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State and Society in France at the Dawn of the Third Republic

Abstract

This essay explores the transformation of France between 1870 and the early 1890s, as the nascent Third Republic built up power following military defeat and political instability. It examines how republican ideals reshaped national identity through education, military service, and social reform. Central to this project were the secular school system promoted by Jules Ferry, universal military conscription as a tool of civic formation, and a growing interventionist state that addressed the «social question» through labour laws and welfare initiatives. The essay highlights the political culture of parliamentary reformism as the key to stabilizing the Republic.

Keywords: *Third Republic, Republicanism, Secular education, Military Conscription, Social Reform.*

The period between September 4, 1870, the date of the proclamation of the Third Republic, and the beginning of the 1890s is one of the most eventful in contemporary French history. The Republic which rose from the ashes of defeat at Sedan was indeed faced with numerous challenges: to end the war against Prussia and restore calm in Paris, which was ready to rise up in the name of popular democracy and its values; to devise a new institutional framework, curbing the conservative reaction which sought to restore moral order and the monarchy; and to revitalize French society along the paths of social stability and economic growth.

It was only by responding to these challenges and in the wake of the failed «coup d'état» by Marshal Mac-Mahon that «absolute republicanism» as described by Odile Rudelle became consolidated in France¹. Starting from the late 1870s, «republicanization» of the French public arena proceeded by leaps and bounds, beginning with the capital, where the former Place du Château-d'eau, renamed Place de la République, erected a monumental bronze statue of the revolutionary Marianne upon a huge pedestal adorned with the allegorical figures of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

Three decisions, in particular, testify to the determination of the new power to root the Republic in society and in the French imagination, even symbolically: in February 1879

¹ O. Rudelle, *La République absolue. Aux origines de l'instabilité constitutionnelle de la France républicaine, 1870-1889*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982.

the Marseillaise, which had not been played since the time of the Commune, was declared the national anthem; July 14 was proclaimed a national holiday; and finally, Parliament returned to the capital. For François Furet, the Revolution symbolically ended in November 1879, when the Chambers left Versailles (where they had moved in 1871 following the Franco-German armistice) and returned to Paris.

That transfer simultaneously enabled the chapter of the Commune to be closed and showed how the new regime did not fear social effervescence or the fervor of the streets and squares, but rather aspired to include and represent them. Republican culture imbued the State, but the republicans did not confine themselves to a purely symbolic dimension. The myth of national efficiency took shape, drawing on the example provided by the German enemy. The obsession with *revanche* – although downplayed by some scholars pace the prevailing historiographical interpretation² – could not hide the undeniable prestige enjoyed by Bismarckian Germany at the dawn of the Third Republic³. The goal of the republican political system during the 1880s, following its stabilization and the constitutional revision of 1884 that proclaimed the Republic as the «definitive government of France», was primarily to redefine the relationship between the State and the individual through a significant extension of the role of the State, manifesting in three priority areas – education, military service, and the «social question» – which will be analysed in this essay.

Republican Schooling

In September 1880 the arrival of the Republican Jules Ferry in government marks the start of the laws establishing the fundamental freedoms, as well as the republicans' initiative in education.

The nexus between democracy and public education is an old republican dogma that reappears with particular force and radicality in the period analysed. The twin fears of a new war against Germany and of a monarchical restoration supported by the Church stirred the republicans' sleep, emphasising the urgency of organising education based on upholding the values of patriotism and secularism.

For Ferry and his collaborators – starting with the philosopher Ferdinand Buisson (author of a detailed report on elementary education from a comparative standpoint, written for the 1876 World Fair in Philadelphia)⁴ – it was a matter of using schooling to create a national sentiment alternative to that conveyed by monarchical France.

Within the republican patriotic project, secular schooling was designed not only to consolidate the new regime but at the same time forge a unitary conception of the national community transcending class divisions, religious affiliations and regionalism.

² B. Joly, *La France et la Revanche (1871-1914)*, in «Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine», 46, 2, 1999, pp. 325-247.

³ A. Mitchell, *The German Influence in France after 1870. The Formation of the French Republic*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

⁴ F. Buisson, *Rapport sur l'instruction primaire à l'Exposition universelle de Philadelphie en 1876*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1878.

