

## **André Tardieu, *les Modérés* and the Politics of Prosperity: 1929-1932**

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This essay seeks to place the economic ideas of André Tardieu, a leading *modéré* of the inter-war years and head of three governments between 1929 and 1932, both within the broader remit and ideas of his political world, and also to demonstrate their relevance to contemporary France.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1920s, Tardieu, as one of the leading parliamentarians of *la droite libérale*, developed a critique of and challenge to the existing model of the highly centralised state which many deemed inadequate and in need of revision. Central to this critique was the development of a particular brand of expansionist economics, which Tardieu believed would lead to greater prosperity and also give his brand of political liberalism a new dynamism.

Tardieu was inspired by his wartime experiences, both as High Commissioner to the United States from 1917, in which he combined wide-ranging economic, financial and diplomatic responsibilities, largely free from parliamentary scrutiny, and also as one of Clemenceau's closest confidants, during the Paris Peace Conference and then as Minister for the Liberated Regions, until his patron's departure from office. After a period of political marginalisation in the early 1920s, Tardieu returned to office in Poincaré's coalition in 1926, coming to be seen as one of the leaders of a new generation of *modérés* committed not only to budgetary orthodoxy, but also to a degree of social reform that hitherto had been more associated with the Radicals. As Minister of Public Works after 1926 he was responsible, at a time of financial stringency, for initiating a number of important construction projects.

Succeeding Poincaré in 1929, Tardieu dominated parliamentary politics until his third and final government was defeated in the 1932 elections. His strategy in government was ambitious, seeking to reconstitute the political landscape by replacing the Radicals with his own *modérés* as the dominating party in parliamentary politics and the natural party of middle-class aspirations. This was to be achieved largely through the pursuit of an expansionist economic policy that came to be known as *la politique de la prospérité*. In this Tardieu was heavily influenced by the American experience from which he deduced that the pursuit of materialism could be both uncontroversial and painless as its beneficial effects percolated down

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief biographical sketch of André Tardieu, see David S. Bell, Douglas Johnson & Peter Morris, *A Biographical Dictionary of French Political Leaders Since 1870*, Cambridge, Simon & Schuster, 1990, p. 408-410 ; Jean-François Sirinelli (dir.), *Dictionnaire historique de la vie politique française au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Quadrige/PUF, 1995, p. 1187-1189.

through the nation, eradicating class conflict and assisting in the attainment of unity within the nation, which he saw as an essential prerequisite to the successful exercise of political power. *La politique de la prospérité* sought to stimulate economic activity and generate prosperity through a programme of public works aimed at rebuilding the economic infrastructure. There was to be a *Plan d'outillage national*, involving private business and chambers of commerce, but it would not involve deficit financing, and much of the contemplated works had already been earmarked for payment out of reparation receipts. The Plan met with considerable parliamentary opposition, and how radical it actually was has been questioned. More generally, Tardieu demonstrated a greater willingness than his predecessor had done to consult businessmen and interest groups in the formulation of government policy, particularly through the use of the new consultative *Conseil national économique*. This move towards corporatist politics was also manifest in his encouragement to employers and employees to work more closely together.

Tardieu failed to impress the Radicals, despite making them repeated offers of office in his governments. He also faced the increasing hostility of the socialists, both in parliament and in the press. Tardieu was seen, even by many of his own supporters, as arrogant and insensitive to the ways of Third Republic parliamentary politics, but *la politique de la prospérité* ultimately floundered on the realities of the Depression. With the deepening economic crisis, Tardieu's flirtation with American materialism as the inspiration for the French economy vanished, and after 1932 he reverted to a more orthodox liberalism in which his vision of the role of the state would be inspired more from his experiences during the War. *L'expérience Tardieu* was of short duration. In the later 1930s Tardieu never reverted to his earlier enthusiasm for expansionist economics, though they became, albeit often unattributed, a pointer to the economic policies of the mid-1950s and to the liberal economics of the 1970s. Giscard d'Estaing, who displayed many of Tardieu's strengths and personal shortcomings, as well as his proximity to the business community, drew heavily on Tardieu's critique in both his advocacy of expansionist economics, the detailed questioning of the proper functioning of the state and in his interpretation of a liberalism which was committed to a more pluralistic society in which economic liberalism could be a vehicle for social reconciliation and national unity. Tardieu also bequeathed to Giscard the unresolved problem of how expansionist economics could be reconciled with traditional "small-town" conservative interests threatened by the consequences of modernization, and how a stronger state, which was the inevitable consequence of the more economically active state, might be reconciled with traditional liberal economics. Nevertheless, Tardieu's belief in the rights of the individual, representative institutions, the rule of law, the notion of the secular state, the separation of powers and, above all, the mostly-free market economy, all hallmarks of his liberalism, have by the beginning of the twenty first century become synonymous with the contemporary republican model.

