his work, within a framework [‘dans un cadre’] that he knows and accepts, within a society to which he can contribute.\textsuperscript{36}

Apart from constraining parliament by reinforcing the power of government, which would alone hold the right to legislate, the plan called for the creation of a new ‘Conseil des Corporations’ that would represent the interests of various economic professional groups. The Conseil would have the task of coordinating the national economy and enforcing mandatory consultation about all proposals of economic of financial character. A total ban on strikes and a crackdown on labour unions were to guarantee a more fluid functioning of the national economy. The plan also provided for the complete suspension of the constitution ‘under exceptional circumstances’, when full political power would be assumed by a ‘gouvernement de salut public’ consisting of ‘experienced and disinterested men’.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{34} Fabre-Luce, \textit{J’ai Vécu Plusieurs Siècles}, 170.
\textsuperscript{35} Amzalak, \textit{Fascists and Honorable Men}, 110; Dard, \textit{Le Rendez-Vous Manqué}, 194, 197.
\textsuperscript{36} Plan du 9 juillet, 18.
\textsuperscript{37} Plan du 9 juillet, 22, 23, 25.
Through the Groupe du 9 Juillet and *La Lutte des Jeunes*, Fabre-Luce and Jouvenel came in touch with the plethora of groups and periodicals that Loubet del Bayle has dubbed ‘the non-conformists of the 1930s’, with some members of these movements expressing their opinions on the pages of Jouvenel’s weekly. As there were elements that both linked and distinguished Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce from these groups, it is useful to take a closer look at these contacts. According to Loubet del Bayle, the ‘non-conformists’ can be divided into three groups: those connected with the journal *Esprit* around the Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier; those associated with the journal *Ordre Nouveau* around Alexandre Marc, Robert Aron, Arnaud Dandieu and Denis de Rougemont; and a group that Mounier called ‘La Jeune Droite’ consisting of young right-wing intellectuals close to *L’Action Française* such as Thierry Maulnier, Jean de Fabrègues and Jean-Pierre Maxence. Most members of these groups were young intellectuals roughly of the same age as Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce and subscribing to a similar generational perspective. They saw their periodicals as part of an intellectual revolt against a crisis of civilisation that was manifesting itself in the ‘désordre établi’ of individualism, capitalism and communism. They were looking for ways to overcome this ‘established disorder’ by supplanting it with a more organic model built on authority and a sense of community, which had to be ‘neither left nor right’. To a certain extent, all three groups subscribed to Mounier’s personalist philosophy, which rejected both liberal individualism and communist or fascist collectivism. Rather, a ‘spiritual revolution’ would pave the way for a new relationship between man and his environment. The school of thought known as personalism claimed to respect individual human rights but stressed that a ‘person’ could only truly exist as an organic part of a community.38

Loubet del Bayle estimated that these groups, short of achieving immediate political influence during the 1930s, made an important – and generally positive – intellectual contribution to French politics. By contrast, Sternhell has taken the position of associating the non-conformist movement with the ‘fascist impregnation’ of French society.39 More recently and in concordance with Sternhell, the Canadian scholar John Hellman has stated that personalism was an anti-democratic, anti-republican and authoritarian philosophy, closely related to the German Conservative Revolution that helped carry the Nazis to power.40 Dard is more cautious

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in his judgments, even shunning the use of non-conformism and fascism as terminological categories of analysis. He prefers to use the deliberately empty concept of the ‘nouvelles relèves’ and concludes that their story is generally one of failure. Within the non-conformist milieu, Dard primarily distinguishes between ‘spiritualists’ and ‘materialists’, the former being primarily interested in philosophical and metaphysical solutions to the perceived crisis of civilisation, while the latter preferred concrete technical reforms, often inspired by corporatist and technocratic ideas. From this perspective, while the reformist Catholic *Esprit* environment clearly belongs to the spiritualist side, Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce might be counted as belonging to the materialistic group at least from their days at *Notre Temps*. But it must be stressed that this distinction is not rigid, as some of the two intellectuals’ writings of the late 1930s and early 1940s show a clearly metaphysical tendency.

