



**THE
BOULANGER
AFFAIR**

RECONSIDERED

**Royalism,
Boulangism,
and the Origins of
the Radical Right
in France**

William D. Irvine

The Boulanger Affair
Reconsidered

This page intentionally left blank

The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered

*Royalism, Boulangism, and the
Origins of the Radical Right in France*

William D. Irvine

NEW YORK OXFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1989

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

Copyright © 1989 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Irvine, William D., 1944—

The Boulanger Affair reconsidered : royalism, Boulangism, and the
origins of the radical right in France / William D. Irvine.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-19-505334-6 (alk. paper)

1. Boulanger, Georges-Ernest-Jean-Marie, 1837-1891. 2. France—
Politics and government—1870-1940. 3. Generals—France—
Biography. 4. France. Armée—Biography. 5. Statesmen—France—
Biography. I. Title.

DC342.8.B7178 1989

944.081'092'4—dc 19 [B] 88-5177 CIP

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

TO WILLIAM THOMAS IRVINE
1911–1981

This page intentionally left blank

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the dozen years I worked on this book I was generously supported by a large number of individuals. My former teacher, Arno Mayer, has for the past two decades subjected my work to rigorous scrutiny and provided me with much-appreciated support and encouragement. A host of scholars read versions of this book, in whole or in part, and both it and I benefited from the resulting comments, criticisms, and, above all, moral support. They include: Oscar Arnal, Stewart Doty, Geoff Eley, Steven Englund, Adrienne Harris, Patrick Hutton, Lynn Hunt, Thomas Laqueur, Phil Nord, Karen Offen, and Robert Soucy.

During my many research trips in France, many librarians and archivists—too numerous to name—made their resources available to me, suggested possible sources and avenues of investigation, and politely overlooked the fact that I was making what appeared to be a “smash and grab” raid on their collections. One who cannot go unnamed is Mme Suzanne d’Huart, who facilitated access to the Archives de la Maison de France and, in the summer of 1981, responded to my lamentations about the inconvenience of the summer closing of the Archives Nationales by permitting me to work in her private office. I should also like to express my thanks to the current Count of Paris for granting me access to the archives of his family.

I should also like to acknowledge my typists—Dierdre MacLean, Chris Monteith, and Marina Sakuta—my research assistants—Dr. Donald Wileman and Howard Margolian—and the editorial staff of Oxford University Press, notably Henry Krawitz and Clifford Browder. I would like to thank *French Historical Studies* for permission to quote from my article, “French Royalists and Boulangism,” *French Historical Studies*, XV (Spring 1988), 395–406. A Glendon College Research Fellowship in 1983–84 permitted me to complete the writing of this book. The many visits to France were made possible by research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (1979 and 1981) and Glendon College Research Grants (1978, 1980, 1982, and 1984). Of course, the real burden of my research trips was borne by my wife,

Marion Lane, and my sons, Carl and Benjamin, who settled for post-cards and phone calls when they were entitled to more.

This book is dedicated to my father. Although a geological engineer by profession, he read a book of history or biography every day of his adult life. I grew up watching him reconstruct the Battle of Waterloo with knives and forks at the dining room table. Of course, he had his own ideas as to how history should be written and considered the work of most academic historians—his son included—hopelessly pedantic. I do know that he never got beyond page 77 in my first book and rather doubt that he would have gotten much further in this one. For all that, every page of it is dedicated to his memory.

Toronto
June 1988

W.D.I.

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
1 Royalists and the Third Republic	21
2 Royalist Political Organization: An Elitist Party in an Age of Mass Politics	48
3 Boulanger: Savior of the Monarchy	73
4 Royalists and Boulangists: From Secret Support to Public Alliance	107
5 Boulangism Without Boulanger: The Elections of 1889	125
6 From Boulangism to Anti-Semitic Nationalism: The End of French Royalism	157
Conclusion	177
Notes	183
Bibliography	223
Index	233

This page intentionally left blank

The Boulanger Affair
Reconsidered

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

In the summer of 1888 the disgruntled editor of a provincial royalist newspaper was reflecting on France's latest political sensation: General Georges Boulanger. The new phenomenon of "Boulangism," he observed, would "provide material for the astonishment of future French historians when they are forced to explain why, in the year 1888, monarchists so ardently supported a republican."¹ What prompted this dyspeptic outburst was the growing evidence that French royalists were covertly in league with the general and playing a central role in what would later be known as the Boulanger affair.