## The Historiography

Though a few of Tardieu's contemporaries saw him as the Franklin Roosevelt that France had never had, they were in a minority.<sup>2</sup> Until the 1960s, the prevailing view of historians was that Tardieu's expansive liberalism was motivated by nothing more than a desire for personal popularity. François Goguel supported this view, seeing Tardieu as merely another, if slightly atypical, representative of *la droite libérale*, which was characterised by pessimistic inertia and inflexibility and in consequence was scarcely worthy of study.<sup>3</sup> Change came with Rudolph Binion's short narrative history of Tardieu and the re-assessment of Tardieu as "a one-man experiment in renovating France against the resistance not of the people but of parliament," and later, with Malcolm Anderson's description of the dynamic and modernizing nature of much of Tardieu's conservatism.<sup>4</sup> In *Les Droites en France*, René Rémond saw Tardieu from 1929 to 1932 as representing a period of enlightened, expansionist Orléanist, characterised by *la politique de prospérité*, and one which was strongly influenced by the economics of rationalization and modernization, much of it inspired by the American example.<sup>5</sup> Looking beyond the early 1930s to the 1970s, Rémond saw similarities between Tardieu's expansionist economics and the liberal economics of the Giscard presidency. Historians since Rémond have tended to follow his analysis of Tardieu in government as a reforming conservative who sought, within the limits of the bourgeois Republic, to consolidate and restore stability through an expansionist economic policy and the introduction of a measure of social reform.<sup>6</sup> Monique Claque found little evidence to conclude that his economic policies ever entailed a policy of deficit spending or that, had he won the 1932 elections, he might have been remembered as the French equivalent of Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>7</sup> With electoral defeat in 1932, Tardieu increasingly saw reform and the role of the state in political and institutional terms, denying the economic and social dimension that had been to the fore in the late 1920s. A close connection has been noted between *modéré*

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Debu-Bridel, *L'agonie de la Troisième République, 1929-1939*, Paris, Éditions du Bateau Ivre, 1948, p. XI ; Louis Aubert *et al.*, *André Tardieu*, Paris, Plon, 1957.

<sup>3</sup> François Goguel, *La politique des partis sous la III<sup>e</sup> République*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1946, p. 17, 332, 340, 378.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolph Binion, *Defeated Leaders: The Political Fates of Caillaux, Jouvenel and Tardieu*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1960, p. 309; Malcolm Anderson, *Conservative Politics in France*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1974, p. 55-58.

<sup>5</sup> René Rémond, *Les Droites en France*, Paris, Aubier Éditions Montaigne, 1982, p. 37-41, 191-192.

<sup>6</sup> Richard F. Kuisel, *Capitalism and The State in Modern France*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 90-92; Julian Jackson, "The Long Road to Vichy", *French History*, 12(3), June 1998, 213-224, p. 216, 220, 222; Julian Jackson, *France, The Dark Years 1940-1944*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 56-57, 59; Julian Jackson, *The Politics of Depression in France 1932-1936*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 32-35; Jean-Luc Pinol, « Le temps des droites », p. 308-310, & Yves-Marie Hilaire, « L'ancrage des idéologies », p. 548-549, both in Jean-François Sirinelli (dir.), *Histoire des droites en France. Tome I : Politique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992 ; Nicolas Roussellier, *L'Europe des libéraux*, Bruxelles, Complexe, 1991, p. 161-166, 172, 176, 188-189.

<sup>7</sup> Monique Claque, "Vision and Myopia in the New Politics of André Tardieu", *French Historical Studies*, 81, 1973, 105-129, p. 107, 115.

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revisionism in the early 1930s, Gaullist revisionism of the 1950s and the institutions of the Fifth Republic.<sup>8</sup>

In 1993 François Monnet published *Refaire la République, André Tardieu, une dérive réactionnaire (1876-1945)*, to date the most extensive study of Tardieu's career. Thematic in its construction, Monnet uses *Refaire la République* as a vehicle for a broad analysis of much of the politics of the inter-war years. Accepting most of the post-Rémond historiography, Monnet sees Tardieu as an agent of modernization who was the inspiration for the future and who was one of a small minority of politicians and thinkers in the inter-war years who sought to challenge the republican model.<sup>9</sup> Accepting Stanley Hoffmann's thesis of the "stalemate society," Monnet explains Tardieu's failure to reconstruct that society in terms of his underestimation of the constraints of the republican model and its traditions.<sup>10</sup>

A greater challenge to the existing historiography has come from Kevin Passmore.<sup>11</sup> *From Liberalism to Fascism* is an archive-based micro study of the right in Lyon during the 1930s that seeks to throw light on the unfolding political crisis of conservatism at a national level. Passmore highlights Tardieu's obsession with the need for unity, not only on the right but also within the nation as a whole, as an essential pre-condition for the effective exercise of power. Contrary to the views prevalent among Marxist historians, who saw conservative politics at this period in terms of a united right waging class warfare on the working classes, Passmore sees the right as deeply divided by reason of its weak leadership, electoral volatility and sketchy party structures.<sup>12</sup> The reality of disunity was in marked contrast to the right's search for, and in Passmore's view almost obsession with, unity. The right regarded unity as an essential prerequisite for the exercise of power, but the search for unity in a pluralistic society was an illusion. The right became obsessed as each

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Wahl, « Aux origines de la nouvelle Constitution », *Revue française de science politique* 3, 1959, p. 59-60, 62-64, 66; Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, tome I : *Le rebelle 1890-1944*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1984, p. 160, 210, 216, 241; Théodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945*, Vol. II: *Intellect, Taste & Anxiety*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977, p. 1064-1065, 1067; Nicolas Roussellier, « André Tardieu et la crise du constitutionnalisme libéral 1933-1934 », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, janvier 1989, p. 62, 69; N. Roussellier, *L'Europe des libéraux...*, *op.cit.*, p. 12; Georges Vedel, « Le hasard et la nécessité », *Pouvoirs*, 50, 1989, p. 15-30; Olivier Passelecq, « De Tardieu à de Gaulle, contribution à l'étude des origines de la Constitution de 1958 », *Revue de Droit constitutionnel*, 3, 1990, p. 397-399.