Jouvenel wanted *La Lutte des Jeunes* to play a federating role, opening his periodical to all initiatives of the young generation under the sole condition that they were not linked to any existing political party. This attempt soon resulted in a cacophony of rivalling and mutually hostile movements and groups, most of whom were unwilling to recognise Jouvenel as one of theirs. Robert Aron wrote a particularly angry contribution, violently attacking Jouvenel and Luchaire as opportunistic members of the political establishment belatedly turning to revolutionary rhetoric. An earlier discussion between members of the ‘Jeune Droite’ and *Esprit* had already escalated into open conflict. The most problematic aspect of Jouvenel’s attempt was that it came precisely when the ‘non-conformist’ milieu was becoming more and more divided. After a short period of centripetal tendencies in 1933, the aftershocks of the 6 February riots began to tear the groups apart, and instead of being ‘neither left nor right’, they became more and more split along traditional political lines.

Within a few months’ time, Jouvenel had to conclude that his weekly had been a failure. In its last edition, he admitted that, having already taken up more debts than he could, he was unable to finance the journal any further. He drew pessimistic conclusions about the prospect of uniting French

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youth around a single political programme. Henceforth, like Fabre-Luce, he fixed his hope on a synthesis of the ‘virility’ of the Croix-de-Feu and the social programme of Marcel Déat’s neosocialism, Gaston Bergery’s Front Commun and a possible future initiative by Jacques Doriot. This synthesis, Jouvenel admitted, could come down to a French fascism. When *Le Cahier Bleu* enquired among several intellectuals what position they would take in the case of a fascist revolution, Jouvenel provocatively stated that he would participate in it. He was quick to stress that many left-wing intellectuals were defining it incorrectly: fascism was not an ‘armed reaction of capitalism against those who attack its privileges’. To Jouvenel, fascism meant ‘violence to conquer power, authority to exercise it’. It meant ‘creation of a revolutionary state of mind among the masses by every means of propaganda to fight fatalism and inertia [quiétisme], which are so undeservedly called Marxism’. Fascism, above all, was a method that could be used for different ends. But since a revolution would mean the destruction of all existing institutions, particularly the ‘master institution’ of capitalism, Jouvenel knew on which side of the barricades he would be.

Within this line of reasoning, fascism is not something desirable for its own sake but a useful method to break the stalemate of French politics. As a means of achieving a revolution that was both anti-capitalist and anti-Marxist, Jouvenel’s interpretation of fascism was not so different from how Fabre-Luce saw the phenomenon. In an ‘open letter’ to André Gide, Fabre-Luce criticised the famous writer for his compliance with Soviet communism, even after having openly denounced its grim reality after a trip to the Soviet Union. Instead of easily dismissing their opponents as ‘fascists’, Fabre-Luce argued, Gide and his anti-fascist friends would do better to understand the circumstances under which fascism had become an attractive alternative for many French intellectuals, who normally shunned anything reeking of authoritarianism. Fascism, according to Fabre-Luce, was a necessary ‘counterweight’ to the Soviet system, only desirable because ‘in the order of tyranny, fascism is less barbaric than communism’. Fascism did not lead to the socialisation of the means of production, it respected ‘moral and religious forces’ and allowed itself to be ‘tempered’ by them. He wrote: ‘Our “fascists” know all this. Forced to choose, they would prefer fascism to communism. But they still hope that we will be spared this

choice.\textsuperscript{47} Besides a weapon against the communist menace, Fabre-Luce saw fascism as a necessary alternative to a democracy in crisis. Half a year later, he remarked that Belgium did not need a fascist revolution because it had managed to ‘discipline’ its democracy, like the United Kingdom: ‘For fascism, if needed, against communism? Yes. For fascism, against a disciplined democracy like in England or Belgium? No!’\textsuperscript{48} The omission of his own country was clear: in the case of France, Fabre-Luce was not so sure the country could do without a fascist revolution.

Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce realised that their revolutionary agenda could only be realised if a credible popular leader were available. Writing for the non-political mass press and for Fabre-Luce’s \textit{L’Europe Nouvelle}, Jouvenel initially had high expectations of La Rocque and his veteran league that had turned into an anti-parliamentary mass movement. His Croix-de-Feu movement grew quickly at the time, achieving such momentum that some saw La Rocque as a candidate to become France’s authoritarian leader.\textsuperscript{49} During 1935, however, increasingly disappointed with La Rocque’s social conservatism and his hesitation in making a political move, Jouvenel turned more towards those who had left his movement due to a longing for ‘action’. Like Déat, Doriot and Bergery, who had all turned their backs on the conservatism of the established parties, Jouvenel expressed hope that a ‘chef’, a charismatic leader, could be found to lead these ‘démissionnaires’.\textsuperscript{50}

With or without such a ‘chef’, Fabre-Luce and Jouvenel did run for parliament in 1936, as candidates for the Union Socialiste Républicaine (USR), essentially a vehicle for personalities close to Déat, Paul Marion, Adrien Marquet and other neosocialist renegades who had split off from the SFIO or the PCF. Both had already been candidates for the Parti Radical in 1932, and Jouvenel had also run in 1928 – always unsuccessfully.\textsuperscript{51} In 1936, Fabre-Luce presented himself as a candidate in the Ain department, close to Lyon. Jouvenel ran in a Bordeaux

\textsuperscript{47} Alfred Fabre-Luce, ‘Lettre Ouverte à André Gide, Trotskyiste’, \textit{L’Assaut} (24 November 1936). Gide’s very critical travel account (\textit{Retour de l’URSS}) was published that some month.

\textsuperscript{48} Alfred Fabre-Luce, ‘Rex et l’Assaut’, \textit{L’Assaut} (13 April 1937).

\textsuperscript{49} See, for example, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, ‘Si J’Étais La Rocque…’, \textit{La Lutte des Jeunes} (20 May 1934); Bertrand de Jouvenel, ‘France Is Stirred by “Crosses of Fire”’, \textit{The New York Times} (29 September 1935).


\textsuperscript{51} Several drafts of speeches and electoral programmes from 1928 (when Fabre-Luce eventually decided against candidacy) and 1932 can be found in: Fonds AFL, 472 AP 1 and 10. Fabre-Luce did manage to get himself elected into the Conseil Général (departmental assembly) of the
district instead of in his native Corrèze, where he could have counted on influential support from family connections. Both intensively toured their districts, holding electoral rallies and presenting their political programmes, a mixture of pacifism in international relations, reconciliation with Germany, protection of farmers’ interest and a stronger national government. Jouvenel was beaten in the first round, Fabre-Luce in the second, because a Parti Radical candidate refused to step down in his favour. This left two progressives in the race and thus paved the way for a victory of the sole conservative candidate, a bar owner from Trévoux. While the few USR candidates that did win their mandates prepared themselves to become a small fragment in the Popular Front coalition, Fabre-Luce and Jouvenel left the party.52

This repeated political failure further embittered Fabre-Luce and Jouvenel about the functioning of parliamentary democracy. In his memoirs, Fabre-Luce poured scorn on his victorious opponent Marius Gallet, whom he described as a ‘marionette’ and a typical product of provincial republicanism. According to Fabre-Luce, Gallet, ‘barely able to speak and write’, had spent his uneventful life in front of the stuffed fox at his bar, joylessly accepting drinks from mediocre costumers. Despite his election, Gallet did not even move to Paris and he ‘never spoke a word’ in Parliament. Looking back on his own experience as a candidate, Fabre-Luce admitted to having felt like a ‘prostitute forced to solicit’ an electorate that instead should have been ‘put in its right place’ by an authoritarian leader like Doriot.53 Jouvenel shared his feelings of humiliation. His electoral campaign had been ‘an effort to seduce’ rather than a glorious electoral battle, and his defeat left him feeling ‘ridiculous like a dancer failing to draw applause’. Jouvenel had nothing but contempt for the ‘animal stupidity’ of voters, ready to follow ‘the animal with the strongest smell’.54

Party Intellectuals at the Service of Fascism

By the spring of 1936, these conceptions had been formed. With only the ‘chef’ missing, it is hardly surprising that the foundation of the Parti Ain department in May 1935. He held this relatively unimportant office until 1940, travelling to Trévoux several times a year to attend the council’s seasonal meetings.

