

CHASING VICHY'S PHANTASMAGORIA:  
AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE INVESTIGATIONS  
INTO THE SYNARCHY AFFAIR,  
1941-1946

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of  
Graduate Studies  
Drew University in partial fulfillment of  
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## ABSTRACT

Chasing Vichy's Phantasmagoria:  
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Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation by  
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This dissertation explores America's intelligence community's experiences with and responses to Vichy France's mythical Synarchy affair between 1941-1946. In the most garish accounts, the highly secretive Synarchy (known formerly as the *Mouvement Synarchique d'Empire (M.S.E.)*) emerged as a perceived threat to global security, as it muddled the actual ambitions of influential French technocrats controlling various machinations of the Pétain regime. Despite the conspiracy being contrived by an effervescent French propaganda machine, William Donovan's intelligence services, Cordell Hull's diplomatic agents in Vichy, and various other *ad hoc* American departments generally recognized it as an authentic phenomenon throughout World War II and beyond. In turn, they believed that the sinister Synarchy threatened numerous American foreign policies and national security aims, most notably those associated with Franco-German collaborationism, the destabilization of international democratic institutions, and the proliferation of clandestine statist cabals.

An endlessly pliable legend, Synarchy appeared concomitantly with numerous world affairs, continually stirring the Americans' interest in the topic. Pétain's controversial cashiering

of General Maxime Weygand in North Africa in late 1941, the rise of the actual Mexican *Sinarquista* (*U.N.S.*) movement in 1941 and 1942, and the ascent of de Gaulle's *C.F.L.N.* in 1943 and 1944, for instance, all intersected with the tall tales of Vichy's technocratic phantasms. While the legendary faction never prompted any catastrophic foreign policymaking decisions on the part of the Americans, it did remain a palpable theme within multiple narratives and became a referent for shifting U.S.-French relations.

Previous scholarship on the Americans' relationship with the conspiracy, though limited, attests that the intelligence community's interest in the affair ended with the closure of the American Embassy in Vichy in November of 1942. By contrast, this paper demonstrates that determined investigations continued until at least 1946. I thus conclude that due to these officers' persistent belief that the cabal constituted a menacing shadow organization, the Synarchy affair ultimately thwarted a sizable portion of America's nascent intelligence networks.

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--Andrew James Tompkins (May 2018)

## Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>	iii
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	v
<u>Introduction</u>	-1-
<u>Review of Literature</u>	
Scholarship Regarding the Synarchy Affair	-15-
Scholarship Regarding Franco-American Relations during the Second World War	-37-
Scholarship Regarding the American Response to the Synarchy Affair	-44-
<u>Chapter One: The Docile Donnybrook: Neutral America's Policy Aims in a World at War (1939-1941)</u>	
Introduction	-52-
The Diplomatic Maelstrom	-54-
The Soul of Civilization	-60-
Spy vs. Spy	-70-
Conclusion	-90-
Appendix	-92-
<u>Chapter Two: Traitors! American Intelligence and the Circuitous French Path Toward Synarchy</u>	
Introduction	-94-
The Men of Bordeaux	-97-
Instruments of Illusion	-110-
The Anatomy of Synarchy	-121-
Conclusion	-135-
Appendix	-137-
<u>Chapter Three: Chasing Vichy's Phantasmagoria (August-December 1941)</u>	

Introduction	-140-
Ear to the Ground, Finger on the Pulse	-142-
The Weygand Affair	-157-
Roosevelt, Donovan, Synarchy	-167-
Conclusion	-174-
Appendix	-178-
<u>Chapter Four: <i>Terra Incognita</i> (1942-1943)</u>	
Introduction	-183-
The Numbered Days of Admiral Darlan (January-April 1942)	-186-
N.I.M.B.Y.	-195-
<i>Camera Obscura</i>	-215-
Conclusion	-224-
Appendix	-225-
<u>Chapter Five: The More Things Change... (1944-1946)</u>	
Introduction	-229-
Metamorphosis	-231-
1944	-244-
To Be Continued	-255-
Conclusion	-259-
Appendix	-261-
<u>Conclusion</u>	-264-
<u>Bibliography</u>	-268-

## Introduction

Among the many narratives that emerged during the “Dark Years” of Vichy France, one of the more fantastic and terrifying of them was undoubtedly that of the “Synarchy.” Also known as the *Mouvement Synarchique d’Empire (M.S.E.)*, this organization was thought to have been led by a sinister and clandestine cabal of French industrialists and financiers. The accused clique, which at one time held key posts in the government’s ministry (*i.e.*, the so-called “*Banque Worms* Group”), captivated the imaginations of many conspiratorially-minded people throughout the West.<sup>1</sup> Though simple monetary ambitions appeared at the heart of their supposed scheme, the mysterious Synarchy represented much more than a faction seeking to share in the profits of Nazi collaborationism. Those who heeded the rumors viewed the movement as a pernicious foray into a new form of technocratic authoritarianism with potential global ramifications. Over time, Synarchy came to epitomize some of the greatest fears of Allied officials observing the changing Vichy situation: the forced restructuring of French society, oppressive new variants of technical leadership, the proliferation of ubiquitous Nazi-sympathetic political saboteurs (cast broadly as “Fifth Columnists”), the state’s comprehensive economic and political commitment to Hitler’s “New Europe,” and even whisperings of occult activities. Beginning in the summer of 1941, some of those in the American intelligence community also took an urgent interest in the subject. Their fascination in it ultimately outlived the events of the Second World War.

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<sup>1</sup>Just some of the “Worms Group” members and accused Synarchists who held ministerial posts under Vichy’s second Vice-Premier, Admiral François Darlan (in office from February 1941-April 1942) and were thus of interest to the American government included: Pierre Pucheu (Secretary of State for Industrial Production and, later, Minister of the Interior), Yves Bouthillier (Minister of National Economy and Finance), Jacques Benoist-Méchin (Coordinator of Franco-German Relations), Jean Berthelot (Minister of Communications), Jacques Barnaud (Foreign Minister and Delegate General for Franco-German Economic Collaboration), René Belin (Secretary of State for Labor), Paul Baudoin (Minister of Foreign Affairs), and François Lehideux (Secretary of State for Industrial Production). Over the course of the war, the list of “Synarchists” ballooned to implicate dozens of individuals with no ostensible connections to either industry or finance.