Between 1886 and 1889 General Boulanger occupied the center of French political life. Although he had once affected a conventional piety and a corresponding preference for the monarchy, the ambitious young general found it expedient to adopt a heartily republican stance following the consolidation of the Third French Republic in the early 1880s. His professions of republicanism—then relatively rare in the French officer corps—brought Boulanger to the attention of left-wing republicans, the Radicals. Their leader, Georges Clemenceau, obtained for him the post of minister of war in January 1886. During his eighteen months in office Boulanger became the most talked-about figure in France. His phenomenal popularity owed something to his striking good looks and dashing manner, rather more to his considerable gift for self-advertising, and a great deal indeed to his belligerent anti-German nationalism. "Le général Revanche" soon became the idol of the Parisian crowds. A minor song-writing industry arose to satisfy music halls that wanted ever more odes to the popular general.

Conservative republicans were less enamored of the bellicose general and combined with royalists to remove him from office in the spring of

1887. Life in the barracks did not appeal to Boulanger, who was soon conspiring to renew his political career. After a series of abortive back-room plots, he began to run for office in the early spring of 1888, mounting a personal plebiscite. Although he was expelled from the army for political activity, his popular appeal was in no way diminished. His platform was characteristically vague: restoration of French national grandeur, cleansing of French political life, and defense of the "exploited" against the "exploiters." Nonetheless it attracted votes from across the political spectrum, including members of the working classes who had previously voted for candidates of the extreme Left. He was elected repeatedly, often with huge majorities. Once elected, he would resign to run elsewhere. In January 1889 he won a resounding electoral victory in Paris, hitherto the bastion of left-wing republicanism. Observers everywhere were predicting an imminent Boulangist dictatorship.

Boulanger, however, had neither the acumen nor the nerve to deal with a tenacious republican regime. When the government of the day leaked rumors of his impending arrest, Boulanger responded by fleeing abroad. Despite this, Boulangism did not immediately die; by 1889 a substantial and well-financed movement had sprung up around the general, and his followers continued to strive for power. In the elections held that year Boulangists waged an imposing struggle and scored some impressive successes. Nonetheless Boulanger's continued exile and the ruthless campaign of the government militated against any major electoral breakthrough; the handful of successful Boulangist candidates constituted little more than a noisy rump in parliament. When Boulanger shot himself in 1891, Boulangism had already been dead for over a year.

Although he mounted a major assault against the fledgling democratic republic, Boulanger was to all appearances a man of the Left, not of the Right. There was, as the unhappy royalist editor had noted, little about him that was appealing to the traditional conservative Right: the dynastic opposition represented by royalists and Bonapartists.² Certainly his every action as minister of war had been calculated to offend royalists. He had threatened to republicanize an army where monarchist sentiment remained strong. He had gratuitously expelled the royal princes from the army despite the fact that, a decade earlier, he had assiduously cultivated the friendship of one of them, the Duc d'Aumale. The brash minister of war then compounded that offense by gracelessly and unsuccessfully lying about the matter. He had sponsored a military reform bill which, by depriving seminarians of their exemption from military service, had outraged Catholic conservatives. During the widely publicized strike at Décazeville, he had blissfully assured the Chamber of Deputies that the

French troops sent to the scene were currently sharing their bread and soup with hungry strikers, thus inflaming royalists, who felt that the army might more appropriately repress than feed revolutionary malcontents. Boulanger quickly adopted the banner of patriotic nationalism, seeking revenge against the German Empire. The provocative saber rattling of "le général Revanche" frightened a French Right which, still traumatized by the Paris Commune, equated foreign war with domestic social upheaval and revolution. Boulanger's dismissal as war minister in the spring of 1887 had been, in large measure, the work of royalists in the Chamber of Deputies who were prepared to make substantial concessions to the ruling republicans in order to be rid of a man they freely denounced as a Communard.

