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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Dörr, N. (2020). "As far as Numbers are concerned, we are beaten": Finis Galliae and the Nexus between Fears of Depopulation, Welfare Reform, and the Military in France during the Third Republic, 1870-1940. *Historical Social Research*, 45(2), 68-113. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.68-113>

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"As far as Numbers are concerned, we are beaten"
Finis Galliae and the Nexus between Fears of
Depopulation, Welfare Reform, and the Military in
France during the Third Republic, 1870-1940

Nikolas Dörr*

Abstract: »Was die Zahlen betrifft, sind wir geschlagen" *Finis Galliae* und der Zusammenhang zwischen der Angst vor Entvölkerung, Wohlfahrtsstaatsreformen und dem Militär in Frankreich während der Dritten Republik, 1870-1940«. After the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the cession of large parts of Alsace and Lorraine, the recapturing of the lost territories became a key objective of French politics. The strengthening of the French military was therefore of high importance in the Third Republic. But it quickly became obvious that the French army had to not only face Germany, but another opponent: the decline in the number of recruits who were fit for military service. The main reason for this development was the sharp fall of birth rates since the mid-19th century in comparison with other European nations. The low birth rates were followed by warnings about their possible negative consequences for the French army and the country's standing in the world. Pronatalist lobby organizations and family associations used and sought to intensify the massive depopulation anxiety ("*finis galliae*") to increase the pressure on political actors to implement welfare measures such as child benefits, tax reliefs for large families, and improvements in maternal and infant protection. But only after the First World War were pronatalist welfare state measures implemented on a larger scale. During the Vichy regime, pronatalism eventually became a state ideology. Although French pronatalism in general can be considered a well-researched topic, its military dimension is still a desideratum. This article is an approach to fill this academic void by analysing the nexus between welfare reform, population development, and the military from the beginning of the Third French Republic to the end of the Vichy regime.

Keywords: Pronatalism, birth rate, family policy, demography, conscription, welfare, depopulation, maternity protection.

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1. Introduction

On 16th January 1883, the London Times published a much-noted article on the fear of a “*Finis Galliae*” (The end of Gaul) in France, which had been triggered by French Interior Minister René Goblet’s report on the census.¹ Goblet had characterised France’s increasingly troubling demographic development as a threat to the country’s security. He particularly outlined the growing gap between France’s, other major European powers’, and the United States’ population and pointed to his country’s declining birth rate as the main source of the problem. The minister explicitly warned President Jules Grévy, who was the addressee of this report, of a “*Finis Galliae*” (Teitelbaum 2018, 195). This Latin expression describes the approaching end of Gaul in times of national crisis, with Gaul meaning modern France. In French history, “*Finis Galliae*” has been and still is a recurring expression of the fear of the motherland’s collapse. Its use became more frequent after the German Empire defeated France in 1871 (Overath 2006b, 52). Because of the country’s comparatively low birth rate, fears of a “*Finis Galliae*” remained present during the entire time of the Third French Republic. They reached an all-time high after the First World War and were especially prevalent in fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany’s pronatalist policies. Just a few years before the end of the Third Republic, in January 1937, Minister and later head of government Paul Reynaud summed up these fears in his speech in the Chamber of Deputies:

There is a single factor which dominates everything: the demographic factor. Forty-one million Frenchmen face sixty-seven million Germans and forty-three million Italians, these last two countries linked by the Berlin-Rome axis [...] As far as numbers are concerned we are beaten. (Tomlinson 1985, 412)

Compared to Germany and Great Britain, France lagged behind when it came to welfare state development (Schmidt 2005, 182).² The German social security system in particular proved to be an advantage, with France scurrying to keep up. A notable exception, however, was the pronatalist family policy: France played a pioneering role in this area of the welfare state. Child benefits, tax reliefs for large families, as well as measures for maternal and infant protection were implemented earlier and more extensively than in similar European countries. Central reasons behind these policies, which were introduced while the country was caught up in depopulation anxiety, were of a military nature, because “population growth was perceived as a guarantee of military and political

¹ *The Times*, 16th January 1883.

² Accident insurance was introduced in 1898, old-age insurance in 1910, and the health insurance in 1928. An exception is the early introduction of the, at that time very rudimentary, unemployment insurance in 1905.

power” (Gauthier 1998, 13). A comprehensive social security system was however only introduced after the First World War, when in addition to the conflict’s consequences, the reintegration of Alsace and Lorraine, where Bismarck’s social security system acted as a role model, played a key role in the development of the French welfare state (Lechevalier 2001, 91).

Marie-Monique Huss defines three central motives for the implementation of pronatalist policies in France: a) a general fear of the extinction of the French people, b) social-moral motives, which were primarily aimed at curbing child mortality, and c) conservative values including an opposition to contraception, pornography, and abortion (Huss 1990, 40). This list does not include one central motive: conserving or enhancing the military’s efficiency by increasing the birth rate, and must therefore be amended. This paper analyses the connection between pronatalist policies, the fear of a depopulation of France, and military performance; it focuses on the Third French Republic (1870-1940). Contrary to the standard thesis that state institutions in France would have hampered rather than promoted the introduction and expansion of the welfare state (Nord 1994, 821f.), this article argues that the French state has promoted social policies out of military necessity. This is particularly true for the pronatalist family policy. The nexus between the military, the welfare state, and the fears of a depopulation of France during the Third Republic is therefore the focus of this article.

2. The Development of Pronatalism in France

Pronatalism generally refers to policies and strategies initiated by the state that promote births (Gilbert 2005, 20ff). Moreover, in the French context, pronatalism can be understood as an ideology that has shaped politics, culture, and society, especially in the second half of the 19th and during the 20th century. Pronatalism has a long tradition in France.³ King Louis XIV, at the instigation of his finance minister Jean Baptiste Colbert, had already issued an edict that exempted fathers of more than ten children from all taxes for life as early as 1666.⁴ At the same time, emigration – with the exception of Frenchmen wanting to move to French colonies – was banned in order to minimize the population’s decline (Glass 1967, 91f.). During the French Revolution, there were initiatives aimed at penalizing a celibate life. Proposals even included forcing unmarried men in certain age groups to wear ridiculous-looking clothing in order to increase public pressure for procreating. Another suggestion was for

³ For more on French pronatalism from the 16th to the 18th century, see Tuttle 2010.

⁴ The edict is printed in Tuttle 2010, 187f.

them to shoulder the double tax burden and not be allowed to enter the civil service (Ogden and Huss 1982, 286f.). Some of these proposals were made directly in the National Convention; they were nevertheless not signed into law. But their existence does reveal how sensitive the topic of depopulation was in France in the 17th and 18th century.

A system of compulsory military service was introduced for the first time with the “levée en masse” (mass national conscription) in 1793. The resulting conscription contributed significantly to the French victories in the Revolutionary Wars. Here, the first connections between military benefits and welfare state measures were made. For example, only unmarried men had to do military service. A few years later, when the military service was extended to married men, they received extra payments for their wives and all children under the age of twelve (Dutton 1999, 441f.). Even Emperor Napoleon I was convinced that a direct relationship between the birth rate and military success existed. In 1806, he therefore ordered that the state would pay for the cost of every sixth child in a family. Four years later, he also promised to pay 6,000 dowries to soldiers of the French army, who had consented to a marriage (Spengler 1979, 224). These pronatalist measures had, however, little effect.

The demographic transition set in significantly earlier in France than it did in other western European countries or North America. Additionally, it showed a significant deviation from the standard theory (van de Walle 1978, 257-88). During the 19th century, the mortality and birth rates declined simultaneously (Labouvie 2016, 73f.). The first (statistically not fully reliable) declines in the annual birth rates can be seen around the year 1790 and they increased during the 19th century (Ariès 1948, 494-521). Several factors were responsible for the striking difference to other Western European countries’ demographic developments. Beginning with the French Revolution, women’s emancipation experienced an upswing and the influence of the church was diminished. Education in schools was committed to rational criteria. Additionally, the level of familiarity with contraceptives, and their availability, increased. The social, political, and religious pressure for women to give birth to as many children as possible therefore declined much earlier than in the other Western European countries (Dienel 1995, 25f.). In the 19th century, fewer and later marriages as well as higher infant and child mortality rates were identified as major causes of low population growth. However, Dienel points out that in reality the number of marriages in France did not decline in comparison with Germany. In fact, marriages were contracted earlier and both infant and child mortality in France were lower until the First World War began (Dienel 1995, 27). Increased family planning and the use of contraceptives must therefore be considered as key factors for the declining birth rate (Bergues, Ariès, and Hélin 1960). Between 1770 and 1789, 35 children per 1,000 inhabitants were born in France, in 1850 the number had gone down to only 27.4. A first decline in

France's population was recorded for the years 1854 and 1855 (Quine 1996, 53). At the turn of the century, there were only 20.6 births per 1000 inhabitants in France. In contrast, in the German Empire 39.1 children per 1000 inhabitants were born in 1871. The first decade of the 20th century was similarly drastic: In 1910, there were only 19.5 births per 1000 inhabitants in France and in 1911, there were more deaths than births (McLaren 1983, 179). At the outbreak of the First World War, 39 million Frenchmen faced 66 million Germans. In Imperial Germany, the decline of the birth rate started only shortly before the First World War (Jütte 2003, 177). At the beginning of the French Revolution, France, with a population of 27.5 million, and Russia were the most populous countries in Europe (Dienel 1995, 25). France represented 26 percent of the European population in 1789. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, that number went down to only 16.5 percent (Huber et al. 1950, 25). The demographer Jean Bourgeois-Pichat points out, that if France had maintained her early 18th-century birth rate, she would have had 88 million inhabitants instead of the actual 38 million by 1880 (Bourgeois-Pichat 1965, 490).

The low birth rates were followed by warnings about their possible negative consequences for the French army and the country's standing in the world. The first French law against child labour for example was passed in 1841 because there was a rising rejection rate of conscripts from industrialized departments (Fricke 1972, 119). In his 1849 book *De la décadence de la France (Of the Decadence of France)*, Claude-Marie Raudot, a member of the National Assembly during the Second French Republic, attributed France's decline to the stagnant birth rates: "In all cases, the first element of power is the population, and on this point, the relative strength of France having diminished in an enormous proportion, even more than its relative territorial strength, France is in full decay" (Raudot 1850, 6f.).⁵ Even before the Franco-Prussian War, there were army officials who warned of the natality crisis' consequences for the military. One of them was the head physician of the French army Jean-Charles Chenu with his 1867 published pamphlet *Recrutement de l'armée et population de la France*⁶ (*Recruitment of the Army and Population of France*; Hartmann 2011, 41). But not until the defeat against the German Empire did an intense political and public debate about the danger of a "Finis Galliae" begin and appropriate welfare state measures were discussed.

