



***Between Justice and Politics:
The Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1898-1945***
Roundtable Review

Reviewed Works:

William D. Irvine. *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des droits de l'homme, 1898-1945.* Stanford University Press, 2007. 288 pp., bibliography and index. ISBN-13: 978-0-80475-317-3. \$60.00 (cloth).

Roundtable Editor: Joel Blatt

Reviewers: Cylvie Claveau, Bertram Gordon, Talbot Imlay, Norman Ingram, Wendy Perry, David L. Schalk

H-Diplo Roundtable Editor: Diane Labrosse

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ROUNDTABLE *Review*

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Introduction by Joel Blatt, University of Connecticut Humanities Institute

William D. Irvine's *Between Justice and Politics: the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, 1898-1945* offers a sharply revisionist, liberal critique of what is usually regarded as the foremost liberal institution of the Third French Republic, the French League of the Rights of Man. The author deepens our understanding of the functioning of The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme (LDH), tensions within the interwar French Left, and the increasingly desperate last years of Marianne (the Third French Republic). He provides insights into the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy and of foreign policy on domestic politics. In attempting to explain how this "quintessential" liberal institution spawned significant members who became anti-Semitic and collaborated during World War II, Bill Irvine has written a provocative work inviting discussion.

Irvine's exceptional breadth of knowledge of the Third Republic as well as a penchant to question accepted historical interpretations both inform *Between Justice and Politics*. His two previous books explored the conservative right and the far Right of the French political spectrum.¹ He has also questioned the widespread assertion that France generally avoided the Fascist temptation. Instead, Irvine argued that the Croix de Feu was a fascist movement; therefore, given its large membership, France experienced a significant Fascism.² Another essay vigorously maintained that France was far more united from 1938-1940 (unlike 1934-1937) than historians have previously assumed.³

In *Between Justice and Politics* Irvine challenges the widely accepted image of the League of the Rights of man in a manner that sparks discussion. The League of the Rights of Man was founded in 1898 in defense of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain on the French Army General Staff falsely accused of treason. The organization came to be regarded as the primary defender of individual liberties in Twentieth Century France, even influencing the establishment of the American Civil Liberties Union in 1920 in the United States (1). To be sure, Irvine includes Chapter 5 which focuses on the generally accepted primary function of the League. He observes, "The energy and persistence with which the League pursued these cases (of injustice) is striking" (121). He notes "...the tenacity of the League, the intellectual rigor it deployed, and the moderately satisfying outcome of its efforts" in defending cases brought against soldiers during World War I (126). He follows the role of a local member of the League, Marie-Françoise Bossier, and of League lawyers, in defending

¹ *French Conservatism in Crisis: The Republican Federation of France in the 1930s* (1979) and *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France* (1989).

² William D. Irvine, "Fascism in France: the Strange Case of the Croix de Feu," *Journal of Modern History*, 63 (1991) 271-295. Robert Soucy has made the same point about the Croix de Feu in a number of works including *French Fascism, The Second Wave* (New Haven, Yale, 1995).

³ William Irvine, "Domestic Politics and the Fall of France in 1940," In Joel Blatt, Editor, *The French Defeat of 1940: Reassessments* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn, 1998), pp. 85-99; originally published in *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 22, 1 (Winter 1996).

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Guillaume Seznec against murder charges and finds in the case “two conflicting but equally admirable sides to the League: passion for justice...and a hard-nosed mastery of the judicial system...” (130). He writes of “the one thing it incontestably did so well-the defense of victims of injustice” (216). Nevertheless, Irvine’s paramount thesis is that politics overwhelmed the LDH’s commitment to individual freedom. He rejects as “in most senses...utterly untrue” the LDH’s claim: “Ici on ne fait pas de la politique” (“Here one does not do politics”), or that the League was above politics (20). The LDH should have limited itself, he bluntly asserts, to a more focused defense of individual rights and civil liberties in accord with its inspiration: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789.

Instead, the LDH expanded its areas of concern to include the decisive political issues of its time. After tracing the emergence, functioning and social composition of the LDH, Irvine turns to a sustained discussion of the consequences of the League’s political “immersion.” It grew enormously in membership, peaking at 180,000 during the 1930s. It became a major political force on the Left, with its “center of gravity” (44) at the juncture between the Radical and Socialist Parties, and it aspired “to be a coordinating agency of the parties of the Left” (49). The numbers of political leaders of the interwar years who joined the LDH, served on its Central Committee and became cabinet ministers and even prime ministers were extraordinary; that its membership included names such as Laval, Déat, Doumergue, is startling. The majority of ministers in Léon Blum’s Popular Front Cabinet of 1936 were members of the League. As such, the League became deeply enmeshed in the practical workings, patronage, and corruption of the interwar Third Republic.

Irvine asserts that the LDH advocated “liberty with all its risks,” but balked at implementing the lofty goal in practice (96). Among examples provided by the author of serious gaps between the League’s professed values and its practice were its lip service to, but failure to support, the emancipation of women (83-91), and its hostility to “freedom of association for religious congregations.” Both practices originated in the League’s anti-Clericalism; in the case of women, the league feared emancipated women would vote conservative. The League also compromised its support for free speech and a free press when it perceived or rationalized that “the Republic was in danger” (109-110). One of Irvine’s central themes is that the LDH often resorted to the Jacobin rhetoric of 1793. Leaguers warned of the dangers of excessive liberalism. Irvine writes, “For too many...‘la république en danger’ was an intellectually lazy shortcut serving...to spare them the possibly inconvenient political consequences of living up to their professed beliefs” (110). One of the worst violations of its founding principles was the LDH’s general whitewashing of Stalin’s Moscow Trials of the mid-1930s and failure to recognize them as murders. In this instance the League majority wanted to maintain the Popular Front in France with Communist Party participation, and also hoped to include the Soviet Union in a coalition against Hitler (173-179).

Another gap between words and deeds emerged with reference to corruption, particularly the Stavisky Affair of 1934. Serge Stavisky floated large swindling schemes by purchasing political and journalistic influence. When his massive financial deceit finally collapsed, despite the LDH’s long condemnation of corruption, according to Irvine, “...Virtually all of

the deputies and ministers incriminated...were members of the League” (although Irvine adds that “all but two” were cleared eventually of criminal charges and “for the most part guilty only of injudicious conduct and an appalling lack of discrimination in the company they kept”) (63). Subsequently, after the tumultuous (mainly right wing) riot of February 6, 1934, the LDH participated in organizing resistance against the rightist surge as it had in the time of Dreyfus. Irvine comments, though, “But unlike in the days of the Dreyfus affair, this time the Right had a case: The regime *was* corrupt, and the corruption extended into the League itself” (63).

Among the most important consequences of the politicization of the LDH was the degree to which political issues divided the organization. From World War I through Vichy, a minority emerged and clashes between it and the majority escalated and weakened the LDH. World War I generated serious discord within the League. The majority supported the war and regarded Germany as generally responsible for it while the minority strongly opposed the war and rejected German war guilt. The majority regarded the Versailles Treaty as basically legitimate; therefore, Germany should pay for postwar reconstruction. The minority condemned the Versailles Treaty and postwar structure of peace as illegitimate. The League’s minority espoused two dominant themes between the wars: integral pacifism and anticapitalism. The latter led the minority to become bitter critics of corruption in the Third Republic, parliamentary practices, and the press, regarding the Republic as dominated by money. At the same time, the minority condemned French colonialism while the majority muted its responses given the League membership of a number of France’s most prominent colonial administrators. At first, the minority’s anti-capitalism even carried it towards considerable sympathy for the Soviet Union while the League majority condemned Communist abuses of individual rights, but this situation turned around during the mid-1930s. At that time Stalin shifted to his popular front policy of seeking anti-German alliances with a corollary of moderating support for social revolution. From the minority’s perspective, with the Soviet Union now favoring war and damping down revolution, the minority turned against Communism. While the majority in the League supported the Loyalist popular front government in Spain and opposed Blum’s declaration of French non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War (Irvine says Blum “really had no choice” (170) given political polarization at home, the danger of civil war in France, and British opposition), the minority opposed involvement in Spain that could escalate into a wider war. The minority condemned the Moscow trials for the travesty of justice they were (George Pioch--“...the Dreyfus Affair a hundred times over”-- 176), while the majority (at best) adopted a low profile and at worst swallowed the Soviet line. As Hitler destroyed the post-World War I balance of power and raced towards war, the League’s Central Committee condemned the Munich Treaty that handed Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland to Germany, while the minority favored it. In part because some of the most important leaders of the League’s majority were Jewish, for example Victor Basch and Emile Kahn, a number of the minority, in their increasingly isolated integral pacifism and under Hitler’s incessant drumbeat, blamed Jews for the approach of war. Their anti-Semitism escalated into a crescendo under Vichy.

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During World War II more of the LDH's leaders joined the Resistance than collaborated. Among the resisters, some died; for example, in January 1944 the Milice arrested and shot perhaps the foremost leader of the LDH, Victor Basch, and his wife, both more than eighty years of age, while Odette Renée Bloch, one of the few prominent women on the Central Committee, perished at Auschwitz. "What was surprising," Irvine writes, "was the number (albeit a rather smaller number) of former League leaders who were actively involved in the collaboration" (195). He ascribes the apparent aberration to "continuities" between the views of the minority during the 1930s and "collaborationist Leaguers" during World War II, including integral pacifism, blaming the Jews for war, and intense disenchantment with the Third Republic. The author adds, "What the Vichy experience so strikingly reveals is the degree to which people who fundamentally shared little in common could have for so long remained in the same organization by virtue of sharing the same demagogic discourse" (218).

Irvine appends an "Epilogue" comparing and contrasting the LDH and the American Civil Liberties Union, finding similarities and differences. He reiterates his preference for a smaller LDH devoted solely to the defense of individual rights, which might have fought for the vote for women, favored equal treatment for religious congregations, defended press freedom, and adopted an "honorable" rather than a "disgraceful" response to the Moscow Trials (216). Irvine states, "...Judicial murders --whether committed by Jacobins, Stalin, or Hitler--were all overt violations of the rights of man, did not justify one another, and ought to be condemned out of hand" (218). He concludes:

Both the League and its American counterpart would prove, at times, incapable of abiding by the liberal principles to which they subscribed. It is important to acknowledge, however, that those very liberal principles are notoriously demanding, precisely because there is no guarantee that they will yield a desirable (or 'progressive') outcome... 'Liberty with all its risks' is an easy slogan in the abstract, but in concrete terms the risks can at times seem overwhelming. The enduring image of the League is not, therefore, only the various ways in which it failed to live up to its mandate. Equally worth remembering is the little schoolteacher who rode a bus for 600 miles to passionately plead the cause of an innocent man (224).

First and foremost, *Between Politics and Justice* adds substantially to what we know about the League of the Right of Man. Few will have realized before reading this book the extent of the League's influence in interwar French politics. Its networks reached to the highest levels of government. Bill Irvine's knowledge of the Third Republic is so extensive that one of the rewards of the book is the range of information readers will absorb as the author establishes and frames the historical contexts for the contentious issues considered by the LDH. He writes with great verve; you can hear his voice throughout. His tone is often ironic, but usually does not fall into cynicism. The book presents sufficiently the arguments of the minority so that readers can follow their reasoning, rationales, and rationalizations, especially important given the outrageous positions many of them espoused blaming the primary victims, the Jews, for causing the Second World War, and making Vichy and Hitler over in their own self images. The book provides another illustration of the colossal impact of World War I on France's interwar history since the minority's long journey to Vichy began in revulsion against the slaughter of the Great War. Bill Irvine does not present a

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complete history of the LDH, but his book will be essential reading for historians who attempt wider histories in the future.

The book also makes a substantial contribution to the history of the Left during the Third Republic. Irvine helps explain interactions within the Left, connections between its components, how the Left and even to an extent the whole Third Republic functioned (or malfunctioned). Divisions within the League over World War I and its aftermath, which spawned strong pacifist currents within the LDH including the minority's more extreme integral pacifism, reflected similar phenomena within the wider Left and influenced French foreign policy making. At the same time, foreign policy dramatically impacted domestic politics. Discord within the League over World War I, the postwar peace, the Communist Revolution in Russia, and how best to confront Hitler's rapid ascent mirrored divisions within the wider Left. Although not the primary intention of this book, Irvine also offers additional illustrations of the degree of political polarization during Marianne's last years.

Among the highest praise for a provocative work is serious discussion, and this book invites response. There are problematical areas. Although Irvine notes the LDH's intense labors to correct violations of individual rights, does his emphasis on the League's politics lead to a completely balanced assessment of the LDH? The title of the book, *Between Justice and Politics*, is apt up to a point, but the book leans more towards the latter than the former. Ultimately, the "center of gravity" of the book falls closer to the minority than the majority, but is that fully indicative of the League? Was the LDH a beneficial institution? This book's answer sounds ambivalent.

The whole issue of the League's politics warrants additional debate. When Italian political émigrés to France during this period got into trouble with French authorities, they frequently approached the League for succor. It was precisely the League's political contacts who offered potential recourse. Irvine refers to this himself, but does not pursue it; as an aside, the book might have considered more the League's responses to immigration.

