

Problems With the French Third Republic

From its very roots, the French Third Republic had its problems. Following the defeat at the end of the Franco Prussian War, a temporary republic was instituted in 1870 which was to serve as an intermediate between the crushed Second Republic and the new monarchy but one problem persisted; who was to take the throne? The divisions that developed among the monarchists were between the legitimists who pushed for the Count of Chambord to take power, the Orlleanists who demanded that the Count of Paris be put on the throne, and the Napoleonists who wanted an heir of the great Napoleon Bonaparte to reign. Because of the Republican unity during the Monarchist quarrels, the Republicans put the Monarchist MacMahon in power as president in 1871. The Monarchists, still having the majority in the Parliament, were able to control the design of this Third Republic to give a great deal of power to this president. The Monarchists viewed the Republic as a monarchy in the making. In the task to empower a premier, MacMahon and the Parliament were at great odds. MacMahon elected the Duke of Paris after rejecting consecutive choices by the Senate for Gambetta and Dufaure for premier. Due to strong opposition by the Senate, MacMahon was lead to dissolve the Parliament and call for new elections in the hopes that, because of the people's Monarchist majority, a Monarchist Parliament would take power. MacMahon's strategy backfired leaving him with an even stronger Republican Parliament essentially forcing him to quit. Because of the division between the Monarchists, a republic was empowered against the people's wishes. Because of MacMahon's opposition to this new republic, the position of president was weakened thus destroying all chances of the French Third Republic's

evolution into a monarchy. By the end of 1871, the French citizens were left with a government unrepresentative of the political majority.

The French people were put in opposition with the rulings of the French Third Republic early on. The French general Boulanger whom they loved was put in the position of Secretary of War following the Franco-Prussian War. Boulanger frightened members of the Parliament as he strongly encouraged militarization. These fears were confirmed in 1889 when a French officer was arrested crossing the German/French border and Boulanger's immediate response was to declare war. The French Senate quickly removed him from office before he was able to make an assault on the Germans as any attempt would have resulted in a sure failure. This action by the Senate, however responsible it was, angered French citizens as Boulanger carried the highest approval rating among French politicians at the time.

The Dreyfus Affair, which began in October of 1894, proved to be another one of the problems that plagued the French Third Republic as it amplified the differences between various political and social groups, and created conflict between them. Alfred Dreyfus, who was falsely accused and convicted for espionage, served as a pivotal point for controversy and conflict. The country was divided into basically two groups: the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards. The Dreyfusards consisted of people such as the intellectuals, liberals and extremists from the left and the right, while the anti-Dreyfusards were made of groups such as the Roman Catholic Church and the army. One of the primary results of the Dreyfus Affair was the conflict between right and left wing political and social groups. When Dreyfus (being Jewish) was first found guilty, anti-Semitic groups quickly responded by spreading anti-Semitic propaganda, much of

the anti-Semites coming from the French Army. However, cover-ups made by the French General Staff gradually became more apparent. As Picquart, the new head of French Intelligence, revealed Dreyfus' innocence (by revealing Esterhazy's guilt), and was later arrested in July of 1898 for doing so, Liberal groups and other Dreyfusards then had something to protest. The right wing groups, specifically the Roman Catholic Church and the French army remained in support of the court decisions concerning Dreyfus. The army did so in order to maintain appearances, not wanting to look foolish for falsely accusing one of their own. Writers such as Anatole France, who wrote *L'histoire Contemporaine* (an analysis of the negative effects of the Dreyfus Affair), and Charles Peguy, led the intellectuals and the liberals, denouncing the position of the right wing groups.

Anti-Semitic movements also flourished as a result of the Dreyfus Affair, aside from mere propaganda. Much of this came as the result of Emile Zola's article *J'Accuse* which accused members of the government and the army of anti-Semitism and conspiracy. January 14, 1898, a day after Zola's article was published in the newspaper *L'Aurore*, anti-Semitic protests began throughout France, lasting for three days. The French-ruled Algerians began to persecute and kill Jews. Over a month later, Zola was put on trial and found guilty of libel, but escaped to England. These sorts of conflicts, the conflict between the right and left and anti-Semitism, arose from the Dreyfus Affair, thus causing it to be another problem for the French Third Republic.

From 1879 to 1899, the conflict between church and state became a major issue and thus another problem for the French Third Republic. The republicans felt that under the Concordat and the Organic Articles, the Roman Catholic Church had too much

power. The Chamber took several measures to limit the church's power, thus damaging the church and state relationship, and contributing to the problems of the French Third Republic.

One of the ways in which the laic laws affected France and the Roman Catholic Church was the reform of education. Many of the reforms made were anti-clerical, and all of them in one form or another undermined the authority of the Catholic Church. Lay teachers replaced several nuns, who formerly had always taught in schools. After passing a law excluding any religious instruction in 1882, the Chamber, while considering the budget, voted to reduce the number of chaplains in the primary schools by a vote of 375 to 95. The Republicans considered the Catholic control of the school system limiting to education; thus they took the control out of the church's hands. This fact served as a source of tension between church and state relations.

The Chamber even went so far as to attack the Concordat itself. In 1881, the separation of church and state ranked fifth among the deputies as far as importance. Two hundred and thirty three deputies shared their view on this topic, the majority of which were in favor of it. In 1885, the elections for the separation of church and state were held. In the first vote it failed, but when Planteau and Michelin proposed it again in the December of that year, it was approved in June of the following year. In this way, relations between the church and state were badly wounded, further complicating the problems of the French Third Republic.

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