⁵ "Dans tous les cas, le premier élément de la puissance c'est la population, et sur ce point capital la force relative de la France ayant diminué dans une proportion énorme, plus encore que sa force territoriale relative, la France est en pleine décadence."

⁶ Chenu 1867.

3. The Decline of the Birth Rate in the Third Republic

In September 1870, the Second French Empire ended and, with the capture of Emperor Napoleon III and the proclamation of Léon Gambetta, the time of the Third French Republic began. The war between France and the German states under Prussian leadership ended finally on 10th May 1871 with the peace treaty of Frankfurt, which sealed the defeat of the French nation. In addition to the forced cession of large parts of Alsace and Lorraine as well as having to pay reparations, France suffered nearly 140,000 deaths and as many injuries. Despite having to pay huge reparations, the country recovered quickly. It even experienced a cultural and technological heyday in the *fin de siècle* movement (“end of century,” meaning an art movement at the end of the 19th century), symbolised by the completion of the Eiffel Tower in Paris in 1889. Nevertheless, the defeat against the German Empire, which was founded in the wake of the war in January 1871, left deeper marks that went far beyond the financial losses. The defeat and especially the cession of Alsace and Lorraine were perceived as traumatic and became part of the collective consciousness (Varley 2008). The recapturing of the lost territories became a key objective of French politics; it was the driving force until the outbreak of World War I. The strengthening of the French military was therefore of high importance in the Third Republic. In 1873, compulsory military service was reintroduced. However, it quickly became obvious that the French army had to not only face Germany, but another opponent: the decline in the number of recruits who were fit for military service. The reason for this development was the sharp fall of birth rates since the mid-19th century. At the same time, infant and child mortality had only slightly decreased. A decreasing population compared to other European powers was the consequence. The many casualties of the past 20 years of military conflicts only reinforced this trend.⁷ There were also increased deaths from indirect consequences of war, including those caused by the loss of the husband and father or his inability to work, epidemics and other diseases, a deteriorating food situation, and a damaged infrastructure (Nixon 1916).⁸

⁷ As a result of the Crimean War, the Second Opium War, various military expeditions of the colonial army in Africa, the Cochinchina campaign in the south of today's Vietnam, the Franco-Austrian war, participation in the suppression of the Taiping rebellion in China, the intervention in Mexico, and finally the defeat against the German troops in 1871, about 300,000 French soldiers died in just under two decades. Almost all of them had been at an age to start a family.

⁸ Using the example of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, Nixon shows that the losses that were indirect consequences of the war were similar to those of actual casualties during the war.

Increased immigration to France was an additional cause for concern. Since the end of the 19th century, it was especially Italians, Portuguese, Belgians, and Spaniards, and after the First World War mostly Poles and Russians who immigrated to France (Spengler 1979, 194-217). The industrialization had triggered a shortage of labour, reinforced by the declining birth rate and the war casualties of 1870/71. In addition, refugees fled to the country.⁹ As a result, France became the country with the highest percentage of foreigners, apart from the USA. The further declining birth rate stoked fears as foreigners fathered more children than French families (Mauco 1932, 184). From the point of view of most pronatalists, immigration was not an appropriate way to compensate for the declining birth rate (Camiscioli 2001, 602f.). Nonetheless, it did mitigate its impact, which was one of the reasons for the law of 26th June 1889 that declared children of foreigners born in France to be French citizens (Spengler 1979, 317).

4. Pronatalism as a Topic in French Politics and Society

Generally speaking, the changing population was one of the few developments that all political camps of the Third Republic – from nationalist and monarchist right-wingers to conservative clericals and reform-oriented socialists – perceived as a threat. According to an established definition, the pronatalist members of parliament could be divided into two groups: On the one hand, there were the “patriarchal patriots,” mostly from the catholic-conservative milieu, on the other hand the primarily secular and left-centre oriented “solidarist republicans” (Lanthier 2004, 4). Both groups agreed that France’s military security and global influence were jeopardized by the declining birth rate, but they differed in their analysis of reasons for the natality crisis (Morgan 2009, 71f.). The “patriarchal patriots” combined their pronatalist demands with the aim of preserving traditional social structures, in particular ending the rural exodus, suppressing women’s emancipation, prohibiting abortion, and preserving the father as the sole head of the family. In their view, only the father should receive financial support for the family. In contrast, the “solidarist republicans” associated pronatalism with a more self-determined image of women. Thus, women should receive additional rights and benefits if they gave birth to more children. Mothers of illegitimate children, widows, and women who had children from several men should also be supported by pronatalist measures. The

⁹ Particularly noteworthy are Armenians who fled to France from the Ottoman Empire, Russians who left their country as a result of the October Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war, and Italians and Spaniards who sought refuge from the right-wing dictatorships of Benito Mussolini and Francisco Franco during the interwar period.

antagonism, especially among the socialists, between the advocacy of a women's right to use birth control and the patriotic duty to have more children largely dissipated in favour of the latter at the beginning of the First World War (Winter 1988a, 136).

Confronted with “neo-Malthusianism,”¹⁰ both groups largely united, but thanks to pressure from the Catholic Church the “patriarchal patriots” were able to enforce their agenda much more strongly than the Socialists. In 1911, a cross-partisan pronatalist bloc in parliament was formed. Radical-Socialist Ferdinand Buisson became the first president of the pronatalist deputies, while the Conservative Edmond Lefebvre du Prey became vice-president. One hundred and nine deputies joined the “Groupe parlementaire pour la protection de la natalité” (Parliamentary Group for the Protection of the Birth rate), whose parliamentary membership increased to 264, out of a total of 502, by 1914 (Quine 1996, 66). Outside the parliament, the first pronatalist initiatives emerged as early as the 19th century. In part, these were only individual initiatives.¹¹

Pronatalist groups primarily originated in the Catholic milieu because of the church's traditional encouragement of child birth (Quine 1996, 58f.). On 10th February 1880, Pope Leo XIII published an encyclical called *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, which emphasized the importance of Christian marriage. Eleven years later, the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* followed. It focussed on the social situation of the workers and lower classes. The social conservative Frédéric Le Play was one of the first to advocate for increased support for large families (Heinze 2016, 46f.). At the same time, he publicly agitated against small or childless families and supported a paternalistic family structure. He pointed to the distribution of an estate between the heirs, which was introduced under Napoleon I, as an obstacle for having more children, especially in the rural population. The legal obligation to divide land among all sons or, alternatively, to pay a large amount of compensation, was, in the opinion of Le Play, a deterrent (Le Play 1871, 8f.). Farmers would therefore deliberately forgo having more children to preserve the unity of their farmland. As one of the protagonists of social Catholic paternalism, Léon Harmel, an entrepreneur, was heavily influenced by the ideas of Le Play. In his mill, Harmel implemented reforms by

¹⁰ In Neo-Malthusianism, Malthus's anti-natalist theory is associated with political demands for women's emancipation and workers' rights. The anti-militarist attitude of most neo-Malthusians is important for understanding the contrast to militarily influenced pronatalism.

¹¹ In 1898, the *British Medical Journal* reported on Professor Stéphane Tarnier, the founder of obstetrics in France, who would pay a reward of 100 francs for each newborn child in his hometown Arc-sur-Tille in Burgundy due to the low birth rate. In the same year, Hilaire de Chardonnet, as mayor of Charette in Isère, made a similar offer, but excluded children born out of wedlock. *British Medical Journal*, 1, 1898, 170.

voluntarily paying workers with families a subsidy (*supplément familiale de salaire*; Quine 1996, 60). The social reformer, engineer, and statistician Émile Cheysson was also one of the followers of Le Play. As director of the steel factories in Le Creusot, he implemented Le Play's ideas and later taught them as a professor at the *École libre des sciences politiques* and the *École des mines de Paris*. In 1891, he described the military, political, and economic consequences of the birth decline in an article for the magazine *La Réforme Sociale* as a "national peril which cannot be ignored" (Dutton 2002, 10).

The most influential pronatalist association was founded in 1896. That year, demographer Jacques Bertillon,¹² together with the physicians Charles Richet, Émile Javal, the politician André Honnorat, and Émile Cheysson, founded the "Alliance nationale contre la depopulation" (National Alliance Against Depopulation), which soon was renamed as "Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française" (National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population; Dutton 2002, 22f.). According to the organization, families should have at least three children. In practice, the Alliance was mainly a lobbying organization that, unlike other pronatalist groups, provided little support to large families. In 1913, the Alliance was recognized by the state as eligible and thus received public funds in support (Harp 2001, 130). With the foundation of the Alliance, the pronatalist lobby was professionalized. Complicated demographic analyses and statistics only played a minor role in their propaganda. The propaganda efforts of the Alliance "focused on the military consequences of a continued decline of fertility, thus making national security completely dependent on a higher birthrate" (Reggiani 1996, 732). Prominent members such as the future Nobel laureate in medicine Richet already thought a high birth rate was a basic requirement for France's military security in the 1880s (Dienel 1995, 155). They therefore concluded pronatalist measures necessary to ensure the security of France. In July 1900, significantly influenced by Bertillon, more than 130 senators demanded an official committee to address the problem of depopulation (Talmy 1962, 99-107). Finally, in January 1902, Interior Minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau established an extra-parliamentary commission with 67 members tasked to discuss the problem of the low birth rate and recommend countermeasures (Becchia 1986, 203).¹³ In addition, the

¹² Bertillon (1851-1922) was director of the Paris Statistical Office and therefore deeply acquainted with the methods of demography. Bertillon is the author of numerous pronatalist writings. His major work is *La Dépopulation de la France: Ses conséquences, ses causes, mesures à prendre pour la combattre*, 1911.

¹³ For the composition of the commission, see Cole 2000, 202. Cole mistakenly names the father and former mayor of Nantes René Waldeck-Rousseau instead of the actual Interior Minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau.

commission issued a large number of reports on the issue of depopulation.¹⁴ During the meetings, the relationship between birth rate and military performance was discussed intensively. In his speech to the Commission in July 1902, Bertillon equated the duty of bearing children with the duty of military defence: “Every man has the duty to contribute to the perpetuation of his country exactly as he is bound to defend it” (Quine 1996, 52). The commission’s report from July 1902 largely supported the pronatalist demands of Bertillon’s Alliance. In 1904, the extra-parliamentary commission met again. Against the background of about 500,000 illegal abortions per year, the last meeting in 1911 mainly dealt with measures against the neo-Malthusians (Quine 1996, 65). Due to public pressure from the pronatalists, a second extra-parliamentary commission with 315 members was convened at the end of 1912. Institutionally, this commission was subordinate to the Ministry of Finance and its minister Louis-Lucien Klotz. But the second commission did not produce many results because of too many members and constant objections from the Ministry of Finance (Tomlinson 1985, 407). It is noteworthy however, that military issues now had an even greater significance. At the very first meeting, a sub-committee was formed, which was to examine the impact of the natality crisis on the military (Dienel 1995, 75).