If the founding Dreyfusards and the League majority could have responded to *Between Justice and Politics*, they might have defined their primary mandate as both the preservation and construction of the Republic, the struggle against individual injustices but also to strengthen the Republic. They would almost certainly have called themselves republicans rather than liberals. They might also have noted the political dimensions even of the Dreyfus Affair and The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Although the Dreyfus Affair represented one of the purest examples in history of the defense of individual rights against power, the affair certainly became enmeshed in politics. Perhaps even more so, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789 was a political document, the product of political compromise. I regard the Declaration as one of the great landmarks in the history of liberty, but one does not have to stretch too far to see tensions in it between the individual and the community. In addition, there were momentous struggles during the Revolution concerning whether the Declaration's tenets would be applied to women, slaves in the French Empire, and others.

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This book raises issues of contemporary political relevance too. In the post-9/11 world where real threats of terrorism exist and governments assert the primacy of the executive, even placing the executive above the law, and where torture is on the table as an issue, how do politicians who believe in individual freedoms and civil liberties respond? With “the republic in danger” for a long time, if compromise is necessary, how far should compromise go?

Bill Irvine’s references to the Third Republic as corrupt also demand discussion. Granted, the Third Republic and its parliament experienced a measure of corruption. Granted, the press was venal; the wide variety of opinion in interwar French newspapers emerged from their large numbers whose survival (and profits) were aided by funds from the French and foreign governments as well as from a bevy of domestic interests. Still, the Right exaggerated the Stavisky Affair for its own political purposes. Stavisky bought the services of a small number of politicians, administrators, newspaper owners, and lawyers, but most of the prominent members of the LDH were not involved. Paul Jankowski, the author of an excellent book on the Stavisky Affair, writes that it occurred “in a Republic hardly more corrupt than previous regimes in its own country, and drastically less so than most contemporary ones elsewhere.”⁴ If the Third Republic was corrupt, one may ask compared to what: Fascist Italy? Stalin’s Soviet Union? Hitler’s Germany? Great Britain? The United States of the 1920s? Was the Third Republic corrupt?

In concluding these observations, it is important to note that Bill Irvine’s criticisms of the LDH are informed by liberal principles. He suggests that basic freedoms and civil liberties apply to one’s opponents too, and wants to apply them to everyone. Another liberal value at work in his book is the idea that means and ends should be in harmony. He advocates the practice of liberal precepts even in difficult times. At a moment when liberal principles are widely under attack, when liberalism’s survival is problematical, and when candidates for President in The United States shy away from the appellation “liberal,” if basic freedoms and civil liberties are to survive in dangerous times, it will be because individuals value liberty so much that they are willing to join in the struggle to preserve it.

Our panelists bring expertise either directly on the Ligue des Droits de l’ Homme or in related areas. I thank the panelists for their participation. I would also like to thank Diane Labrosse who originated the panel and served as the Co-Editor of it. Our panel includes the following scholars:

Cylvie Claveau, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, has written a PhD Dissertation focusing on those left aside by the Ligue des Droits de l’ Homme, *L’ Autre dans les “Cahiers des Droits de l’ Homme,” 1920-1940. Une sélection universaliste de l’ altérité à la Ligue des Droits de l’ Homme et du Citoyen*, McGill University, 2000.

⁴ Paul Jankowski, *Stavisky: A Confidence Man in the Republic of Virtue* (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 2002), p. 265; also see the book review by Joel Blatt of Jankowski, *Stavisky*, *Journal of Modern History*, 76, 2 (June 2004), pp. 457-459.

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Bertram M. Gordon, Mills College, has published important works on Vichy France. See Bertram M. Gordon, *Collaboration in France during the Second World War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 1980); Gordon, Editor, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France: The Occupation, Vichy, and the Resistance, 1938-1946* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1998).

Talbot Imlay, Université Laval, Québec, has published an insightful book comparing French and British preparation for World War II, *Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics, and Economics in Britain and France 1938-1940* (Oxford: Oxford, 2003).

Norman Ingram, Concordia University, Montreal, is the foremost historian of interwar French pacifism. See his book, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France 1919-1939* (Oxford: Oxford, 1991).

Wendy Perry, University of Virginia, has written a PhD Dissertation on the LDH, *Remembering Dreyfus: The Ligue des Droits de l' Homme and the Making of the Modern French Human Rights Movement*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998. Following over 300 pages of analysis, the Dissertation includes an extraordinary prosopographical appendix, which includes close to 600 pages of biographies of 204 Central Committee members of the LDH from 1898-1939.

David L. Schalk, Kenan Professor of History, Emeritus, Vassar College, has written on (and lived) the topic of engagement; for example, see *The Spectrum of Political Engagement: Mounier, Benda, Nizan, Brasillach, Sartre* (Princeton: Princeton, 1979) and *War and the Ivory Tower: Algeria and Vietnam* (New York and Oxford, 1991).

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Review by Cylvie Claveau, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. (translated by Pierre Henrichon)

The *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* (LDH) is one of the more admirable institutions in contemporary French politics and community life. Established in 1898 for the defense of a single man, Alfred Dreyfus, the LDH has subsequently been able to extend its assistance to everyone who is a victim of arbitrary treatment or injustice. Furthermore, from 1898 to 1945, the organization, which defends civil liberties and human rights, endeavored to embody its role even more deeply. Essentially, the LDH presented itself as the jewel of French democracy and the upholder of the republican ideal in its noblest component: the "*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*" (1789). Furthermore, the LDH has been frequently presented, both by its presidents and by many historians, as the guardian of Republican values, of a Republican moral or ethic. Posing as the conscience of French democracy, further enhanced by the prestige and the indisputable quality of the members of its *Comité Central* (the Central Committee or CC), the LDH has garnered enormous respect, both among *acteurs sociaux* (social actors) from 1898 to 1945, and among historians since that time.

Cylvie Claveau, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, has written a PhD Dissertation focusing on those left aside by the Ligue des Droits de l' Homme, L' Autre dans les "Cahiers des Droits de l' Homme," 1920-1940. Une sélection universaliste de l' altérité à la Ligue des Droits de l' Homme et du Citoyen, McGill University, 2000.

In this connection, the succession of celebrations since 1998, which was the centenary of the Dreyfus Affair¹ and, more recently, the anniversary of the definitive conclusion of the Appeal Court rehabilitating Dreyfus,² leaves absolutely no doubt with regard to the sanctified character that history and French historians have conferred on the organization. Thus, William D. Irvine is not exaggerating when he says that the LDH has been a "sacred cow" of contemporary French history. Furthermore, Irvine, an intrepid specialist of the Third Republic's political history, tackles this delicate subject with the critical detachment

¹ Bernard Deljarrie, Bernard Wallon et al. *La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. Un combat dans le siècle*, Paris, Études et Documentation Internationales, 1988, 150 pages and two special issues: nos. 97/98 of *Hommes & Libertés*, 1998, no. 403-404, *Après-demain*, April-May 1998. Madeleine Rebérioux, ed., *Le Mouvement social*, April-June 1998, no. 183.

² Colloque international de Paris, "Être dreyfusard, hier et aujourd'hui", December 8-9, 2006. Symposium organized by the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* at the *École militaire de Paris*, proceedings to appear in Albin Michel in 2008.

appropriate to the study of such an admirable organization, that is, through unexpected angles, a rigorous approach and conclusions that are, at the very least, astonishing.³

In this regard, *Between Justice and Politics* is a historiographic event for specialists in the history of the LDH. Until 2002, the LDH's archives being inaccessible, historians were unable to tackle certain questions with the assurance that the existence of verifiable primary sources provides. Irvine's work is the first published study that takes these archives into account. There exists an exhaustive study of the history of the LDH, a doctoral thesis recently submitted by Emmanuel Naquet.⁴ Its forthcoming publication will undoubtedly enable us to learn a great deal about the LDH, and will certainly enable us to measure the importance of Irvine's critical analysis. These studies, far from exhausting the subject, nevertheless enable us to confirm or invalidate the interpretations debated by historians.⁵

Furthermore, quite surprisingly, there are two things we can learn from Irvine's work. We first discover that the LDH is a "*maison de verre*" (glass house), that is, a truly democratic organization. Both through its publication *Le Bulletin Officiel de la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* (1902-1920), which subsequently became *Les Cahiers des Droits de l'Homme* (1920-1939), the Federations' *Bulletins* (newsletters), and through the *in extenso* reports of its annual conferences, the LDH provided its members with a complete portrait of the day-to-day activities and discussions of the LDH from its *Comité Central* to the humblest provincial Section (16). The LDH was thus completely transparent! There is cause for rejoicing in this reassuring fact with regard to the scientific value of those works prior to 2002, as they are strongly based on these published sources. Thus the works of William D. Irvine, dealing with questions of freedom of the press, the freedom of association of congregations, women suffrage (Chapter 4) or even of the "*Affaire des fiches*" (Chapter 2), fall smoothly within the framework of his current interpretation of the LDH, preserving all of their scientific value and their critical scope.

³ William D. Irvine, *Boulangier Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism and the Origins of the Radical Right in France*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989, 239 pages and *French Conservatism in Crisis: The Republican Federation of France in the 1930's*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1979, 256 pages.

⁴ Emmanuel Naquet, *Pour la défense de l'humanité. La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme une association entre éthique et politique, 1898-1940*, 2008, Fayard, 650 pages. coll. "Nouvelles études contemporaines". from the thesis: *La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, une association en politique, 1898-1940*, doctoral thesis under the direction of Serge Berstein, IEP de Paris (Sciences Po), 2005, 5 vol., 1349 pages.

⁵ Cylvie Claveau, "L'Autre dans les Cahiers des Droits de l'Homme, 1920-1940. Une sélection universaliste de l'altérité à la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen", PhD thesis, McGill University, 443 pages; Wendy Perry, "Remembering Dreyfus: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and the Making of Modern French Human Rights Movement", PhD. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998, 949 pages and XXXVI.; Éric Agrikoliansky, "Biographies d'institution et mise en scène de l'intellectuel. Les candidats au Comité Central de la LDH", *Politix*, no. 27, 3,1994, pp. 94-110.

But, just as surprisingly, Irvine's work leads us to discover that the archives in no way answer the questions left hanging in historiography, but that they even suggest new questions. In fact, the most troublesome questions in the history of the LDH are found at the heart of W. D. Irvine's study: What were LDH members' reasons for membership? How was the LDH able to maintain its credibility despite this evident contradiction between its mission to defend victims of injustice and arbitrary treatment and its frequenting of the corridors of power, its participation in electoral politics and in the exercise of power in the thirties? Finally, how was it possible that, within the LDH, old Dreyfusites forming the pacifist minority were able between the two wars to sustain a fascist conception of the regime, subsequently passing into collaboration under Vichy?

The answers to these questions make the work a singular contribution. Its interpretation will henceforth allow us to understand, beyond the shock of the Second World War, the causes of the decline of the most important organization defending civil liberties and human rights in the world between 1898 and 1945 (1). Irvine demonstrates to us in this tightly-knit essay of 269 pages that: the LDH is a comfortable political club, a sort of easy-to-afford collective insurance located somewhere between a social service, a bureaucrats' unionism and a legal aid service on the basis of a powerful network of patronage reaching right up to the highest levels of the State, an "intergroup" of France's parties of the left, and then finally, the architect of the Popular Front. In this, the LDH constitutes the quintessence of culture and of political sociability under the Third Republic (220). Presented in this fashion, the LDH appears in a whole other light, and the members' reason for joining, as well as the reason for leaving, become perfectly comprehensible: personal interest and politics.

Incidentally, the *tour de force* of this work is in making understandable the process by which the Dreyfusites became admirers of fascist regimes during the thirties, then, under the Vichy regime, fervent collaborators. These Dreyfusites, who had been the "*conscience de la démocratie*" (conscience of democracy) for a considerable time, had chosen to become the "*conscience de la Révolution nationale*" (conscience of the National Revolution) under the Vichy regime (202). The author explains this phenomenon, ironic in its paradoxical nature,⁶ by referring to the debates and to the divisions between minority and majority of the CC surrounding questions of war and peace (Chapter 6), of the specific relationship to politics and to the power of the LDH (Chapters 2, 3 and 7) and to the problem of Collaboration under the Vichy regime (Chapter 8). The author's analysis on these subjects is particularly dazzling and innovative in more than one respect.

[6] Irvine does not refer to these works. But it seems to us his work must be associated with this thinking surrounding the constitutive paradox at the origin of "the Rights of Man". Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Greg Grandin, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn Young, eds., *Human Rights and Revolutions*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2007, 228 pages. Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradox to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1996. 229 pages. Olwen Hufton ed., *Historical Change and Human Rights*, The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1994, New York, Basic Books, 1995, 288 pages.