<sup>9</sup> François Monnet, *Refaire la République, André Tardieu, une dérive réactionnaire (1876-1945)*, Paris, Fayard, Harper and Row, 1993, p. 9, 73-77, 100, 131-132, 144, 159-160, 172-173.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, "The French Political Community", in Stanley Hoffman *et al.* (eds.), *In Search of France*, New York, 1963, p. 28, 30, 105.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism, The Right in a French Province, 1928-1939*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997; Kevin Passmore, "The Construction of Crisis in Interwar France" in Brian Jenkins (ed.), *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2005, p. 151-199.

<sup>12</sup> K. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6; K. Passmore, "The Construction of Crisis in Interwar France", *op. cit.*, p. 178-179. For a synthesis of the Marxist historiography, see Michel Margairaz, « La droite et l'État dans les années trente », *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez* 20-21, 1977, p. 91-136, & Michel Margairaz, « La droite française face à la crise : incompétence ou choix politique ? » *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, 20, 1977, p. 69-88.

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successive attempt at achieving unity led, almost inevitably, to disappointment. To Passmore, conservative politics are best interpreted in terms of "a dynamic of unity and disunity" and "a cycle of expectation and disappointment."<sup>13</sup> Expansionist economics was merely one of a number of strategies that the right used in its attempt to achieve unity within its coalition and which it believed would enable it to retain power.<sup>14</sup> Expectations were raised with each successive strategy, only for disappointment to set in after that strategy's failure. With each failure another group of traditional conservatives, hitherto loyal to the Republic, drifted towards acceptance of a more authoritarian solution to the crisis. The *modérés* of the early 1930s were entrapped by the very liberalism of their strategy; both politics and political solutions were perceived in purely parliamentary terms, and ideas, which might well have had a fair degree of support amongst the wider electorate, were not capitalised upon.<sup>15</sup>

### Tardieu's Political Strategy

Tardieu's ambition in 1929 was to see the *modérés* replace the Radicals as the party of middle-class aspirations, and so achieve a fundamental political realignment, but the problem for Tardieu was that Poincaré's successful rapport with the middle-class electorate had been founded on a broad, inclusive and secular appeal that was very personal to him. The anticlericalism that had been a hallmark of his early political career, as well as his years as President of the Republic, demonstrated that Poincaré's commitment to the republican model was unassailable. This greatly assisted him in the successful presentation of what was essentially a programme of social conservatism. Unlike Tardieu and other *modérés*, Poincaré was never tainted with the charge of reaction. The alienation of the Radicals, Tardieu's more abrasive personality and his reliance on the Catholic right to sustain his parliamentary majority meant that to attract the broader middle-class electorate, his interpretation of liberalism had to differ from that of his predecessor if his ambition of political realignment was to be achieved.

The problem for Tardieu in the successful presentation of *modéré* liberalism, as Serge Bernstein emphasises, was that there was not one but several middle classes.<sup>16</sup> Bernstein draws a distinction both between "les classes moyennes indépendantes" and "les classes moyennes salariées," and between those who, by inclination rather than necessarily by the extent of their wealth, belonged to "les classes moyennes modernes", and those who displayed "un certain conservatisme, la peur du nouveau, du changement, du risqué."<sup>17</sup> These divergent groups had certain characteristics in

<sup>13</sup> K. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6-8; K. Passmore, "The Construction of Crisis in Interwar France", *op. cit.*, p. 179, 181-182, 191, 194.

<sup>14</sup> K. Passmore, "The Construction of Crisis in Interwar France", *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>15</sup> K. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 119-120.

<sup>16</sup> Serge Bernstein, « La politique sociale des Républicains », in Serge Bernstein & Odile Rudelle (dir.), *Le modèle républicain*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1992, p. 202-207.

<sup>17</sup> Serge Bernstein, « Le parti radical-socialiste, de la défense du peuple à celle des classes moyennes », in Georges Lavau, Gérard Grunberg & Nonna Mayer (dir.), *L'Univers politique des classes moyennes*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1983, p. 75, 77.

common, both seeking social and financial advancement based on the ownership of property, whether physical or intellectual, and both regarded socialism as a threat to that advancement. But in a class which included progressive liberal businessmen and anxious conservative smallholders, even that could be overstated. This diversity presented a problem for Tardieu: how to win over one set of interests, aspirations and fears without automatically alienating another? It could be done, but the record over the longer term was mixed. In 1952 Antoine Pinay's blend of social conservatism and financial orthodoxy was to prove attractive to a broad middle-class electorate and Giscard's promise of measured change succeeded in 1974, though his programme of economic liberalism and social conservatism in a more difficult economic climate than that which had prevailed in 1974, failed to impress a majority in the presidential election of 1981.

The very diversity of the middle classes with their often-competing interests and aspirations was reflected in their political allegiances. Middle-class voters spread themselves between the various parties of the right, the centre and the centre-left. A small minority favoured the socialists. The challenge for Tardieu was the pivotal position occupied by the Radicals as the party of middle-class aspirations and the defenders of the bourgeois Republic. Though Radicals and *modérés* had much in common in their shared commitment to the sanctity of private property, economic liberalism and individual enterprise, the Radicals had, since the 1880s, been able to present themselves as almost the sole guardians of the republican tradition, a tradition which had proved to be stronger and more durable than liberalism. This might have suggested that the Radicals' position was unassailable and that any attempt to dislodge them in the affection of the middle classes at large was likely to be a waste of time.