In addition to the Alliance, other pronatalist associations emerged.¹⁵ Simon Maire, former officer of the French army, founded the “Ligue populaire de pères et mères de familles nombreuses” (Popular League of Fathers and Mothers of Large Families) in 1908, which took a much more offensive attitude to promote pronatalism than Bertillon’s more elitist organization. Every father and mother with at least four children could become a member. In 1911, the organization already had a membership of 600,000 (Quine 1996, 70). Hunter estimates – based on statements by the right-wing deputy in the Chamber of Deputies Major Émile Driant – that about 350 MPs supported the Ligue in 1913 (Hunter 1962, 494). In addition to the already existing associations, the “Ligue des fonctionnaires pères et mères de familles nombreuses” (Civil Servant’s League of Fathers and Mothers with Large Families) was founded in 1911. It was primarily aimed at state officials (Robcis 2013, 32). In response to Maire’s Ligue, industrialists from northern France founded the “La plus grande famille” (The Largest Family) organization, which was strongly influenced by Le Play’s social-catholic ideas. Unlike Maire’s Ligue, no workers, peasants, socialists, and non-Catholics could join. Finally, in 1918, the strictly Catholic conservative “Ligue des droits de la famille” (Family Rights League) was established by Senator Joseph Massabuau (Passmore 2013, 223).

¹⁴ The published reports of the commission of 1902 and its sub-commissions are listed in Becchia 1986, 246.

¹⁵ For a list, see Luca Barrusse 2009.

Neo-Malthusianism, propagated primarily by the radical left, became the central enemy of all pronatalist associations. Especially the libertarian pedagogue Paul Robin became a prominent advocate. Robin was less concerned with radical antinatalist measures in the sense of Malthus. He rather promoted birth control through contraception and improved sexual education. Although the neo-Malthusians had little direct influence on political decisions, they were present as a concept of sexual liberalization that evoked feelings of fear in the Third Republic. At that time, small families were also referred to pejoratively as “*familles malthusiennes*” (Malthusian families; Quine 1996, 58). Radical demands from neo-Malthusian activists, such as the “*grève des ventres*” (strike of the womb) propagated by Marie Huot, increased the fear of the Malthusians. Pronatalism was able to succeed as a countermovement to the neo-Malthusians by acting as a socially accepted safeguard against the radical left they represented. The pronatalists were socially connected to many groups due to their politically broad position. In addition to civil society groups and religious organizations, the Alliance also received support from prominent political, business, military, and cultural representatives. A striking example of this is the entrepreneurial family Michelin (McLaren 1983, 177). Many high-ranking soldiers also became members of Bertillon’s Association, including the Generals Noël de Castelnau and Maxime Weygand. Later, top politicians like Raymond Poincaré, Alexandre Millerand, and Paul Reynaud also joined. The famous author Émile Zola became a member of the Alliance, too. In 1899, he even published a pronatalist novel called *Fécondité* (fecundity), which artistically propagated an increase in the birth rate.

5. Strategic Demography - the Military Dimension of Depopulation

The era of the mass army began with the French Revolution and the Revolutionary Wars. From this point onwards, as Clausewitz pointed out in his basic work *Vom Kriege* (On War), the number of available soldiers constituted a central component of warfare (Clausewitz 1980, 799). The size of an army was no longer just a symbol of a nation’s strength. In fact, the number of soldiers was considered to strongly influence the likelihood of victory or defeat in a war. The negative development of the birth rate combined with her geographical situation posed a particular danger to France. With the German Empire and Italy, the French Republic bordered on two hostile states, which had a significantly higher population growth. Between 1880 and 1910, France’s population increased by only two million to a total population of 39 million, while that of Germany’s increased ten times as much (Grawe 2017, 276). In 1800, France had been the most populous country in Europe with about 28 million inhabit-

ants, but already in 1850, the states of the later German Empire overtook her – followed by Austria-Hungary in 1880, the United Kingdom in 1900, and finally Italy in 1930 (Ogden and Huss 1982, 284). Between 1871 and 1911, the populations of Imperial Germany, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Italy, and Spain increased by at least 20 percent, while the French population only increased by 9.7 percent from 36.1 to 39.6 million. In Russia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Finland, Portugal, and Denmark, the birth rate was also higher than in France (Weyl 1912, 343). The largest increase in absolute numbers and in percentage was seen in Germany with a population growth from 41.1 to 64.9 million, an increase of 57.8 percent within 40 years (Dyer 1978, 5). The German Empire grew on average by 600,000 people per annum during this period, while France only grew by 89,700. A stir was caused by the censuses in the years 1890 to 1892, 1895, 1900, 1907, and 1911 because in these years, the French population, instead of growing, declined due to higher death than birth rates (Becchia 1986, 201). Between 1850 and the outbreak of the First World War, there were a total of eleven years with a negative population development. Between 1935 and 1945 there were more deaths than births every year, from 1939 onwards the war was the main cause of this downward trend.

In the German Empire, the stagnating population development in the neighbouring country was interpreted as a major strategic advantage. After the Franco-Prussian War, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke is said to have commented that France has since lost a battle every day because of its low birth rate (Dienel 1995, 155, 246). Edme Piot, left-wing Senator of the Côte-d'Or department, agreed with Moltke:

Assuming that the fate of modern wars, between European nations that are equally well prepared and armed, depends primarily on the superiority of numbers, one cannot overlook the fact that the future seems to be full of uncertainties and threats and that Marshal Moltke has rightly declared that 'the French lose a battle every day' (Piot 1900, 23).¹⁶

The German army reconnaissance in particular analysed the consequences of the low birth rate in the neighbouring country (Grawe 2017, 276-82).¹⁷ In 1908,

¹⁶ "Si on songe qu'entre nations européennes, également et formidablement préparées et armées, le sort des guerres modernes dépend surtout de la supériorité du nombre, on ne peut manquer de reconnaître que l'avenir apparaît chargé d'incertitudes et de menaces, et que le maréchal de Moltke avait raison de déclarer que 'les Français perdent tous les jours une bataille.'"

¹⁷ See also the analyses of the third division of the German General Staff: Compilation of the most important changes in the army of France [Zusammenstellung der wichtigsten Veränderungen im Heerwesen Frankreichs] 1907, 10th February 1908, German Federal Archives [GFA], PH 3/654, 60-63; Compilation of the most important changes in the army of France 1908, 15th February 1909, GFA, RM 5/1234, 3-11; Compilation of the most important

for example, the German General Staff reported that the French army needed to call in 32,000 unfit recruits in order to maintain the strength of their peacetime presence and the German chancellor Bernhard von Bülow believed that “for biological reasons” the situation of the French army would continue to deteriorate (ibid., 277). Until the end of the Second World War, the French population development remained a topic widely discussed in German science, politics and media (Heimsoeth 1990, 53). But the voices in Germany that saw the danger of developing a low birth rate similar to France’s increased after the turn of the century (Etzemüller 2007, 44f.).

Because of diplomatic crises, demographic developments became even more important for the French, as they made a war with Germany and her well-equipped army seem more realistic.¹⁸ Against the backdrop of these crises and a more aggressive German foreign policy under Emperor Wilhelm II, the decline in the birth rate and its effects on the army were more widely debated and analysed:

The political motive of the debate from 1900 to 1918 in France and Germany is no longer the concern about the increase of the poor, not even – despite socialists and neo-Malthusians, who seem almost old-fashioned – the miserable plight of the worker with many children under capitalism but the question of the military strength of one’s own country, the number of its battalions, and the health of its recruits – ‘strategic demography.’ (Dienel 1995, 245)

Pronatalists used the military dimension of the natality crisis to increase domestic pressure. Thus, an analysis allegedly written by the German doctor Otto Rommel was published in French in 1886, plainly describing the French birth decline as a weakness in a conflict against the German neighbour. The author predicted that five poor German children would easily defeat the only child of a wealthy French family (Bourdelaïs 1993, 120f.). In truth, the text was written and disseminated by French pronatalists (Surkis 2006, 120). The Germans immediately, but largely unsuccessfully, denied authorship (Boillot 1886, 4). The partly drastic analyses of the alleged German doctor were often quoted as evidence of French decline (Andersen 2015, 78): “It is very good to like comfort and to hate trouble; unfortunately, the moment is approaching when the five poor sons of a German family will easily overcome the only son of a French family. [...] You do not want to pay for children, to bear the trouble of their education [...]!” (Rommel 1886, 230)¹⁹

changes in the army of France 1909, 15th February 1910, GFA, RM 5/1234, 150ff.; Compilation of the most important changes in the army of France 1910, 15th February 1911, GFA, RM 5/1234, 223–226.

¹⁸ Particularly noteworthy are the *Krieg-in-Sicht-crisis* (War-in-Sight crisis) of 1875, the Boulanger crisis of 1889, and the two Moroccan crises of 1904–1906 and 1911, respectively.

¹⁹ “C’est très bien d’aimer le confort et de détester les ennuis; malheureusement, le moment approche où les cinq fils pauvres de la famille allemande viendront facilement à bout du fils

Various options were discussed, both by the military and political actors, to solve the problem of the declining French birth rate. Integrating recruits from the colonies into the military service was a possibility.²⁰ They could compensate the decline in the birth rate and would help to integrate the colonies more strongly into the motherland (Koller 2001, 64-74). In 1907, Adolphe Messimy, a former general, at that time member of parliament and later Minister of War, proposed to extend compulsory military service to include French Algeria. Although the Ministry of War was interested and a commission on the issue was established, the plan was not pursued for the time being. A main reason for this were racist reservations, but also the fear of a potential uprising of militarily trained Algerians against the colonial rulers (Grawe 2017, 278). A short time later, Charles Mangin, a highly decorated officer and later general, published an article in the *Revue de Paris*, which caused a great debate because he advocated for an “*armée noire*” (Black Army) consisting of inhabitants of the colonized areas of West and Central Africa. The so-called “Senegalese army” was supposed to replace French troops in North Africa, especially Algeria. The French could then be deployed to mainland Europe. The “Senegalese” themselves were not to be deployed in Europe for the time being (ibid., 278). The first two battalions were set up and relocated to Algeria in February 1910 (Koller 2001, 71).