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In this central part of his work, Irvine analyzes the aspects by which the LDH greatly exceeded the mandate of defending civil liberties and human rights and was thus directed toward an inevitable decline. The author shows us how, since the founding of the LDH, the so-called apolitical league members, by virtue of the LDH's statutes, were in fact leading politicians under the Third Republic. Until the Great War, their politics were Republican and, in a way, reactionary. The league members, flying constantly to the rescue of the "*République en danger*" (Republic in danger), reacted to the occult machinations of congregations that threatened secularism, or to the powers of the Army of the State with regard to surveillance and national security. This dynamic continued after the Great War. The LDH reacted to attacks brought against the Republican regime by what they called "*fascisme français*" (French Fascism), to "*fauteurs de guerre*" (warmongers) and to "*marchands de canons*" (arms merchants) in the twenties, and to the machinations of the "*ligues factieuses*" (seditious leagues) in the thirties. Busy defending the threatened Republic, league members had pushed aside, provisionally, fundamental principles like defending civil liberties and human rights. Even more decisive, in Irvine's opinion, would have been the proximity of the LDH, with the power, from the Dreyfus Affair to the Popular Front.

Essentially, somewhat in the manner of the French Colonial Party, the LDH maintained a Parliamentary Group of league members who were senators, Members of Parliament and ministers, the list of which the LDH's official newsletter published proudly at every legislative election. The majority of these Members of Parliament and ministers had been members of leftist parties from the Radical Party to the *Section Française de l'Internationale Socialiste* (SFIO). Until the *Cartel des gauches*, in 1924, radicals and socialists rubbed shoulders on the list as comfortably as the LDH members who walked the corridors of power. The Stavisky Affair, ten years later, would considerably modify this way of functioning. Several parliamentarian league members found themselves compromised in the Affair and, by ricochet, so was the LDH brand name. Also, these lists were no longer to be published.

In the interval, the socialists took the initiative in political action at the LDH. Since the days of February 1934, the LDH had become an "intergroup" of the parties of the left that would produce, in 1935, the *Rassemblement Populaire*, then the *Front Populaire*, brought to power in 1936. W. D. Irvine considers that, as an anteroom for the politics of the left in the halls of power, and as principal architect of the Popular Front in power, the LDH would have constantly had its hands tied. Its inability to properly defend what is basically a matter of civil liberties and human rights is solidly demonstrated. The author provides several proofs. In internal politics, the author analyzes the position of the LDH in cases of purges of bureaucrats, the riots in Place Clichy and the strikes and factory occupations in the summer of 1936. With regard to foreign policy, the author shows us how the LDH held to the positions of the Popular Front government at the time of the Spanish Civil War, and especially on the occasion of the Moscow Trials in 1936.

It is on this basis that the author places in perspective all of the debates that animated the life of this organization, which experienced a moral crisis in 1937 with the departure of the

minority. Historians are very interested in these debates surrounding pacifism,⁷ as well as in the evolution of the *pacifistes intégraux*, who shifted from Dreyfusism to Collaboration between 1898 and 1945.⁸ We now understand well enough the moral imperatives of the new-style French pacifism born following the Great War. We also better know those first-rank league members at the LDH who, starting in 1933, placing peace above all, descended into primary anti-Semitism from the fact that the desire for war was attributed to the Jews, “*aux puissances d’argent*” (to the power of money), to arms merchants, all responsible for the “*guerre à outrance*” (war to the end) that Western democracies would have wished to bring against Germany. We also know that, to many of them, this anti-Semitism of the pen was not at all incompatible with Dreyfusism and membership in the LDH, ever since the Dreyfus Affair. Essentially, many “philo-Semites” Dreyfusites descended cheerfully into anti-Semitism between the Dreyfus Affair and the German occupation.

Furthermore, what has been less demonstrated is that this anti-Semitism was accompanied by a virulent condemnation of the Third Republic for its political sterility, its social immobility, and its foreign policy. Similarly, everyone loathed parliamentary democracy and liberal capitalism, or Liberalism. In addition, however, they all opted for economic integration in Europe and called for the creation of an authoritative supranational European State, the only defense against war. Irvine paints a group portrait of these league-member collaborators, anti-Semites of the pen, pacifists, Members of Parliament, and ministers, the best-known of whom are: Félicien Challaye, Gaston Bergery, Maurice Thiolas, Robert Jardillier, Marcel Déat, Pierre Laval, Léon Émery, René Château, Eugène Frot, Camille Planche, René de Marmande, Francis Delaisi, and Armand Charpentier.

In our opinion, Irvine provides the proof that this group well and truly possessed a structured ideology, a world vision, of which anti-Semitism was one of the central pieces (Chapter 8). The ideology discussed at the LDH throughout the period between the wars meant that the shock of the French Occupation was not a shock to them, any more than was the establishment of the Vichy regime that they supported unanimously, including its anti-Semitic legislation. Irvine also demonstrates that these minority league members at the LDH were in other respects excellent and leading league members, frequently presidents of important Federations of the LDH, who were able to amass, conference by conference, strong percentages of support for their ideas, and who continuously benefited from editorial space and from public platform to express their point of view and distill their ideology among all of the league’s members.

[7] Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France 1919-1939*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1991, 366 pages.; “Defending the Rights of Man: The Ligue des droits de l’homme and the Problem of Peace”, Chapter 8 in Peter Brock and Thomas Paul Socknat, *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999. 474 pages.

[8] Simon Epstein, *Les Dreyfusards sous l’Occupation*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2001, 358 pages. “Bibliothèque Albin Michel Histoire”.

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However, we are compelled to recognize that the measure of this impact on the league members as a whole remains quite difficult to grasp. In this regard, there is every reason to presume that the league members are scarcely different from union militants or members of professional associations of the French *mouvement social* in the context of the community culture of the time. Historians of the French *mouvement social* have amply demonstrated this dynamic of frequent dissociation between the militants in Paris and the militants in the provinces on one hand, and on the other hand, the essential distinction between the Parisian directors, the militants and the members. Thus, we must ask ourselves what was the actual scope of these debates between Parisian militants of the minority and the majority with regard to peace, foreign policy, and anti-Semitism among members of the LDH? We don't know at the time when these debates were held at the LDH. We can only assess their historical impact *a posteriori* in light of the destinies of all these minority league members who became collaborators at the time of the Second World War under the Vichy regime. What judgment should be then made about this political route taken by the LDH since its establishment? "entirely understandable but also perfectly regrettable", the author tells us in the epilogue (p. 217).

Let us conclude with the form chosen by the author: the critical essay. It enables the author to accomplish one of the fantasies most deeply rooted in historical science: transgressing the prohibition on passing judgment. Such as a "*juge des Enfers*" (judge from Hell), in Marc Bloch's apt turn of phrase, William D. Irvine approves or disapproves the ideas of the social actors and passes judgment on the political orientation, the wanderings, and the shortcomings of the LDH, on its patronage practices and on the dilemma between justice and politics that it was unable to overcome or to resolve because it had followed the politics of the left. This is joyously invigorating throughout these very well-written chapters, right up to the epilogue, where the author demonstrates such mastery of the political history of contemporary France that the exercise of the critical essay, which is often similar to the controlled skidding of a car on ice, finds its justification even though the passengers are shaken.

Review by Bertram M. Gordon, Mills College

I wish to thank the editors of H-Diplo and the organizers of the roundtable for the invitation to comment on William D. Irvine's book, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, 1898-1945*. Because my own work concentrates on Vichy, I was asked to focus on the latter portion of *Between Justice and Politics*, where the author traces the political trajectories of a small but significant number of League leaders who ended up supporting Vichy and the pro-Axis collaboration during the 1940-1944 Occupation. Accordingly, after some general comments about the book, this review focuses on the tangled League-Vichy connections. More detailed and general comments are offered by my colleagues in this roundtable and in the very thorough review by J. P. Daughton, published by H-France in July 2007.¹

Bertram M. Gordon, Mills College, has published important works on Vichy France. See Bertram M. Gordon, *Collaboration in France during the Second World War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 1980); Gordon, Editor, *Historical Dictionary of World War II France: The Occupation, Vichy, and the Resistance, 1938-1946* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1998).

Between Justice and Politics is a first-rate book, the kind to be expected from Professor Irvine, whose prior writings on the Boulanger Affair, and the 1930s Republican Federation of France, and many additional articles and papers, extensively expanded our knowledge of the nineteenth and twentieth century French political right. Well-written and documented, *Between Justice and Politics* also contains a useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources relating to the League. The editing is marred by only a few minor lapses: a description of Ernest Lafont as a "left-wing Socialists" in the plural rather than singular (51), use of "premiere" rather than "premier" in reference to André Tardieu (103), and a gratuitous apostrophe bestowed upon 'Bastille' on page 162. Of far greater significance is that Professor Irvine, who has used the League's archives, available only since their return from Russia in 2001, tackles a topic that heretofore drew little scholarly attention. He tells his story well. *Between Justice and Politics* is likely to remain the standard on its subject in any language for some time.

Composed largely of lawyers, doctors, journalists, schoolteachers, and civil servants, mostly male (9), representing the social groups most strongly identified with the Third Republic, the League played a significant role in French political life during the first half of the twentieth century. At the peak of its influence, during the interwar years, it was considerably larger in proportion to the French population than its analogue, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in the United States (1). *Between Justice and Politics* focuses

¹ J. P. Daughton, review of William D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, 1898-1945*, H-France Review, Vol. 7 (July 2007), No. 81.

<<http://h-france.net/vol7reviews/daughton2.html>>, accessed 17 July 2007.

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on the continuing tension between the civil libertarian impulses of the League and the pull of politics, largely toward towards the French Republican left. Established to defend civil liberties in the era of the Dreyfus Affair, the League was confronted by the political consequences of clashes between civil liberties and left-wing politics. There was “something problematic,” however, Irvine indicates, about being a defender of civil liberties and a political activist for the political left. The book’s purpose, he adds, is to examine these tensions from a sympathetic point of view (4). The League, in other words, claimed to be the conscience of democracy but it became instead the conscience of the political left (52). In 1935, for example, following the Stavisky Affair, the League abandoned any non-partisan mission of protecting civil liberties to join the leftist *Rassemblement Populaire* (pages 57 and 161).

With the Communists forced to choose between their party and the League, the latter became after 1922 an association essentially of the non-Communist left (42). Irvine cites debates within the organization over women’s suffrage, freedom of association for religious congregations, and a selective view of freedom of the press (81). League discussions of women’s suffrage focused on the political consequences rather than the basic civil libertarian principle involved in granting women the vote (91). Many League members were “intellectually lazy” in failing to live up to their professed ideals regarding press freedom (page 110).

Two major failures of the Third Republic were its failure to enfranchise women and its maintenance of an undemocratically elected Senate. On both these issues, Irvine notes, the League took an essentially conservative stance, supporting the status quo (47). Women were underrepresented in the League (7), though there were a few outstanding female members, such as Marie-Françoise Bosser and Odette René Bloch, who crossed swords in the widely publicized case of Guillaume Seznec, accused of murder in the 1930s. Irvine depicts the Seznec Affair in considerable detail (27-130), performing a great service in making the stories of the two female protagonists better known.

Together with the tension ‘between justice and politics,’ reflected in the book’s title, was an ongoing conflict between the League’s idealistic civil rights mission and its growing function as a source of political patronage as the Third Republic consolidated itself, then became the “establishment during the early twentieth century and interwar years. Often, its members used the League as a vehicle for personal advancement and political favors” (117), in a mirror image of the “republic of pals” (120), the unflattering sobriquet given the late Third Republic by some of its domestic enemies. Its political career reflecting many of the strengths and weaknesses of the Third Republic as a whole, the League, as Irvine is careful to emphasize, was open and “transparently democratic” (17).

Hitler’s accession to power in 1933 and the growing threat Nazi Germany posed to France divided the League as it did the broader political class in France. Distinctions between Dreyfusard-type activism for individual justice and political action, already blurred by 1933, became even more so as some League members accused colleagues who wanted to

stand up to Hitler as in reality wishing to fight a war for the Jews. Pointing to the nearly total silence about League members who adopted anti-Semitism in the 1930s and pro-German collaboration after 1940, Irvine notes that while Vichy's Milice was assassinating former League leader Victor Basch in 1944, other pre-war League members were supporting the Pétain government (3-4).

The author expresses surprise (195) and shock (213) at even the modest number of League activists who followed Vichy into pro-Axis collaboration and anti-Semitism after 1940. As he points out elsewhere, however, these minoritarian former League members all 'had in common a set of values they had inherited from their years in the League' (208). These values included the belief that the Second World War was unnecessary and was the fault of the West, a faith in European integration to avoid future wars, and a condemnation of the Third Republic's politics, the latter two positions, as Irvine notes, common also to many in the Resistance (208).

Sorting out the evolving political beliefs of League members during rapidly changing times can be a daunting task as many examples show. The political trajectories of Maurice Weber and Georges Valois, for example, are described in *Between Justice and Politics* in some detail. Weber had been criticized in the early 1930s for calling Édouard Herriot a "fascist," the term apparently used as one of opprobrium. Valois, a Dreyfusard, had created the Faisceau in hopes becoming France's Mussolini in the mid-1920s but subsequently shifted to an anti-fascist stance. He died in Bergen-Belsen after having fought in the Resistance after 1940. Weber, for whom 'fascism' had been the equivalent of a political curse, ended up in Marcel Déat's pro-German Rassemblement National Populaire (RNP) after 1940 (77-78).