If Boulanger had little appeal for French royalists, his friends had even less. He was the darling of the revolutionary masses of Paris, and his initial supporters were almost exclusively from the radical Left. Boulanger's entourage read like a list of those most feared and despised by conservative Frenchmen: Henri de Rochefort, a brilliant journalist, former Communard, ferocious anticlerical, and arguably the most accomplished blasphemer of the nineteenth century; Alfred Naquet, a Jew, champion of the graduated income tax, and author of the 1884 law liberalizing divorce; Georges Laguerre, former secretary of the socialist Louis Blanc and a lawyer who specialized in defending revolutionaries; Paul de Susini, whose maiden speech in the Chamber represented an impassioned call for the immediate expulsion of the monarchist pretenders; Charles-Ange Laisant, deputy of the extreme Left and political counselor of Georges Clemenceau; Francis Laur, Radical republican and advocate of cooperative socialism; Paul Déroulède, leader of the republican revanchist Ligue des Patriotes; and Henri Michelin, the Radical deputy who rendered the right flank of the Chamber of Deputies apoplectic by observing that the principal shortcoming of the French Revolution had been its failure to guillotine enough aristocrats. Boulangists, in short, seemed to be drawn exclusively from the revolutionary rabble, and Boulangism appeared as a reincarnation of the Commune.

In the end Boulanger's appeal proved a good deal more eclectic, but he undeniably exercised considerable charm in winning over important segments of the nascent French socialist movement. In the spring of 1888 the old revolutionary socialist Emile Eudes found himself in secret conversations with Boulanger. A good half of his fellow Blanquist socialists later endorsed Boulangism. Even Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, was momentarily tempted. The most famous convert to Boulangism, Maurice Barrès, became for a number of years a prominent

French socialist. Antoine Jourde, later one of the leaders of France's first Marxist socialist party, began his political career in the ranks of the Boulangists.

To be sure, Boulanger's plebiscitary and antiparliamentary political style was more than a little reminiscent of the Napoleonic tradition, a point that did not escape the remaining French Bonapartists. That very fact, however, rendered Boulangism even less palatable to the far more powerful royalists. For Orleanists, principled partisans of parliamentarianism, plebiscitarianism was reminiscent of the worst and most dangerously demagogic features of the Second Empire. For legitimists, whose pretender had died in exile rather than accept the tricolor, the plebiscite was a frankly revolutionary instrument, the very antithesis of dynastic principles. As countless royalist editorials noted, Boulangism was the enemy.

Yet in 1888 the royalist leadership was behaving as if none of this mattered. The bewildered provincial editor saw signs everywhere that royalists, far from opposing Boulanger's ambitions, were giving him indispensable electoral assistance. Increasingly he heard rumors that the fabulous sums Boulanger and his entourage were spending came from royalist coffers. Just as disquieting were the ambiguous pronouncements emanating from royalist headquarters and, worse still, the gentle hints reaching his editorial office that the standard anti-Boulangist diatribes were no longer appropriate fare for royalist readers. It is little wonder that the perplexed editor would appeal to future historians to explain this bizarre transformation of the royalist Right.

For the most part historians have not done so. That royalists played a role in the Boulanger affair has never been at issue. Contemporaries were vaguely aware of it and many of the details of the royalist-Boulangist alliance were authoritatively documented in 1890 in *Les Coulisses du Boulangisme*, written by Gabriel Terrail, a disillusioned former Boulangist.³ Adrien Dansette's 1946 account of Boulangism, drawing on private royalist papers, confirmed and reinforced Terrail's account.⁴ Nonetheless subsequent histories, while conceding the fact of royalist involvement, invariably gloss over its ramifications.⁵ Michael Burns's recent examination of grass-roots Boulangism, for example, concedes only obliquely and inconsistently that the decisive determinant of Boulanger's electoral support was the attitude of local conservative elites.⁶

Most historians would appear to agree that Boulanger's secret royalist allies do not adequately explain his phenomenal electoral success, nor does their support prevent Boulangism from being a fundamentally left-wing phenomenon. One of the most accomplished students of Boulanger

gism, Patrick Hutton, has recently described it in the following terms: "The Boulangist movement . . . was an expression of Jacobin discontent which drew together the constituent elements of the revolutionary tradition. Radicals, populists and Blanquists were all enticed into General Boulanger's cause. The Boulangists were committed to constitutional revision, and their propaganda about creating a more open, democratic republic evoked longings similar to those which had perpetuated the myth of the Commune." Boulangism is repeatedly depicted by him as "a restatement of Jacobin values," an attempt "to rekindle revolutionary fervor by restating Jacobin values in populist idiom," "a genuine expression of popular discontent with Opportunist political oppression," "a means of challenging the elitist style of parliamentary politics which had so long frustrated the ambitions of the revolutionary movement," and "a configuration of protest not unlike those which had preceded the revolutions of 1830 and 1848." Considered in isolation, such quotations are not an entirely fair representation of the author's position, yet he explicitly challenges those historians who have accepted "uncritically . . . this interpretation of Boulangism as a right-wing conspiracy," noting that "recent scholarship has . . . called into question . . . the interpretation of the Boulangist movement as a monarchist front," and has demonstrated that the popular movement behind Boulanger was "one of left-wing protest against the failings of the moderate republican regime."⁷