52 Fabre-Luce and Jouvenel were not alone, as even leading neosocialist Déat was beaten in the second round. Dard, Bertrand de Jouvenel, 134; Alfred Fabre-Luce, Vingt-Cinq Années de Liberté I, 18.


54 Fonds BdJ, NAF 28143 (59).
Populaire Français by Jacques Doriot, on 28 June 1936, just a month after the electoral victory of the Popular Front, unleashed such enthusiasm among Fabre-Luce, Jouvenel and other non-conformist intellectuals. Pierre Andreu has described this spirit in his memoirs. At the end of June 1936, he received a phone call from Drieu, who had just attended the birth of the party, telling him that ‘What we have been waiting for has finally happened. Doriot has founded his party. We’re waiting for you; you will find all your friends here: Jouvenel, [Paul] Marion, [Jean] Fontenoy, [Claude] Popelin…’55 Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce were present at the founding ceremony of the party, during which both the Marseillaise and the Internationale were sung and the audience was confused over which way to greet their leader: with the communist or the fascist salute.56 Drieu was deeply impressed by Doriot’s three-hour-long speech, during which he sweated abundantly, leaving upon Drieu the impression of health and masculine strength: ‘Doriot is big and

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55 Andreu, Le Rouge, 125.
56 Jouvenel, Un Voyageur, 294; Fabre-Luce, Vingt-Cinq Années de Liberté II, 156; Kestel, La Conversion Politique, 135.
strong. Everything inside him breathes health and plenitude: his thick hair, his mighty shoulders, his large belly.\textsuperscript{57}

During the 1920s, Doriot was seen as the rising star of the French Communist Party (PCF). In 1931, he won an easy election and became mayor of the ‘red’ Parisian suburb of Saint-Denis. His ambitions to head the party were thwarted, however, as he lost the leadership battle to his rival Maurice Thorez. During the spring of 1934, Doriot openly began to rebel against the PCF and the Komintern. With the collapse of the German KPD after Hitler’s seizure of power, and with the incidents of \textit{Le Six Février} on his mind, he opposed the Komintern doctrine that disallowed any collaboration with socialists. Doriot stated that fascism could only be stopped if all forces of the left joined hands against it. Although Stalin would encourage his followers less than five months later to work together with the socialists formerly branded as ‘social fascists’, Doriot’s views were considered treason to party discipline. Doriot responded by quitting the PCF. During the 1936 elections, Doriot could narrowly defeat a communist counter-candidate and retain his position as the mayor of Saint-Denis, but his position was manifestly under pressure from the left-wing parties that were now working together in the Popular Front, excluding him.\textsuperscript{58}

Confronted with rising political and financial problems and realising that his plan of unity of the left against fascism had been brought into practice without him and against him, Doriot took drastic measures. He founded the Parti Populaire Français, a party that rejected Marxism and instead called for class collaboration. He soon became strongly anti-communist and increasingly anti-Semitic, while also advocating a programme of European peace through friendship with Nazi Germany. During its first years, the PPF received financial support from Fascist Italy and from financial backers in the French banking and business world. Members swore an oath to their leader Doriot and greeted each other with the fascist salute.\textsuperscript{59} In 1937, after violent clashes with communist militants, the party also developed a ritual martyr cult for members who had died fighting for its cause.\textsuperscript{60} The PPF, which probably counted about 100,000 members at its climax in 1938, was first dominated by former communists like Doriot, but their percentage decreased slowly. When in 1936 La Rocque changed his dissolved CdF to

\textsuperscript{57} Drieu la Rochelle, \textit{Doriot ou la Vie d’un Ouvrier Français}, 31.
\textsuperscript{58} Burrin, \textit{La Dérive Fasciste}, 172.
\textsuperscript{59} Brunet, \textit{Jacques Doriot}, 238, 249.
\textsuperscript{60} Burrin, \textit{La Dérive Fasciste}, 319.
the seemingly more moderate PSF, several prominent far-right members left the party and joined Doriot.\textsuperscript{61} Considering Doriot and his associates' past communist credentials, Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce had reason to believe that, unlike the Croix-de-Feu and the other right-wing leagues, the PPF would be a fascist movement with a serious social dimension. Jouvenel, who had already been on friendly terms with Doriot since 1935, was convinced that the PPF embodied his dreams of realising a ‘French socialism’ without class warfare within an organic, authoritarian state.\textsuperscript{62} In 1954, attempting to explain and justify his PPF engagement in a letter to the American historian Rudolph Binion, Jouvenel even compared Doriot to Marshal Tito (as a fellow renegade Stalinist) and claimed:

my association with Doriot at its inception marks my extreme-left high-
mark! We were then a strange little band of intellectuals fascinated by
our association with real manual workers!! A feeling of the team grew up
which bound us together and Doriot shifted us to the extreme right in
no time at all to our amazement and disappointment: still so close were
the personal links which had grown up that one hated to break them.\textsuperscript{63}

Evidently, these claims are to be taken with more than just a grain of salt as far as the supposed left-wing character of the PPF is concerned, as well as Jouvenel’s falsely naïve ‘amazement’ at Doriot’s move to the extreme right and his claim that this was the reason he left the party. But the elements Jouvenel highlighted are striking: the association of intellectuals and manual workers, a ‘feeling of the team’ and a reluctance to cut ties and quit the party. Andreu and Jouvenel suggest that the PPF offered them something they had been looking for for a long time.

Fabre-Luce praised Doriot as the ideal, universally admired ‘Chef’, applauding his directness, his simplicity, his ‘eloquence that doesn’t care about eloquence’. Under PPF leadership, Saint-Denis had become a place where ‘the words national and social, so often used in vain in so many speeches, have regained a vital meaning’.\textsuperscript{64} In practice, the PPF soon had to walk a tightrope between its obligations to its financial backers in big business and its alleged social agenda. Doriot’s electoral victory in Saint Denis in

\textsuperscript{61} Soucy, The Second Wave, 217, 256.
\textsuperscript{62} Jacques Doriot to Jouvenel (27 November 1935), Fonds BdJ, Don 96 01 (298).
\textsuperscript{63} Jouvenel to Rudolph Binion (August/September 1954), Fonds BdJ, Don 96 01 (294).
\textsuperscript{64} Alfred Fabre-Luce, ‘Interview de Jacques Doriot’, L’Assaut (16 March 1937).
the second round of the May 1936 elections had been by a narrow margin and had been mainly thanks to the right that had called upon its followers to vote for him against his communist opponent. Thus, Doriot was forced to attack the Popular Front even as it was busy realising large parts of his own traditional agenda. This impossible situation may have contributed to Doriot quickly severing his left-wing affiliation.65

Nevertheless, the PPF was, at least during its early days, a party that indeed seemed to cross the class divide, uniting workers, the middle classes and non-conformist intellectuals all in the service of the uncontested ‘chef’ Doriot. Both Jouvenel and Andreu stressed the importance of their new experience of being in touch with completely different social environments in their enthusiasm for the new party.66 Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce but also Drieu, Andreu, Pierre Dominique, Paul Marion, Jean de Fabrègues, Robert Brasillach and Ramon Fernandez became party intellectuals and joined the PPF press, which permitted their ideas to reach a much larger and more diverse audience than ever before. As prominent intellectuals in a party that took both its nemesis and its inspirational model from the French Communist Party, Jouvenel and Fabre-Luce were supposed to serve the PPF in every possible way. Apart from writing for the PPF press and sitting on its central bureau, they were also expected to tour the country and speak at party rallies in every corner of France. Convinced that his party would create a new elite for the French nation, Doriot set up student sections in Paris and other larger cities in France and Algeria, dispatching Drieu, Fernandez and Jouvenel to hold propaganda lectures at several universities.67

When the Popular Front government banned all paramilitary ligues, Doriot hoped to fill the void left by their disappearance, especially that of La Rocque’s mass-based Croix-de-Feu. The successful rebirth of the CdF as the seemingly more moderate and parliamentary Parti Social Français marked Doriot’s failure to do so, although he did manage to attract a few disillusioned former followers of La Rocque, including Robert Loustau and Pierre Pucheu. Noticing that his movement was failing to grow any further, Doriot then tried to play a federating role. In March 1937, he proposed to unite all right-wing parties in a ‘Front de la Liberté’ that was supposed