In another example cited by Irvine, Georges Michon and Francis Delaisi shared most political positions in the 1930s but did not follow a similar course after 1940 when Delaisi ended up in the collaboration, more specifically in Déat's RNP² whereas Michon did not (215). As Irvine concludes, "the subsequent political evolution of Dreyfusards defied prediction" (215). Even if prediction is impossible, the discussion of political trajectories in *Between Justice and Politics* invites a systematic synchronic and diachronic taxonomy in which the evolving political positions of an identifiable statistical sample of League Central Committee members, or section heads, or perhaps both, could be laid out over time. The political patterns of League members could be compared to those of other organizations over time in France and elsewhere.

Such a taxonomy might help situate the evolving career of Léon Emery, a prominent League member, who by the mid-1930s had adopted some of the methods of fascism. Attempting to capture Emery's evolution, Irvine calls him "a protofascist in the making" (48) but a phrase such as this calls for clarification and fails to place him into a taxonomical context.

² See Rémy Handouretzel and Cyril Buffet, *La collaboration...à gauche aussi, Vérités et Légendes*, (Paris: Perrin, 1989), p. 208.

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The case of Félicien Challaye, addressed in detail in the book, is striking. During the interwar years, Challaye argued against the common French view depicting France as a victim of German aggression in 1914 (139). Challaye took this position in the context of a League discussion of the causes of the war. Here was another case of the League involving itself in politics rather than confining its activities more narrowly to civil liberties and of League members defining civil liberties in varying degrees of breadth. Challaye, a pacifist in the parlance of the day, found some legitimacy in Hitler's demands even as early as 1931 (143). He also saw some of the contradictions between the League's defense of civil liberties and French colonial rule abroad (144).³

Challaye's discourse turned anti-Semitic in the 1930s as some both within and outside the League noted that its majority and Hitler's victims both contained prominent Jews (151). Some League members began referring to a Jewish "ethnic pride" and "a sense of superiority," in the words of Jean Florac, a contributor to the League's national student auxiliary, the League d'Action Universitaire Républicaine et Socialiste [LAURS] (152). Challaye expressed similar sentiments (152), reflecting a current in French political thought still evident in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War when General de Gaulle called the Jews, "an elite people, sure of themselves and domineering."⁴ Irvine reminds the reader that while these sentiments might seem sinister in the light of post-1940 developments, they were calculated to appeal to a sizeable proportion of League members in the mid-1930s (154). Challaye would become more anti-Semitic in his writings after 1940 (196-197).

The same Challaye, however, an "excellent Leaguer," in the author's words, took more highly principled stands on major issues of the 1930s and would be more open to Algerian independence in the 1950s and 1960s than many of his former colleagues who had not embraced Vichy (213-214). Although some of Challaye's perspectives, for instance a hardening of his anti-Semitism, changed after 1940, Irvine shows a logical development of his politics through the entire period covered by the book.

A constituency of the socio-political groups that supported the Republic and the League emerged under Vichy and many of them either found their way to the RNP or allied with it, once Déat had purged his party of Eugène Deloncle and his right-wing followers by the end of 1941.⁵ Déat himself had been a member of the League (44 and 211) and his political

³ See *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

⁴ Quoted in Serge Berstein, *The Republic of de Gaulle 1958-1969*, trans. By Peter Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1993 [original French edition 1989]), pp. 181-182.

⁵ Regarding the formation of the RNP, the purge of Deloncle, and the socio-political composition of the party thereafter, see Bertram M. Gordon, *Collaborationism in France during the Second World War* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 109-110.

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evolution resembled Challaye's, especially regarding the role of the Jews in French life.⁶ Having defended the rights of German Jews in 1935, Déat moved to a post-1940 position that became increasingly anti-Semitic as the war went on. By 1942, he considered Jews to be an alien race though he was still willing to allow exceptions to French Jewish war veterans as "honorable allies."⁷

Former League members who allied with Déat, sometimes only briefly after 1940, in addition to Challaye and Delaisi, included Emery, Eugène Frot, and, more importantly, René Château (199-200) and Gaston Bergery (201). Emery and Bergery had opposed collaborating with the Communists in the 1936 Popular Front government (162-163). Bergery drafted a manifesto in July 1940 that called for the establishment of a one-party state led by those parliamentary members who had opposed going to war in 1939. Déat did much of the lobbying for Bergery's manifesto but it ultimately failed. As Irvine notes, the July 1940 manifesto showed how far a minority of League veterans had moved in their abandonment of the League's civil liberty mission. Château became one of Déat's closest associates in the RNP but the two men later quarreled over "pacifism." Château took a less selective view of it than Déat and he was expelled from the RNP when he refused to support the latter's idea of arming the collaborationist parties in 1943. Arrested and imprisoned by the Germans, Château was subsequently arrested as well by the Provisional Government after the Liberation.⁸

As Irvine states, partisans of liberal democracy could cite the First Republic as precedent but so also could partisans of an authoritarian state (215). Émile Guerry referenced the French Revolution selectively to justify Stalin's purges (174-175 and 187) whereas Challaye used it to justify Hitler's anti-Semitic purges (187).⁹ The symbolic use of the First Republic by League veterans on various sides of the political spectrum parallels the symbolic use of Joan of Arc, who appeared in collaborationist as well as Resistance literature and who continues to be claimed by a wide variety of political spectra in France.

In short, it is probable that most of those who sided with Vichy during the war were not former League members and, as Irvine makes clear, most League members did not embrace pro-Axis collaboration, even if many, as was true of the French population at large,

⁶ For brief references to Déat's membership in the League, see his posthumously published memoirs, Marcel Déat, *Mémoires Politiques*, (Paris: Denoël, 1989), p. 136 and Jean-Paul Cointet, *Marcel Déat, Du socialisme au national-socialisme* (Paris: Perrin, 1998), p. 41.

⁷ Déat's pre- and post-1940 positions on the Jews are addressed in Gordon, *Collaborationism in France during the Second World War*, pp. 105, footnote 12 and 111, respectively.

⁸ See Château's autobiographical account published under the nom-de-plume Jean-Pierre Abel, *L'Age de Caïn* (Paris: Les Editions Nouvelles, 1947), and for his quarrel with Déat, p. 147.

⁹ A good example of the authoritarian use of the First Republic as precedent may be found in Marcel Déat, *Révolution Française et Révolution Allemande, 1789-1943* (Paris: Rassemblement National Populaire, 1944).

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welcomed the advent of Marshal Pétain after the defeat of 1940.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the reality of even an important minority of League members embracing Vichy, as Irvine suggests, indicates how far the League had evolved from its Dreyfusard origins in the 1890s (212). A vague mandate and imprecise language in the pre-World War I and interwar years allowed the League to incorporate a broad variety of people, who followed different political directions after 1940 and, to some extent, stained its reputation after the Second World War (220). Unlike the ACLU, the League evolved into a large patronage organization (221) and to some -- and arguably a significant -- extent, lost its soul.

Following the Liberation, eleven former members of the League's Central Committee, including Delaisi and Château, were purged for their activities during the Occupation (195 and 250, footnote 6). Although one of the eleven, Marc Cassati had played a "provocative" role during the League's last prewar convention, but the reasons for expelling him after 1944, according to Irvine, were anything but clear (250, footnote 7). The careers of the League members discussed in the earlier sections of *Between Justice and Politics* show how correct Irvine is to argue that the future political evolution of the 1890s Dreyfusards defied prediction. This was equally true of their successors in the 1930s and 1940s. Hopefully, future research will produce a taxonomic grid prepared by a team of historians charting the course of all the League members, or at least those for whom documentation is available over the course of their political careers, contextualizing the outlying cases of Challaye, Château, Emery, Delaisi, and the others who ended in support of Vichy. Until then, Professor Irvine's book is likely to be the gold standard in its field.

¹⁰ For the importance of Pétain in 1940, see Bertram M. Gordon, "The Morphology of the Collaborator: The French Case," *Journal of European Studies*, 23 (parts 1 and 2): 89 and 90 (March-June 1993), pp. 7-8.

William Irvine has hitherto trained his considerable skills as an historian on the Third Republic's political Right. His first book examined the policies of the *Fédération Républicaine*, a conservative group, arguing that for the *Federation* during the 1930s the defence of the existing social-economic order increasingly took precedence over other issues, notably national defence. His second book focused on the pre-war Boulanger Affair in which he maintained that the Boulangist movement was quickly co-opted by the old conservative, monarchical Right whose leaders recognized the need to transform themselves in what was becoming an age of mass politics. Shortly afterwards, in a reassessment of the Croix de Feu/Parti Social Français, Irvine suggested that this mass organization might well be viewed as fascist and that French fascism, by extension, should be seen as a far more important phenomenon than many scholars had contended.¹

Talbot Imlay, Université Laval, Québec, has published an insightful book comparing French and British preparation for World War II, Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics, and Economics in Britain and France 1938-1940 (Oxford: Oxford, 2003).

Given Irvine's obvious taste for critical argumentation, his decision to examine the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, a venerable institution of the Third Republic associated with the Left rather than the Right, is all the more welcome. And, true to form, Irvine, in this crisply-written and vigorously argued book, offers a sharp and largely unflattering portrait of the League that is likely to prove provocative. Although founded at the time of the Dreyfus Affair to defend individual rights, the League, according to Irvine, quickly became something far less inspiring: a platform for the politically ambitious, a patronage machine, a local talking shop, a forum for the airing of petty grievances. But Irvine has a more fundamental criticism of the League. In a version of Julien Benda's *Trahison des Clercs*, he accuses the League of sacrificing its principles on the altar of politics and of Centre-Left politics in particular. Despite its claim to stand above the political fray, the League threw itself into political battles on behalf of governments and issues that had little, if anything, to do with the defense of civil liberties. If increasingly bitter divisions within the League was one result of this betrayal, another was the loss of its political-moral compass, culminating during Vichy in the involvement of leading pre-war members in collaboration.

As Irvine's book is already the subject of a thorough H-France review by J.P. Daughton, I will limit myself to raising a few questions in the hope of encouraging further discussion.² Was

¹ See *French Conservatism in Crisis: The Republican Federation of France in the 1930s* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1979); *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulanger, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France* (Oxford, 1989); and "Fascism in France and the Strange Case of the Croix de Feu" in *Journal of Modern History* 63 (1991), 271-295.

² J. P. Daughton, review of William D. Irvine, *Between Justice and Politics: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, 1898-1945*, H-France Review, Vol. 7 (July 2007), No. 81.

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the League a failure? Although Irvine does not explicitly say that it was, his argument certainly points in this direction. But, if so, this begs the question of a failure for whom? Presumably not for most of the League's leaders who chose to participate in partisan politics. Even if the League's leadership could not foresee the consequences of its initial decisions, there is no evidence that it desired a League along the lines of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) – a leaner, more focused organization that remained aloof from day-to-day politics. Nor was the League necessarily a failure for its many members seeking a local *lieu de sociabilité*, support for a job application, or political contacts. Even the counterfactual argument that an ACLU-type League would have been more successful, is open to question on two counts. First, it is not obvious that such a League would have been any more united. As Irvine's brief sketch of the ACLU's history indicates, the attempt to detach principles from politics would likely have been contested by members, some of whom would have interpreted any such attempt as a political choice while others would have decried what they saw as the wrong political choice. It also worth adding that the ACLU has been and is seen by many Republicans as extremely partisan, which is to say pro-Democratic. Would not a French version of the ACLU have been similarly attacked by the Right in France? Second, it is not clear that an ACLU-type League would have succeeded in better defending civil rights or, more concretely, women's suffrage, the rights of religious congregations, and freedom of the Press. Such a League would have been much smaller and arguably unable to wield much influence on politicians in what was a parliament-centered political system. In any event, the argument rests on a counterfactual that would need to be much further developed to be convincing, although here obvious methodological problems would arise. In the absence of a more elaborate counterfactual argument, the most that one can confidently say is that an ACLU-type League would likely have been more faithful to its founding principles, but this does not get us very far.

Perhaps more important than whether the League was a failure is the question of why it developed the way it did. Irvine traces the League's history up to 1945, identifying the years 1906-11 as the critical period when the League became "more or less exclusively a formation of the Left." (40) But he has less to say about why this happened, largely, I suspect, because of the book's resolute focus on the League itself. In the conclusion Irvine remarks that the League "had been the quintessential example of the political culture of the Third Republic." (220) Unfortunately, however, little effort is made to link the two subjects, for if Irvine is right then more discussion is needed of the Third Republic's political culture (or cultures) in order to understand the League's evolution and its place in French politics. More to the point, such a discussion would help to answer the question of whether the League's politicization could reasonably have been avoided. Although there is no need to bandy about national stereotypes, the Third Republic's politics do appear to have been deeply partisan with clear divisions between political camps or traditions, even if the borders between the Right and Left were sometimes permeable. To be sure, one might claim that there was a widespread consensus in support of a "bourgeois Republic" and that political fireworks were largely rhetorical exercises, serving to disguise a common

<<http://h-france.net/vol7reviews/daughton2.html>>, accessed 3 October 2007.

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commitment to the defence of the social-economic order.³ But such functionalist arguments tend to overlook the subjective aspect of politics, the role of beliefs, prejudices, passions, and historical memory. All these elements work to create divisions, and all of them were amply in evidence during much of the Third Republic's life. In this context, it is asking a great deal of people who are politically aware to remain detached from politics.