Bertillon’s major work with the title “La dépopulation de la France” was published in 1911. In his book, the protagonist of the Alliance emphasized the nexus between military performance and the natality crisis. According to Bertillon, France and the German Empire had nearly the same number of recruits right after the war of 1870/71: 296,334 French versus 330,136 German. At the time of publication in 1911, Germany had twice as many. He saw the reason for this in the births per annum. On average, 908,859 children were born in France between 1891 and 1911 compared to 1,903,160 in Germany (Bertillon 1911, 15f.). Bertillon also pointed out that the importance of the birth rate for the strength of the military is an argument that can best be understood by the “ordinary” population. Therefore, it has a special significance for pronatalist propaganda (Bertillon 1911, 15).

The use of colonial troops helped to alleviate the military consequences of the birth decline. However, the numerical disadvantage toward the German army continued to increase. The declining birth rate and diplomatic crises with the German Empire led to recurring discussions about the length of military service in France. Their existence made it obvious that the relationship between military service and birth rate was considered ambivalent. In the short term, the

unique de la famille française. [...] Vous ne voulez pas vous payer des enfants, supporter les ennuis de leur éducation [...]!”

²⁰ See also Carina Schmitt’s article in this issue.

military leadership was interested in as many soldiers as possible. Hence, the compulsory military service should include as many recruits as possible and last a long time. In the medium and long term, however, conscription was detrimental to the birth rate because the recruits could not father children while they were on duty (Balfour 1867, 230). Even during holidays, it hardly came to procreation as the soldiers and their wives often deliberately put off the desire for children until the man was back in the house. The increased danger of death from war or accidents within the army also played a role. The mortality of French soldiers during peacetime was higher than in the German army (Bertilon 1911, 20). Since the recruits were exclusively men of fertile age, such losses had a particularly negative effect on the birth rate. According to the military law of 1872, the duration of military service was five years and officially the same for every Frenchman. In practice, however, lots were still being drawn, a positive one reducing the duration of service from five years down to only one. In addition, many professions were excluded from having to serve altogether (Krumeich 1994, 142f.). In 1889, the compulsory military service was reduced by the *loi Boulanger* (Boulanger Law) to only three, then from March 1905 (*loi Bertheaux*) on to two years, and the exemptions, above all the system of drawing lots, were abolished.

Since the defeat against the German Empire, many proposals that linked military security with an increase in the birth rate were discussed. In 1878, Member of Parliament Jean-Edmond Laroche-Joubert recommended that fathers of at least two children should be exempted from compulsory military service (Dienel 1995, 82). In his book, *La question de la dépopulation en France*, Senator Piot proposed a comprehensive reform of the military to increase the birth rate:

A reform of the military law in favour of large families is just as necessary as a reform of the tax law. Nothing is more legitimate. Those who do not adequately defend their country through their offspring need to make a greater contribution through their personal services. Nothing is fairer, as they have less to bear than the heads of families with many children. Nothing will be more effective. (Piot 1900, 62)²¹

Senator Odilon Lannelongue, member of the extra-parliamentary commission on depopulation, proposed legislation in June 1910, which included an extended compulsory service for bachelors over the age of 29 (Pedersen 1996, 684f.). Other proposals wanted to link the duration of military service to the number of

²¹ "Une modification de la loi militaire en faveur des familles nombreuses s'impose au même titre que celle de la loi fiscale. Rien n'est plus légitime. Ceux qui ne contribuent pas suffisamment à la défense du pays par leur descendance doivent être tenus d'y contribuer dans une plus large mesure par leurs services personnels. Rien n'est plus équitable, puisqu'ils ont moins de charges que les chefs des familles comptant beaucoup d'enfants. Rien ne sera plus efficace."

sons (v. W. 1900, 379). However, these proposals did not receive a majority. The *loi des deux ans* (Two Years Law) finally reduced the duration of military service from three to two years, which corresponded to the situation in Germany. At the same time, the options for evading the service were significantly reduced. But as the French army was unable to conscript enough recruits in the following years, a return to the three-year compulsory military service was repeatedly discussed. As early as 1906, the massive superiority of the German opponent became obvious. That year, the army of the German Empire was able to conscript 1.2 million recruits while the French army could only recruit 368,000 men. Due to the extreme population advantage, the German army was able to send nearly 55 percent of the young men back to their families and their jobs. In fact, Germany needed only 26 percent of all recruits, not counting the young soldiers who were transferred to the reserve force and the Landsturm, whereas France needed to integrate two-thirds into her army (Winter 1986, 7). In July 1913, Adolphe Messimy, one of the most important military politicians, pointed to this central problem: "... a country can have only the army of its birth rate" (Hunter 1962, 492).

That same year, a bill (*loi Barthou*) was finally adopted. In the parliamentary debate over the re-introduction of the three-year service, demographic and military arguments were treated almost equally (Hunter 1962, 491). The majority of MPs were aware that an extended service would have a negative impact on the birth rate, as the recruits who were drafted would most likely not father children until the end of their service. The debate over the three-year compulsory military service therefore represented in practice a dispute over the correct military handling of the declining birth rate. During the discussions, on 3rd June 1913, the deputy Joseph Reinach criticized the law, which had introduced the two-year service in 1905: "The law is condemned by the most powerful thing on earth, the force of nature. One cannot allow the number of male births to fall from 500,000 in 1872 to 385,000 in 1912, while at the same time the number was rising in Germany from 770,000 to 1 million" (Tomlinson 1985, 408).

Knowing that soldiers were most likely to beget children in the first year after military service, parliament adopted an amendment by MP Paul Escudier, which lowered the conscription age by one year (Geva 2013, 70). Many military leaders and politicians criticized the amendment. Firstly, they considered the recruits too young and weak. Secondly, they argued, by lowering the age, it would take until the end of 1915 to hold two fully trained cohorts of recruits. Other proposals received no majority in parliament. These included André Honnorat's proposal to shorten service for recruits from or with large families, the linking of service to the number of children and siblings by Marc Réville or the recommendation to extend holidays for recruits, which should increase the likelihood of procreation (Hunter 1962, 498f.). Reinach and MP Adrien Jean

Lannes de Montebello also demanded a pronatalist amendment to the law. They respected the need for an expansion of the army in the short term, and at the same time acknowledged the long-term problems with the birth rate. As a compromise, they proposed that certain groups of people should only be drafted for military service if the number of conscripts fall below a specified number. Then young men who earn the living for their family should be recruited, followed by men with at least three, then four, then five or more siblings, and finally, fathers with at least two children (Geva 2013, 68f.). However, these men should serve only two years instead of three. According to Hunter, the proposals were rejected because they violated the principle of *Égalité*, which had been an ideological cornerstone of the Republic since the French Revolution (Hunter 1962, 491, 502f.). Despite massive criticism, especially from the workers' movement, the extension of the military service was passed in July 1913 (Krumeich 1980, 54-138). It did not however only consist of said extension; it also obligated more men to have to serve. From then on, men were drafted at the age of 20 instead of 21 and the total service obligation (including service in the reserve force) was increased by three years. This pushed the army to the limits of France's demographic potential.

Following the reintroduction of the three-year compulsory military service, the Alliance intensified its lobbying efforts. In the election campaign of 1914 – the election took place on 26 April and 10 May – the organization distributed 1.5 million posters picturing five German soldiers killing two French soldiers with a bayonet. The picture represented the threat Germany's higher birth rate posed to France. Postcards were also used as an advertising medium for the pronatalist cause. Charles Gide, a member of the first extra-parliamentary commission on depopulation, was impressed by a postcard distributed in the Chamber of Deputies on 29th March 1909. It showed Europe in 1950, with Germany stretching from the Rhine to the Black Sea and from the North Sea to the Adriatic and having a population of more than 250 million people (Becchia 1986, 211f.). The lobbying was quite effective: one third of all candidates incorporated the issue of a declining population into their election program (Tomlinson 1985, 408).

In addition to the quantity of the population, its quality became a topic during the Third Republic as well. The more and more complicated technical innovations in the military demanded a minimum of mathematical and scientific knowledge. Additionally, the army's internal communication, which gained in importance due to advances in military tactics, now demanded fluency in the national language. In a war, it was crucial for soldiers to be able to understand, implement, or pass on orders within a very short time. In 1863, 7.5 million French people could only speak in local dialects, making communication between citizens from different regions at least difficult, if not completely impossible (Obinger and Petersen 2014, 13f.). Some pronatalists felt that the

quality of the soldiers should be an issue of secondary importance, if there were not enough recruits: "So, not having the quantity, we cannot hope to have the quality" (Bertillon 1911, 21).²² This was also noticed in Germany. Chief of General Staff Helmuth von Moltke (the Younger) reported to Chancellor von Bülow that the French army would have to draft 90 out of 100 conscripts, whereas in Germany it was only 53 out of 100.²³ Others, like the former Minister of War Charles de Freycinet, believed that France's recruits were qualitatively superior to Germany's and that this advantage could still be increased. Within the army especially, many thought numerical inferiority could be more than compensated by qualitative factors. For them, it would not be the pure number of soldiers, but their readiness for combat, higher morale, and intense connection to their homeland that would be the decisive factors, and education would play a central role in furthering them (Forrest 2009, 170-75). The Japanese army, which despite quantitative inferiority defeated the Russians in the war of 1904/05 with "causes of a moral kind," served as a role model for the French (Wesseling 2000, 167). Nonetheless, pronatalists argued that the sheer number of soldiers in the German army had a decisive advantage: it allowed them to be more selective in deciding who was to join the military. This meant that unlike the French army, Germany was not dependent on unfit or physically inferior soldiers. Bertillon recognized this point as crucial for a decline in the quality of the French army:

The numerical strength of the German population makes it possible for its military administration to choose conscripts much more rigorously than our revision councils can [...]. French soldiers are less robust than those of other armies. This is fatal, since in other countries one can eliminate not only the disabled, but also the mediocre, and keep only the men of choice. In France, on the contrary, we have managed to take even the infirm (for auxiliary services) and the mediocre ones for active service. This physical inferiority of the soldiers is reflected in the medical statistics of the army. (Bertillon 1911, 19f.)²⁴

²² "Ainsi, n'ayant pas la quantité, nous ne pouvons pas espérer avoir la qualité."

²³ The military capability of the most important states of Europe [*Die militärische Leistungsfähigkeit der wichtigsten Staaten Europas*], Helmuth von Moltke (the Younger) to Bernhard von Bülow, 29th January 1909, Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, R 995.

²⁴ "La force numérique de la population allemande permet, en effet, à son administration militaire de choisir les conscrits avec beaucoup plus de rigueur que ne peuvent le faire nos conseils de révision [...]. Les soldats français sont moins robustes que ceux des autres armées. Cela est fatal, puisque dans les autres pays, on peut éliminer non seulement les infirmes, mais aussi les médiocres, et ne garder que les hommes de premier choix. En France, au contraire, on en est arrivé à prendre même les infirmes (pour les services auxiliaires) et les médiocres pour le service actif. Cette infériorité physique des soldats se traduit dans les statistiques médicales de l'armée."