Hutton is on undeniably strong historiographical grounds, for a host of scholars have emphasized the leftist dimensions of the Boulangist phenomenon. The starting point for this reading was Jacques Néré's monumental thesis on Boulangism.⁸ Néré demonstrated that after 1882 there was a sustained economic crisis in France which, while largely unnoticed by contemporary observers, led to high unemployment, low wages, and economic misery among the popular classes. Faced with the ruling republicans' ignorance of and indifference to their plight, and the absence of a significant socialist movement, the French working classes found in Boulanger and Boulangism an appropriate outlet for their grievances. There was, in short, a determining link between "working-class misery and Boulangism."⁹ Boulanger's campaign greatly appealed to the popular classes because they saw it as "the sole means of putting an end to parliamentary impotence and, as a consequence, of bringing about the social reforms, so long promised, which would end their suffering."¹⁰ So desperate were the working masses, and so insensitive to their condition was the government, that "it is hardly astonishing that they became more and more engaged in Boulangism without being deterred by the support, increasingly difficult to hide, that the majority of the conservative right

was giving to Boulanger."¹¹ Although Néré's able dissection of the industrial and social crisis is a good deal more convincing than his explanation of Boulangism, most historians have accepted the broad outlines of his thesis.¹²

The leading English historian of the Third Republic, Theodore Zeldin, has chided Jules Ferry for dismissing Boulangism as the work of the monarchists and for failing to understand the true nature of the movement. According to Zeldin, "it was the socialists who became the backbone of Boulangism. . . . They defined it clearly as a movement for social reform, for action to meet the economic crisis, with constitutional revision as the means. Boulangism survived . . . to become one of the elements in a reinvigorated socialism." By crushing Boulangism the republicans demonstrated that they were the true conservatives.¹³ Zeev Sternhell, one of the foremost French authorities on the subject, has focused almost exclusively on "popular authoritarian, antibourgeois and antiparliamentary Boulangism, the Boulangism of the Radicals, of the Blanquists and of the Guesdists, the Boulangism of the miners of the Nord and the common people of Belleville." For him Boulangism represents "the revolt of the new social classes, in particular those of the big cities and industrial centers . . . which prepared the terrain for the growth of the workers' movement in the region of Paris and the industrial north, east, and southwest." As a consequence the Boulangist flirtations of some French socialists were hardly the betrayal that Friedrich Engels imagined. French Marxists recognized Boulangism as "a revolt against bourgeois society" and "a popular movement fulfilling a function of which the workers' party was as yet incapable." It was therefore entirely appropriate for socialists to "support Boulangism in its destruction of the established order."¹⁴ Since Boulangism is treated as the handmaiden of socialism, the active participation of Maurice Barrès in the movement is but the logical springboard for his 1890s socialism.¹⁵ All these writers recognize a disquieting undercurrent of xenophobia, racism, irrationalism, and authoritarianism in Boulangism, but they insist that these arise directly from the less savory dimensions of the Jacobin and socialist traditions and are, if anything, proof of the distinctly leftist valence of Boulangism. This reading is oddly congruent with the anti-Boulangist diatribes of royalists in 1886 and 1887. The subsequent royalist involvement—invariably acknowledged—is dismissed as a rather bizarre sideshow: the desperate, unsuccessful, and ultimately uninteresting intrigue of a dying political force.

Yet the royalist role in the Boulanger affair was anything but peripheral. True, Boulanger was always lionized by the popular classes of

Paris, but he became an imposing political force because he won a series of provincial by-elections in 1888. In these elections Boulanger invariably ran in conservative departments, always replaced a recently deceased conservative deputy, never faced a conservative opponent, and in every instance obtained the great majority of his votes from those who usually voted for conservatives. Indeed, these were necessary preconditions for his successes, explicitly requested by Boulanger. In June 1888, when Paul Déroulède attempted to run as Boulanger's personal candidate against a conservative in the Charente, he came in third. When royalists remained neutral, as they did in the Ardèche in July 1888, Boulanger lost. Whenever Boulanger resigned a recently won seat in order to run elsewhere, he was replaced by a royalist or Bonapartist in subsequent by-elections. Only once—in Paris in January 1889—was this pattern broken, when he received a majority of his votes from the Left in a thoroughly republican constituency. Even here, however, he obtained the quasi totality of the capital's conservative vote, which, had it gone elsewhere, might well have cost him the election.