This dissertation principally chronicles the investigations conducted by numerous American intelligence agencies and departments. From Admiral William Leahy's State Department officials to William J. Donovan's Coordinator of Information (C.O.I.), and later his Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.), to other military offices, the Americans generally accepted the Synarchy affair as a genuine phenomenon. Yet as the historical literature has demonstrated since the end of the Second World War, the Synarchy was an utter fabrication, conjured by conjecture and furthered by fear.

Since the end of the World War II, few studies of the Americans' responses to the affair have been produced. Beyond a handful of references and a small chapter dedicated to it, no monographs, dissertations, theses, or essays on the topic exist. The following project, therefore, serves as the first comprehensive study of this narrative. This particular story of Synarchy also offers new windows from which to view Franco-American relations during the Second World War as well as how these objectives intersected with the activities of America's intelligence entities. Donovan's C.O.I./O.S.S. represented the most prominent of these agencies.<sup>2</sup> Thus, aside from merely presenting a microhistory of the alleged Synarchic conspiracy, this dissertation also

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<sup>2</sup>At times throughout this dissertation, Donovan's intelligence agencies are referred to collectively as the "C.O.I./O.S.S." The simple rationale for using this moniker is that most of the functions of the O.S.S. were in line with those of its predecessor organization. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff required the newly reorganized O.S.S. to shed its propaganda functions, which they subsequently reestablished as the Office of War Information (O.W.I.), the division continued to work closely with the American military establishment, instead of reporting directly to Roosevelt, as its forerunner did. Thus, despite minute changes, for all intents and purposes, O.S.S. operated much as the C.O.I. did. Donovan remained its director; its basic research and analysis functions remained the same; and, most importantly, its black operations (sabotage, espionage, counterespionage, etc.) operated in very similar fashions. In this sense, O.S.S. kept, and even bolstered, its monopoly on the core functions of America's nascent foreign intelligence program.

Cristof Mauch, *The Shadow War Against Hitler: The Covert Operations of America's Wartime Secret Intelligence Service* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 61-2.



illuminates new corners of the wartime American diplomatic and intelligence accounts which have evaded significant treatment, even by preeminent scholars in these areas.

At bottom, this dissertation defends the following claim: Despite the tales of Vichy's Synarchy being categorically false, the Americans generally accepted the danger as a viable one throughout World War II and beyond, and its perceived existence threatened various diplomatic and national security objectives. Broader concerns over the proliferation of Franco-German collaborationism, European Statism, and international fascist cabals, specifically, drove the Americans' suspicions of Synarchy. The officials who heeded the various canards viewed the *M.S.E.* as posing diverse ramifications for Franco-American relations and U.S. military and political aims throughout the Western Hemisphere. This resulted in investigations (often detailed ones) into the tall tales throughout the war and beyond. But the intelligence community's general belief in Synarchy did not merely reflect its desire to pursue a comparable shadow force. It indeed had greater stakes. Ultimately, their investigations reveal the nascent state of American espionage during the Second World War and its often disorganized and decentralized nature.

### Significance of this Project

This dissertation contributes to both previous examinations of Synarchy as well as to World War II-era American diplomatic and intelligence scholarship. To the first of these, it fills a gap in the scholarship which still persists within the Synarchy-related scholarship more than 70 years after the war. Specifically, and once again, there are no extensive studies of the Americans' responses to the conspiracy within the relevant literature to-date; this project accomplishes this. These findings not only further challenge orthodox narratives contending that the Synarchy conspiracy actually existed, they also do much to sculpt a broader history of the affair itself.

Second, and more importantly, this project adds to current scholarly understandings of Franco-American relations and American military objectives in Europe during and immediately following the Second World War. Declassified American documents reveal that the intelligence community's study of Synarchism embodied a complex fear of authoritarianism, collaborationism, and Fifth Columnism until at least 1946. This paper's chronological scope, in fact, ends with research conducted on the subject by the interim American intelligence agency, the Strategic Services Unit (S.S.U.) (September 1945-October 1946). Thus, with this particular conspiracy highlighted, this project offers new insight into the sculpting of America's foreign policy toward Marshal Pétain's Vichy regime, Charles de Gaulle's *Comité Français de Libération Nationale (C.F.L.N.)*, and postwar reactionary French political movements, all of which underwent similar intelligence scrutiny for suspected Synarchist activities.

### Research Design

Research for this project required academic sojourns to a handful of American libraries and archives. Though the vast majority of the materials pertinent to this project came from the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, other sites provided source materials allowing for a more comprehensive historical account.

The first locale of note is certainly that which yielded the vast majority of relevant materials throughout this research process: the aforementioned Maryland-based National Archives II location. As it related to this survey of Synarchy-related intelligence reports, the Records of the Office of Strategic Services (Record Group 226), as well as two of its microfiche publication series, M1221 and M1642 (Records of the O.S.S.'s Research and Analysis Branch (R&A) and the Records of the O.S.S.'s Director's Office, respectively), the Records of the

Strategic Services Unit (M1656), the Records of the Department of State (Record Group 59), and its interwar microfilm series, M1442, and the Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (Record Group 84) all constitute the backbone of this project's primary source materials. Additionally, though not used extensively, documents from the Records of the Department of the Treasury (Record Group 56) and the Records of the Office of Alien Property Custodian (1942-1946) (Record Group 131), a subsidiary organization of the Treasury Department, provided valuable supplementary materials as well. Finally, for additional C.O.I./O.S.S. documents as well as postwar studies conducted on these agencies, the National Archives' C.I.A. records research tool (known under the acronym, "C.R.E.S.T."), an exclusively in-house digital database of declassified intelligence documents dating back to 1941, also afforded valuable insight into the thinking of American policymakers. In total, nearly four months' worth of research was required at the National Archives.