66 Jouvenel, Un Voyageur, 294; Andreu, Le Rouge, 128.
67 Dard, Bertrand de Jouvenel, 132. Dard wrongly claims that Jouvenel only joined the PPF’s central bureau in the summer of 1938, shortly before he left the party. Jouvenel’s personal notes show that he sat on the bureau right from its creation at the first party congress in November 1936, frequently attending its meetings during the following two years. See ‘chrono-f ile’, Fonds BdJ, Don 90 39 (11).
to fight the Popular Front in an organised way, under his leadership. The initiative drew support from the Action Française, the Jeunesse Patriote and the centre-right Fédération Républicaine, but La Rocque, who was eager to preserve his full independence, rejected it. With the single largest anti-Popular Front party not participating, the Front de la Liberté did not materialise. After the government forced advanced mayoral elections in Saint-Denis in May 1937, which Doriot lost to the communist candidate, the PPF was increasingly marginalised and began losing support from its major financial backers. By late 1937, the PPF started to move increasingly to the extreme-right fringes of French politics, aligning itself with the pro-Nazi course that would continue to mark its activities during the occupation years.68

This loss of significance initially did not lead Jouvenel or Fabre-Luce to break with Doriot. On the contrary: in June 1937, Fabre-Luce announced that he would be discontinuing his weekly L’Assaut to merge it into La Liberté, a

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well-known mass daily bought by Doriot with Italian subsidies. Formerly an opinion weekly that was led by Fabre-Luce and that published contributions from Jouvenel, Drieu, Brasillach, Maurice Bardèche, Robert Poulet, André Thérive, Claude Popelin and others, L’Assaut became a weekly supplement of the PPF newspaper, and its subscribers were offered to start receiving La Liberté at a discount price. Fabre-Luce dismissed the importance of the Saint-Denis elections and identified Doriot as the incarnation of the ideals of class collaboration and national recovery that his weekly had campaigned for. Above all, he admired Doriot’s strength: ‘Doriot has built around himself a force comparable to the one he freed himself from [i.e. the Communist Party]. That’s enough to measure the value of this man.’ During the same month, Jouvenel, who frequently published in La Liberté, became editor-in-chief of the other party newspaper L’Émancipation Nationale. Jouvenel’s articles betrayed his complicated task of having to attack the Popular Front while at the same time defending a social policy very similar to the one followed by the Blum government. In a series of articles, he tried to explain that the financial chaos that the government was supposedly causing would effectively lead to the evaporation of all the benefits it had just granted to French workers, although it is likely that his complicated economic analysis was lost on many of his readers.

Jouvenel did not limit himself to dry economic analysis. Especially his attacks on socialism and communism received bodily and racial connotations that are normally associated with the fascism of authors like Drieu la Rochelle and Céline. Socialists wanted to rob France of its ‘masculinity’, of its capacities to be proud of itself. They were an ‘illness’ that France had to get rid of ‘in any possible way’. Calling communists ‘the Russian microbe’ plotting to destroy France by provoking a war with Germany, Jouvenel wondered: ‘are we wrong for wanting to throw them out of the country?’ Jouvenel was not afraid to explicitly state the superiority of racist theory over historical materialism, favourably comparing Arthur de Gobineau

69 Alfred Fabre-Luce, ‘À Nos Lecteurs’, L’Assaut (8 June 1937).
70 Bertrand de Jouvenel, ‘La Déflation, pour Stimuler l’Économie Nationale, doit être faite par un Gouvernement ayant la Confiance de Tout le Pays’, L’Émancipation Nationale (3 October 1936); idem, ‘De Combien la Vie va-t-elle Renchérir?’, L’Émancipation Nationale (10 October 1936); Alfred Fabre-Luce, ‘Le Ministère des Dupes’, L’Émancipation Nationale (11 February 1938).
71 See Kestel, ‘L’Engagement de Bertrand de Jouvenel au PPF’, 116. Kestel wrongly claims that Jouvenel reserved his attacks for Blum and socialism while leaving communism alone – he violently attacked both.
Figure 5  Bertrand de Jouvenel in 1938

Source: Roger Viollet / Hollandse Hoogte
to Karl Marx. He considered the two philosophers the most important thinkers of the twentieth century, since two of the world’s most powerful states had adopted their respective theories as their national ideologies. But Marx had been ‘completely wrapped in the mechanistic superstition of his century’, confounding ‘material progress with progress of civilisation’, while Gobineau ‘based his pessimism on the degeneration of manly virtues. One was only addressing the tool. The other addressed man.’