6. French Pronatalism before the First World War

In general, the French welfare state experienced a boost in the years up to the First World War. The state budget for the welfare state doubled between 1890 and 1910 (Mitchell 1991, 295). With the “*Direction du Travail*” in the Ministry of Commerce and the “*Direction de l’assistance publique*” attached to the Ministry of the Interior, the bureaucracy was also adapted to the new requirements. At the municipal level, cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants now had to set up a *bureau d’hygiène* (Nord 1994, 822). However, only few pronatalist measures were implemented before the outbreak of the First World War, although the decline in the birth rate and its military implications became a widely discussed topic in the Third Republic. A large part of the elites in politics, the military, and in business acknowledged the need for welfare state improvements to stimulate the birth rate; but high costs kept them from implementing major welfare state legislation. Politically, the financial burdens of pronatalist measures had a deterring effect, as their positive repercussions would take 10 to 20 years to materialize. From a military point of view, promoting births meant losing soldiers in the short term because young men would not be allowed to be recruited or given long holidays to have children.²⁵ In addition, their pay would have to be increased to support larger families. From an entrepreneurial perspective, pronatalism meant a restricted use of female labour because of extended maternity leave, breastfeeding during working hours, increased financial support for working mothers, etc. These were the reasons why, despite the intense debate about pronatalism, only a few new laws were actually implemented. These were often abolished or restricted after a short period of time – mostly because of fiscal pressure. Until the First World War therefore, France was not pursuing a broad pronatalist strategy to improve the declining birth rate but rather trying to combat it using several isolated regulations.

Some improvements were nevertheless remarkable. As early as December 1874, the *loi Roussel* implemented the first pronatalist measure: a law intended to restrict wet-nursing (Sussman 1982, 122-28). At that time, it was common practice for wet nurses to breastfeed several children, which often led to undernourishment of the nurse’s own. With the Roussel law, two married women were appointed at the local level to inspect the wet nurses and pay particular attention to the hygienic conditions of their workplaces (Klaus 1993, 197). The Child Protection Act of 1874 was also, at least partly, passed in reaction to the low birth rate. It set the legal working age at twelve years and introduced a

²⁵ For this reason, in 1928 the military service was re-organized so that recruits could serve as close as possible to their hometown, in order to facilitate the procreation of children.

state inspection at the *Directorate du Travail*, which was expanded in 1892 (Heywood 1988, 267-86).

Under Jules Ferry, far-reaching reforms were implemented in the education sector in 1881/82. Schooling became compulsory, free of charge, and the lessons were secularized. The introduction of universal compulsory education together with compulsory military service brought about a modernisation push that replaced or at least supplemented regional identities with a national one, especially for the rural population (Weber 1976, 95-114). The reforms were also a reaction to the military's criticism of their recruits' level of education (Aghion, Persson, and Rouzet 2012, 7-10). The 1883 draft of the "*Loi relative à la dépopulation de la France et aux moyens d'y remédier*" (Law relating to the depopulation of France and the means to remedy it) included the most far-reaching pronatalist measures the Third Republic had ever implemented (Ranse 1883, 145ff.). One of these was, for example, a regulation obligating employers to set up nursing rooms for mothers in workshops and factories (Article 4; N. N. 1883, 561). However, the bill did not receive a majority in parliament. The law of 17th July 1889 was a first, albeit short-lived, success for pronatalists seeking birth-favouring tax legislation. It completely exempted fathers of seven or more children from taxation but was repealed in the following year due to financial problems (Quine 1996, 64). After long and intense discussions, a Labour Protection Act was passed in November 1892 banning women from working in mines or at night and reducing their daily working hours (Offen 2018, 223-26). The law was in fact less intended to protect women in general than protecting potential mothers and their fertility (Zancarini-Fournel 1995, 75-92).

A major problem for population growth was infectious diseases. At the end of the 19th century, France had one of the highest tuberculosis rates in Europe. In the fight against epidemics, France, in contrast to Imperial Germany, relied less on centralized politics. Instead, the doctors on the local level were supposed to provide support for a containment of the disease. The medical lobby had great influence in the Third Republic and advocated heavily against a public hygiene that was centralized and organized on the national level (Ellis 1990, 171-206). It was not until 1902, after nearly 20 years of discussions, that a law on public health care came into effect. Epidemics were officially classified as a threat to national security, a development, which shows the decisive role military considerations played in implementing the law (Shapiro 1980, 4-22). In Particular, the widespread prevalence of tuberculosis, especially among young men of military age, posed a threat to France's ability to defend herself. It also had a negative effect on the birth rate because of infants falling victim to the disease and potential mothers and fathers becoming infertile or dying prematurely.

The influence of the pronatalists increased after the founding of the “*Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française*” (National Alliance for the Growth of the French Population) in 1896. Their continuous lobbying efforts, including contacts to political, business, cultural, scientific, and religious elites, contributed significantly to putting depopulation on the agenda. Ogden and Huss point out that the Bibliothèque nationale de France lists an impressive amount of 48 monographs written between 1894 and 1918 that referred to the population question in their book title (Ogden and Huss 1982, 288). The press also started to cover the topic more often. On 25th February 1897, the newspaper *L'Éclair* published a debate between the pronatalist Bertillon and the neo-Malthusian Robin, thereby making the problem of the low birth rate known to the general public.

A few journals were highly critical toward pronatalism and its military dimension. The weekly satirical magazine *Le Canard Sauvage* dedicated an entire special issue to the topic of “Repopulation” in July 1903. In caricatures and texts, the fears of a depopulation of France were taken up critically and in an ironic way. For example, a cartoon showed dead French soldiers with the accompanying text: “That’s why boys are needed.”²⁶ The magazine also revealed the contradictions of pronatalist propaganda. It pictured a worker with numerous children saying: “The more children I have, the more rent I have to pay, the more taxes I have!”²⁷ Additionally, *Le Canard Sauvage* sharply criticized the racist policies of a part of the pronatalist movement by portraying a French colonial soldier killing a black baby with a bayonet and pronatalists simultaneously demanding a population increase in the colonies.²⁸

Despite occasional criticism, the Alliance in particular was able to exert a stronger influence, which became evident as more and more pronatalist laws were implemented. In 1904, it was decided that each department must have at least one “*maison maternelle*” (maternity home). These were medical-social facilities with an appropriate infrastructure, physicians, social workers and civil servants from the social services. They were open to all pregnant women, with no distinction made between those who were married, and those who were not (Fuchs 1984, 58). This made these institutions especially interesting for single women because they were not allowed to use the Catholic facilities. In order to carry out pre- and postnatal checks, the “*Direction de l'assistance publique*” also employed numerous gynaecologists, obstetricians, and *dames visiteuses* (literally visiting ladies, meaning a mixture of nurse and social worker in today's sense). At the beginning of the First World War, about one third of all

²⁶ “C'est pour ça qu'il faut les garçons.” *Le Canard Sauvage*, No. 16, 5th July 1903, 4.

²⁷ “Plus j'ai d'enfants, plus j'ai de loyer, plus j'ai des impôts!” *Le Canard Sauvage*, No. 16, 5th July 1903, 5.

²⁸ *Le Canard Sauvage*, No. 16, 5th July 1903, 8.

French physicians were involved in these measures (Rollet-Echalier 1990, 352).

7. Military, Pronatalism, and the First World War

Because of Imperial Germany's intensified armament and the continually low birth rate, increasingly pronatalist legislation was enacted in 1913/14 and especially after the outbreak of the First World War. Tomlinson rightly points out the temporal connection between the beginning of pronatalist legislation in France and the army bill that was passed in the German Reichstag on 5th July 1913 (Tomlinson 1985, 408) leading to "the largest army expansion the German Empire had ever seen" (Afflerbach 1994, 74). In peacetime, the German army now consisted of 863,000 instead of the previous 653,000 soldiers (Porch 1981, 194).

The Strauss Act²⁹ of 17th June 1913 replaced the Maternity Protection Act of 27th November 1909. The latter had been drafted by the conservative deputy and social policy expert Fernand Engerand. This *loi Engerand* had given mothers the right to an eight-week unpaid leave from work after their child's birth (Childers 2003, 29). For Engerand, "repopulation was an act of national defence that justified collective sacrifices" (Weintrob 2012, 73). The new *loi Strauss* gave women the right to a, albeit small, state compensation in the last month of their pregnancy and the first two months after birth. The sum was slightly higher if the mother nursed the toddler herself (Cova 1991, 129). Mothers without other financial support could apply for a family allowance in the first two years after birth. A month after the *loi Strauss*' implementation, a law was enacted that introduced a new special category for poor relief: large families. It entitled them to extra payments from January 1914 onwards. These were paid as child benefit to families with at least three children and increased for each additional child. In the first year alone, 162,070 children benefited from the law (Zahn 1916, 471f.). In an additional attempt to curb the population decline, the cost of medical care for women on maternity leave was reduced by law in July 1913. Once more, military considerations had been a driving force behind the enactment of these welfare laws (Dienel 1995, 82).

With the German Empire's declaration of war against France on 3rd August 1914, the worst fears of the pronatalists appeared to have come true. The numerically superior German army quickly advanced far into French territory. During the war, the fear of a "Finis Galliae" increased enormously. Propaganda

²⁹ The law was named after Senator Paul Strauss (1852-1942). He had previously campaigned for increased protection of mothers and pregnant women. In 1902, together with Pierre-Constant Budin and Théophile Roussel, he founded the "Ligue contre la mortalité infantile."

materials often connected the low birth rate to a possible defeat of France. The important role of a high birth rate for (future) military success was particularly emphasized. A postcard from the First World War showed, for example, a French baby in a trench being overrun by the enemy. The baby comments desperately on the defeat with the words: "Alas! I'm coming too late!"³⁰ (Ogden and Huss 1982, 289) Alluding to the common use of rubber condoms to avoid pregnancy, pronatalists even warned that the German Emperor Wilhelm II could destroy thousands of future French soldiers with only 10 kilograms of caoutchouc every year (Schultheis 1988, 209). The fears of depopulation became more and more hysterical. Even high-ranking military leaders shared these anxieties. Emmanuel de Blic, an officer of the French army and member of the "*Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française*," went as far as describing the voluntary childlessness of French couples as a treasonable act that had indirectly contributed to the German attack in 1914: "Shout: 'Halt!' to the agents of revolutions and strikes, to the sowers of suspicions, dissensions, and hatreds, and to the lovely preachers of free love and sterility; in short, to all those consciously or unconsciously responsible for national weakness" (McLaren 1983, 178). Blic strongly insisted on a new tax policy, which should improve the financial situation of large families. Additionally, he argued fathers with several children should receive more than one vote in political elections (Blic 1916, 33).