Take the case of the League's commitment to the defence of the Republic. For Irvine this was largely an excuse for inaction. As he writes: "For far too many in the League, leaders as well as rank as file, *la république en danger* was an intellectually lazy shortcut serving no purpose but to spare them the possibly inconvenient political consequences of living up to their professed beliefs." (110) Perhaps this was the case for some, but was it for all or even most members. Odile Rudelle and Serge Berstein, among others, have argued that the Republic's early, embattled years left lasting marks on successive generations of Republican politicians which predisposed them to view the Republic as a vulnerable, frequently endangered creation. The result was the dominance of the "republican model", a rigid form of republican ideology that fostered a defensive reflex in which criticism of the regime was interpreted as anti-republican.⁴ Although Rudelle and Berstein use this "republican model" to explain the paucity of political reform during the Third Republic, the more important point for our purposes is the possibility that many Republicans and presumably League members were convinced that vigilance was called for. Irvine contends that there was no clerical peril after the 1880s and suggests that the army was largely apolitical before 1940. (109-110, 231, fn. 23) The latter claim in particular is open to doubt, but more generally one might ask if it is wise to refer to an objective political reality that is separate from the beliefs and understanding of people at the time.

Given the political context, is it all that surprising that for many members the League claim to be the "conscience of democracy" entailed defending the Republic against its real and perceived enemies, which in turn meant participating in day-to-day politics? And participation required getting one's hands dirty – making compromises, establishing priorities, and even choosing the lesser of two evils. This is not to defend all the League's choices. As Irvine intimates, it is difficult to see how the pros and cons of automobile insurance fell within the League's remit, however broadly the latter was defined. But it is to suggest that many, if not most, League members might not have perceived the contradiction, which Irvine insists existed, between "being a defender of civil liberties and a committed member of the political left." (4) Arguably for them, principles divorced from politics were as deplorable as politics divorced from principles.

³ As Sanford Elwitt argued. See his *The Making of the Third Republic: Class and Politics in France, 1868-1884* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1975); and *The Third Republic Defended: Bourgeois Reform in France, 1880-1914* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1986).

⁴ See Serge Berstein and Odile Rudelle, eds., *Le modèle républicain* (Paris, 1992), pp. 129-208, 319-35; Berstein, *Édouard Herriot ou la république en personne* (Paris, 1985); and Odile Rudelle, *La république absolue: aux origines de la l'instabilité constitutionnelle de la France républicaine, 1870-1889* (Paris, 1982).

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There are two final questions. The first one concerns the League and Vichy. Irvine describes the wartime collaboration of many pre-war members with Pétain's regime and the German occupiers as an especially black mark on the League. But did this phenomenon have much to do with the League and its pre-war activities? Did not the trauma of defeat in 1940 play a greater role, seemingly discrediting earlier beliefs and positions – for League as well as for non-League members? True, as Irvine recounts, the question of the proper response to Nazi Germany and, ultimately, of war and peace was fracturing and even poisoning the League well before the defeat. But these questions also tore apart political parties, dissolving previous divisions between the left and right and, in some cases, prefiguring the new political alignments under Vichy. The League's experience, in other words, reflected that of French politics in general, which suggests that the problem lay not so much with the League but with the intractable nature of the issues involved. Equally to the point, the extremely contentious nature of foreign policy during the 1930s indicates that the issue was too urgent to ignore, the stakes simply too great, for League members to have followed Irvine's advice and declare that "it is simply not our issue." (159)

The second question concerns the League's relationship with political parties on the Left. Irvine remarks that for much of its history one of the League's self-assigned tasks was that of "holding together the diverse fractions of the Left." (77) This raises to the question of why the League existed at all. Why were its members not content with membership in a political party such as the Socialists or the Radical-Socialists, both of which fulfilled some of the social and patronage functions of the League? Why, in short, did so many people join the League? Any answer at this point is speculative, but perhaps it had something to do with a perceived need at the local and national levels to group together in some organized form the various elements of the Left. And, if so, perhaps this testifies to a perceived need for unity against the Republic's enemies on the Right and within the Church and Army. From this perspective, the League might be seen as a type of *Rassemblement Populaire*/Front Populaire *avant la lettre*, which also might help to explain its apparent loss of steam from the mid-1930s, when the need for the League became less apparent.

All told, more on the Third Republic's political culture and politics would have been welcomed. But this is to take nothing away from an excellent study, one whose clear and provocative thesis will, one hopes, stimulate further research into the League and the larger political context surrounding its activities.

Pacifism and the Ligue des droits de l'homme

B*etween Justice and Politics* is written with verve and elegance. It is a seminal contribution to the history of the second half of the Third Republic. William Irvine is to be congratulated.

Irvine provides us with an iconoclastic corrective to a new hagiographical orthodoxy which seems set to emerge in French historical writing. Having ignored the Ligue des droits de l'homme

for decades, at least insofar as a full-length monographic study is concerned, French historians have now discovered the Ligue. Much of this is due to Emmanuel Naquet's doctoral thesis at Sciences Po, supervised by Serge Berstein and defended in 2005, which is shortly to be published in somewhat slimmed down form by Fayard. Interest in the Ligue also grew over the course of the 1990s because of the influence of the eminent historian, the late Madeleine Rebérioux, who was also the Ligue's first woman president. That said, it was North American and non-French historians who were the first authors of major monograph and university studies of the Ligue.¹

Norman Ingram, Concordia University, Montreal, is the foremost historian of interwar French pacifism. See his book, The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France 1919-1939 (Oxford: Oxford, 1991).

Irvine's main thesis is that the Ligue des droits de l'homme was destroyed by politics, that if it had limited itself purely to the many possible issues of human rights in Third Republic France, it would have been a smaller entity, but also ultimately a more successful one. Moreover, at the local level especially, it was weakened by venal politics. He gives many examples of the banal, indeed sometimes bizarre, cases that made their way to headquarters in Paris, ostensibly because they involved some question of human rights. He is quite right to see this sort of political patronage as one of the weaknesses of the Ligue by the time of the Great War. One of the best examples that I have found of this less than high-minded view of the Ligue's mission, is the request by the Romorantin section in the Loir-et-Cher for help in defending two members accused of *outrage à la pudeur*. Essentially, the Ligue's legal advisors suggested that the two men in question might consider hiring their own lawyers.²

¹ Most notably Wendy Perry, "Remembering Dreyfus: The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and the Making of the Modern French Human Rights Movement" (Ph.D. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1998); Cylvie Claveau, "L'Autre dans les *Cahiers des droits de l'homme*, 1920-1940: Une sélection universaliste de l'altérité à la Ligue des droits de l'homme et du citoyen en France" (Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 2000); and Simon Epstein, *Les Dreyfusards sous l'Occupation* (Paris, Albin Michel, 2001).

² See Ligue headquarters to the Section de Romorantin, 7 May 1937, in Archives de la Ligue des droits de l'homme [ALDH], Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine [BDIC], FARés 798/147.

Thus, according to Irvine, if the Ligue had genuinely championed the cause of women's suffrage or taken a more forthright position on the Moscow trials, to name but two bona fide human rights issues, one domestic and the other foreign, then it might have had less direct influence on French politics, but would have benefited from an immeasurably stronger moral position. In this he is undoubtedly correct. Third Republic France was far from lacking cases of human rights abuses which needed to be addressed.

Instead, the Ligue, almost from its inception, crossed the line into a defence of a certain type of left-wing politics. In its early years, this was often elided with the notion of the defence of the Republic against the clerical-military threat posed by the right wing. With the passage of time, the politics of the Ligue gradually came to centre more on foreign policy questions than perhaps on anything else. Of central importance was the question of peace and of pacifism.

How did this come about? From virtually the beginning of the First World War, a vocal, but important minority of ligueurs contested the moral validity of the Union sacrée, refusing to see in France's war effort anything more than the lamentable result of the Franco-Russian Alliance which they detested. From 1915 onwards, the LDH was thus divided between those, like Victor Basch, who believed that France was fighting a just war, and those opposing him who believed that the Great War was being fought under false pretences. At the outset, these members of the nascent minority can hardly have been called "pacifists", at least not in any meaningful sense of the word. What they claimed to be looking for was the truth – namely, the truth about the origins of the War. The group they formed to search for this truth, the Société d'études documentaires et critiques sur la guerre, quickly came to the conclusion that there was nothing "sacred" about the War and that France was being bled white for nothing. By 1917 at the very latest the battle-lines had been drawn for the entire interwar period.

The Ligue's President, Ferdinand Buisson, attempted to anthropomorphise the French nation during the Great War. With a rhetorical flourish, he re-integrated the Ligue's ideals into those of the nation, those of the collectivity, and made of the Ligue an integral part of the pre-war nationalist revival. According to Buisson, the cataclysm convulsing Europe was in no way a "sinister denial of the doctrines of liberty, of the hopes in progress and of the desire for peace that had always inspired the Ligue". Far from it! Buisson was convinced that the Ligue had actually contributed to this "magnificent élan affirming the national community". After all, was it not the Ligue which for the past fifteen years had familiarised people with the notion that "an injustice done to the most humble amongst us cannot leave the Nation indifferent, and that no injustice done to the Nation can leave a single Frenchman unmoved"?³ Clearly, this was something different in Ligue discourse. The first part of Buisson's phrase defined the very essence of the Ligue. The great struggle of the Dreyfus Affair had been to defend the rights of the individual over those of the State,

³ Ferdinand Buisson, 'La Ligue des droits de l'homme et la guerre', *Bulletin officiel de la Ligue des droits de l'homme* 15, 1 (1 January- 1 April 1915), p. 8.

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and yet in the first year of the Great War, the Ligue's president was arguing the case, in time of war, for the rights of the State. In many ways, this was a logical extension of the Ligue's not-so-latent Jacobin Republicanism, but on another level it was a new departure – in tone, if not in substance.

Irvine spends a good part of his book (Chapters 6-8) dealing with the failings, moral and political, of the pacifist minority. It is perhaps too easy to castigate the minority as a whole for the clear and obvious failings of some of its more visible members. There is no excuse for the tawdry anti-Semitism of Challaye or of Emery, for example. Irvine does an excellent job of highlighting the ways in which, by the collapse of France, both had slid over the line from a principled pacifism to outright collaboration. In the case of the agrégé de philosophie, Challaye, one might usefully meditate on the words of Jean-Paul Sartre regarding Martin Heidegger: "C'est un homme qui n'était pas à la hauteur de sa philosophie".

While it is clear that many members of the minority, by the time of the Second World War at least, were anti-Semitic and collaborationist, it is less clear why this evolution should have occurred. What was it that allowed a Challaye to become an anti-Semitic collaborator, but did not permit his erstwhile colleague in the minority, the architect of the historical dissent which underlay the new pacifism of the 1930s,⁴ Georges Michon, to abandon the side of right? It seems at times as if Irvine is content to let the political and moral position of a Challaye or an Emery speak for the entire minority, suggesting, perhaps unconsciously, that pacifism leads ineluctably to defeatism, anti-Semitism, Vichy, and collaboration. If one were to take this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, then one would argue that it was pacifism which killed the Ligue des droits de l'homme – in other words, a very specific sort of politics that ultimately stifled the Ligue's original purpose of defending human rights.

Such a view fails to take into account, however, the enormous impact of the Great War on the men and women who eventually became the pacifist minority. If Ferdinand Buisson could anthropomorphise the French nation in terms which glorified the Union sacrée, so, equally, could the nascent minority in terms which vilified the slaughter of 1.35 million Frenchmen and untold millions of other Europeans in the "war to end all wars". If the Ligue (quite appropriately) interested itself in the campaign to rehabilitate the "fusillés pour l'exemple", surely there was nothing wrong with the minority's search for the "truth" about the origins of a conflict which cost so much French blood. Irvine rather unfortunately seems to take this aspect of the minority's worldview far less seriously than its execrable positions during the Second World War. What seems clear is that until perhaps the mid-thirties, the minority was right on a whole range of issues, including its critique of the Union sacrée, women's suffrage, and the Moscow Purge Trials.

⁴ On historical dissent and the origins of the new pacifism, see Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 122-125.

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The Ligue des droits de l'homme was dead or dying long before the Second World War broke out. Irvine situates the beginning of the end in the mid-thirties, shortly after the effects of the Stavisky scandal and the Herriot affair wrought their nefarious influence on the Ligue. Certainly, by the time of the 1937 Tours Congress, the Ligue was already on the ropes. When the Nazis arrived in the spring of 1940, they expected to find a dynamic LDH which they would have to extirpate; instead they found a Ligue which in the case of many sections had already expired.⁵ One could plausibly infer, therefore, that it was not the war experience that killed the Ligue, nor the collaborationist activities at Vichy or in Paris of some of its high-profile members, but rather that the Ligue's demise antedates by several years the coming of the Second World War.

How to explain this? Once again, a facile view might be that the Ligue was destroyed by pacifism.