Such an attitude would however have ignored the divisions on the left and centre-left which presented distinct possibilities for their political opponents. The split within the Marxist left in the early 1920s and the fragility of the relationship between the Radicals and their socialist allies in government between 1924 and 1926 presented possible openings for Tardieu. Berstein notes the importance of the support of small businessmen, artisans, and small farmers in the election of the governments of the left in 1924, 1932 and 1936<sup>18</sup>. But in each case this support had fallen away within two years of the new government assuming power. The initial support of this section of the middle class was a product of tradition, education and political culture. Its subsequent desertion arose from its sense of vulnerability and unease with the collectivist direction of governments that were seen as increasingly vulnerable to socialist pressures. Each successive period of disillusionment with the Radicals within their middle-class electorate weakened the latter's traditional allegiance to Radicalism. The Radicals had no option but to respond to the haemorrhaging of their traditional support. In response they moved to the right, so that by 1938 an almost complete metamorphosis had taken place. The rejection of the *front populaire* by the

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<sup>18</sup> Serge Berstein, « Les classes moyennes contre la gauche », *L'Histoire*, 71, octobre 1984, p. 6-9, 11, 14.

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Daladier government was final proof that the Radicals had become the defenders of the middle classes and the effective leaders of "la droite anti-marxiste."<sup>19</sup> But that metamorphosis had not taken place by the early 1930s, and Tardieu was not able to benefit from this *glissement à droite* that in time would enable the Radicals to become more natural allies for the *modérés*.

## Liberalism in Support of Strategy

Tardieu's liberalism differed from that of his predecessor, for while Poincaré's political philosophy had developed from the struggles that had threatened the new Republic, Tardieu assumed the permanence of the Republic as given; the task now was to ensure its efficient operation. In that he sought inspiration from his experiences in the United States, both as a lecturer at Harvard in 1908 and later as Clemenceau's High Commissioner to America after 1917. These experiences left a profound impression on Tardieu, and were crucial to the development of his liberalism.<sup>20</sup> In short, the American experience was the motor that drove Tardieu's economic thinking until the onset of the Depression.

Tardieu was not unique among French politicians in seeking inspiration from America as he charted his political strategy. The French attitude towards the United States has invariably been complicated and ambivalent. At times, the unsophisticated nature of American society, with its emphasis on liberty, equality and personal emancipation, has been admired; whilst at other times its materialism, vulgarity and excessive individualism have been derided.<sup>21</sup> During much of the prosperous 1920s there were those, like Tardieu, who were fascinated by the dynamism of the American economy, its productivity and the business methods of F.W. Taylor and Henry Ford, while others expressed disquiet at its materialism which seemed to threaten the older and more rarefied aspects of French culture and society.<sup>22</sup>

In 1908 however, Tardieu found much to admire in the sense of "optimisme, action et caractère" that he believed were common to Americans in their approach to both business and to politics, and which he found personified in President Theodore

<sup>19</sup> S. Bernstein, « Le parti radical-socialiste, de la défense du peuple à celle des classes moyennes », *op. cit.*, p. 91, 92-93.

<sup>20</sup> See generally André Tardieu, *Notes sur les États-Unis*, Paris, Flammarion, 1908 & André Tardieu, *Devant l'obstacle, L'Amérique et nous*, Paris, Flammarion, 1927.

<sup>21</sup> There is an extensive literature on French attitudes to America and the effect of Americanisation on French politics, society and culture. For a detailed review of this literature see: Chapter 3, "French Anti-Americanism", p. 34-53 in Michel Winock, *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Fascism in France*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998; J. F. V. Keiger, *France and the World since 1870*, London, Arnold, 2001, p. 161-162, 183.

<sup>22</sup> André Siegfried in *Les États-Unis d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1928, whilst admiring American efficiency and progress, lamented the standardization of industry that led to the standardization of the individual. With the onset of the Depression in the early 1930s, writers such as Georges Duhamel in *Scènes de la future*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1930, and Robert Aron & Arnaud Dandieu in *Le cancer américain*, Paris, Reider, 1931, saw the United States as the source of all ills: cited in M. Winock, *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and Fascism in France...*, *op. cit.*, p. 38-40.

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Roosevelt.<sup>23</sup> Roosevelt's optimism was to be compared to "une perpétuelle revanche. C'est une philosophie de l'action."<sup>24</sup> Twenty years later Tardieu would write in almost identical terms:

"De l'optimisme, du calme, de la bonne humeur, de l'imagination, des idées, voilà pour cette période neuve, le nécessaire bagage dont se doivent munir les volontés résolues à toucher le but."<sup>25</sup>

Roosevelt would be the inspiration for the optimism, imagination and ideas, if not always the good humour, that were to be the hallmarks of Tardieu's style of political leadership and which were evident in the long and detailed Ministerial Declaration at the start of his first government.<sup>26</sup>

Tardieu noted the contrasting nature of French and American individualism. To him the French were obsessed with intellectual introspection and ideological fixation: "l'individualisme américain est plus social que l'individualisme français."<sup>27</sup> The French obsession with the individual explained their inability to operate effectively as a group, and it was this failure to transcend individual egotism that explained France's poor economic record in comparison with that of the United States. Tardieu greatly admired the success of the American economy, which he put down primarily to the primacy of economics over politics and, unlike in France, a philosophy which was shared by both the main political parties. In words that could have been written by Henry Ford himself, Tardieu saw materialism as a philosophy that was capable of disarming social tension:

"Devant cet accord, les luttes sociales s'apaisent. Des millions d'ouvriers font confiance aux patrons, dont le génie a créé leur aisance... une conception du monde s'ordonne autour de cet idéal national de fécondité... 'Mass production, high wages', grosse production et gros salaires deviennent sujet de prédication."<sup>28</sup>

Tardieu concluded that rationalisation and mass production would bring in its wake high salaries and material prosperity. Prosperity would reduce social and political tensions, both by putting money in the individual's pocket, but also by increasing government revenues through higher tax receipts, which in turn could be spent on social reforms. Through a policy of wealth creation, rather than of wealth redistribution, hitherto insoluble problems within society and between classes would vanish. He believed that this was an economic model capable of export.