Education was both the objective and the instrument of the Republic: the objective because the Republic could not survive without educated citizens; the instrument because only educated citizens would grasp the point of safeguarding the political regime that made them protagonists of their own destiny while building national unity. For this reason, school must avoid any form of particularism, be it religious, cultural or linguistic, and establish a special relationship with the Republic - which inevitably gave rise to tensions over the school question.

The leading French intellectual journals focused on two potential risks in this regard.

The first was the spectre of a slide towards socialism, lamented in particular by the «Revue des Deux Mondes», which took a line of moderate liberalism⁵ and railed against «the egalitarian passion of the radicals [who] wish the state to be the sole teacher of the nation»⁶:

It is easy to see the stages of this socialism: first free schooling is established, then books are provided, then decent clothes for those who lack them, then a meal that rich children pay for and those who are deemed destitute do not. The absolute gratuity of all these school complements will become the norm [...]. The state replaces charity, the state generalizes everything, turns all aid and relief into law, that is, it corrupts everything⁷.

The second fear, shared by the «Revue politique et littéraire» (which had strongly supported the first measures in education, starting with free schooling), was that the hoped-for neutrality and secularism of public education might fuel an anticlerical shift that would reopen painful rifts in the country, judging by the contemporary experience in Belgium:

Secular education, even if the State desires it to be neutral, will inevitably prove hostile to the Church, which will condemn it and cast anathemas upon it. The teacher will become a sort of «anti-priest». The conflict, which once existed only within administrative spheres, will thus shift to the depths of consciences and will force itself on the population from childhood, even in the smallest villages. This is the spectacle currently offered by Belgium, where the regime of separation between Church and State was introduced into elementary schools by the 1879 law. It is not possible to draw a balance sheet on this attempt, but what can be said is that, far from ending the conflict between the two parties now identified throughout Europe as the liberal and the clerical, it has done nothing but prolong it and exacerbate it⁸.

⁵ Founded in 1829 by François Buloz on progressive leanings, in line with the liberal monarchy of Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, the «Revue des Deux Mondes» quickly established itself as one of the most prestigious journals in the French intellectual landscape, benefiting from the contributions of figures such as Alexandre Dumas, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, and others. Gaining further authority through its constant engagement with other European countries and the United States, in the second half of the 19th century, the journal adopted a line of moderate liberalism, initially opposing Napoleon III during the Second Empire and later criticizing the secularist course of the republican governments during the Third Republic.

⁶ G. Valbert, *Le radicalisme et ses variétés*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 60, 1883, p. 206.

⁷ P. Leroy-Beaulieu, *L'Etat moderne et ses fonctions*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 89, 3, 1888, p. 306.

⁸ E. De Laveleye, *La séparation de l'église et de l'état*, in «La Revue politique et littéraire», 12.11.1881, p. 614.

Once these education measures were approved, the republicans did not seem intent on going further. Many of them believed that the provisions of the Concordat, strongly defended by Jules Ferry and Paul Bert (Ferry's successor at the Ministry of Public Education), ensured sufficient control over the Church. Moderate republicans were furthermore convinced that peaceful control of the Church allowed them to channel the workers' demands, which they viewed as a greater danger to the Republic and individual liberties than the Catholic religion. By the early 1890s it seemed the time had come for pacification, favoured by the rallying call of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1905) that the old monarchist legitimism be abandoned and the French clergy join the Third Republic⁹.

In the republican view, school was to serve as a tool to combat ignorance, forge new citizens, and simultaneously catch up with Germany, while opposing the German conception of the nation. The cement of a nation is not blood, but primarily what one loves and in which one identifies. This idea was explored by Ernest Renan in his famous lecture *What is a Nation?* delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, which captivated the intellectual world. Proposing an idea of the nation as a «daily plebiscite», he argued that the role of schools was to transmit and root the sense of national belonging and love of country.

In the «*Revue politique et littéraire*»¹⁰, which dedicated two issues to the lecture, Charles Bigot, called Renan the most influential intellectual of his generation¹¹:

Education must act as a nurse to patriotism. What it must teach above all is the national language. Language is the most important, the most evident symbol of unity [...]. Along with the national language, education must teach everyone national history. This history – political, moral, social, philosophical – must be the heart of all lessons [...]. After the patriotic education in school, comes the patriotic education of the troops¹².