Boulanger's electoral campaigns were without precedent in French history. They were also financed by unprecedented sums of money, all of which came from royalist coffers. Boulanger and the Boulangists almost always had at their disposal the royalist electoral machine and the royalist printing presses. For a while some part of the royalist press proved refractory (although the fulminations of editors were always a poor guide to their back-room behavior), but when its support counted and it was ordered to comply, the press also swung behind Boulanger. Royalists were not, as is often suggested, mere backdoor conspirators and credulous paymasters. They actively orchestrated Boulanger's campaigns at almost all levels. Without their active intervention there would have been no Boulanger affair.

Boulanger's contacts with royalists were far more consequential than his dalliances with the Left. The discussions between Boulanger and the Radicals, the famous "nuits historiques" of November 1887, were subsequently highly embarrassing for the latter, but nothing came of them. By contrast, Boulanger's simultaneous meetings with the royalists Mackau and Martimprey established the basis for two years of active collaboration. The secret meeting between Boulanger and Emile Eudes, the ex-Communard leader of the Blanquists, is no doubt a commentary on the ambivalent nature of Blanquist socialism (as well as on Boulanger's duplicity), but its overall significance pales in comparison with the repeated contacts between the general and the royalist leadership. Friedrich Engels's profound irritation at Paul Lafargue's momentary tempta-

tion and Guesdist irresolution in the face of Boulangism is well (and often) documented, but the political consequences of such flirtations were minimal compared to the resolute action of the royalists. Although royalist leadership was also divided on the question of Boulanger, the most skeptical of them showed less hesitation than did a man like Lafargue. It is significant that five Blanquist candidates in 1889 were supported by the Boulangist Republican National Committee, but surely less important than the fact that the great majority of candidates endorsed by that committee were in fact royalists or Bonapartists. There is no denying that Boulangism attracted some fraction of the extreme Left, but it was precisely that fact which made Boulanger so attractive to the royalists. By discounting the relevance of royalist support for Boulanger, historians are no closer to resolving the question posed by the bemused royalist editor in 1888.

Why have most historians minimized the significance of the royalist role in the Boulanger affair? One reason is that the royalist gambit failed and, having failed, appears in retrospect to have been hopeless, desperate, and perhaps even frivolous. As one disgusted royalist later observed, the calculations of the monarchist leaders "would have been the ultimate in Machiavellianism had they not been the height of stupidity." Charles Dupuy, editor of *La Gazette de France* and one of the few consistent royalist opponents of Boulanger, once complained that when he asked a prominent royalist why he had invited Boulanger to dinner, he received the disarming reply, "Mon cher, boulangisme, c'est du sport." Among some royalists, Dupuy remarked, Boulangism enjoyed "un certain côté du snobisme et du chic."¹⁶ Weary of defending royalist principles and bored with dynastic politics, too many royalists supported Boulangism for its nuisance value or its potential for amusement. With few remaining political options but plenty of wealth, royalists could easily toss a few million francs after the disruptive general. Given the fact that the best-known (although not the most important) source of royalist funds for Boulanger was the Duchesse d'Uzès, whose naiveté was as great as her fortune, the hypothesis has a superficial plausibility. Yet the entire campaign was underwritten by the royalist pretender, the Count of Paris, a man not temperamentally disposed to rash actions or rash expenditures. There were certainly some quixotic elements in the royalist party, but Albert de Mun, Jacques Piou, the Baron de Mackau, the Marquis de Breteuil, the Marquis de Beauvoir, and Edouard Bocher were seasoned veterans of political struggles, entirely immune to the seductive charms that so endeared the general to the benevolent duchess. That they, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm, should have en-

dorsed the Boulangist strategy suggests that it was something more than a *divertissement*.