<sup>23</sup> A. Tardieu, *Notes sur les États-Unis...*, *op. cit.*, p. 106, and see generally, p. 101-106.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> André Tardieu, Préface to Maurice Petsche & Jacques Donge, *Signe positif, à la recherche des temps nouveaux*, Paris, Librairie Hachette, 1928.

<sup>26</sup> André Tardieu, *L'épreuve du pouvoir*, Paris, Flammarion, 1931, p. 21-60. On the reactions of his political opponents to his "optimism and good humour," see Jacques Debu-Bridel, *L'Agonie de la Troisième République...*, *op. cit.*, p. 49, and Joseph Paul-Boncour, *Entre-deux-guerres*, Paris, Plon, 1945, p. 214.

<sup>27</sup> A. Tardieu, *Devant l'obstacle...*, *op. cit.*, p. 53. See also p. 57, 64, 116, 204.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Tardieu was not alone in his advocacy of the economics of rationalization. His enthusiasm was shared by a number of what Adrian Rossiter has described as "free-spending technocrats and entrepreneurs of the neo-capitalist school," such as Ernest Mercier and Albert Petsche in the emerging chemical industries, the car manufacturer Louis Renault and Raoul Dautry in the state railway network<sup>29</sup>. Rationalization also attracted a small minority of conservative politicians, such as Paul Reynaud and André François-Poncet, even though most politicians on the right remained committed to a classically liberal interpretation of economics until the end of the 1930s. Though they might differ on detail, these associates of Tardieu shared a commitment to a more dynamic capitalism and to a Republic fortified by technical and economic expertise.<sup>30</sup> Opposed to *étatisme* as such, they were prepared to accept intervention by the state as the price to be paid for a more dynamic and prosperous France. In political terms it appeared to have the advantage of offering an effective and painless way of preserving the bourgeois Republic.<sup>31</sup>

To Tardieu, material prosperity offered a real prospect of restoring national unity. He observed the lack of unity, both amongst his natural constituency and amongst the nation at large, regretting the loss of what he called "une unité ordonnée," the abandonment of which had led to the loss of "l'équilibre nécessaire."<sup>32</sup> He saw French history as a repeating pattern of unity lost and unity regained through the interventions and actions of leaders who, "par l'ordre rétabli ont récréé la puissance nationale."<sup>33</sup> To Tardieu the restoration of unity was a precondition of the effective exercise of power within the state.<sup>34</sup> He believed *la politique de la prospérité* would be the means of achieving this unity.

<sup>29</sup> Adrian Rossiter, "Experiments with Corporatist Politics in Republican France 1916-1939", Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1986, p. 172, see also p. 171-174; J. Jackson, *The Politics of Depression in France 1932-1936...*, *op. cit.*, p. 12-17, 32-34; Richard F. Kuisel, *Ernest Mercier: French Technocrat*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967, p. 85-88; R. Kuisel, *Capitalism & The State in Modern France...*, *op. cit.*, p. 77-78, 81-83, 86-89.

<sup>30</sup> The economics of rationalization and modernization attracted the support of politicians and organizations of diverse political affiliations, including the radical Bertrand de Jouvenel, the neosyndicalist Georges Valois and the Confédération générale du travail.

<sup>31</sup> See generally, R. Kuisel, *Ernest Mercier: French Technocrat...*, *op. cit.*, p. 50-53; F. Monnet, *Refaire la République...*, *op. cit.*, p. 91, 93, 95.

<sup>32</sup> A. Tardieu, « Réformer ou Casser », *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> Tardieu's rhetoric of unity was a common one in the inter-war years. Calls for unity above and beyond party had been one of the hallmarks of the European right since the end of the nineteenth century and were often a mask for internal divisions amongst conservatives. Unity for the far right meant something different than for the parliamentary right. In totalitarian states, unlike in parliamentary regimes, unity was perceived in terms of an enforced social unity that was regarded as an essential component in the creation of either a racially homogenous Volk or in the success of policies that anticipated the likelihood, if not the certainty, of war. See generally Martin Blinkhorn, *Fascism and the Right in Europe 1919-1945*, Harlow, Pearson Education, 2000, p. 11-12, 19, 21-23, 41-43, 67-68, 71, 75, 77-87, 107, 111; Eugen Weber, "The Right, An Introduction", in Hans Rogger & Eugen Weber (eds.), *The European Right, A Historical Profile*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965, p. 5-6, 9-10. See also K. Passmore, "The Construction of Crisis in Interwar France", *op. cit.*, p. 178-179, 181-182, 191, 194; K. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 6-8, 182-189, 308.

*La politique de la prospérité* was the theme that permeated Tardieu's first Ministerial Declaration of 7<sup>th</sup> November 1929, which, whilst it proposed a programme of substantial tax cuts, family allowances, annuities for war veterans, and increased salaries and pensions for civil servants, was dominated by a *Plan d'Outillage National* that envisaged an ambitious programme of infrastructure modernization costing some five billion francs over a period of five years.<sup>35</sup> Half that sum would be spent on roads, ports and lighthouses, the supply of water and of electricity, repairs to ports and lighthouses, hospitals, and State primary schools. Contrary to established practice on such occasions, Tardieu presented an extraordinary amount of detail about the Plan in his Declaration, reflecting both his familiarity with substantial capital projects which he gained during his time in charge of all French orders for raw materials and supplies in the United States after 1917 and as Minister for the Liberated Regions with responsibility for planning their reconstruction, and the importance that he attributed to the role that capital expenditure could play in stimulating demand.<sup>36</sup> In fact, many of the projected public works were not new projects as such, and their cost had already been provided for out of reparation payments. Moreover, the Plan would never be implemented in its entirety, primarily due to changes in the international economy. It would also face ever-growing hostility within parliament, from the socialists who saw it as *neo-bonapartisme*, from the Radicals who resented what they saw as theft of their own ideas, and from many on the right who disliked much of it for the threat that it posed to the budget and for its traces of *étatisme*. But all that was for the future; in November 1929 it was seen as remarkable for the radical departure it represented from laissez-faire liberalism.