«The strength of Germany was built not only through the army but through its schools and universities», observed Gabriel Monod, then director of the «*Revue Historique*», in a letter published in the «*Revue politique et littéraire*»¹³.

At the dawn of the Third Republic, the widespread belief that Sedan had represented the victory of the German educational system made the elementary school teacher the new «missionary of the State».

⁹ The crisis at the end of the century, and in particular, the devastating consequences of the Dreyfus Affair, would radically alter the landscape, leading to the law of separation between Church and State in 1905. J. Lalouette, *La séparation des églises et de l'état. Génèse et développement d'une idée 1789-1905*, Paris, Seuil, 2005.

¹⁰ This was a cultural magazine, founded in 1863 in Paris under the name «*Revue des cours littéraires de la France et de l'étranger*» (renamed «*Revue politique et littéraire*» in 1871), which is notable for publishing the lectures of the Collège de France, the Sorbonne, and other French and foreign universities.

¹¹ «No other writer has had an influence comparable to his in the generation of the last thirty years». C. Bigot, *Conférence de M. Renan*, in «*La Revue politique et littéraire*», 18.03.1882, p. 321.

¹² C. Bigot, *L'idée de patrie*, in «*La Revue politique et littéraire*», 25.03.1882, p. 363.

¹³ G. Monod, *Lettre*, in «*La Revue politique et littéraire*», 08.04.1882, p. 417.

This goal was pursued throughout the 1880s, in the broader context of secularizing society¹⁴. In concrete terms this meant the introduction of free (1881), secular (1882), and mandatory (1882) primary education; it was bolstered by the Goblet Law (1886), which entrusted teaching in public schools exclusively to secular staff and completed the organization of primary education by making teachers public employees.

This policy clearly carried a high cost: in ten years public spending on primary education doubled. «Under the vigorous impetus of the ministers of Public Education [...] the country became passionate about school issues: it did not shrink from any sacrifice [...] to multiply schools, to attract the generation that is being formed and preparing republican citizens»¹⁵, writes the journalist and republican deputy Léon Journault, while an inspector speaks of the «white mantle of schools» that covers the country, a clear reference to the «white mantle of churches» that once covered medieval Europe. By defining the principle that no student should have to travel more than 3 kilometers to go to class, republican governments established schools even in isolated hamlets, particularly in the rural areas of the west. «The Ministry of Public Education has become a veritable factory of schools», explained Ferry in 1882¹⁶.

Schools embodied municipal and republican pride and provided a valuable patriotic safeguard, which, according to the «Revue pédagogique», must «prepare young people for military service, toughening them through gymnastics and familiarizing them immediately with the handling of weapons»¹⁷.

The theme of military education was one of the hottest topics, and reference to the German model is omnipresent:

Military education begins, in Germany, with elementary school, mandatory for all subjects of the Empire, just like military service. During elementary school, children receive gymnastics lessons, which prepare them for future military training [...]. Since military service follows a few years after the end of school, mandatory military conscription is considered a precious tool for educating the nation. At least this is the opinion of Marshal Moltke, according to whom the German people, for this reason, enjoy a significant advantage over all other peoples¹⁸.

The founder of the Ligue des patriotes, Paul Déroulède, in 1882 dedicated a pamphlet to this theme, in which he delivered a sharp indictment against Ferry and the republicans¹⁹, summarized in the «Revue politique et littéraire» as follows:

¹⁴ In 1880 a law abolished the obligation to rest on Sundays; in 1881 another law removed the religious aspect of cemeteries; in 1884 divorce was legalized; in 1887 civil funerals were facilitated, while various measures secularized hospital staff.

¹⁵ L. Journault, *L'enseignement primaire et le Sénat*, in «La Revue politique et littéraire», 09.07.1881, p. 34.

¹⁶ A-D. Houte, *Le triomphe de la République, 1871-1914*, Paris, Seuil, 2014, p. 111.

¹⁷ L. Armagnac, *L'enseignement militaire à l'école*, in «Revue pédagogique», 2, 1882, p. 111.

¹⁸ C. Grad, *Les forces militaires de l'Empire Allemand*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 86, 1888, p. 794.

¹⁹ P. Déroulède, *De l'éducation militaire*, Paris, Librairie Nouvelle, 1882.