A second reason for the inattention to the right-wing dimensions of Boulangism is the enduring influence of the interpretive framework established by Néré. Once it is accepted that Boulangism is a radical republican phenomenon, the activities of those who are neither radical nor republican become, almost by definition, of secondary importance. In his analysis of the contemporary press, Néré asserts that the question of Boulanger "leaves few traces in the royalist press. . . . Conservative newspapers by and large preferred to speak as little as possible about Boulangism." In fact the royalist press, be it Parisian or provincial, was absolutely obsessed by Boulanger, talked about little else for months, and openly debated the merits of the alliance throughout 1888 and 1889. These debates make little impression on Néré because he has already dismissed royalist relations with Boulanger as "an unnatural alliance."¹⁷ Odile Rudelle's excellent analysis of the 1889 elections is marred by the arbitrariness of her designation of Boulangists. For her they are by definition republicans of the kind who object to the "odious persecution" of Boulanger (although the example she cites is, inconveniently, a Bonapartist). Socialists, except where overtly and explicitly hostile to Boulanger, are automatically included among the ranks of Boulangists "in order to give Boulangism its exact dimensions." Royalists and Bonapartists, by contrast, are automatically excluded, even when they enjoy the formal endorsement of the Boulangist headquarters or even Boulanger himself. Maurice Barrès is a "true Boulangist candidate," as opposed to the Bonapartist Paul de Cassagnac, who, despite his intimate collaboration with the royalists in the entire Boulangist enterprise, is merely a "false revisionist."¹⁸ Since it has become virtually an article of faith that being a Boulangist meant being on the political Left, the many ultra-conservative Boulangists are usually either ignored or misidentified. The quest for "genuine" Boulangists of unsullied republicanism can color the findings of the most acute observer. In his classic study of the west of France, André Siegfried managed to identify four "pure" Boulangists, one of whom was in fact a royalist, one a Bonapartist, and one an ex-royalist. The fourth, while admittedly a republican of long standing, was prepared to drop the word "republican" from his campaign posters in deference to local royalists.¹⁹

Undeniably the nebulous program of Boulangism admits of a multitude of interpretations. Denouncing the moderate republic as the "regime of persecution and exploitation" sounds healthily radical, but royalists could and did bandy about similar epithets. Of course their target was

not the social conservatism of the Opportunist republic but its anticlerical legislation and the republican zeal of its administrators. Royalists despised Jules Ferry as intensely as did the Radicals, albeit usually for quite different reasons. The demand for the revision of the 1875 constitution was the classic platform of those who sought a more thoroughly democratic political system. But since, as of 1887, royalists hoped to restore the monarchy by means of a constitutional revision, they could as easily claim to be revisionists. Some Boulangists did espouse socialist doctrines, but so did some royalists. Presumably these were different kinds of socialism, but the respective contours remained vague. Boulangists like Alfred Gabriel and Maurice Barrès certainly had kind words for the socialism of royalists like Albert de Mun and even of the German emperor. A socialism thoroughly infused with anti-Semitism was not unwelcome in some royalist quarters, and there were plenty of royalists who believed that the Boulangist variety of socialism could be domesticated for their purposes. The ambiguity of the prevailing rhetoric therefore permitted all kinds of "unnatural alliances."

Most historians of Boulangism, however, dismiss the alliance with the royalists as a purely tactical one while simultaneously insisting that the adherence to Boulangism by some part of the radical Left speaks to the very essence of the phenomenon. The assumptions behind this argument are at best highly problematic. The great majority of the Radicals, after all, did not endorse Boulangism. Their qualified enthusiasm for Boulanger in 1886 and 1887 is hardly more significant than their hostility by 1888. His principal parliamentary antagonist in that year was the Radical premier Charles Floquet. The latter was perhaps a pretty tepid Radical, but the uncontested leaders of the left wing of Radicalism, Camille Pelletan and Georges Clemenceau, were equally outspoken in their denunciations of "le brav' général." It might be objected that the rejection of Boulanger by most Radicals is proof of their growing conservatism; certainly on most accounts the years 1888-89 mark the acceptance by the Radicals of the existing parliamentary regime. Yet the subsequent rightward evolution of Georges Clemenceau is far less pronounced than that of "radical" Boulangists like Maurice Barrès and Paul Déroulède. Radicals rejected Boulangism not because they were frightened by its socialist dimensions but, as they claimed, because it was reactionary.