In Jouvenel’s mind, racial and class stereotypes were not mutually exclusive. In January 1937, he visited a large communist rally in the Paris Vélodrome d’Hiver, and he was struck by the foreignness and the ‘perfect homogeneity’ of the crowd. Instead of the usual collection of subtly disagreeing individuals, this was an anonymous, amorphous mass, pushing and pulling to get inside the already packed cycling stadium. When he took a closer look, he saw ‘a pale, dwarf-like race, with soft mouths and red eyelids’. They made him think of the living conditions in the banlieue that, ‘within two or three generations’, had produced these characteristics. Then he thought about Marx’s prediction that ‘the bourgeoisie brings forth the proletariat that will eventually kill it’. There was also something more directly foreign about the crowd. Foreign faces – Spanish, German, Russian, Jewish – did not contrast with the French ones, who seemed as foreign, under the spell of a kind of ‘national decolourisation’. This, he concluded in a striking racialisation of class elements, was the result of unchecked labour immigration promoted by irresponsible industrialists: ‘The banlieue has become a melting pot where, under the influence of blood mixing and the conditions of the environment, a particular race is constituted. This race is now invading Paris.’ Jouvenel now understood why anti-communism was so strong among French banlieue workers. For them, it was not about opinions but an attempt to fight against the ‘Lithuanisation of the Île-de-France’.

When Andreu left the party at the end of 1936, having become quickly disillusioned by Doriot’s alliance with financial backers in business and industry, Jouvenel was furious at him, accusing him of not daring to engage himself fully and preferring to watch from the sidelines with his hands in his pockets. With such an attitude, Andreu could return to writing for ‘reviews that no-one reads’ and abandon all prospects of making a political difference – a striking example of the way Jouvenel reflected on his own current and past activities. According to Andreu, Jouvenel told him: ‘Look, with my articles, I’m reaching every week hundreds of thousands of people

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73 Bertrand de Jouvenel, [untitled], *L’Émancipation Nationale* (17 July 1937).
who would never read me if I weren’t in the Party.’75 Fabre-Luce repeatedly claimed, both in his memoirs and in his statement of defence during his 1948 collaboration trial, that he was never formally a member of the PPF. This could be true. Since the PPF administration papers have been lost, there is probably no way to answer this question. It is also questionable whether it matters if Fabre-Luce held a membership card or not, given that he sat on the party’s central bureau and frequently published in its newspapers. Moreover, were it true, it would have been a weird exception for a non-member to hold such a prominent position inside the PPF.76 As we have seen, it was to take almost two more years before Jouvenel, Fabre-Luce and Drieu were willing to follow Andreu’s path – without fundamentally changing their political orientation.77

75 Andreu, Le Rouge, 131.
76 Fabre-Luce, Vingt-Cinq Années de Liberté I, 160; Fabre-Luce, J’Ai Vécu Plusieurs Siècles, 170; Fabre-Luce to the Juge d’Instruction (10 January 1948), Dossier d’Épuration FABRE-LUCE Alfred, Archives Nationales de France, Z/6/285 dossier 8648.
77 In his post-war memoirs, Fabre-Luce also claims that he had been ‘the first’ to break off all contact with Doriot and the PPF, in 1937. Despite receiving support for this claim in Jouvenel’s memoirs, this is a double lie: Andreu had already left the party in 1936 and Fabre-Luce remained strongly involved with the party until the autumn of 1938. See Fabre-Luce, J’Ai Vécu Plusieurs Siècles, 170; Jouvenel, Un Voyageur, 302. Dard mistakenly believes Fabre-Luce’s claim: Dard, Le Rendez-Vous Manqué, 243.