At the same time, the pressure to react to the German invasion counteracted the goal of increasing the birth rate. Instead of long-term pronatalist programs, financial resources now needed to be invested in military goods at short notice. Young men were drafted and could no longer be exempted for procreation, birth, and child rearing. For this reason, the army leadership promoted the – relatively short – furloughs from the front as the soldier's duty to procreate, a duty that had to be performed as a kind of special mission for the fatherland during home leave (Huss 1988). In addition, a comparison was drawn between soldiers and mothers, who, like the soldiers at the front, had to do their duty for the fatherland by giving birth. The war also meant that women often had to replace men in the factories, which in turn had a negative impact on the birth rate. There were other developments, too, that impeded a birth increase. The French state, like all belligerent nations, was confronted with the problem of sexually transmitted diseases, in particular syphilis, as a result of its soldiers' brothel visits. Contraceptives and the propagation of sexual abstinence were two proven and tested remedies recommended by the government and the military, but they went contrary to pronatalist goals. The French state tried to mitigate the problem with various prohibitions and benefits. At the outbreak of

³⁰ "Hélas! J'arrive trop tard!"

war, a law was passed on 5th August 1914, which provided compensation payments for mothers of children under six whose husbands were soldiers at the front (Dutton 2002, 17). In 1917, a ban on the sale of baby bottles was issued because working mothers had stopped the state-desired breastfeeding of babies, which had increased their mortality rate. The production of milk powder for infants was also restricted in 1918 to force French mothers to breastfeed again (Quine 1996, 76).

8. Pronatalism in the Interwar Period

Fears of a “Finis Galliae” intensified considerably after the end of the First World War. Although France had won the war together with the Allies, more than 1.4 million dead, including 1.2 million men of procreative age, as well as the victims of the 1918/19 influenza pandemic (“Spanish flu”) had drastically exacerbated the population problem (Winter 1988b, 16ff.). In addition, the birth rate had declined even more during the war. Vandenbroucke estimates the number of unborn children, due to the reduced birth rate in the war, to another 1.4 million (Vandenbroucke 2014, 108).³¹ Georges Clemenceau, both Prime Minister and Minister of War, was pessimistic about the French demographic situation during the negotiations on the Treaty of Versailles in 1919:

The treaty does not say that France must undertake to have children, but it is the first clause which should have been included in it. For if France turns her back on large families, one can put all the clauses one wants in a treaty, one can take all of Germany’s guns, one can do whatever one likes, France will be lost because there will be no more Frenchmen. (Tomlinson 1985, 408)

As a result of the high war losses, pronatalism experienced a massive boom after the First World War. In January 1920, Alexandre Millerand became a member of the “*Alliance nationale pour l’accroissement de la population française*.” In September of the same year, he was elected French President. In addition to Millerand, Minister of Finance Frédéric François-Marsal, Minister of Interior Adolphe Landry, Minister of Education André Honnorat, Minister of Public Health Jules-Louis Breton, and Minister of Commerce Auguste Isaac were members of the Alliance. Thus, the pronatalists achieved unprecedented governmental power. The same was true for parliament. Almost half, 47 percent, of the elected deputies became members of the cross-party parliamentary group “*Pour la protection de la natalité et des familles nombreuses*” (For the

³¹ In addition to women in belligerent states’ fear that the father of their children could die in the war, Vandenbroucke cites the lack of financial security for potential mothers as a major reason for the stronger drop in the French birth rate compared to that of other Western European countries during the war.

Protection of the Birth rate and Large Families; Dutton 2002, 25). Following the logic of equal sacrifice, family associations, too, aggressively demanded compensation for the larger families' higher "blood tax" during the First World War (Obinger and Petersen 2014, 20f.).

Pronatalism became so influential after the war that politicians from all parties increasingly represented themselves as family-oriented persons and fathers in election campaigns, for example, by listing the number of their children in their advertising brochures (Talmy 1962, 5f.). There were more radical demands than before the war, too. In April 1919 and again, with slight modifications, in May of the same year, the Conservative MP Henri Georges Roulleaux-Dugage proposed to introduce a family vote instead of women's suffrage. This would enable fathers (not mothers!) to cast an extra vote for every child under the age of 16. Women would have gained the right to vote only in the case of their husband's death (Simon-Holtorf 2004, 109-18). The bill received a lot of support and was rejected only by a slight majority of 219 to 200 votes in the Chamber of Deputies (Tomlinson 1985, 410).

The decline of the birth rate was seen as a sign of general decadence, especially in religious circles and among the political right. They equated depopulation to the "plagues" of prostitution, pornography, promiscuity, rising crime rates, homosexuality, alcoholism, nicotine addiction, depravity, and a general moral decline.³² The reception of the so-called "Comstock Laws"³³ in the United States of America had an important influence on the French pronatalists during the interwar period (McLaren 1983, 177f.). Conservative French pronatalists in particular saw the Comstock laws as an opportunity to increase the birth rate and therefore tried to implement similar laws in France (Peller 1930, 46). In general, pronatalists were calling for and implementing radical measures, especially in the fight against the neo-Malthusians, much more strongly in the post-war period (Bard 2008, 63). The conservative deputy Auguste Isaac, who had founded the *Fédération nationale des associations de familles nombreuses* (National Federation of Large Family Associations) in 1919, accused the neo-Malthusians of secretly supporting the German enemy during the war (Tomlinson 1985, 411). Some French pronatalists and supporters of the anti-pornography movement even assumed that the German Empire had produced malformed anatomical reproductions of babies on purpose to display them at French fairs to prevent young women from having children (Dienel 1995, 156).

³² Examples are: Lavollée 1909; Charon 1908; Maurel 1896, 192-239.

³³ The Comstock laws were passed by the US Congress on 3rd March 1873, in addition to the Federal Anti-Obscenity Act of 1872. The laws prohibited the import and distribution of abortifacients, contraceptives, erotic or pornographic writings, sex toys, and even sexual content in private letters sent by the US Postal Service. On the Comstock laws see: Beisel 1998, 36-42.

The fanatical pronatalist Fernand Boverat shared these assumptions. As secretary-general of the “*Alliance nationale pour l’accroissement de la population française*” from 1913 to 1937, Boverat was the protagonist of the French pronatalists during the interwar period. As early as 1913, he had argued in his major work “Patriotisme et paternité” that the French natality crisis would lead to military weakness and convey to Germany that a war could be won without major losses (Boverat 1913). For Boverat, pronatalism was less a question of morals and more a strategic task of preserving and expanding France’s military and geopolitical power (Cahen 2016, 194f.). Under the leadership of Boverat, the Association increasingly developed nationalistic and anti-feminist tendencies (Koos 1996, 699-723). In addition, Boverat propagated a radical anti-abortion policy (Boverat 1939b, 58-60). In general, pronatalist propaganda became easier in the 1920s because most of the neo-Malthusians had gone into exile during the First World War (Ronsin 1980, 82ff.). The pronatalists had thus lost their strongest opponent inside France.

Not all the birth-inducing demands could be implemented due to the French Republic’s financial problems. However, there was a significant increase in welfare state legislation compared to the pre-war period, targeted in particular at promoting births and supporting families. As early as January 1920, a governmental institution to coordinate pronatalist policies was created with the “*Conseil supérieur de natalité et de la protection de l’enfance*” (Higher Council for Births and Child Protection). Boverat as Secretary-General of the Alliance became Vice President of the Conseil. One of the first measures implemented during Prime Minister Millerand’s term of office was the law of 31st July 1920 which prohibited anti-natalist propaganda and banned the sale of contraceptives. The overwhelming majority of 521 yes votes to 55 against in the Chamber of Deputies proved the massive influence of the pronatalists (Quine 1996, 73f.). Almost all the dissenting votes came from the extreme left. Abortions were now punished with up to three years in prison and a fine of 3,000 francs. The distribution of information that could prevent births was punished with a six-month imprisonment and a fine (Roberts 2003, 91-101). Three years later, the law was tightened even further (Bokelmann 1998, 99). Social housing was also intensified for pronatalist reasons (Smith 2018, 130).

The status of pronatalism, large families, and especially motherhood was also enhanced symbolically. After the First World War, pregnancy was increasingly regarded as the “military service of women” (Mai 2001, 75), which had to be rewarded. The state first officially celebrated Mother’s Day in May 1920. 30,000 mothers of five or more children were awarded a medal for patriotic services to the French nation (Offen 1991, 138). The births were stylized into a kind of competition in which, similar to the Olympic Games, mothers received gold, silver, or bronze medals, depending on their “birth performance” (Fortescue 2000, 152). Private Organizations also donated to large families. The

Cognacq-Jay-Prize, financed by the founders of the “La Samaritaine” department store in Paris, became particularly well known. This prize came with 25,000 francs each for 90 families with nine children and 1,000 francs each for 100 families with five children (Fell 2003, 51). The Declaration of the Rights of Families was adopted by the Congress of French Family Associations in December 1920 and also symbolized the new significance of pronatalism. Furthermore, the public proclamation of the declaration by the famous general and member of parliament de Castelnau can be interpreted as a sign for the connection of pronatalism and the military.

After the war, pronatalist elements were introduced into the tax system. In June 1920, parliament passed a law that obliged single persons over the age of 30 to pay an extra 25 percent on their income tax. Couples who had been married for ten years without children had to pay ten percent extra. A year later, large families became entitled to discounts on train tickets and museum entries and, in the following years, were given priority in renting public apartments (Talmy 1962, 5-38). Additional pronatalist measures were to follow. But it is important to keep in mind that the pronatalist reality was largely dependent on the state’s financial situation. If it worsened, pronatalist measures were often withdrawn or toned down, especially in the area of tax policy. After the election victory of the *Cartel des Gauches*,³⁴ the pronatalist legislation almost came to a standstill. The main reason was again the precarious financial situation of the French Republic. In addition, the socialists believed that birth control was a human right and should therefore not be restricted by the state (Field 1983, 84ff.). During the left-wing government’s term (1924-1926), pronatalist legislation was mostly limited to some exceptions. For example, widows who remarried were financially disadvantaged by a law in 1925 (Kuhlman 2012, 132). It was assumed that widows would not give birth to more children and thus block men for younger women who wanted to have children (Lanthier 2004, 6). The *Cartel des Gauches* also increased the family allowance in 1926 (Fricke 1972, 220).