This simplistic analysis holds, in the words of Jean Defrasne, that pacifism is simply a political "perversion": "it is easily assimilated to defeatism, to cowardice, to treason".⁶ Another explanation could be the Sudhir Hazareesingh thesis that the war/peace debate in France has been completely deformed by the presence of the Communist party.⁷ This would explain, although certainly not excuse, some of the more aberrant political choices made by Ligue pacifists during the late 1930s who were increasingly anti-Communist in their outlook. Perhaps more helpful is Martin Ceadel's thesis, based on Weber and the sociology of religion, that pacifism represents an "ethic of ultimate ends", that it becomes, in essence, a faith rather than a political doctrine as such. There is much to commend this thesis, but it seems largely inapplicable to the French case in which the religious "inspiration" (to use a Ceadelian idea again) for pacifism was largely absent.

I would argue that the LDH was not destroyed by pacifism, but rather by its inability to deal with the Great War and its legacy. The historical debates within the Ligue on the Union sacrée, war origins and war guilt all coalesced to provide the intellectual bases for the historical dissent upon which the emergent new-style pacifism of the late 1920s and early 1930s was formed. The increasingly strong conviction that the Great War had been fought under false pretences fuelled the minority attacks on the Ligue's leadership which they accused of having blindly colluded in the slaughter of millions of Frenchmen and Europeans. What the minority seemed unable to recognise was that 1933 had changed everything. Hitler was not, *pace* A.J.P. Taylor, just another German statesman. But it was possible to believe in all good faith that he was until the invasion of the rump Czechoslovakia in March 1939. By then it was too late.

⁵ See the reports of the Gestapo interrogations of 171 sections in occupied France in the autumn of 1940 in BDIC/FΔRés 834.

⁶ Jean Defrasne, *Le Pacifisme en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), p. 8.

⁷ See Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France*, Chapter 7 ("Why no Peace Movement in France"), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

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What is interesting in Irvine's analysis of the pacifists within the Ligue des droits de l'homme is how the political choices of the Second World War years seem to have cut across the old-style/new-style pacifist divide. Théodore Ruysen, the president of the Association de la Paix par le droit, a quintessential old-style pacifist and a long-time ligueur, succumbed to the same temptations to publish in the collaborationist press as did Gerin, Emery, and Challaye, all of them new-style, integral pacifists. Even in the case of the latter three, however, distinctions have to be made. In a small book written in 1937, Gerin declared that if he were Spanish, he would be fighting in the civil war alongside the Republicans.⁸ Right up until his untimely death in 1957, he proclaimed his innocence against the conviction for collaboration by the courts of the épuration.⁹ Challaye, for all his anti-Semitism and collaborationism, was defended (as Irvine points out) by Michel Alexandre, a Jew who had been interned by the Vichy authorities, but whose pacifism stretched all the way back to the Great War and the Société d'études documentaires et critiques sur la guerre.¹⁰

How to explain these apparently bizarre *chassés-croisés politiques*? Did "la paix prime le droit", as Henri Jeanson had already suggested in 1936?¹¹ The only plausible explanation must be the heritage of the Great War. Sandi Cooper sees the pre-World War One French peace movement as imbued with the notion that international peace was, or ought to be, a human right.¹² For the pacifist minority in the Ligue, the bloodletting of the 1914-18 war defined their entire approach to politics right on down to the next war. Their politics was in turn based on an historical understanding of war origins and war responsibilities which completely rejected the "official" Pierre Renouvin/Camille Bloch thesis of unilateral German responsibility shared by so much of the Ligue's leadership. This had profound implications for the internal life of the Ligue. As Mathias Morhardt, the pre-1914 Secretary-General of the Ligue, wrote in a 1936 letter to his friend and fellow *minoritaire*, Georges Demartial, "We are those, in effect, who suffer more from an injustice committed by France than from an injustice committed against her."¹³

⁸ Rene Gerin, *Pacifisme "intégral" et guerre civile* (Paris: Ligue internationale des combattants de la paix, 1937).

⁹ Rene Gerin, *Un Procès de la Libération... La "Justice" enferrée* (Paris: Editions de Contre-courant, 1954).

¹⁰ See Norman Ingram, "'Nous allons vers les monastères': French Pacifism and the Crisis of the Second World War", in Kenneth Mouré and Martin S. Alexander, eds., *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918-1962* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 145-146.

¹¹ Henri Jeanson, "La Paix prime le droit", in *La Flèche* (21 March 1936).

¹² Sandi Cooper, "Pacifism in France, 1889-1914: International Peace as a Human Right." in *French Historical Studies* 17, 2 (Fall 1991), pp. 359-386.

¹³ Mathias Morhardt to Georges Demartial, Capbreton (Landes), 19 March 1936 in BDIC/ALDH/FARés 798/7.

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Review by Wendy Perry, University of Virginia

At last the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme—the first sustained human rights organization in the world, the largest and most influential group of its kind in the first half of the twentieth century, and a central player on the stage of French left-wing politics—has received due attention in a scholarly book. William D. Irvine deserves much credit for taking on a subject that is undisputedly worthy and elusive at the same time. Founded in 1898 at the height of the Dreyfus Affair and still in existence today, the League has worked to defend civil liberties and uphold the “spirit” of the French Revolution’s Declaration of the Rights of Man almost continuously for more than a century. Although significantly weaker since World War II, in its heyday in the Third Republic the League boasted as many as 180,000 members in over 2,500 local sections, ranking it likely larger than all French left-wing political parties combined (6). Not only strong in numbers but also in status, the League counted most major left-wing politicians, at least in the interwar years, as members or former members.

Wendy Perry, University of Virginia, has written a PhD Dissertation on the LDH, Remembering Dreyfus: The Ligue des Droits de l' Homme and the Making of the Modern French Human Rights Movement, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998. Following over 300 pages of analysis, the Dissertation includes an extraordinary prosopographical appendix, which includes close to 600 pages of biographies of 204 Central Committee members of the LDH from 1898-1939.

Irvine’s purpose is not to write a comprehensive history of the League, but rather to reveal the problematic contradiction inherent in the League’s mission of defending both human rights and French republican ideals. He examines an important facet of the League at its acme while depreciating elements that gave the group its identity and cachet. As Irvine explains, the majority of League members agreed that the group’s self-defined mandate as the “conscience of democracy” necessitated broadening the definition of human rights in an ongoing fashion as society evolved. In so doing, however, the League involved itself in nearly all of the political issues of the day, including foreign policy, adopting positions that reflected the left-wing political orientations of its leaders, thus undermining its self-proclaimed political detachment. Although League militants repeatedly, ardently, and obstinately insisted that the organization remained “above politics,” the group just as often found itself embroiled in electoral and parliamentary politics that risked compromising its charter principles and, hence, disillusioned some of its members. The tension between defending human rights and championing republican principles culminated in the 1935 Rassemblement Populaire. The League played the leading role in the movement as unifier of the French Left, paving the way for the Popular Front Government the following year, the closest the League ever came to political power.

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With his characteristic sarcasm and flair for irony, Irvine masterfully argues his case. His work is elegantly written and thoroughly researched, especially with respect to the interwar period, which appears to interest Irvine more than the League's early years. Irvine was among the first scholars to comb through the recently discovered archives of the League, repatriated from Moscow in 2001 and deposited at the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine in Nanterre. He also digested the League's voluminous serial publications, the *Bulletin officiel de la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* and the *Cahiers des Droits de l'Homme*, the published minutes of the group's national congresses, countless contemporary newspapers, and hosts of other primary and secondary literature.

Irvine examines principal cases and crises throughout the League's history prior to World War II to expose what he sees as the organization's fatal flaws: the looseness of its basic principles, its "shop-worn" motto of republican defense, and its politicization of human rights issues. He does so with force. He analyzes the League's treatment of several specific issues, such as women's rights, freedom of association, and freedom of the press, to accentuate the League's Jacobin double standard in favor of left-wing republican political interests at the expense of pure civil liberties. (Interestingly, Irvine is somewhat forgiving of the League's position on the press in the 1930s). From the *affaire des fiches* at the turn of the twentieth century to the Spanish Civil War and the Moscow trials in the late 1930s, the League selectively applied its founding principles, choosing its moments and allies carefully, always with the added goal of protecting the republic as the form of government it believed necessary to a flourishing, just society.

The newly found League archives allow Irvine to make one of the freshest and enlightening contributions of his work: an analysis of the relations between the League at the local level and its headquarters in Paris in handling individual civil liberties cases. Here also is where Irvine sees the League's greatest value. He begins by introducing a sampling of cases presented by local sections to show that many rank and file members misperceived the League as a sort of patronage society, submitting petty, self-interested cases (e.g. regarding pensions and fines), wasting staff time, and trivializing the League's essential function. He faults League leaders in Paris for devoting considerable time to responding tactfully to this correspondence—as he understands it—to keep membership totals high. Irvine then reveals that most of the cases originating at the local level, as many as 20,000 in 1930, indeed had real merit as matters of injustice. Addressing them required tremendous resources. The League's leaders and its nearly 50 employees painstakingly worked to seek due process. Communicating with impatient local militants unversed in the intricacies of the French legal code sometimes proved challenging and thankless for the inured legal experts in Paris. Irvine provides a balanced assessment of the indefatigable energy the League devoted at both the local and national levels to this end.

Irvine is adept at situating the League's impassioned rhetoric in its broad political context. He argues that the group's revolutionary discourse attracted buy-in from a wide array of political persuasions of the Left but was ultimately a hindrance to cohesion and

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effectiveness. For some members, primarily the moderate socialist majority in the interwar years, this rhetoric veiled a conventional political platform, whereas others took it literally, namely the growing dissident minority that expected the League to adopt a more radical stand on issues. Not only did this rhetoric fuel tensions and misunderstandings within the group, it invited strained exchanges among people who shared very little fundamentally in common—hence the coexistence in the League of those who would go on to collaborate with the Vichy Regime, some body and soul, and others who would resist it.

Compelling is Irvine's concluding assertion that liberal principles themselves are inherently vulnerable—"notoriously demanding, precisely because there is no guarantee that they will yield a desirable (or 'progressive') outcome" (224). Liberty at all its costs is often too costly in practice, and examples abound among liberal governments and organizations that have cut such costs to champion what they interpret as policies for the greater good. The League was far from unique in this way, but what disturbs Irvine about this group is its false claim of political detachment.

Would the League have done better to stick exclusively to defending civil liberties as defined by law? In Irvine's opinion, yes. But even he questions how this narrower purpose would have impacted the group's popularity and membership. It is highly unlikely that the League would have attracted large numbers with such a purely legalistic function, particularly in early twentieth-century France. Moreover, one can imagine League militants past and present taking exception to the rather circumscribed label "civil liberties organization," which fails to translate fully the broad symbolic power of "les droits de l'homme" in French society.

What drew people to the League? Readers, especially those unfamiliar with French history, may come away from Irvine's book scratching their heads on that question. Irvine himself is admittedly "less clear" on it. The reasons he cites most frequently reveal his cynicism about the group. He maintains that for most members the League functioned as "an inexpensive political club, the French equivalent of a Rotary club or civic improvement society, and inexpensive form of insurance, or a well-connected patronage network" (4). Could it not be that League members actually believed that they were taking part in a movement that could make a difference for the common good? Even if one acknowledges that self-serving motives came into play at times, could not multiple interests motivate a single individual to participate in the League's efforts? It is difficult to accept the League as a sham of its mission after learning the individual histories of some of its leaders and most prominent members—Presidents Ludovic Trarieux, Francis de Pressensé, Ferdinand Buisson, and Victor Basch, prominent members Séverine, Jacques Hadamard, Léon Blum, Marius Moutet, to name only a few at the national level alone. In reading their testimonies and the details of their lives, one gains a rich (though not uncritical) appreciation for people who exhausted their personal time and fortunes riding trains to speak in big cities and in small towns, defending the wrongly accused, serving the public and supporting causes they deemed worthy, all without the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, which Irvine admits comes in awfully handy. For them, the League was hardly inexpensive.

Irvine's expectations of the League are not unrealistic in theory, but it is hard to imagine a critical mass of contemporary French men and women who would have met them, let alone sustained such an initiative over the long term. Irvine seems to want consistency and narrow focus at a time when the events of the day made both very difficult. Although Irvine sets out to balance his criticism with recognition of the League's "real strengths," his pervasive acerbic tone overrides that effort. He minces no words in repeatedly depicting League leaders as pompous windbags who paid lip service to liberal ideals for personal gain, an image he chooses not to humanize. The chapter devoted to Vichy exposes the dark histories of the League's collaborationists, whereas those who engaged in Resistance activities receive little more than a footnote. Irvine's treatment is askew. The Dreyfus Affair, the League's defining moment, receives cursory attention. The lack of institutional archives for this period in the League's history perhaps only partly explains why Irvine passes over it so quickly. In shining a bright spotlight on the League's flawed defense of civil liberties, Irvine leaves a very real and human aspect of the group in shadows. Dreyfusards led the League for 60 years. The group functioned within the French Left as the "site of remembrance" of the Affair and sought to perpetuate its practical role as a unifying force of the republican Left. The League owed its moral authority not only to its claim of political detachment but also to its birth amidst the upheaval over Dreyfus, an event that marked many for life.