The Library of Congress's manuscript division offered a second valuable repository of source materials. In particular, the private papers of government officials and other individuals possessing intimate knowledge of either the Synarchy affair, Franco-American relations during the war, or both, garnered the most attention. Three collections held particular value at the L.O.C. The private papers of Lilian and Edgar Mowrer (collated as a single compilation) were the first of these. Edgar served as a wartime journalist working closely with U.S. and British intelligence officials in 1940 on questions of supposed Nazi spy rings. For a short time in 1941, he also worked as a C.O.I. intelligence operative under Donovan. Lilian, Edgar's wife, was an iconoclastic social activist who promoted stories of the Vichy Synarchy in a published 1944 pamphlet entitled "Concerning France." The collections of Admiral William Leahy (American ambassador to Vichy (1941-1942)), and Cordell Hull (Secretary of State under FDR (1933-

1944)) also provided exceedingly valuable materials for this project. Overall, the Mowrers' papers proved beneficial for Synarchy- and "Fifth Column"-related materials, while Leahy's and Hull's papers offered insightful contributions to the assessments of wartime Franco-American relations and relevant intelligence operations.

Harvard University served as a third research setting of interest, as it houses the private papers of William L. Langer. A long-time Harvard history faculty member and the director of the O.S.S.'s Research and Analysis (R&A) branch, former policymakers called upon Langer in 1944 to conduct a survey of America's controversial foreign relations policy with the Vichy regime. Langer's unpublished manuscript on the topic, *Our Vichy Policy and the North African Venture* (1946) now located in Harvard's Cambridge library, provided materials of particular value. An extensive editing process produced his widely-disseminated monograph, *Our Vichy Gamble* (1947), and a collection of unpublished notes.<sup>3</sup> While much of *Policy* is identical to that of the published *Gamble*, the manuscript differs from the publication in some important ways. His notes thus offered an inimitable perspective into Langer's archival findings that go beyond those of his monograph. Both his monograph and manuscript notes are implemented throughout this project.

The Franklin Delano Roosevelt library in Hyde Park, New York provided yet another beneficial fount of documentation, particularly for Chapter Two's contents. The sources of value here were principally found among the President's Official Records (OF) and those from correspondence with his close, trusted advisors, such as Adolph Berle (Assistant Secretary of

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<sup>3</sup>For a detailed collection of his correspondence with various companies and agents regarding these publishing matters, please consult the following records: William L. Langer, Personal Correspondence (1946-1954), Box 13 of 20 (Naval-S), HUG(FP) 19.9, Harvard University Archives.

State (1938-1945)) and Sumner Welles (Undersecretary of State (1937-1943)). Documents pertinent to the rumors of Axis “Fifth Columns,” both domestically and abroad, garnered the most attention.<sup>4</sup> The suspected subversive actions of spies, traitors, saboteurs, and sympathizers alike, which is a palpable theme throughout this dissertation, emerged as a topic of great interest for Roosevelt and his inner circle, especially during the 1940-1941 period. The Hyde Park repository houses numerous documents related to this subject that supports this. The findings at the FDR library, therefore, afforded valuable supplementary materials for topics relevant not only to broad concepts of Fifth Column activities, but also indirectly to the Synarchy affair itself, which materialized under similar frameworks in 1941.

The final venture made during this project’s research phase was to the Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University. Allen Dulles’s and Colonel William Eddy’s private papers proffered peripheral information germane to this project from two wartime spies. Dulles, among many other roles, served as the Director of the Bern, Switzerland O.S.S. outpost from 1942-1945, while Eddy acted as William Donovan’s personal representative in French Morocco throughout 1942, where he assisted numerous U.S. espionage operations prior to the North African TORCH invasions.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the findings at Mudd were limited to a transcribed

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<sup>4</sup>For Fifth Column-specific reports sent directly to the President’s office, the following collection presents a unique insight into the topic: Official Files of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1. In this box are folders pertinent to both “Fifth Column” and “Sixth Column” reports and ephemera. Both of these terms receive treatment in Chapter Two. Additional collections of correspondence between Roosevelt and his advisors also concerned with Fifth Column activities during the 1940-1942 period include those of Sumner Welles (Box 150, Folders 13 and 14 and Box 151, Folder 5) and Adolf Berle (Box 70).

<sup>5</sup>Though Dulles became a well-known figure in the lore of American espionage during the war and early postwar years, Eddy appears as a more obscure figure. To help clarify his relevant wartime accomplishments, a military citation found in his personal papers begins to highlight his contributions made to Allied intelligence gathering projects in Vichy-controlled territory: “Colonel William A. Eddy, United States Marine Corps, performed exceptionally meritorious service to the Government from January 1942 to October 1943. Under the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in cooperation with the State Department, he was placed in charge of certain aspects of preparations for the Allied Landings [*sic.*] in North Africa.”

1969 interview between Dulles and Edgar Mowrer regarding the latter's editorial contributions to the highly influential 1940 pamphlet, "Fifth Column Lessons for America" and a few intelligence observations made by Eddy during his tenure in North Africa. Still, both offer unique insight into the Fifth Column hysteria and the state of Franco-German relations in the critical year of 1942, and both collections thus provide tangential value at select points throughout this work.

The Denver Public Library represented the final repository consulted for this project's source materials. Possessors of a rare 219-page O.S.S. intelligence report conducted on Mexico's identically-titled "*Sinarquista*" movement, the library's generous staff scanned select passages of it and provided them via e-mail. Some of its contents were subsequently incorporated into this project. The suspected connections between Mexico's and Vichy's Synarchists receives attention beginning in Chapter Four. Beyond the methodological approach of this paper, a central terminological component also demands clarification.

