

Fourteenth Annual Conference of the Western Society for French History

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Sessions on biographical approaches to reform in the Third Republic, feminine sociability in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, France in the world economy under the Third Republic, the Mitterrand years, and a luncheon talk by Robert Paxton on rural fascism in the 1930s were some of the panels of interest to historians of French labor at this large conference, held in Baltimore on November 19–22, 1986.

Topics covered by the panel on feminine sociability in public and private in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France cut across class lines with two papers on bourgeois women and one on the working class. Janet Burke (Arizona State) argued that by joining the Freemasons, elite women were introduced to the ideology of the Enlightenment and thus to nascent feminism. Whitney Walton (Oakland) analyzed how bourgeois women acquired control of the private sphere in the new bourgeois culture of the home in the nineteenth century. W. Scott Haine (South Alabama) pointed out that the separation of the sexes in both public and private spheres was less extensive in the working class than among the bourgeoisie. Among workers, the café was important in the formation of social connections and as a center of women's participation in political discussion. Bonnie Smith (Rochester) commented that although women managed the conspicuous consumption of the nineteenth-century bourgeois household, they did not even own their homes. Margaret Jacobs (New School for Social Research) questioned Haine's assessment of the political importance of socializing between the sexes.

The panel on biographical approaches to early Third Republic reformism offered papers by David C. Wright (Wisconsin) on Benoit Malon, Phyllis H. Stock (Seton Hall) on the importance of Protestants in republican reform, and Dan Warshaw (Fairleigh Dickenson) on the contrasts between Paul Cauwès and Leroy-Beaulieu. The appearance of the topic suggested to the commentator, Marjorie Farrar, a renewed interest in political biography in social history.

In the discussion of France and the world economy, Michael Smith (South Carolina) laid the blame for the slow expansion of French exports in the nine-

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teenth century on a misguided government policy more responsive to protectionist textile and metal manufacturers than to the needs of the export industries. Commentator Leslie Derfler (Florida Atlantic) suggested that social considerations, such as the need of republican governments to keep the support of small farmers and petty producers, and the distractions of conservative politics such as the Boulanger craze, might have diverted interest from export promotion.

In the roundtable on the Mitterrand years, Irwin Wall (UC-Riverside) made the case for what he called "the most extraordinary peaceful social accomplishments in democracy of the 20th century." If the socialist experiment has fallen short in some respects, he attributes this to problems of implementation. Jolyon Howorth (University of Bath) cast a critical light on socialist defense policy. In sweeping away much of the secrecy in which the latter is embedded, he came to the conclusion that the melange of Jacobin-Gaullist thinking underlying socialist policy has opened the way to higher percentage costs of GNP, well-attuned to the post-socialist orientation after 1986. Helmut Gruber (Polytechnic University) challenged Wall's celebration of socialist accomplishments by pointing to the *paternaliste* and *dirigiste* means by which reforms were initiated and carried out and concludes that at best a liberal reform of the French state was carried out leaving civil society virtually untouched. Although agreeing with Howorth's trenchant critique, Gruber went one step further on the defense issue in pointing to the socialists' support for the myth of French *grandeur*.

The luncheon address by Robert Paxton (Columbia University) reported both the importance and the difficulties of tracing the role of Henri Dorgeres's attempts to create a rural fascism in the 1930s. The importance for labor of social struggles in the countryside in Italy is known. Paxton's report of research-in-progress suggests that these struggles are an important theme for French social and labor history, too.

This sample of the paper topics at this conference, although not comprehensive, nonetheless suggests both a growing richness and diversity in the study of labor and working-class history and a softening of the lines dividing social, economic, and political history.