Although not within Irvine's purview per se, the Dreyfus Affair is a missing piece of this puzzle. It shaped the League's tradition of militancy, created strong bonds that were painful to sever, and conditioned many Dreyfusard League members (though not all) and their allies to see issues in a certain light. Irvine argues that for the majority of League leaders republican defense was an "intellectually lazy shortcut serving no purpose but to spare them the possibly inconvenient political consequences of living up to their professed beliefs" (110). Surely such an assessment ignores the full context of the League's experience. No doubt, by the interwar years the League's rhetoric came across as outdated to some younger elements. Generational conflicts were endemic to the ageing League, and they warrant more than the occasional mention Irvine gives them.

For the League's Dreyfusard old guard, justice was political. From time to time, they would acknowledge the inherent contradiction in their founding claims, but always with the disclaimer that the League engaged in "pure politics," "public policy," or some other version thereof, all of which were equally stretching the truth. In moments of lucid reflection, the League was self-aware, but it did not disengage from the political arena because few members really complained, as Irvine points out. Fewer still cared that joining the 1935 *Rassemblement Populaire* violated the spirit of the League's statutes. Members were bothered by the League's political involvement not so much in principle but rather when they disagreed with a given stand. As Irvine argues, "when members of the League decried the nefarious effects of creeping politics, what many of them really deplored was the wrong kind of politics" (39), in other words, not theirs.

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Are we to consider the contradiction a weakness then? What were the League's strengths? According to Irvine, at the local and national levels the group excelled at its impressive energy in taking on civil liberties cases. He would prefer the League to have confined itself to this business. He also admires the League's unparalleled transparency in making public stenographic records of its national congresses, complete with personal attacks and squabbles, at least until the late 1930s. On the other hand, Irvine does not appreciate the League's lofty rhetoric and fetish for the French Revolution, its ritualized memorialization of the Dreyfus Affair and the Dreyfusards, its tendency to overplay the republican defense card, and its conflation of civil liberties with left-wing republican political interests. While problematic, these practices also gave the League strength. It is amazing that the organization could hold together such disparate elements for any length of time, to say nothing of its longevity in such turbulent times. A large number of left-wing activists were attracted to the looseness of the League's rhetoric. Its artful appropriation of the French Revolutionary and Dreyfusard pasts, the twists of its selective memory and logic, these characteristics may have frustrated the League's doctrinaire elements (and Irvine), but the majority of the group's members consistently approved. The League created a rare forum for open discussion among often widely divergent perspectives. It welcomed the act of questioning and challenging on paper; in practice it valued progressive reform, republican institutions, and uniting the Left to keep that open exchange going.

The League deserves credit for blazing a trail for other human rights organizations. League leaders had no effective models to follow. They made the first mistakes and learned the first lessons. From tolerating the absurd petitions presented to headquarters by local sections, to suspending activities at the local level during legislative elections, to instituting ministerial incompatibility with Central Committee membership, and so on, the League proved capable of adapting to its growth and experiences, even if that adaptation had its limits.

Irvine gives his readers a surprise ending with the sentimental image of a "little" female provincial League member taking a long bus trip to save an innocent man from the death penalty. This glimpse at the human side of the League is refreshingly redemptive but eclipsed by the overarching unfavorable image presented. Irvine adroitly tackles one aspect of a big topic in this excellent work well-suited for graduate courses on the political divisions in French left-wing politics or the general history of human rights worldwide. To be sure, his provocative assessment will spur debate.

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Review by David L. Schalk, Kenan Professor of History, Emeritus, Vassar College

William Irvine is a master historian; any subject he chooses to address will be examined with brio, elegance, clarity and wit, and any assertions he makes will be grounded on intensive and careful research.

His new book, so forcefully and accurately titled, offers us a fascinating portrait, judicious and balanced, of a uniquely French institution, both profoundly admirable and profoundly flawed. The closest American parallel, which he discusses carefully, pinpointing a few similarities and significant differences, is the American Civil Liberties Union.

David L. Schalk, Kenan Professor of History, Emeritus, Vassar College, has written on (and lived) the topic of engagement; for example, see The Spectrum of Political Engagement: Mounier, Benda, Nizan, Brasillach, Sartre (Princeton: Princeton, 1979) and War and the Ivory Tower: Algeria and Vietnam (New York and Oxford, 1991).

Irvine was able to research this book, the first full-length study of the *Ligue des droits de l'homme* (henceforth LDH) since 1927, because the archives of the LDH, after dramatic peregrinations, found their way back to France from Moscow, and finally became available to scholars in 2002.

The LDH, founded at the peak of the Dreyfus Affair in 1898, and initially focused on the defense of Captain Dreyfus, became the largest and most influential civil rights organization in the world. The first 42 years of the LDH's history were played out against the background of the French Third Republic, and Irvine has a remarkable ability to render that regime's immensely complicated history clear to a 21st century Anglophone readership. Without this background the reader might be lost, finding the LDH incomprehensibly strange, almost extraterrestrial.

The LDH's energy was undeniable, the range of its concerns and the number of cases its local sections addressed extraordinary (as many as 20,000 cases annually, with roughly one in twenty deemed to have enough merit to be sent up to Paris¹). Irvine has a wonderful gift for choosing the apt illustrative detail, for example, the section in Maçon once weighted equally two resolutions, one dealing with the separation of church and state, the other with postage rates for local newspapers.

Irvine remarks convincingly, "It is hard to imagine that any organization as large as the League was ever as openly and as transparently democratic."² He documents carefully its origins, growth, and structure, the basic unit being the local section, with a Central

¹ That is still a significant number, and each was examined with great care and patience. "There can be no doubt about the merits of many of the cases the League chose to pursue." (p. 123.)

² Irvine, p. 17.

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Committee, mostly composed of Parisians, as the governing body. He examines the social and religious background of its membership³, and its gender ratio (a low percentage of women members)⁴.

A constant theme of League discourse was that its ideal of justice would be tarnished if it involved itself in “partisan issues.” Irvine demonstrates beyond the shadow of a doubt that this so frequently articulated assertion was for the most part “patently untrue.”⁵ All throughout its history, politics simply could not be excised from the League’s concerns and debates. Over the years there were periodic pleas from individual members to concentrate on the League’s original mandate – defending the rights of man and the citizen - and not get involved in politics. Those pleas were almost totally ignored.

Beginning in the 1920s, the general political position of the LDF moved leftward, but even after 1935, when the 3rd International lifted the ban on *Parti communiste français* members from joining, there is little evidence, despite conservative accusations, that Communists ever infiltrated the LDH. Indeed, the (misnamed) Radical Party, which traditionally was the dominant political grouping in the LDH, at least until the 1930s, when the socialist party (SFIO) gained influence, was “at ease with a rhetoric that went far beyond anything [its leadership] ever intended to do.”⁶ The revolutionary rhetoric, the attack on the “*puissances d’argent*,” for example, of the LDH was always a sort of mask, though some of its membership appeared to have taken it seriously.

There is a tragic and painful paradox within the interwar history of the LDH, which Irvine addresses with tact and skill, namely that a significant minority of its membership, including some of its ablest and most articulate leaders, began in the 1920s to inject a hint of anti-Semitism into their rhetoric. In the 1930s they began to advocate fascist methods and developed an admiration, if reluctant, for the fascist states surround an increasingly embattled Third Republic. After the Fall of France in May-June 1940, a number of them collaborated with the Vichy Regime.⁷ Irvine documents this mysterious and painful

³ Largely middle class and professional, with a significantly higher percentage of Protestants, Jews, and Freemasons than in the French population at large.

⁴ As is well known, women did not get the vote in France until 1944. Irvine is brilliant on the LDH’s ambivalence regarding women’s suffrage, which technically they supported. Regarding how to implement it, by 1925 they actually retreated from positions they had taken in 1909! (p. 84.) The extraordinary hesitation to advocate such an obviously just reform was largely due to the perceived “clerical peril.” (p 89). If women got the vote, they would cast their ballots following the instructions of their priests.

⁵ Irvine, p. 20. Almost from its inception, the League was “deeply enmeshed in the day-to-day politics of France.” (p. 52.)

⁶ Irvine, p. 43.

⁷ To be sure a number of former members of the LDH, banned by the occupation authorities after the fall of France in 1940, joined the resistance. That is not the slightest bit surprising, nor is the courage and dignity manifested by the league President, Victor Basch, who was murdered by the Vichy *milice* in 1944.

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“deviation” superbly, but it is very difficult to explain.

The paradox of an important minority within an organization dedicated to human rights able, for example, to offer a “startlingly benign assessment of Nazi Germany,”⁸ leads me to my first question for Professor Irvine. Can he examine the roots of this paradox more thoroughly, whether in a second edition or a separate article? One clue could be to look at the intellectuals, and here I refer readers of H-Diplo to a brilliant work of intellectual history by Denis Hollier, *Absent Without Leave*, sub-titled “French Literature under the Threat of War.”⁹

All of Hollier’s principal characters, the intellectuals from the generation of the 1930s, were reacting, in complex and convoluted ways, to the rise of fascism and more generally totalitarianism in that decade. Hollier documents a “totalitarian desire” among the intellectuals. I wonder if that desire spread to the LDH, part of a sinister, defeatist climate of opinion.

The other panelists, will, of course, examine different aspects of Irvine’s remarkable book. (For example, I hope that the complex and difficult issue of press freedom, and the LDH’s deliberate and rather distasteful ignoring of that liberty in the 1930s, which I do not have space to discuss here, will be addressed by my colleagues.)

I would like to close with a request and a question.

First the request: I hope very much William Irvine will consider a second volume, building upon his excellent “Epilogue,” and carry the history of the LDH down to the present day. Even though its post-1945 membership has been much smaller than its 180,000 peak in 1933, it remains very active in promoting human rights, and not just within France, as a look at its website will demonstrate.

My question, to become pertinent, needs a little background. In April 1958, four of France’s leading intellectuals – André Malraux, Roger Martin du Gard, François Mauriac, and Jean-Paul Sartre, signed a “Solemn Petition to the President of the [Fourth] Republic. They were protesting against the seizure of Henri Alleg’s, *The Question*, the powerful and moving, and today still profoundly pertinent¹⁰, account of the torture Henri Alleg endured in Algiers in the hands of General Jacques Massu’s paratroopers, half a century ago.

⁸ Irvine, p. 150.

⁹ Published in English by Harvard University Press. Cf., my review on H-France, October 1998. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=18591908302479>

¹⁰ Available in English in a new paperback edition (Bison Books: 2006), and reviewed by Kim Munholland for H-France, February 2007. <http://h-france.net/vol7reviews/munholland4.html> .

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The four intellectuals, three of them Nobel Prize winners (though Sartre formally refused his award in 1964), asked that the facts reported by Alleg be publicly and impartially disclosed, and they:

“—call on the Administration, in the name of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, to condemn unequivocally the use of torture, which brings shame to the cause that it supposedly serves.

“—and call on all Frenchmen to join us in signing this ‘personal petition’ and in sending it to the League for the Rights of Man...”¹¹

I ask Professor Irvine why in 1958 these four great writers chose the much weakened and smaller LDH for this purpose, and whether the archives indicate how many French men (and women) added their names to this “personal petition”. My personal hope would be many thousands, more than the four thousand who signed the “Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority,” of October 1967, the single most influential petition of our Vietnam era.¹² But I am ready to be disappointed.

¹¹ The petition was reprinted on the front page of *l'Humanité*, April 17, 1958, and in translation in the 1958 American edition of *The Question* (New York: George Braziller), p. 123. I have used this translation.

¹² See my *War and the Ivory Tower*, new edition (University of Nebraska Press Paperback), 2005, pp. 122-24.

Author's Response by William D. Irvine, York University

Given how thoroughly generous all of the reviews in this forum are, it would be pointless, not to say churlish, to issue a "rebuttal." Instead, I will treat these careful reflections, coming from several generations of distinguished French historians in the spirit that inspired them, as an invitation for a broader discussion of the complex history of modern France.

I found Talbot Imlay's contribution to be extremely thoughtful and most challenging. I am inclined to think that what underlies his review is the suspicion that I was a tad bit too quick to mount my moral horse and castigate the Ligue for not fully abiding by my own twenty-first century standards. (Although he most certainly did not put it quite that way!) For my own part I am inclined to think that I held the Ligue and its leaders to the standards they had articulated. Imlay wonders, for example, if it is not asking a bit much of the kind of people who joined the Ligue that they "remain detached from politics." A good question and one to which the answer is probably: yes. Still, it is worth noting that it was the leaders of the Ligue themselves, and not I, who incessantly decreed that the LDH should stay out of politics. Nothing like that happened of course. But the reason why Ligue leaders were so fond of declaring, for example, that the LDH was not on the right or the left but on the ceiling, above and detached from the partisan fray, was the reason they themselves so frequently gave: a non partisan Ligue would have the necessary accrued moral authority to pursued more effectively questions of justice. This was what led me to assert that a non-political Ligue, or at least one more detached from politics, might have been more willing to abide by its principles on matters like the rights of women and congregationists and the question freedom of the press. Imlay quite rightly counters that this is a counter-factual and therefore unprovable hypothesis. As of course is his own assertion that such a Ligue, necessarily much smaller, might not have had the political clout to make much difference on those kinds of issues. He could well be right, a point I concede (albeit obliquely) on p. 216. But all we can say for sure is that the LDH was very large and very well connected politically and did little for the cause of women, congregationists and a free press.