#### Nomenclature of the Term "American Intelligence Community"

Before proceeding any further with this project's introductory points, it is prudent to offer a clear definition of the term "American intelligence community."<sup>6</sup> In short, the bulk of the reports which comprise the foundation of this project's primary source base are derived from the

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Author Unknown, "Citation for Legion of Merit for Colonel William Eddy," Date Unknown, William Eddy Papers, Box 11, Folder 7; Personal Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>6</sup>Historian David Rudgers in citing the Department of Defense's *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (1974), defines the term "intelligence" as follows: "[the] product resulting from the collection, evaluation, analysis, integration, and interpretation of all information concerning one or more aspects of foreign countries or areas, which is immediately or potentially significant to the development and execution of policies, plans, and operations."

David Rudgers, *Creating the Secret State* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 2.

records of two governmental bodies: William J. Donovan's nascent Coordinator of Information (C.O.I.) (July 1941-June 1942) and its bureaucratic reincarnation, the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) (June 1942- September 1945), as well as the U.S. State Department, particularly those entities and agents directly affiliated with the Vichy government. Though documents from other American intelligence organizations, such as the Office of Naval Intelligence (O.N.I.), Herbert Hoover's F.B.I., and the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency (J.I.C.A.) (1943-1947)), also appear throughout the latter chapters of this examination, RG 226 ultimately housed all of these papers. Why are these intelligence entities emphasized as opposed to the many others that also conducted similar shadow operations during the war?

First, this specific collection of records conveys a focused research approach. Many offices and bureaus within the wartime American government featured such aspects in their operations, as historians of intelligence studies generally agree that World War II signaled the nation's first true foray into foreign covert practices.<sup>7</sup> Just a handful of the other departments engaging in foreign espionage during this period included J. Edgar Hoover's F.B.I., the Military Intelligence Division (M.I.D.), the O.N.I., and the Office of Army Intelligence (G-2).<sup>8</sup> Yet

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<sup>7</sup>David Walker argues in his dissertation, for instance, that although America's foreign intelligence practices emerged as early as the 1880s, as it "[set] up networks of military and naval attachés in United States embassies and missions abroad," these functions were often limited to collecting information "on armed forces of foreign powers." He describes these first intelligence entities' responsibilities (and shortcomings) as follows: "during the 1880s the United States Army and Navy [established] agencies whose primary function was to collect, process, and distribute information of the armed forces of foreign powers—the Office of Naval Intelligence (O.N.I.) in 1882, and an Intelligence Group in the War Department in 1885, which later became the Military Intelligence Division (M.I.D.). [...] No institutional link was set up to provide for a regular exchange of information between O.N.I. and M.I.D. until October 1941, when the Joint Intelligence Committee (J.I.C.) was created." Substantial advancements in intelligence practices occurred on occasion, especially during the Spanish-American War and throughout World War I, as U.S. national security interests were more directly threatened in both instances. Still, the American government devoted little time and fewer resources in attempting to build a unified coordinator of information until the Second World War.

David Alexander Walker, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Creation of the United States Intelligence Community" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2000, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing), 28-9, 36.

<sup>8</sup>Intelligence Historian, Bradley Smith, in his 1992 assessment of the field of American intelligence history, notes that there existed historiographical gaps as it related to scholarly treatments of other wartime bureaus with

scouring the records from all of the wartime agencies in search of Synarchy-related reports would undoubtedly require a Herculean effort. The textual documents from the C.O.I./O.S.S. alone comprises nearly 4,000 cubic feet worth of materials.<sup>9</sup> Further, with archival finding aides that are often convoluted or, at times, incomplete or out-of-date (to no fault of the staff), one is reminded of the proverbial haystack that must be rummaged through in search of needles. These challenges alone make the prospect of investigating other intelligence services' records exponentially more time-consuming, daunting, and problematic.

Simple logistics serves as the second rationale for principally scrutinizing C.O.I./O.S.S. and State Department records. Specifically, agents from these departments took a particular interest in aspects of Synarchy or French political matters that sculpted the narrative presented in this dissertation. When other governmental organizations, such as the F.B.I., waged turf wars with the C.O.I./O.S.S. over territorial spheres of influence, a gentleman's agreement gave Donovan and his teams authority over the European and North African theaters.<sup>10</sup> These areas, of

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intelligence functions beyond that of the Office of Strategic Services. While C.O.I./O.S.S. still receives the bulk of scholarly attention today in World War II-related intelligence narratives, which is undoubtedly due to its "cloak-and-dagger" reputation, this department often overshadows others which also made their own contributions to foreign operations. For instance, he states that "serious research into the intelligence work of the State Department, G-2, [and] the Treasury is virtually nonexistent." In scrutinizing the secondary literature of World War II intelligence studies, it is apparent that many of these deficiencies still exist today. Yet in this assessment of the State and (to a lesser extent) Treasury Departments' records concerned with Synarchist activities, this dissertation contributes (if only in small ways) to these underrepresented areas of scholarship. Bradley Smith, "America and Wartime Changes in Intelligence," in *America Unbound: World War II and the Making of a Superpower*, ed. by Warren Kimball (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 99.

<sup>9</sup>The resident O.S.S. records expert at the National Archives, Bill Cunliffe, also noted during my interview with him which highlighted this fact that this staggering collection only represents 4-5% of all O.S.S. documents ever produced! All others were either subsequently lost or destroyed. William Cunliffe, Archivist, National Archives, Interviewed by Andrew Tompkins, November 3, 2016, National Archives Location II, College Park, MD.

<sup>10</sup>Mauch's monograph explicates elements of this turf war. For instance, as it pertained to Donovan's proposed intelligence operations in the Western Hemisphere (with the use of his Foreign Nationalities Branch), and the bureaucratic pushback it received from Hoover and Nelson Rockefeller (Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (C.I.A.A.)), the intelligence historian declares that "espionage activity in North and South America were reserved for other government organizations—primarily the F.B.I. [...]." Similar institutional run-ins occurred between the



course, represented the epicenters of the Synarchy legend. Thus, scrutinizing documents from other organizations or divisions not directly involved in the search of the clandestine organization nor operating in its geographic purview threatened the possibility of a fruitless effort.