What was also novel was that Tardieu asked the *Conseil national économique* (CNE) to participate in the future deliberations on the Plan, being the first time that this recently-constituted consultative body had been asked to pronounce, in advance of parliament, on what amounted to a central plank of the government's economic policy. Adrian Rossiter has noted that Tardieu's attitude towards the CNE was indicative of a more general move towards corporatist politics; increasing its annual budget, granting it full legal status and using the reports of its subcommittees in drafting social and economic legislation.<sup>37</sup> When in due course the CNE presented its report on the Plan, it criticised what it saw as gaps in the Plan and Tardieu for being at times too *étatiste*, but it was not unconstructive in its recommendations, most of which Tardieu accepted. In June 1930, largely as a consequence of opposition from the left who wanted the Plan to be more far-reaching, Tardieu announced a major extension of the Plan and proposed that the future decision-making would henceforth be delegated to a new *Comité consultatif de perfectionnement de l'outillage national*, outside parliamentary control and containing four members of the CNE, who would

<sup>35</sup> For the text of the Déclaration ministérielle of 7 November 1929, see André Tardieu, *L'épreuve du pouvoir*, Paris, Flammarion, 1931, p. 21-60.

<sup>36</sup> See in particular, A. Rossiter, *Experiments with Corporatist Politics in Republican France...*, *op. cit.*, p. 171-201.

<sup>37</sup> A. Rossiter, *Experiments with Corporatist Politics in Republican France...*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

then make recommendations to the Minister of Finance for implementation. Further indication of Tardieu's vision of a more corporatist state came with a speech that he made at Dijon in June 1930.<sup>38</sup>

## The Dijon Speech and a new Liberalism

The Dijon speech represented a critique of the traditional liberal deference hitherto given to the individual and to individual rights. Tardieu saw the First World War as having demonstrated the fragility of the individual in the modern state and the consequent realisation by individuals that henceforth they must mobilise collectively in order to survive. The resulting creation of « un réseau d'oligarchies d'origines diverses » had been relentless in the pressure that it applied to the state in the pursuit of its particular interests.<sup>39</sup> This presented new problems for the state. For the first time the state had to regulate relations between the individual and the collective, between individual groups, and between the group and the state itself, forcing them to submit to "le contrôle des disciplines d'intérêt général, que l'État représente et qu'il doit pouvoir imposer".<sup>40</sup> Faced with these responsibilities, the old "doctrines d'hier," in particular "la vieille et noble doctrine libérale du laissez-faire et laissez-passer," were no longer able to provide solutions.<sup>41</sup> He continued:

"L'État, qu'on le souhaite ou non, doit désormais intervenir là où jadis il n'intervenait pas et contrôler ce qu'il ignorait. Il a le devoir de venir en aide, dans l'intérêt général, aux intérêts professionnels momentanément menacés, de prévoir et d'empêcher les ricochets des phénomènes extérieurs sur la production nationale et sur le marché des salaires. Il a le devoir de se défendre contre l'égoïsme de certains intérêts".<sup>42</sup>

Tardieu was again articulating the traditional liberal position. For, as he was only too well aware from his own ministerial experiences after 1917, the French state had a long tradition of intervention within the economic sphere.<sup>43</sup> Now Tardieu was formally conceding that modern liberalism was prepared to recognise the reality of intervention and, moreover, was happy to welcome it. Henceforth the state would intervene to protect the general interest from the particular interests that threatened it. As Monnet observes, the challenge to the general interest by the force of overbearing and over-mighty sectional interests had been part of the liberal critique of the Republic as it had developed since 1871.<sup>44</sup> Whilst writers such as Charles Benoist had envisaged the protection of the general interest essentially through institutional change and the revision of the Constitution, the significance of the Dijon

<sup>38</sup> A. Tardieu, *L'épreuve du pouvoir...*, *op. cit.*, p. 35-60.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52-53. It is questionable whether that had ever been the reality, at least not since the fall of the July Monarchy, but Tardieu was articulating the theory of classical liberalism with the intention of stressing its present inadequacies.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Tardieu was not alone amongst politicians on the right whose attitudes towards the role of the state in economic management had been modified or altered by the requirements of fighting a world war.

<sup>44</sup> F. Monnet, *Refaire la République...*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

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speech was that the principle of economic intervention, hitherto advocated by the left, was being advanced by a *modéré* who presided over a government with a parliamentary majority. That was a radical departure.