By stressing the "tactical" nature of the Boulangist alliance with royalists, it is implicitly assumed that the radical Boulangists were prepared to spend royalist money, attract royalist votes, permit their campaign to be orchestrated by royalists and, where called upon, vote for royalists

while remaining faithful throughout to their revolutionary past. According to this reading, the Boulangist “use” of royalists did not undermine their sincere commitment to their radical goals. But the question of political sincerity poses some awkward questions. Is Georges Laguerre’s status as the former secretary to Louis Blanc ultimately more important than his willingness to permit his newspaper to be subsidized and later owned outright by royalists? Was Paul de Susini’s declaration that he had, since 1885, “flown the true flag of socialism” undermined when he assured the Count of Paris of his family’s royalist past in order to obtain 25,000 francs? Were Maurice Barrès’s assertions of socialism in *Le Courrier de l’Est* at all vitiated by his continued contacts with the royalists of Nancy? In the end, are electoral declarations and newspaper articles more important than what transpires in the smoke-filled rooms? The question must remain open, although the subsequent political trajectory of many of the radical Boulangists does suggest that by 1888 their past was already behind them.

Nonetheless the royalist-Boulangist relationship was, by any standard, a *mésalliance*, an “unnatural” association of fundamentally incongruous political philosophies. Nor would it be the last. In the half century following the Boulanger affair European conservatives would often find themselves allied to movements which appeared to share few of their basic values. Indeed, many of the issues raised by the Boulangist episode have reappeared in the ongoing debate about twentieth-century fascism. Because the classic models of fascism arose as a reaction to the reformist and revolutionary Left, many scholars have stressed its affinity with the conservative Right, even suggesting that fascism amounts to a radical version of conservatism.²⁰ No one of course contends that fascism is the *same* as conservatism, for there are important elements in the doctrine and practice of the former which are alien to the conservative tradition and which, in fact, are borrowed from the traditional Left.

In his classic study Ernst Nolte defined fascism as “anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvment of a radically opposed and yet related ideology and by the use of almost identical and yet typically modified methods, always, however, within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy.”²¹ Although cumbersome, Nolte’s definition accurately captures the central tension within fascism: Its enemies are clearly the parties of the classic political Left, but its means of combating them bear striking similarities to the means employed by the Left. Many of the best-known fascist leaders served their political apprenticeships in parties of the extreme Left: Benito Mussolini in the revolutionary wing of prewar Italian socialism

and Jacques Doriot in the French Communist Party. Hitler's party chose to call itself the "National Socialists" (a term coined in the 1890s by the onetime French socialist and Boulangist Maurice Barrès). Just as Italian Fascists made much use of the vocabulary of revolutionary syndicalism, so the early program of the National Socialists was replete with anti-capitalist rhetoric. Moreover, the "methods" of the fascists were far closer to those of the revolutionary Left than to those of traditional conservatives. They were, or purported to be, "popular" movements with a mass base and support among the lower classes of society—elements for which conservatives had rarely had any appeal. Furthermore, theirs was the politics "of the street," involving direct and violent action against political enemies and selected targets among the established political order. By descending into the piazza they appeared to emulate the revolutionary forces of the nineteenth century. Even when they engaged in electoral politics, they did so with an energy, vigor, and attention to mass propaganda which had heretofore been the exclusive preserve of the Left. Like the Socialists and communists, fascists formed mass-based parties that excelled in the techniques of mass politics.

As a consequence, students of fascism have long been fascinated by its affinities with the revolutionary Left. During the 1940s and 1950s, fascism and communism were frequently lumped together under the general rubric of "totalitarianism."²² With the end of the Cold War and the correspondingly reduced appeal of a theory identifying communism with the Nazis, the totalitarianism thesis lost much of its attractiveness. Nonetheless an important current of scholarship continues to emphasize the fundamental affinity between fascism and the revolutionary Left. In a major study of Fascist Italy, A. James Gregor identifies "Fascism as a member of a class of regimes that include Bolshevism, Maoism [and] Castroism" and assigns it the status of "the first revolutionary socialist heresy."²³ In a provocative interview a leading scholar of the subject, Renzo de Felice, after correctly identifying mass mobilization as a salient feature of fascism, insisted that this placed the phenomenon in the revolutionary tradition.²⁴ A seminal article by Eugen Weber contends that, far from being a species of "counterrevolution," fascism represents an "alternate revolution." In his account, most of the distinguishing features of this "alternate revolution" suggest compelling parallels with the revolutions of the classic Left.²⁵ In the same spirit, the concluding volume of Zeev Sternhell's trilogy on fascism in France, *Ni droite ni gauche*, treats the subject as "one more stage in the revision of Marxism."²⁶

The radical aspects of the fascist program were, however, the first casualty of the transition from fascist movement to fascist regime. "Sei-