## Chapter Overview

### Chapter One: The Docile Donnybrook: Neutral America's Policy Aims in a World at War (1939-1941)

In setting the groundwork for the Americans' later foreign relations' concerns pertinent to the Synarchy affair, this contextual chapter outlines the particular threats that the cabal posed. Prior to the U.S.'s entry into the war, numerous dangers emerged which governed American foreign and domestic policymaking. With regard to France, collaborationism with the Nazis appeared as the most crucial of these. Thus, subsection one, entitled "The Diplomatic Maelstrom" demonstrates how FDR and his inner circle recognized and attempted to stave off rapprochement between the two states. "The Soul of Civilization," the second subsection, delves into specific concerns regarding the proliferation of global authoritarianism. In directly challenging FDR's liberal global project, groups such as the sinister Synarchy later appeared as a *bête noire* to the President's envisioned new world order. Finally, the final subsection, "Spy vs. Spy," emphasizes FDR's and William J. Donovan's efforts to create the nation's first centralized foreign intelligence service. The Nazi "Fifth Column" tales of 1940, which the President firmly believed in and Donovan marketed to the American people through a public service pamphlet ("Fifth Column Lessons for America"), proved to be the principal impetus for FDR's creation of

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C.O.I./O.S.S. and military intelligence organizations (as well as the State Department) throughout much of the war. (Mauch, 57.)

the C.O.I. one year later. Synarchy's clandestine character later reflected this apprehension as well.

## Chapter Two: Traitors!: American Intelligence and the Circuitous French Path Toward Synarchy

In moving beyond the domestic narratives of a similar character, Chapter Two surveys the Americans' French foreign relations' experience in the months preceding the explosion of the Synarchy legend in American intelligence circles. Despite the vibrant response that the American intelligence community had to the affair in August 1941, it had significant exposure to analogous stories of French Fifth Columnism well before this. Numerous tales of defeatism accompanied the fall of the Third Republic in June 1940, where the so-called "Men of Bordeaux" expedited the death of French liberalism. Their analyses of this topic constitutes the chapter's first subsection. Similar and often related tales of French clandestine activities also crossed the desks of American diplomats before the war. This chapter's subsection entitled "The Anatomy of Synarchy" highlights their prior knowledge of some related tales which later framed the myth. In particular, the Americans of the interwar period took great interest in the highly secretive terror organization, *La Cagoule* (The Hoods) and the Vichy ministerial clique known collectively as the "*Banque Worms* group," which later crafted much of the legend. While it knew of some components of the affair before mid-1941, the intelligence community was further edified on other aspects of it during their initial investigations. Official Vichy documents, namely the so-called "Martin Note" and the "Chavin Report," and polemical periodicals such as "*L'Appel*" ("The Appeal") ultimately sculpted the myth that later captured the Americans' attention. The subsection "Instruments of Illusion," thus outlines these works' origins and their contents, and establishes how the affair theoretically endangered the U.S. functionaries' foreign relation's policies regarding the mythical emergent movement.

### Chapter Three: Chasing Vichy's Phantasmagoria (August-December 1941)

The next stop in this evaluation of Synarchy begins in the halls of the American Embassy in Vichy where the earliest evaluations of the canards surfaced. Perhaps surprisingly, it was the American diplomats, led by ambassador William Leahy, who first truly engaged with the burgeoning legend. William Donovan's nascent intelligence agency, the Coordinator of Information, became privy to it later in the year. The subsection "Ear to the Ground, Finger on the Pulse," demonstrates that the Embassy staff viewed Synarchy as a viable threat to the Americans' various foreign relations' objectives, though an obscure one. Additionally, "The Weygand Affair," reveals that these tales of the Synarchy had noteworthy repercussions on American diplomatic policymaking regarding the regime later in the year. Though high-profile figures such as William Leahy and Cordell Hull consumed numerous reports and memoranda on the Synarchy stories, the rumors reached the highest echelons of the American government by late 1941. In mid-December, Donovan personally forwarded President Roosevelt an analysis on the supposed activities of the esoteric society of technocrats. This chapter's final subsection, "Roosevelt, Donovan, Synarchy," chronicles this survey's findings. The Oval Office's briefing on Synarchy reflected the urgent nature of tracking such a cabal, especially in the immediate post-Pearl Harbor period. Ultimately, the intelligence community's belief in certain aspects of the Synarchy myth in late-1941 not only caused the American government to briefly reconsider its controversial Vichy diplomatic policy, it also spurred on future investigations into the affair.

### Chapter Four: *Terra Incognita* (1942-1943)

The fourth chapter of this dissertation scrutinizes intelligence reports regarding the affair which have not been presented in previous scholarly contributions on the topic. In a sense, then, this chapter truly enters unexplored terrain. Beyond the previously-undocumented reports

highlighted here, however, this portion of the analysis also portrays the exceedingly kaleidoscopic nature of the myth, as it necessarily evolved following the political reemergence of Pierre Laval in April 1942 and the subsequent dispersal of the clique previously accused of Synarchist activities. The final two subsections of this chapter, most notably “N.I.M.B.Y.” and “*Camera Obscura*,” provide explicit evidence of this. The former presents a body of documents from the community studying a supposedly comparable Mexican movement known as the “*Sinarquistas*.” Their extensive investigations into this semi-fascist organization moved the concerns over Vichy’s Synarchy from one of foreign relation’s to more pressing national security issues. The latter features two distinct intelligence discourses from this period which considered the possible failure of Synarchy’s conspiratorial objectives in France as well as the first claim that the *M.S.E.* revolution never existed at all. Still, despite previous scholarly arguments that investigations into Synarchy effectively ceased in November 1942 after the closure of the American Embassy in Vichy, this chapter also demonstrates that they continued in earnest well after.