The need for strong military education has been demonstrated more than once after our disasters, demonstrated but not acknowledged [...]. Eleven years ago, we received the lesson of defeat, invasion, and dismemberment. In eleven years we have improved our weapons, built fortresses, approved a law on military conscription that does not seem to have produced fully satisfactory results [...]. Is there still anyone who fears the excesses of military spirit and the surrender of France to what fifteen years ago was called «Prussian corporals»? [...]. Gymnastics is already part of the compulsory subjects in elementary education. It is progress. But has what is necessary been done to ensure that this part of the law is effectively implemented? Is sufficient determination being shown in training the teaching staff? [...]. Teachers will become good gymnastics instructors and good educators only when they undergo military service²⁰.

In Search of a Republican Army

«For the homeland, through the book and the sword!» is the motto coined by Jean Macé, founder of the Ligue de l'enseignement. Just like school, the army immediately becomes the object of republican pedagogy, and military service represents the tool of a political strategy aimed at «republicanizing» the nation and making the army what Jules Ferry would later define as an «arsenal of democracy»²¹.

After the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the republicans developed an original military model based on the inseparable connection between the desire for *revanche* and attachment to the ideals of the Republic, between defence of the homeland and defence of the universal values of the Enlightenment²².

The Prussian system became an inevitable benchmark. «No other nation today has greater power in terms of soldiers, organization, and discipline»²³, insists Charles Grad in the «Revue des Deux Mondes» at the end of the 1880s. According to Ernest Renan, the defeat should lead France to a solution that favoured «intellectual and moral reform»²⁴. The solution devised by republican governments was compulsory conscription, recruitment of an army of conscripts modelled after the Prussian army, which had shown its superiority over the imperial army of Napoleon III.

Thus, the French army became that of the Republic, partly through its cultural references and symbols. And partly because of the tasks assigned to it by the governments of the 1870s and 1880s: defence of the borders, maintenance of republican order, and, starting in

²⁰ R. Frary, *L'éducation militaire d'après Paul Déroulède*, in «La Revue politique et littéraire», 27.05.1882, p. 642.

²¹ A. Ehrenberg, *Le corps militaire. Politique et pédagogie en démocratie*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1983, p. 91.

²² J.F. Chanet, *Le service militaire*, in J-P. Rioux and J-F. Sirinelli, *La France d'un siècle à l'autre 1914-2000*, Paris, Hachette, 2002, p. 266.

²³ C. Grad, *Les forces militaires de l'Empire Allemand*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 01.03.1888, p. 790.

²⁴ E. Renan, *La réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, Paris, Michel Lévy Frères, 1871.

the 1880s, not without debate and controversy, colonial expansion aimed, according to Ferry, at spreading the lights of civilization.

Through the legislative texts of 1872, 1889, and 1905, conscription gradually became one of the great republican institutions, progressively generalizing military service and contributing to making it the place for the «triple learning of the nation, citizenship, and the Republic»²⁵.

The Cisse Law of July 27, 1872 was the result of a compromise, primarily driven by the precarious situation in which the country found itself after the defeat against the Prussians and the inability to financially and logistically guarantee mass military service (starting from the insufficient number of barracks). It reintroduced universal service – presented by conservative deputy Justin Chasseloup-Loubat, the law's rapporteur, as a «school of civic discipline» – with a duration determined by a lottery: the «lucky» numbers spend one year under arms, «unlucky» numbers five. Those holding a higher education diploma and paying 1500 francs were exempted. This law denied soldiers the right to vote: the army became «la Grande Muette» (the «Great Mute»)²⁶.

The debate resumed vigour during the centenary of the Revolution: the new Freycinet Law, passed on July 15, 1889, eliminated all exemptions and reduced conscription from 5 to 3 years, though maintaining the lottery. Nicknamed «the law of priests with backpacks», it abolished military service exemption for teachers, students of «great schools», and seminarians. Now, the entire clergy had to undergo military service, triggering opposition not only from the Catholic press, which criticized the violation of the Concordat²⁷ and a law «inspired by anti-religious hatred and a passion for electoral slogans»²⁸, but also from intellectual journals taking a moderate line.