After the end of the left-wing government, pronatalist legislation was expanded again. The controversial social insurance act of 1928³⁵ was at that point the most extensive pronatalist law ever enacted. It was explicitly designed as a family insurance scheme. Family allowance was paid, if the insured person had to provide for children between the ages of six weeks and 16 years (Rager

³⁴ The first *Cartel des Gauches* (Lefts cartel) was an electoral and then governmental alliance primarily between the Radical-Socialist Party (*Parti républicain, radical et radical-socialiste*) and the socialist French Section of the Workers’ International (SFIO – *Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière*).

³⁵ A first draft of the social security act had already been discussed in Parliament in the early 1920s. In April 1928, the law was finally approved, but had to be revised several times due to protests, especially by the employers, until its final enactment in 1930.

1930, 436). Childless people had to pay higher contributions to social insurance. In addition to the introduction of health insurance, disability insurance and old age insurance, widows' and orphans' pensions, and an extension of unemployment benefits, this law included a significant increase in maternity protection. Women became entitled to a full reimbursement of what they paid their midwives, medical assistance including free choice of a doctor, medical treatment, and, under special circumstances, health spa stays during pregnancy and up to six months after childbirth. Insured women were now entitled to maternity benefits equal to half their salary from six weeks before to six weeks after delivery, if they were not working during this period. Up to nine months after giving birth, insured women could apply for compensation if they breastfed their child. If the mother did not want to or could not breastfeed, it was also possible to apply for a dairy sum that was equal to two thirds of the breastfeeding money.

The Family Allowance Act of March 1932 (*loi Landry*), which was largely drafted by the Minister of Labor Adolphe Landry,³⁶ was a milestone for pronatalism in France. It established for the first time a nationwide state subsidy scheme for families with at least two children (Lenoir 1991, 149). The law made the previously voluntary contributions of employers to family support for employees (*allocations familiales*) in the *Caisses de compensation* mandatory. Thus, the former "company-related family policy" (Fricke 1972, 144-69) was now guaranteed by the state (Dutton 1999, 441). It is noteworthy, however, that these grants did not completely carry the extra cost of having a child. In some cases, families were even given less than they had previously received by the voluntary, company-based support fund. The pronatalist effect of the law was therefore limited. Nevertheless, the Family Allowance Act of 1932 increased the living standards of the working class. About five to six out of nine million French factory workers received government subsidies for their children in 1938. An unskilled worker with four children could increase his income by an average of ten to fifteen percent (Quine 1996, 80f.). In the following years, the subsidies were continuously raised. In the Fourth Republic (1946-1958), an unskilled worker with three children received on average a subsidy equal to 50 percent of his wage, and a factory worker with five children even received more than 100 percent of his wages. France was the second country in the world to introduce state guaranteed family support. Only in Belgium, a similar law had been passed in August 1930. As in neighbouring France, pronatalist associations, especially the "*Ligue des Familles Nombreuses de Belgique*" (Belgian League of Large Families), had had a strong influence on political decisions.

³⁶ Together with the US-Americans Warren Thompson and Frank W. Notestein, Landry was one of the founders of the theory of "demographic transition." See Landry 1934.

However, apart from a short baby boom from 1920 to 1923, the French birth rate did not increase (Huss 1990, 55). As life expectancy went up, the population's average age grew older and older. In 1936, 14.7 percent of French people were over 60 years old, while only 12.9 percent of the British, 11.9 percent of the Germans, and 10.9 percent of the Italians had reached that age (Tomlinson 1985, 407). In the United States it was only 10.4 percent (Sowerwine 2009, 112). But the other major European powers were now suffering from a downturn of the birth rate, too. Compared to the turn of the century, significantly fewer children were born in Weimar Germany and the United Kingdom in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Great Britain even had a lower birth rate than France did (Kahn 1930, 52f.). By the beginning of the 1930s, France's rate was again average among those of the major European powers. Only Italy, where the pronatalist strategy of the fascist Mussolini dictatorship showed its first successes, recorded a significantly higher birth rate.

The pronatalist discourse in France, however, was still marked by fear of a "Finis Galliae." At the end of the 1920s, the "*Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française*" therefore intensified its lobbying efforts by familiarizing soldiers with pronatalism (Thebaud 1985). For this purpose, the Ministry of War as well as the Ministry of the Navy and the Alliance made an agreement in 1928. Numerous soldiers and officers became members of the Alliance: "The idea of contributing to the greatness of the nation through propaganda could not fail to attract military men who were familiar with this type of argument" (Luca 2005, 29f.). The Alliance instrumentalized French fears of the German "*Erbfeind*" (hereditary enemy) to increase public pressure for pronatalist policies (Overath 2006a, 190f.). In particular, the Alliance used impressive graphics to illustrate the danger posed by the demographic policies of Italian fascists and German National Socialists. In his richly illustrated book, *Comment nous vaincrons la dénatalité (How We Will Overcome the Fall in the Birth Rate)*, Boverat demonstrated the strong increase in the birthrate of the Axis powers (including Slovakia, a client state of Nazi Germany at this time) in contrast to the Franco-British Entente by using different sizes of flag-waving babies (Boverat 1939a, 5).

Figure 1: The Paris-London Axis and the Rome-Berlin Axis. Number of births in 1938



He also illustrated the military consequences of this development. Marianne, the national symbol of the French Republic, threatened by German and Italian bayonets, will not be able to defend a depopulated France (Boverat 1939a, 6). The message to the readers was clear: France will lose the territories claimed by Germany (Alsace, Lorraine, Cameroon, Morocco) and Italy (Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Tunisia), unless a pronatalist policy is initiated immediately.

The National Socialist's methods to increase the birth rate, however, were praised by Boverat and others and even recommended as an example for France (Overath 2006b, 49f.). The leadership of the Alliance increasingly emphasized the civic duty to produce children. In an analysis, Boverat mentioned, in addition to the lack of financial support for families, "disappearance of the belief that it is a duty for every married individual not to limit his posterity"³⁷ as the main reason for the low birth rate (Boverat 1927, 3).

Although the Popular Front government (1936-1938), consisting of the Socialist, Communist, and Radical Socialist Party, largely continued the previous

³⁷ "disparition de la croyance que c'est un devoir, pour tout individu marie, de ne pas limiter sa postérité"

family policy, it was less pronatalist in its rhetoric. The Moscow-oriented Communists had originally been radically opposed to the Pronatalists and supportive of the neo-Malthusian cause after abortions had been legalized in Bolshevik Russia in 1920. Stalin prohibited abortions in the Soviet Union in 1936 and as a result, the *Parti communiste français* also changed its position and became an advocate of pronatalist policies. In July 1936, all communist deputies even joined the cross-factional, pronatalist group in parliament (Tomlinson 1985, 414). The Popular Front government implemented a few innovative measures that also had a pronatalist effect. For example, it created the position of under-secretary of state for child protection, which was given to Socialist Suzanne Lacore. Additionally, the government passed an inheritance law reform in February 1938, a measure for which pronatalists had campaigned for decades. From now on, parents could once more divide the inheritance unequally amongst their children and thus avoid the feared fragmentation of land-ownership. However, it was not until Édouard Daladier, an explicit supporter of pronatalism, took office in April 1938 that the topic was once again prominently featured on the government's agenda. At the beginning of 1939, Prime Minister Daladier appointed the "*Haut comité de la population*" as an advisory body to the government on population issues. Georges Pernot, chairman of the "*Fédération nationale des familles nombreuses*," became President while Fernand Boverat, Secretary-General of the "*Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française*," became Vice-President of the committee. The radical wing of the pronatalist movement thus gained an unprecedented amount of political influence. The "Haut comité de la population" made a significant contribution to the "*Code de la famille et de la natalité françaises*" (Drouard 1999). Apart from the continuingly low birth rate, Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany in January 1933 was the main reason for intensified discussions about the quantity and quality of the French population. After the losses Germany had suffered during the First World War, improving the birth rate had become a topic in the Weimar Republic, but no pronatalist movement comparable to France's had emerged. Only after of the "seizure of power" by the National Socialists in 1933, a pronounced racist pronatalist policy was implemented in Germany (Pine 1997). The aggressive nature of this new National Socialist dictatorship was, at the latest, revealed to France when the German army illegally remilitarized the Rhineland in March 1936. Moreover, the French army could now feel the lack of the "*classes creuses*" (empty classes), the children that should have been fathered by the lost generation of the First World War (Hoffmann 2008, 270f.). The Alliance tried using advertising material to inform the public of this potentially detrimental situation. One postcard for example pictured three large crosses in a graveyard opposite two smaller cradles with toddlers and the warning: "More crosses than cradles! This

is what awaits us in the future if we do not immediately adopt a real natalist and family policy” (Huss 1990, 61).³⁸

In 1937, it was announced that the peacetime birth rate had reached an all-time low in the previous year, with only 620,000 births. The military aspect of the declining birth rate was therefore discussed even more intensely. The country’s depopulation was now being seen as a “unilateral disarmament” of France, therefore facilitating a German attack (Teitelbaum and Winter 1985, 17). The Daladier government responded with a pronatalist decree on 12th November 1938, which entitled mothers who stayed with their children instead of going to work to a compensation payment (*allocation de la mère au foyer*) (Fuchs 2008, 245).³⁹ The measure was meant to reduce infant and child mortality. Additionally, the family allowances act of 1932 was extended. From now on, it included government paid state subsidies and more citizens were eligible to receive payments, most notably agricultural workers.

Figure 2: What a Depopulated France Would One Day See



The publication of the “*Code de la famille*” on 29th July 1939 – the law came into force on 1st January 1940 – was a reaction to the threat posed by the military of their highly equipped neighbours, Germany and Italy: “As in 1913,

³⁸ “Plus de croix que de berceaux! Voilà ce qui nous attend dans l’avenir si l’on n’adopte pas de suite une réelle politique nataliste et familiale.”

³⁹ 4.4 million women were employed in the industrial and service sector in 1936. Most of them were forced to work for economic reasons. See Fricke 1972, 260f.

concern about the birth rate in the late 1930s was closely linked with renewed fears about its effect on national security” (Tomlinson 1985, 412). In the preamble to the code, Daladier explicitly emphasized the military significance of the birth rate: “Our military and economic forces are in danger of wasting away.” Therefore, according to the Prime Minister, an expansion of the welfare state was inevitable: “...each citizen is having to pay more to support the social welfare system” (Tomlinson 1985, 414). The code was a legislative proposal that linked the increase of the birth rate to a conservative image of a patriarchal family. To achieve its goal, it included both restrictive and supportive measures. In order to make large families more attractive, child support for the first child as guaranteed by the decree of 12th November 1938 was revoked and replaced with a one-time payment. In turn, child benefits for the following children were significantly increased. The government also made the amount of grants paid partly dependent on the family’s place of residence: rural residents received higher payments to counterbalance the trend of rural depopulation. Young couples could receive generous government loans if they lived in the countryside. Special clinics for pregnant women were established. The penalties for abortions and the distribution of pornographic material were increased and demography was introduced as a subject in schools (Pedersen 1995, 386ff.). Doctors, who were believed to be carrying out illegal abortions were kept under surveillance and in some cases interrogated by the secret police. In addition, texts with for example sexual and/or antinatalist content were censored, drinking alcohol was subjected to stricter controls, the inheritance law for large families was improved, and a family compensation tax was introduced.