#### Chapter Five: The More Things Change... (1944-1946)

The final foray into this story of Vichy’s Synarchy delves into the later investigations of the affair, as it further evolved during the twilight months of the Pétain regime and after. Even as the political milieu of France swung violently from fascism toward liberation by the end of 1944, Synarchy proved an enduring image for some of those in the American intelligence community. Yet even as Vichy became increasingly irrelevant, the accounts of the technocratic cabal altered course once again toward those in the rising Gaullist camp, where new officers and politicians appeared as potential Synarchist adherents. The subsection entitled “Metamorphosis” chronicles part of the curious genealogical trajectory of the year. In indicating that Synarchy ultimately survived Vichy as well as the Second World War, this study briefly highlights a single

intelligence study conducted by the interim American intelligence agency, the Strategic Services Unit (S.S.U.), which continued to view Synarchy as a viable threat to domestic French politics. Thus, the title for this subsection, “To Be Continued...,” points to the conclusion that these conspiracy theories outlived their Vichy-era confines and transitioned to a persistent Cold War concern for America’s European-based intelligence entities.

### Review of Literature

In framing this dissertation around both the Synarchy narrative generally as well as the American diplomatic and intelligence responses to it, it is necessary to scrutinize the scholarly evolutions of three collections of secondary texts. Specifically, the following historiographies, all of which pertain to aspects of this project, demand attention: 1. scholarship regarding the Synarchy affair, 2. scholarship regarding Franco-American relations during the war, and 3. scholarship regarding the American response to the Synarchy affair. The legend of the *M.S.E.* resides firmly within the crux of these scholarly discourses.

### Scholarship Regarding the Synarchy Affair

Assessing the scholarly accounts of the Synarchy poses one considerable obstacle for the interested scholar. In short, the historical literature concerning Vichy’s rumor mill after the 1960s is relatively small. The general dearth of scholarship on this subject is, for example, demonstrated by the limited number of books held by the American Library of Congress. Under their subject heading of “Synarchism—France,” the library’s gargantuan holdings only feature four such texts.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between the pre- and post-1970 periods of scholarship is a

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<sup>11</sup>These books are as follows: André Ulmann’s and Henri Azeau’s *Synarchy and Power* (1968), Jean Saunier’s *Synarchy* (1971), Oliver Dard’s *Synarchy or the Myth of the Lasting Conspiracy* (1998), and Michel Sitbon’s *Synarchy at the Roots of Fascism* (2014). By contrast, nine books are listed at the L.O.C. in connection with the identically-titled, yet vastly disparate, organization from Mexico (listed under the subject heading of “Synarchism—Mexico”),

noteworthy one. Before 1970 (which marked the publication of Richard Kuisel's paradigm-shifting article, "The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy"), when many in the academic community still widely accepted the conspiracy as real, scholarly interest in the topic was notably potent. Afterward, however, as historians categorically demystified it, the number of works dedicated to its study significantly diminished. All told, fewer than 15 academic studies have been published over the past 47 years offering extensive inquiries into the affair.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in an examination of the literature from the past 75 years, there exists discernable orthodox, revisionist, and postrevisionist canons.

The orthodox vein of this scholarship represents works that fervently accept most aspects of the Synarchy account, and present the movement, at least to some degree, as a perpetual and viable threat to international stability. Such works mainly appeared between the late war years to the late 1960s. The earliest investigations from the mid-1940s often featured considerable efforts to study the rumors. Still, these studies often proved inconsistent and unreliable. Historian Richard Kuisel, for instance, asserts that "during 1944-47 the Synarchy affair received a great deal of publicity. Efforts were made to verify the story's authenticity while the left-wing press produced extensive exposés."<sup>13</sup> Kuisel identifies these leftist accounts as D.J. David's investigations into the *M.S.E.* in the periodical *La France intérieure* (February 15 and March 15, 1945), a handful of similar reports conducted by Pierre Hervé's communist newspaper, *L'Action* (October 5, 12, and 19 and November 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30, 1945), Geoffrey de Charnay's 54-

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known as the "*Sinarquistas*." The Mexican movement, and its supposed ties to French Synarchism, receives treatment beginning in Chapter Four.

<sup>12</sup>Within this context, the term "extensive" means at least a chapter's-worth of analysis in a published monograph, or an academic, peer-reviewed article.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Kuisel, "The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy," *French Historical Studies* 6.3 (spring, 1970): 396.

article anthology, *Synarchie, panorama de 25 années d'activité occulte* (*Synarchy: a Panorama of Twenty-five Years of Occult Activity*) (1946), and Roger Mennevé's extensive appraisal on the affair entitled *Les Documents de l'agence indépendante d'information internationales* (*Documents from the Independent International Information Agency*) (June 1946 and May, August, October, and December, 1947).<sup>14</sup> Yet, as Kuisel goes on to indicate, these reports, although perhaps well-intentioned, still fully epitomized the credulity of the time. Others, by contrast, held more sinister ulterior motives. For instance, he points to a chapter composed by Henri du Moulin de Labarthète's (Pétain's former personal aide) in his 1946 memoir, *Les Temps des Illusions* (*Times of Illusions*), which attempted to chronicle the affair from an inside perspective of the regime. Du Moulin, a self-identified enemy of Darlan's team during the occupation, and one of the supposed disseminators of the Synarchy affair (his complicated role receives further treatment below), offered a muddled but still polemical account of the conspiracy narrative. Kuisel chronicles his blatantly disingenuous intentions in writing this account at the end of his memoir:

In a private letter to [Jacques] Barnaud's wife (Jan. 16, 1946) Du Moulin confessed that he had written the chapter on the Synarchy in the spring of 1944 while he himself was accused of being a synarch. Apparently to clear himself he called attention to others. He stressed in this letter that he never believed in the existence of an esoteric secret society bent on seizing power at Vichy [...].<sup>15</sup>

Though Kuisel's work recounts the numerous early iterations of the Synarchy narrative, his was not the only one to critique this critical historiographical period.

Economic historian, Roger Ehrmann, in his extensive 1957 monograph, *Organized Business in France*, advances his own interpretations of these initial academic endeavors as well.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 398.