The «Revue des Deux Mondes» – which stated that «to imagine making priests or seminarians carry a musket one must be at war, more or less openly, with the Church»²⁹ – called the measure deliberately punitive intent and practically useless:

Where does the need to revise the military organization and the law of 1872 come from, which remains the true and great reform, which has produced excellent results and given France a serious, solid, and devoted army? The radicals don't care. They don't approve a law with the goal of equity or the army's interest, but simply approve a party and sectarian law. The essential

²⁵ A. Crepin, *La conscription en débat ou le triple apprentissage de la nation, de la citoyenneté, de la République (1798-1889)*, Arras, Artois Presses Université, 1998.

²⁶ The nickname was given because the army was both large in size and silent at the polls, as military personnel did not have the right to vote.

²⁷ J. Maxence, *La loi militaire et l'épiscopat*, in «Annales catholiques. Revue religieuse hebdomadaire de la France et de l'Église», 24.08.1889, p. 425.

²⁸ E. Tavernier, *France*, in «L'Univers», 10.07.1889, p. 1.

²⁹ «We would like to observe that in countries where the separation between Church and State is complete, such as the United States, there has never been any attempt, even during the mass conscription of the Civil War, to impose military service on ministers of various creeds. A measure like that would have been seen as a clear violation of religious freedom and the free exercise of worship». A. Leroy-Beaulieu, *De la séparation de l'église et de l'état*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 15.12.1886, p. 837.

thing for them is to satisfy their own instincts, to strike, through suppression of legal exemptions, at the liberal class, the children of the bourgeoisie, and the priests, including parish priests and even bishops, who, like others, are subject to military service [...]. The result is a law that responds neither to military needs nor to the moral interests of the country, which only creates widespread disorganization³⁰.

The Boulangist interlude and the dramatic tensions generated by the Dreyfus Affair ultimately convinced the radical governments in power of the urgent need to complete the process that had begun. The Bereteaux Law, passed on March 21, 1905, under the radical government of Combes, approved single, universal, and mandatory service without lotteries or exemptions, lasting two years.

«The new law was born of the need for equality, and the resistance it is encountering is the last defence of the privileged», summarized «Le Radical», the reference organ of the radical-socialist galaxy, a few weeks before it was approved³¹.

This measure completed the transition from the professional armies of the previous century; it proved decidedly functional to the context of growing international tensions and a climate of «total» war at the doorstep.

Ultimately, compulsory conscription stood for reaffirmation of patriotism after the defeat against the Prussians and, at the same time, one of the most obvious expressions of political voluntarism and republican pedagogy. The army became a sort of «Ark of the Covenant» in service to the nation, the institution designed to guarantee *revanche* and, at the same time, embody a Republic that was now beginning to identify itself with France.

Republicans Tackling the «Social Question»

In the course of the 19th century industrialization led to growing concern across many European countries about the «social question». The precarious occupational situation of a large portion of the working class, the absence of any regulatory framework, urban growth and territorial imbalance, phenomena of marginalization and social exclusion, and the instability of industrial growth all threatened the functioning and cohesion of European societies.

Awareness of this, coupled with fears of social upheaval and revolution, led political elites, public powers, political groups, associations, and trade unions to dream up countermeasures, policies, and social welfare systems ranging from philanthropy to socialist municipalism, with health reformism as a precursor to the welfare state systems that would characterize the next century. An important turning point occurred in France with the Third Republic. The need to prevent a reaction from conservative forces, and at the same time, to broaden the social foundations of the state so as to avoid the specter of a socialist revolution, led the republicans to

³⁰ C. De Mazade, *Chronique de la Quinzaine*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 91, 1889, pp. 711-712.

³¹ S. Lacroix, *Dernière Résistance*, in «Le Radical. Journal Politique et littéraire», 05.02.1905, p. 1.

undertake reforms that, for many within the republican ranks, were not merely instrumental, but seen as inherently just and a fundamental expression of republican ideology itself. The reforms took two directions.