Just as the *modérés* of the late nineteenth century had called for a state in which executive authority needed to be reinforced, so Tardieu now believed that the state must be strong if it was to discharge its proper obligations as "le seul défenseur de ces deux grands représentants de l'intérêt général, qui s'appellent le contribuable et le consommateur et dont la ruine équivaldrait à celle de la nation même."<sup>45</sup> But if his vision was of "un État coordinateur, rajeuni, fort et obéi," it was a state fashioned in the republican model: centralised, parliamentary and committed to the preservation of the existing Republic. There is no suggestion that Tardieu was looking beyond better management of the existing institutions.<sup>46</sup> More effective management was entirely consistent with the new role of the state as arbitrator. As Tardieu explained in a speech made later in 1930, "seul un État fort peut persuader et peut convaincre"; requirements essential in its role as arbitrator.<sup>47</sup>

However, Tardieu did not countenance this stronger state having more than "un rôle d'arbitre," which he classified under three heads: "contrôle, régulation, animation."<sup>48</sup> It would watch over the general conditions of trade, intervening, only cautiously and rarely, to protect France's international economic standing and to avoid "les déséquilibres internes des diverses formes de la production."<sup>49</sup> The state would encourage contracts between management and workers, making the benefits of technical education available to reconcile the work force to the benefits of mechanization, increased production and more specialised skills. The state would assist, through regulation, a modern *patronat* to win the economic battles of the future, for example, by reducing costs through the encouragement of technical innovation and permitting close cooperation between complimentary industries. In short, Tardieu sought "un état d'esprit nouveau" between capital and labour.<sup>50</sup>

Tardieu's economic vision and his hopes for a new form of corporatist politics rested on a continuation of the prosperity of the late 1920s, but by 1931 it was clear that France could no longer escape the effects of the world economic crisis. America as a model for future French prosperity now appeared anomalous. By the summer of 1930 affairs appeared to be slipping out of Tardieu's control. The budget, the legislation over social insurance and a flood relief programme for southwestern France were dominating the parliamentary timetable. The Plan was unlikely to be approved before the autumn, by which time a number of ministers were to be enmeshed in the Oustric

<sup>45</sup> A. Tardieu, *L'épreuve du pouvoir...*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41-42, 60, 168.

<sup>47</sup> Speech to the Congress of the Union des intérêts économiques, Paris, 19 November 1930 : A. Tardieu, *L'épreuve du pouvoir...*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105-106.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

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Bank scandal. The government was narrowly defeated in the Senate at the beginning of December 1930.

Internal politics apart, it was the world depression that destroyed the credibility of *la politique de la prospérité*.<sup>51</sup> Tardieu reacted in due course by rejecting almost the entire policy. In *L'heure de la décision*, published at the beginning of 1934, he wrote:

"Le capitalisme... a perdu mesure et prudence. L'excès du machinisme a provoqué l'abus de crédit, la surcapitalisation des entreprises, le dérèglement des rapports économiques. Le capital de spéculation, substitué au capital d'épargne, n'a plus voulu connaître les bornes des débouchés. Il a produit des marchandises, en nombre indéfini, à des prix arbitrairement fixés, pour des consommateurs inexistantes. Après avoir manipulé le crédit, il a manipulé les monnaies. Après avoir ruiné la paysannerie, il a ruiné l'industrie et les banques elles-mêmes. En se flattant de faire du réalisme, il est tombé dans l'irréalisme."<sup>52</sup>

Tardieu's accusation that America was not just a victim of the Depression, but had actually caused it was a rejection of everything that he had said and written between 1929 and 1932. In condemning the American model as "une philosophie de l'individualisme, une philosophie de l'égoïsme", Tardieu rejected those ideas that hitherto he had believed could easily be translated from the United States, most notably its expansionist economics.<sup>53</sup> Disillusioned, he returned to a more traditional liberalism: a commitment to the balanced budget and the other hallmarks of orthodox economic liberalism, from which perhaps he had never really departed.<sup>54</sup>

*L'expérience Tardieu* was of short duration, but, despite that, it is clear that by 1932 Tardieu had rejected both orthodox liberalism and *étatisme*. He also demonstrated a clear antipathy for socialism and for Radicalism too. He had established close contacts with businessmen, such as Mercier and other neo-capitalists, in preference to the banking community favoured by his predecessor, although the business community never gave him in government the level of support that he proffered them. His public rhetoric and his advocacy of the Plan and the CNE demonstrated that he was tempted by new, often extra-parliamentary, institutions and methods, combined with a desire to develop a new, if largely undefined, form of corporatist politics. This new politics would be allied with an expansionist economic policy in pursuit of a material prosperity that he saw as likely to disarm collectivist and revolutionary tendencies within French society. Tardieu was seen by many of his contemporaries as arrogant and insensitive, and his personality generated much hostility, not just from his political opponents. His ambitions were considerable. Too ambitious perhaps, for his record as *président du Conseil* demonstrated just how

<sup>51</sup> For the problems that Tardieu had with the Catholic right, see K. Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 122-123.

<sup>52</sup> André Tardieu, *L'heure de la décision*, Paris, Flammarion, 1934, p. 247.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>54</sup> See Monique Clague, "Vision and Myopia in the New Politics of André Tardieu", *op. cit.*, p. 113, 119-120.

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restrictive the political conventions and institutions of the Third Republic could be for such a reforming politician.