According to him, David's aforementioned 1945 text represents "the most elaborate treatment devoted to the Synarchy [that] [reproduces] many of the documents which, at one time or another, have been circulated concerning the subject." Yet this "enormous" treatment, which is formally titled, "*Le Mouvement Synarchique d'Empire (M.S.E.) et le Pacte Synarchique Révolutionnaire (P.S.R.) liant les Affiliés Française*" is also unfortunately a continuation of the fantastic wartime narrative. Specifically, he states that "this [account seems] to mix truths, exaggerations, and falsehoods [...]." Furthermore, Ehrmann makes note of a handful of other authors whose texts qualified as those written in "a similar vein." He (along with Kuisel) highlights Pierre Nicolle's memoir, *Cinquante mois d'armistice (Fifty Months of Armistice)* (1947), which attempted to perpetuate the credibility of the earliest accounts. This is unsurprising as well, as Nicolle, a small business lobbyist who became personally marginalized by the Vichy regime, also opposed Darlan's ministers. Both Ehrmann and Kuisel condemn this text as offering overtly biased information, but Kuisel argues for intentional deception noting that he "based his accounts on gossip." Ehrmann also cited the "indirect material" from the period that broached the topic. In particular, he calls attention to the postwar trial of Jacques Barnaud, "presumably one of the leaders of the Synarchy." Unlike the more widely disseminated sources, however, Ehrmann concedes that "these hearings provide mostly negative evidence inasmuch as the witnesses tried to convince the committee that the Synarchy never existed."<sup>16</sup> While Kuisel and Ehrmann trace the stories posited by many Synarchy reports from the immediate postwar years, other orthodox works from this era evaded their studies. Specifically, while both authors cite the

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<sup>16</sup>Henry W. Ehrmann, *Organized Business in France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 74. Kuisel, "Legend," 398.



various works produced in *Europe* during this period, they fail to consider those produced in the United States during this same time.

Perhaps the most prominent American work on Synarchy, which has received nominal historiographical attention since the end of the war, is the 1944 pamphlet published by the social and political activist, Lilian T. Mowrer, simply entitled, “Concerning France.” In his extensive 1969 volume on the Third Republic’s destruction of 1940, prominent European historian, William Shirer, represents the sole academic paying homage to Mowrer’s critical orthodox work.<sup>17</sup> In particular, Shirer notes that Mowrer’s brochure, “published [by] the Union for Democratic Action, was the first to call attention in this country [*i.e.*, the United States] to the Synarchist movement in France.”<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this study, Mowrer’s text of course holds a special significance. And although “Concerning France” endeavored to record the activities of the *M.S.E.* in a scholarly fashion, it also exemplified the wartime hysteria. Disseminating her piece during the final days of Pétain’s government in Vichy, she, for instance, provides the following unsettling description of the secret cabal:

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<sup>17</sup>Interestingly enough, although Mowrer’s pamphlet appears as an obscure addition to the applicable body of academic literature, in a transparent nod to its past, excerpts from it are posted on the *Banque Worms’* official website today.

<sup>18</sup>Depending on one’s point of view, Shirer’s statement here could prove problematic. While Mowrer’s publication perhaps represented the first *scholarly* attempt in the United States to chronicle the Synarchy affair, at least one other media source in this country predated hers. Specifically, in the November 1941 edition of *Fortune Magazine*, the following excerpt proffered a most sensational account of Synarchy: “Last July strange rumors began to fly around Vichy. In a town where even official cars are scarce, a sudden influx of police cars was naturally conspicuous. Soon there was talk of house-to-house searches, inquiries, and investigations. A strange story was whispered of the mysterious death in Paris of a man called Jean Coutrot and of a compromising document found among his effects. It was a project for state reorganization entitled ‘Synarchy,’ interpreted by the police as a project for a *coup d’état*, and attached to it was a list of names of possible sympathizers. Among them were Bouthillier, Lehideux, and Pucheu [...] as well as a number of important capitalists.”

William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 954-5.

Author Unknown, “Report from France” (*Fortune Magazine*, November 1941): 182.

The chief French contribution of world reaction, and the chief link of French cooperation with Germany was [a] group of over-ambitious French industrialists and bankers who organized, presumably in 1922, something they called *Mouvement Synarchie d'Empire (M.S.E.)*. The Synarchy (Greek: 'syn-archy,' the opposite of 'an-archy') aimed at nothing less than the overthrow of French democracy, the establishment of a ruthless monopoly at home and cooperation with similarly-minded groups throughout the world in a kind of international super-cartel.<sup>19</sup>

In summarizing her points, she concluded that the secret society's plans, with the political downfall of Vichy, were defeated. But, she also argued, Synarchy's leaders were more than capable of embedding themselves in the financial fabrics of other nations, where they could covertly revive their villainous activities. Unless the opponents of reactionary politics observed constant vigilance, she believed, the United States offered a suitable staging ground for a future worldwide Synarchist revolution. She attested that "if the Nazis and fascists are to be allowed to save themselves as Synarchists, are to be granted shelter in the Americas and from there are permitted to burrow their way underground once more back into European society, then indeed the next war is just around the corner."<sup>20</sup> Although the transmogrification of Nazis into Synarchists appears as an unusual interpretation of what the movement supposedly represented, even as compared to the more fantastic accounts of the time, Mowrer's pamphlet still stands as a prime example of the orthodox narrative.

A second early work ostensibly referencing the Synarchy is Admiral William Leahy's 1950 memoir, *I Was There*. Unlike the other scholarly works offered here that directly addresses the conspiracy by name, the former American ambassador to Vichy, instead, indirectly alludes to the cabal. Two quotes in particular confirm his tacit acceptance of either the Synarchy, or, at the