Imlay also suggests that I take a rather benign view of the threats to the Republic, most notably with respect to the allegedly "apolitical" officer corps. In fact I did not use that word (p. 231, fn 23) but what I did say is probably not quite good enough. I ought to have said that some fraction of the officer corps was indeed very political. But the point is that their politics were not always anti-republican. One can certainly point to reactionaries like Castelnau or Weygand, but also to impeccably republican generals like Sarrail, Gamelin and even, if Léon Blum in 1936 were to be believed, Pétain. To put the point another way, for every colonel or general frequenting the salons of monarchists, there were rather more pacing the ante-chambers of Radical politicians, either out of sincere conviction or a sharp eye for the main chance. But I wholeheartedly agree with Imlay that what counts when assessing the past is not merely objective reality as determined from the comfortable perch of a twenty-first century historian, but the very genuine subjective perception of that reality by contemporary historical actors. I did make some allowances for this (pp. 72-73,

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109) but perhaps not enough. This might be explained by the fact that I seem to be incurably wedded to the belief that the old Third Republic was, *_pace_* its critics and the events of 1940, both a very good regime and a pretty stable one too. Here I seem, at long last, to be on the same page as my good friend Joel Blatt. Although I appreciate that he was making a slightly different point, I cannot but agree that the Third Republic appears to be a shabby regime if, but also only if, one does not compare it to any other contemporary regime. So perhaps I went a bit far in suggesting that the frequent invocation of “*la république en danger*” served merely as a convenient pretext, permitting the Ligue to overlook inconvenient principles. But if so, what then do we make of the repeated (not to say pious) statements by Ligue leaders to the effect that the mission of the Ligue was to pursue justice no matter where that might lead even if the result would be comfort to their enemies?

I also agree that memories of the republic’s foundational decades carried over into the twentieth century and that many republicans persisted in seeing any criticism, especially if coming from the Right, as a threat to the regime. Of course, when criticism came from the Left – maybe not so much. Instructive in this regard are Léon Emery’s remarks at the Ligue’s 1935 congress to the effect that he could see no fundamental difference between bourgeois democracies and fascist regimes. It is very much to the point that his remarks were greeted by a standing ovation.

Given how all-persuasive issues of foreign policy had become by the 1930s, in marked contrast to the years that saw the foundation of the LDH, Imlay is surely right to suggest that it is not very realistic to argue that the Ligue ought to have declared that foreign policy “is simply not our issue.” Granted, it would be hard to find much in the 1789 *_Declaration of the Rights of Man_* that would have given the Ligue much guidance on this matter. But its leaders could, and did, declare that they could, and should, be guided by the “spirit” of that declaration. Fair enough. But it is then not entirely unreasonable to suggest that any position on foreign policy informed by the “spirit” of the Declaration ought to have been devoid (as was manifestly not the case) of flattering references to, and exculpatory statements about, either of the two most murderous dictatorships of the era.

Vichy looms large in my book as it does in the commentaries. In truth, when I began this project I had not anticipated that Vichy would be of much importance and effectively stumbled upon this dimension of the Ligue’s history. Fairly early on I came across a pamphlet dealing with the Ligue’s internal divisions in the mid-1930s, written by prominent members of the Minority. One of the signatories was Félicien Challaye, a name that then meant nothing to me. So I thumbed through the *fichiers* in the old BN (which gives an idea as to the gestation period of this project) and discovered his appalling wartime anti-Semitic novel. I repeated the exercise with other signatories and sometimes got comparable results. Soon I was scouring the pages of the collaborationist press, tracking down ex-Liguers gone bad. And the obvious questions this raised was: why were these people, of all people, writing the things they were. Or, better: what on earth had people like this been doing in the LDH in the first place. I still think those are good

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questions. But, as several commentators suggested, answering that question does not quite explain the process by which Liguers, often prominent ones, could come to embrace both Vichy and collaboration with Nazi Germany. I think they are right and this might explain a certain uneasiness I detect about my over-all treatment of this question

To be sure the book has the elements of an explanation and at its core is the whole question of pacifism, or more accurately a certain kind of pacifism driven by a relentless reductionist logic. If one believed that Germany was no more (and possibly less) responsible for World War I than any other nation, then it would follow that the Treaty of Versailles, which did rather assume German guilt, was, at best, devoid of moral legitimacy and, at worst, a certain recipe for another murderous go around. If one believed that Hitler came to power in large measure because of Versailles, then it followed that France (and everyone else) had only itself to blame if it now had to confront this particular dictator. If one believed that Hitler's demands on the international community were essentially limited to getting rid of Versailles and its illegitimate provisions, it followed that accommodating those demands was a reasonable course of action – especially since the alternative seemed to be war. Just as, if one believed that the root causes of war were economic, it followed that closer economic cooperation with Germany was a far better way to ensure the preservation of the peace than collective security which sounded suspiciously like a new label for what amounted to a new version of prewar entangling alliances. Since the Third Republic did not, in the end, heed this doctrine, it followed that its defeat and destruction were not altogether a bad thing and that the regime that replaced it, one that at long last was openly collaborating with France's neighbor across the Rhine, was not without its redeeming features. If one believed that even a willingness to contemplate war with Germany was morally odious then perhaps the anti-Semitism escaping from more than a few lips, before and after 1940, could be excused as no more than the understandable frustration at the spectacle of some Jews, including some erstwhile pacifists on the Ligue's Central Committee, who were contemplating precisely that and for no better reason than their obsession with the fate of a few co-religionists across the Rhine. Toss in a certain penchant in the 1930s for viperous attacks on bourgeois democracy, couched in Jacobin, socialist or at times even fascist terms, and suddenly Vichy, or at any rate the early Vichy, antithesis of bourgeois democracy though it was, did not seem all that bad.

I could not however (and did not) erect any of this into a grand theory and David Schalk, Bert Gordon and Norman Ingram are not wrong to suggest that this part of my argument is somewhat under-developed. This is so because there is a fair bit that the aforementioned model cannot explain. And I fully agree with Imlay that choices made in Vichy France often owed less to pre-war views and values than to the traumatic shock of defeat in 1940. I said as much with respect to Théodore Ruysen and to some degree René Château. But this line of reasoning does not help much with Challaye or Emery, whose wartime outpourings did not add much, in tone or substance, to the vituperative lines they penned in 1938. But, as Ingram so aptly reminds us, relentless though the logic of some pre-war pacifists could be, it was not always relentless enough to take them into collaboration. Michel Alexandre did not go there, for pretty obvious reasons. George Michon, a born again Jacobin if ever there

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was one, was on the same page as his pal Delaisi in the 1930s but not at all, to the latter's evident distress, after 1940. Elie Reynier's fulminations in 1938 make him sound like a Challaye clone, something he manifestly was not under Vichy. And at times it gets hard to tell the players without a program. Better minds than mine will be needed to get a handle on Eugène Frot, simultaneously sitting on the Vichy National Council and writing articles defending the parliamentary regime in the pages of an overtly collaborationist newspaper! As for that greatest of all enigmas, Gaston Bergery, this is a question that only Diane Labrosse will be able to handle.

Given how long Wendy Perry and I have been teasing one another about our divergent views of the Ligue, I looked forward to her review and was not disappointed. In light of her unparalleled knowledge, her spirited questions must be taken seriously. Was it really necessary, she asks, to approach the Ligue with quite so much sarcasm and irony, to be quite so relentlessly cynical and acerbic? Probably not, although a more measured tone might have required a personality transplant. To some degree the tone reflects the fact that I was reacting (and arguably over-reacting) to the version canonique (a wonderful phrase I owe to Claveau Claveau) currently prevailing in Paris. I think though that the reason for what appears to be my cynicism is more fundamental. As Claveau usefully reminds us, in any large organization there is often a gulf separating the leaders from the rank and file. I was trying, at least to some degree, to view the Ligue through the optic of its militants, not all of whom shared the lofty visions of the members of the Central committee listed by Perry.

Why the cursory treatment of the Dreyfus affair which, as Perry correctly points out, was the guiding star for future generations of Liguers? Reasons of economy, to be sure, because that story is well known. But I was also trying to suggest that, moral compass though the Dreyfus Affair might have been, it was a pretty crude navigational instrument for a Ligue faced with the far more complex issues of the following decades. (I am reminded here of H. Stuart Hughes' observations about Julien Benda and how the formative experience of his youth, the Dreyfus Affair, an essentially black and white issue, really did not prepare him for the shades of grey of the 1930s.)

But why only a couple of paragraphs on the courageous men and women of the LDH who fought and sometimes died in the resistance and endless pages on the rather smaller number who rallied to Vichy? A very good question. Here I was guided by the old American newspaper axiom to the effect that when dog bites man it is not a story whereas when man bites dog it makes page one. This is so despite the fact that man rarely bites dog but also because of that very fact. We have a pretty good idea of why a dog would bite a man but no idea at all of why a man would possibly bite a dog. By extension, that a group of men and women who had belonged to a Ligue founded to defend a Jewish captain and which identified itself as the conscience of democracy would oppose the Vichy regime which was the negation of democracy and thoroughly anti-Semitic is to their eternal credit but not really a very surprising finding. But that men (I found no women) who belonged to that same organization could openly support the Vichy regime, embrace its collaborationist

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policies and engage in savage attacks on Jews is a genuine puzzle which deserves an extended examination.

Claveau raises the capital question of the degree to which the distressing views expressed by the high profile members of the Minority were shared by the rank and file. Alas, it is difficult to speak to that question with any confidence. Yes it is significant that 40% of the delegates at the 1935 congress rallied to the thesis of the Minority but only up to a point. In the first place (and despite the best efforts of the Ligue), delegates at congresses did not necessarily reflect the views of the membership at large. Moreover it is entirely possible that many of the delegates who voted for Emery's motion did so less because they subscribed to everything therein than because they were irritated by the antics of Edouard Herriot and his supporters on the Central Committee. Support for the Minority had largely collapsed by the 1937 congress although this might have reflected little more than a desire to make platonic gestures in favor of a Republican Spain which Emory and company seemed to have abandoned in the cause of peace. Overall Ligue membership declined dramatically in the last years of the Republic but there are a host of possible reasons for this, none of which tell us very much about how the average militant stood with respect to the battles of principle going on at the leadership level.

Implicit (and at times explicit) in all of these reviews are some important general questions about the Ligue and also about the political culture of the Third Republic. They can probably be best addressed if we get beyond my periodic sermons about the Ligue and politics. One good question is: why did so many people join the Ligue. Put another way, did most really join because they thought the Ligue to be a cheap political party, a patronage machine or a low cost form of personal insurance? The answer is: probably not. To be sure it was Ligue leaders themselves who harbored these suspicions about unworthy motives; I simply confirmed those suspicions. But there is no telling why most of the 180,000 members joined and no way of knowing whether the worthy gentleman who thought the Ligue should protect his right to fish without a license was more typical than the indefatigable Mme. Bosser devoting her energies to getting an innocent man off Devil's Island. I suspect though, that both were a-typical of Ligue militants for most of whom the Ligue was a small town political club devoted to discussing and advocating progressive politics. I quite agree with Imlay that in this regard the Ligue was a *Rassemblement Populaire avant la lettre* or, probably more accurately, a coordinating agency for assorted Cartels or Blocs of the Left, from 1902 to 1938. Certainly this would be one way to read the otherwise odd statement by the president of one of the Ligue's largest federations to the effect that the Ligue never cared about the political orientation of its members providing that they were "red." Nor was this necessarily a bad thing. Although I did not say so in the book, I take it as an article of faith that having the citizens of a small town actively discussing the political issues of the day – regardless, in my view, of their exact political orientation – is healthy for, and arguably essential to the survival of, a vibrant democracy which I persist in thinking Third Republic France was. Indeed I am prepared to extend that charitable reading to include those sections whose members were there primarily for patronage and pork barrel. It could well be argued that when the little guy (and they mostly

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were guys) feels he is getting the shaft from an impersonal state apparatus or even being denied positions or promotions to which he is entitled, it augurs better for the survival of a democratic regime that he can find an organization that might plead his case or at least level the playing field, than that he be reduced to a permanent state of impotent rage.

Finally, while no one disputes that historians should present their actors warts and all, in the hands of someone like Irvine, don't the warts take on a life of their own thereby unfairly diminishing the admirable work of admirable men and women? I'm not so sure. Although nobody seems to have noticed, even in the case of people about whom I was most judgmental, I leaned over backwards (in the case of Challaye, very very backwards) to find some redeeming qualities. I did not feel it necessary to lean over quite as far with the many admirable people cited by Perry and felt I could expose their flaws and inconsistencies precisely because they were, at the end of the day, genuinely admirable individuals whose historical reputation would withstand whatever mild drubbing I delivered. So let me end this comment the way I ended my book. The hero of the book (if there indeed is one) is certainly the indomitable Marie-Françoise Bosser and she is not made less so by my periodic critical comments.

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