The first series of measures strengthened fundamental freedoms: in 1881, one month apart, laws on freedom of assembly and freedom of the press were approved, the text being the most liberal in the world (in a European context that was moving in the same direction). Freedom of the press, alongside education extended to all, was considered by the republicans as the only means of guaranteeing the people the due exercise of their sovereignty. A form of freedom of association was granted through the Waldeck-Rousseau Law (named after the Interior Minister who promoted it) of 1884, which allowed for the formation of trade unions. In the same year, a law introducing divorce was approved, and in 1885, the reform of the criminal system was passed. The second series of measures aimed to address labour issues and the «social question». The term «social reform» in late 19th-century France immediately calls to mind Frédéric Le Play and his social doctrine, set forth during the imperial era in his manifesto book *La Réforme Sociale* of 1864³². A decidedly provocative title in the context of the Second Empire, against which the author clarifies from the first pages the meaning of «slow and steady improvement»³³ in opposition to revolutionary breaks. The moderate reformism promoted by Le Play found fertile ground at the dawn of the Third Republic, gaining widespread support from both academic-intellectual circles and enlightened French entrepreneurs. In 1881, he founded the journal «La Réforme Sociale», which from its inception stood «not only as a «theoretical journal» aiming to spread principles scientifically deduced from observation, but also and above all as an “application journal” pursuing the practical realization of these same principles».

Although industrialization in France came later than in other European countries and France remained predominantly rural until World War I³⁴, from the 1880s onwards worker agitation, the structuring of a trade union movement, and the rise of socialism forced the republican and radical leadership to draw up a political response to the «social question», which found broad ideological agreement. Political, religious, and philosophical currents (Catholics, positivists, solidarists, socialists) helped to sensitize the political world and public opinion. Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* also contributed, further legitimizing the political measures taken.

Fuelled by this «reformist nebula», the end of the 19th century spawned studies, statistics, investigations, and projects legitimizing public intervention and seeking to provide the State with the means to intervene in multiple areas of social life: from working conditions to hygiene, from health to housing, from crime to working hours.

The condition of women also became a subject of specific attention, particularly with Charles Benoist's book on the working conditions of female workers in the sewing industry

³² F. Le Play, *La Réforme sociale*, Paris, Henri Plon, 1864.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

³⁴ In 1911, 56% of the French population lived in rural areas, and 41% were employed in agriculture, while in the United Kingdom 75% of citizens lived in urban areas and only 7.5% were active in agriculture.

(whose subtitle is evocative: «Notes for the Study of the Social Question»)³⁵, which inspired many an investigation in «La Réforme Sociale»³⁶.

The industrial crisis of the 1880s urgently raised the issue of unemployment³⁷ and formed the basis for the 1884 parliamentary inquiry into the situation of workers in industry and agriculture. The issue of labour forced its way to the centre of the political debate: the republicans and, in particular, the radicals sought to reach out to workers and integrate them into the Republic, meeting with broad political agreement, including among Catholic socialists. This is evidenced by Albert De Mun, who, in a famous speech delivered at the National Assembly on January 25, 1884, during the height of the industrial crisis, quoted an essay published a few months earlier in «La Revue des Deux Mondes» on the rising prices of goods and services³⁸:

The real issue is knowing if all those who care about maintaining social order will manage to meet and listen to one another in due course, not to band in futile resistance, but to guide the now necessary economic reform [...]. That is the question: there are no more important issues on the political scene, none that deserve more attention from the state's leadership. It has a name: it is the social question.

The convergence of this broad reformist front helped accelerate unprecedented labour legislation in the 1890s. In 1891 the Minister of Commerce, Jules Roche, speaking on behalf of the radicals' social policy, saw to establishment of the Labour Office³⁹.

1892 completed a long process regarding the professional protection of women and minors, prohibiting night work and employment in unhealthy or dangerous establishments for these two categories. Simultaneously, the law of November 2, 1892 created a body of labour inspectors, a state institution whose tasks and tools were codified, though five years after its establishment, its actions were still judged insufficient by the «Réforme sociale»⁴⁰.

The following year saw the passing of regulations regarding hygiene and safety in large factories, recommending proper ventilation and machine inspections. This was an important step showing attention to the health of workers in the workplace. Simultaneously, the law of July 15, 1893 established the principle of free medical care – both hospital and home care – for the poor. It remains a symbol of the welfare legislation of the Third Republic, inspired by the doctrine of solidarity.

³⁵ C. Benoist, *Les Ouvrières de l'aiguille à Paris. Notes pour l'étude de la question sociale*, Paris, Léon Chailley, 1895.

³⁶ See: J. Des Rotours, *Les patronnes, employées et ouvrières de l'habillement à Paris. Leur situation morale et matérielle*, in «La Réforme sociale», 1, 1898, pp. 61-79.