Less than a year after the code was promulgated, Nazi Germany invaded France and a few weeks later, fascist Italy crossed the French border. Shortly before the end of the Third Republic, the government of Prime Minister Paul Reynaud created the first French Ministry for Families in June 1940, which was subsequently kept up by the Vichy government (Nord 2010, 64f.). After the defeat, Philippe Pétain, before being appointed the head of the Vichy government, analysed in June 1940: “Too few children, too few weapons, too few allies, these are the causes of our defeat” (Dyer 1978, 5).⁴⁰ Although he was partially responsible as a former Minister of War, Pétain’s analysis sought to divert attention from the strategic mistakes of the French army by blaming a policy that, in his view, had failed to increase the birth rate and therefore had not provided enough soldiers (Pollard 1998, 43ff.). Following the state doctrine “*Travail, Famille, Patrie*” (Labor, Family, Fatherland), the authoritarian Vichy regime pursued a radical pronatalist policy. Above all, the penalties for antina-

⁴⁰ “Trop peu d’enfants, trop peu d’armes, trop peu d’alliés, voilà les causes de notre défit.”

talist crimes were harsher. Abortions were now considered an act against national security. The government's radical course culminated in a law in February 1942 that defined abortion as a crime against the state that could result in the death penalty. Penalties for abortions were thereby equal to those for high treason. A verdict soon revealed the government's intention to carry out this new, radical dimension of French pronatalism. Cherbourg-born laundress Marie-Louise Giraud, who had performed 26 abortions, was executed by guillotine at La Roquette prison in Paris on 30th July 1943 (Tomlinson 1983, 273). Further pronatalist measures such as the *loi Gounot* of December 1942 had next to no effect, as they were implemented shortly before the end of the Vichy government (Robcis 2013, 52f.).

9. Pronatalism Since the End of the Second World War

Despite the Vichy regime's downfall and the liberation of France, pronatalism remained an important political topic (Office of Population Research 1946, 78f.). Nearly 360,000 French people were dead and most of them had died young, which would have a detrimental effect on the birth rate. Additionally, increasing France's population was considered important for restoring her position of power and maintaining her hold on the colonial empire. Two months before the end of the war, Charles de Gaulle had already demanded "Twelve million beautiful babies are needed in France in ten years" (Norvez 1990, 72).⁴¹ An increase of the birth rate was of such great importance after the war that de Gaulle, as the new head of government, created a Ministry of Population Affairs in November 1945.

The Alliance remained an influential actor in French population policy. Due to its collaboration with the Vichy regime, it changed its name to "*Alliance nationale pour la vitalité française*" (National Alliance for French Vitality) and later to "*Alliance nationale population et avenir*" (National Alliance Population and Future). Many pronatalists had worked in leading positions for the authoritarian government. Some of them kept their positions or accepted other posts in the field of family policy. Among them were Fernand Boverat, Adolphe Landry, and Alfred Sauvy, some of the most important pronatalists of the Third Republic. French family policy has since been criticized as being too nationalist, not having properly discussed the pronatalist's collaboration with the Vichy regime, and largely excluding migrants from the benefits of France's family policy (Le Bras 1991). After the Second World War, the connection between a low birth rate and the military only played a minor role in pronatalist consid-

⁴¹ "Douze millions de beaux bébés qu'il faut à la France en dix ans."

erations. However, demographic arguments continued to be important when it came to the status of France as a global power. For example, in 1950 a publication co-authored by Boverat, the former Secretary-General of the Alliance, warned that France's declining population would have negative consequences for the country's representation in international or supranational organizations. The authors explicitly referred to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in which each national delegation's number of mandates were determined based on the country's population (Huber et al. 1950, 307).

10. Conclusion

There are few states in which pronatalism has been as politically important for as long as it has been as France. There are also hardly any states that, despite being governed by various political systems and governments, have declared an increase of the birth rate a major field of politics: from absolutist France, to the revolutionary period, to Napoleon and the Third Republic, the popular front government, the authoritarian Vichy regime and finally the Fourth and Fifth Republic after the Second World War. Even though pronatalism remained a central issue throughout the years, the motivations for keeping it on the agenda shifted and until the Third Republic, there was no long-term "strategic demography," only individual measures were being implemented. These were mainly reactions to short-term problems such as programs to repopulate regions after epidemics, famines, natural disasters, waves of emigration, or to increase the population for the purpose of colonizing newly acquired areas. The military dimension of these early welfare state measures was rather small. Although the pure size of the population was a power factor in itself, in the era of mercenary armies, however, its quantity and quality was of little military importance. From a military perspective, money was better invested in new mercenaries and weapons instead of expensive welfare state programs for promoting births and protecting infants. In addition, social policies only have long-term effects. Until the French Revolution therefore, pronatalism consisted of individual measures, often implemented due to short-term needs. In general, economic, religious, and ethical motives were the driving force.

This changed dramatically when mercenaries were replaced by mass armies and compulsory military service was introduced. France was the pioneer of this development. Under the pressure of the anti-revolutionary coalition, the *levée en masse* was proclaimed in 1793 and a short time later, a general compulsory military service was introduced. The impressive victories of the French army in the Coalition and Napoleonic Wars sparked major changes throughout Europe. Within a few years, almost all European states had introduced universal conscription. From the early 19th century on, the quantity and quality of the popu-

lation played an increasingly central role for military ambitions. Napoleon had already recognized how important the welfare state could be for the army. He initiated pronatalist measures to be able to supply France's army with more and healthier soldiers in the future. However, it took some time before the majority recognized the welfare state's military value. In the wake of military victories and because of a stable population growth, few experts, such as the head physician of the French army Jean-Charles Chenu, acknowledged the impact a declining birth rate could have on the military. It took the traumatic defeat against the German Empire in 1871, including the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, and a sharp decline in the birth rate to spark a nationwide fear of depopulation, reflected in the "Finis Galliae." The aggressive nationalist attitude of the German Empire under Emperor Wilhelm II, including military rearmament, in combination with the rapid German population growth then increased the pressure for a pronatalist welfare state policy in France.

French pronatalism largely owed its success to its openness. Moderate leftists, centrists, conservatives, monarchists, nationalists, and racists alike recognized, albeit for different reasons, the need for a higher birth rate to secure the military's strength and thus maintain France's position as a global power. Although neo-Malthusianism remained a marginal phenomenon in practice, it had a unifying effect on the differently motivated pronatalist groups. The two most important considerations behind the expansion of France's family policy were particularly complementary. The social catholic, conservative-patriarchal idea of family included a classic marriage with numerous, usually at least three, children, a working father, and a mother caring for the offspring. This notion was not only propagated by the Catholic Church and much of the political right in France, but also – and this is particularly important for the introduction of social benefits – by social-catholic entrepreneurs such as Le Play, Harmel, and Cheysson, who had established a voluntary family support system at the company level (Saint-Jours 1981, 225). After the defeat in the Franco-German War, the military dimension of the low birth rate joined these religious and paternalistic motives. The fear of a "Finis Galliae," which was based much more on the discourse than on an actual danger of the "extinction" of the French people, caused pronatalism to become a mass phenomenon. Well-organized lobby organizations reinforced this effect. The military argument, that a low birth rate posed a threat to France's security, also had an effect on the political left. Family policy was therefore more than just part of the welfare state for the French nation. Family policy in France was seen as a pillar of national security.

The military consequences of a low birth rate came to dominate the discourse by the turn of the century. Pronatalist lobby organizations and family associations used and sought to intensify the fear of Germany and Italy to increase the pressure on political actors. There was also a growing personal interconnectedness between active and former soldiers and these associations. Some

officers, such as Simon Maire, even founded their own influential family organisations. But only after the First World War, which had massively increased France's demographic problem, were pronatalist welfare state measures implemented on a larger scale.

A largely militarily motivated pronatalism helped France to become the “pioneer country of family policy” (Rothenbacher 2000, 182). Particularly important was the *loi Landry* of 11th March 1932. With this law, France became the second country in Europe, after Belgium, to introduce a system of family support (Gerlach 2004, 313). This, even before the pronatalist fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini introduced its family policies. With the National Socialists' seizure of power in Germany and their racist family policy, the military dimension of pronatalism became even clearer. The threat of a militarily superior and expansionist German neighbour was one of the motives behind France's expansion of family allowances by the decree of 12th November 1938. For the first time, child benefits were no longer linked to wages and work. Furthermore, they were state subsidized. The government's compensation payment for mothers made it easier for them to give up the working life and concentrate on raising a family. With the “*Code de la famille*,” family policy became the main focus of French politics. The system of child benefits was reformed by providing a one-time payment only for the first child, while the monthly sum significantly increased for the following children. The quick victory of the German Wehrmacht in 1940 seemed to confirm all of the pronatalists' fears. In a much-cited quote, Marshal Pétain attributed the defeat, in addition to not having enough weapons or allies, to France having born too few children. The head of state of the authoritarian *État français* blamed the size of the army, which he found lacking, on the low birth rate of the past decades. During the Vichy regime, pronatalist family policy became a kind of state ideology, which was enforced with drastic measures such as the death penalty as punishment for abortions. After the end of the Second World War and the change to the Fourth (1946) and then Fifth French Republic (1958), pronatalism remained on the agenda. However, the direct relationship between it and the military grew weaker and weaker. This was partly due to a change in the way militaries were being structured: away from compulsory military service and instead to professional armies.⁴² Another reason for the decline of military pronatalism in France was mass immigration, especially from the former French colonial territories in Africa and Asia. Faced with this development, the discussion shifted its focus to the topic of the population's ethnic composition. Lastly, the reconciliation of Germany and France and the long-lasting peace period in a united Europe since 1945 also played a role. For the development of

⁴² France suspended peacetime military conscription in 1996; in 2001, the compulsory military service was finally abolished.

the French welfare state in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, the nexus between military and pronatalism, as shown in this paper, should not be underestimated. Historical welfare state studies and military history have to this day been two separate areas of research. It is important to overcome this separation so both fields can be analysed together. This paper is intended to be a first step in this interdisciplinary direction.

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Historical Social Research

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All articles published in HSR Special Issue 45 (2020) 2: Military & Welfare State.

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doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.7-26](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.7-26)

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doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.27-67](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.27-67)

Nikolas Dörr

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doi: [10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.68-113](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.45.2020.2.68-113)

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