Had Tardieu won the 1932 elections then his invigorated liberalism would still have faced a number of possibly intractable difficulties. The consequences of economic modernisation threatened traditional *modéré* interests; not least in how to reconcile the interests of economic liberals with social conservatives, *les grands* with *les petits*, and those who welcomed modernity with those who were threatened by its consequences. There were many on the right, like Louis Marin, who were strongly opposed to Tardieu's economics and were deeply suspicious of his connections with big business.<sup>55</sup> Tardieu's vision of the expansionist state was at odds with the liberal commitment to lower taxation. More importantly, he left unanswered the question of where the boundary lay between the interventionist state and the *dirigiste* state. Tardieu's support in 1930 for protectionist measures designed to save agriculture from a crisis of over-supply and the rhetoric which he used to praise the virtues of the rural community and its crucial role, as he saw it, in providing social stability, suggest that he was not over-sensitive to the contradictions and difficulties which his economics presented for his conservative electorate.<sup>56</sup> This unresolved ideological conflict between modernising liberals and reactionary conservatives would continue well into the Fourth Republic, causing particular difficulties after the fall of the Pinay government in 1952 and blunting the political effectiveness of the centre-right until 1958.<sup>57</sup>

*La politique de la prospérité* can also be seen as Tardieu's particular contribution to the much wider debate amongst politicians and intellectuals that gathered momentum from the middle of the 1920s and which reflected the widespread concern that the republican model was both inefficient and somehow inappropriate to contemporary needs.<sup>58</sup> This debate was ultimately about the state, its definition, role and organization. In the later 1930s the debate on the form that *réforme de l'État* should take crystallized around the issue of *l'autorité de l'État* and, in particular, the need to restore executive authority. To that debate, Tardieu would in due course make a significant contribution. In the late 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s,

<sup>55</sup> Jean-François Eck, « Louis Marin et les milieux industriels », in François Roth (dir.), *Les Modérés dans la vie politique française (1870-1965)*, Nancy, Presses universitaires de Nancy, 2000, p. 331-332, 337.

<sup>56</sup> For Tardieu's speeches in praise of the rural and agricultural communities, see his speech at Alençon, 28 September 1930: A. Tardieu, *L'épreuve du pouvoir...*, *op. cit.*, p. 84, 92; also his speech at Giromagny, 17 April 1932: André Tardieu, *Devant le pays*, Paris, Flammarion, 1932, p. 141, 147.

<sup>57</sup> Marcel Merle, « Les Modérés », in Maurice Duverger (dir.), *Partis politiques et classes sociales en France*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1955, p. 272-273, 275-276; Jacques Malterre & Paul Benoist, *Les partis politiques français*, Paris, Éditions T. C., 1957, p. 152-153, 155.

<sup>58</sup> This debate had its origins in the decade or so before the First World War and included those of very differing political persuasions, offering varied solutions. One such was a former colleague and contemporary of Tardieu's, Joseph Paul-Boncour, a socialist, who saw economic federalism and democratic regionalism as the means by which the Republic could be rejuvenated: see Julian Wright, "Joseph Paul-Boncour: Regionalism, Syndicalism and the Third Republic", *Nottingham French Studies*, 44 (1), Spring 2005, 66-81, p. 73.

however, Tardieu's contribution was directed to improvement of the existing model, to *réforme dans l'État* rather than to the more radical *réforme de l'État*. It was a critique of the republican model from within rather than from without, from one who still believed that the Republic could be saved.

## Conclusion

If Tardieu's expansionist economics were not of themselves particularly original, he could claim originality in that such ideas were advanced by a leading politician of the right who was also the head of a government with a good majority, at a time when conservative opinion overwhelmingly favoured the return to a more neutral and limited state. Reflecting his wartime ministerial experience, as well as that gained from the portfolios he held between 1926 and 1929, Tardieu was convinced of the beneficial role that capital expenditure could play in stimulating demand. His admiration for the American economic model led him to emphasize the role that material prosperity could play in reducing political and social tensions and thus achieve that degree of national unity that he saw as essential to good government. He again saw from the American model the advantages that could come from a more corporatist approach, demonstrating this in his attitudes to the CNE and in his public rhetoric, most notably in his Dijon Speech. If prosperity resulted, then it would realise his political ambition of permanently replacing the Radicals with a like-minded coalition of conservatives and liberals.

Intense political opposition to his policies was exacerbated by his personal failings, which, combined with a dramatic change in the international economic landscape, destroyed Tardieu's dreams, making the Tardieu years appear to some as a missed opportunity. Many questions were left unresolved, not the least of which was the crucial question of where lies the boundary between the interventionist and the *dirigiste* state. At the very least, it can be said of Tardieu that he had greater empathy for the modern world than most conservatives of the inter-war period, and that he was one who saw the opportunities that change could present in a markedly different way from most of his contemporaries.

### L'auteur

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### Abstract

The essay examines the economic ideas of André Tardieu, a leading *modéré* and président du Conseil between 1929-1932, who developed a critique of and challenge to the existing republican model which many deemed inadequate and in need of revision. Central to this critique, which was part of the wider debate relating to *réforme de l'État*, was the development of a particular brand of expansionist economics. Rejected during his lifetime, much of Tardieu's critique would become

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accepted as part of the new republican consensus that had developed by the end of the twentieth century, demonstrating the contribution that he and political liberalism have made to contemporary France.

**Key words :** The Outline of the Critique, The Historiographical Context, The Challenge of Presentation, The New Liberalism is Pronounced, The Inspiration.

### Résumé

Cet essai historique a pour but d'examiner les idées économiques d'André Tardieu, l'un des dirigeants des *modérés*, président du Conseil de 1929 à 1932. Tardieu développe une critique et lance un défi au modèle républicain en place que beaucoup jugeaient inadéquat et en grand besoin de réformes. Le développement d'un certain type d'économie expansionniste est au centre de la critique qui, elle-même, fait partie d'un débat plus large lié à *la réforme de l'État*. Rejeté de son vivant, l'essentiel de la critique de Tardieu s'intégrera au programme des nouveaux républicains développé à la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, prouvant ainsi sa propre contribution et celle du libéralisme à la France contemporaine.

**Mots clés :** les grands traits de la critique, le contexte de l'historiographie, le défi de la présentation, l'inspiration, la déclaration du libéralisme moderne.

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