³⁷ C. Topalov, *Naissance du chômeur. 1880-1910*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1994.

³⁸ A. Cochut, *De l'enchérissement des marchandises et des services*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 60, 1883, pp. 512-551.

³⁹ This was the logical and immediate consequence of the creation (January 22, 1891) of the Higher Council of Labour, conceived as a kind of social Parliament. The Labour Office was meant to be its executive body. I. Lespinet-Moret, *L'Office du Travail 1891-1914. La République et la réforme sociale*, Rennes, PUR, 2007.

⁴⁰ «Despite all the efforts made by the inspection service officials, control is still quite incomplete». M. Vanlaer, *L'inspection du travail en France*, in «La Réforme sociale», 01.07.1897, p. 727.

In 1894 creation of the Social Museum, animated by Frédéric Le Play, enabled documents from the Social Economy Pavilion at the 1889 World Exposition to be collected, preserved, and placed on permanent exhibition. This institution attracted reform groups from various professional and ideological backgrounds, with the goal of studying the economic and social problems of the time and proposing solutions to public authorities. The Social Museum quickly became one of the key institutions marking the first steps of France's welfare state⁴¹.

In the same vein, a law of 1898, directly inspired by Bismarckian Germany's example, held employers responsible for industrial accidents unless they could prove the accident was due to a mistake by the victim (previously, workers had to demonstrate the responsibility of the company in an unlikely trial).

The republicans and radicals in power addressed the «social question» by extending State intervention to regulation of the labour market, as well as social welfare and protection. The result was three laws providing welfare assistance for abandoned children (1884), the poor (1893), and the elderly and incurably sick (1905).

Conclusion. Parliamentary Reformism

France represents a singular case within the European context of the late 19th century, as reconstructed in this monographic issue. And this is not because the «social question» becomes central to the republican political agenda during the 1880s and 1890s. Far from being a hypothetical French exception, it is actually a broadly transnational theme. This is an aspect that has been studied for some time, especially concerning the relations between France and Germany⁴², as well as between the United States and Europe⁴³.

The French peculiarity, rather, lies in the political-institutional context in which a new form of state interventionism and redefinition of the relationship between the state and the citizen take shape: a regime change proposed a marked limitation of executive power in favour of parliament. Remembering the excesses of Bonapartism, the Third Republic was founded on the centrality of the Chamber of Deputies and reduction of government prerogatives; it gradually acquired the traits of what Raymond Carré de Malberg would call «absolute parliamentarism».

In these foundational years the Third Republic urgently addressed the «social question» and tried to respond through intense parliamentary-driven reformism and the creation of new institutions regulating the labour market and developing a welfare and insurance system to extend social protection.

«The radical is a fervent supporter of the omnipotence of the state and governs a little too much», summarizes the «Revue des Deux Mondes» from the early 1880s⁴⁴. Starting

⁴¹ J. Horne, *Le Musée social. Aux origines de l'État providence*, Paris, Belin, 2004.

⁴² A. Mitchell, *The Divided Path. The German Influence on Social Reform in France after 1870*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

⁴³ D.T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings. Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.

⁴⁴ G. Valbert, *Le radicalisme et ses variétés*, in «Revue des Deux Mondes», 60, 1883, p. 208.

with the turn of the century, the «radical» Republic (1898-1914)⁴⁵ shows even greater determination in politically addressing the «social question».

With the entry of Alexandre Millerand into the executive as the first socialist to join the government in 1899, state interventionism grew, both in legislative matters and in arbitration and conciliation. In 1906 creation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, under another socialist, René Viviani, was another instance of republican response to the «social question»: assigning a ministry to workers as a guarantee of their integration into a society undergoing increasing industrialization⁴⁶.

Republicans, radicals, and socialists jointly planned and defended the republican social policy. Broad consensus regarding the nature of the republican regime helped to surmount the end-of-century crisis and the Dreyfus Affair, consolidating the Republic and consecrating it as the only regime capable of combining stabilization, order, and progress.

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⁴⁵ M. Rebérioux, *La République radicale? 1898-1914*, Paris, Points, 2014.

⁴⁶ I. Lespinet-Moret, *La Troisième République face à la question sociale*, in R. Bélot ed. *Tous Républicains! Origines et modernité des valeurs républicaines*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2011, p. 247.