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<sup>19</sup>Lilian T. Mowrer, "Concerning France" (New York: Published by The Union for Democratic Action, August 1944): 10-11.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

very least, the influx of highly influential technocrats within the Darlan ministry. First, in reporting the changing face of the Vichy ministry to the President in late 1941, the admiral “emphasized [what] might be called a ‘palace guard’ [that] had developed around the Marshal which directed its efforts to building up a political organization that could preserve order in the immediate future and maintain the present government if the German Army withdrew from any or all of the occupied area.”<sup>21</sup> He goes on to state that within this group “the most ambitious was [the] young, energetic [Pierre] Pucheu, who was looked upon as a contender with Darlan for the position of dictator when the old Marshal passed to his earned reward.”<sup>22</sup> Second, and more telling, Leahy circuitously cites the Synarchy affair when he references some of the ambitious technocrats and their growing influence within the regime at the end of 1941. His sentiments regarding this, which were noted in his appendix in a letter directly sent to President Roosevelt in November of that year, receives scrutiny in Chapter Three.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless, in spite of his vague (but evident) references to Vichy’s caustic rumor mill, Leahy also wielded a working knowledge of French culture, which is historically studded with conspiracy theories. As a result, the admiral claimed that he opted to “[discount] rumors. You could hear rumors about anything at any time in Vichy.”<sup>24</sup> Although he exhibited a more dismissive position in his memoir concerning his acceptance of conspiratorial tales and legends, Leahy, in fact, acted as a key American figure who vigorously heeded the Synarchy affair,

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<sup>21</sup>William Leahy, *I Was There* (New York: Whittlesey House Publishing, 1950), 51.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>23</sup>Throughout his work, the admiral chose to implement the general term, “conspirators” over that of any explicitly-named syndicate, in this case, “Synarchy.”

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

especially during the latter half of 1941. The ambassador's prominent role in this portion of the narrative appears in Chapter Three.

Other orthodox studies conducted on the Synarchy, while equally as sensational in their own rights, often appeared with accompanying political critiques.<sup>25</sup> Henry Coston's 1962 lecture series, *Les Technocrates et la Synarchie*, appears as a transparent instance of this. From his ideological soapbox, Coston used the fictionalized images of the Synarchy as a framework from which to denounce the actual technocratic reforms taking place in Charles de Gaulle's early Fifth Republic.<sup>26</sup> In criticizing the state of 1960s French politics, his text forwards vitriolic statements such as the following: "One speaks a lot of the Synarchy. One speaks a lot of technocrats. [...] This is the system that is evil, and no men profit from this so-called System. Change the system, put in its place a system or State that does not prize power, money and technocrats, and all will become normal."<sup>27</sup> Aside from his blatant political motives, however, Coston's book also fervently forwards the orthodox position regarding the Synarchy.

One final American work from late in this period, although undoubtedly well-researched, also sought to propound the existence of the Synarchy, as no definitive proof had yet been presented to dispute it: William Shirer's previously-cited 1969 monograph, *The Collapse of the Third Republic*. Shirer, who did not explicitly argue for an active plot against the government,

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<sup>25</sup>To these overt polemics, Kuisel attests that "a few die-hards refuse to give up. Certain political journalists have tried to revive the legend by linking it to the current controversy over technocracy in France." Kuisel, "Legend," 397.

<sup>26</sup>Jean Meynaud, a French political theorist from the period, harshly criticized Coston's position on the Synarchy just two years after the publication of the latter's work. He wrote that "although it is accompanied by reservations and qualifications, [Coston's] theory sees the technocrats of today as the successors to the inter-war 'Synarchists.' In short, contemporary technocracy seems to be a sort of reincarnation of Synarchy." Jean Meynaud, *Technocracy*, trans. by Paul Barnes (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 170.

<sup>27</sup>Henry Coston, *Les technocrates et la Synarchie* (Paris: *Lectures françaises*, 1962), 1.

because, as he asserts, “its members were too fond of writing and talking to act,” still concludes that the Synarchy constituted a *bona fide* mysterious cabal and French Fifth Column that sought to destabilize the state’s Republican institutions. He writes:

[Though] no revolutionaries in all of history probably ever worked out a more detailed and flamboyant program than did the authors of this paper [The *Pacte Synarchiste*—the supposedly fundamental document of the group], this secret society of technocrats never got close to staging a revolution. [...] Nevertheless, in hammering away at the very conception of parliamentary government, in insisting that it was incapable of solving the country’s economic, social, and even political problems, the Synarchists made a considerable, if subtle, contribution—on top of all the others, to undermining the Republic.<sup>28</sup>

Shirer also concedes during his brief exculpation, that the exact activities and ambitions surrounding the Synarchy group remained “somewhat of a mystery” to him.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding, when considering Shirer’s claim, it is interesting to note that in his nearly 1,000-page tome on the fall of French democracy in 1940, he dedicates less than two pages to outlining the Synarchy’s “considerable” role in subverting the state! Yet beyond the accounts of those such as Mowrer, Coston, and Shirer and their contemporaries that unequivocally accepted the original Synarchist narrative, or perhaps simply feigned acceptance of it, a second thread of scholarship also developed during roughly this same period which constituted the first upsurge in revisionist history.

During the first two decades after the war, while many still suggested a past (if not an ongoing) international Synarchic plot, others began to challenge, if only delicately, the more imaginative anecdotes surrounding the rumors. This first wave of revisionist history disputes at least aspects of the Synarchy legend, though its claims do not come from an influx of new

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<sup>28</sup>Shirer, *Collapse of the Third Republic*, 238.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

evidence directly repudiating its existence. Instead, the authors' conclusions stem from a lack of conclusive evidence that clearly or cogently corroborates it.

Paul Farmer's 1955 monograph, *Vichy Political Dilemma*, represents one of these first revisionist positions.<sup>30</sup> In it, Farmer begins his terse, two-page analysis with familiar fictitious descriptions of the cabal: "According to these stories, it was the political instrument of a combine of French banking and industrial interests, in league with large chemical and metallurgical firms in Germany, Britain, and the United States. From behind the scenes, it had controlled such prewar 'leagues' as the *Cagouleurs* ["The Hooded Ones"]) and had been instrumental in establishing the dictatorship of Pétain."<sup>31</sup> Still, Farmer falls short of fully renouncing the rumors. He instead devotes his limited energies toward summarizing the activities of the Vichy ministers and pointing to aspects of the narrative explaining how the account could have accrued some level of credence. For instance, he declares that "there was conceivably some particle of truth behind this talk of the Synarchy. It is clear that certain members of the Darlan cabinet had a close association with one another. Some of these had ties with leading French banking and business interests."<sup>32</sup> Overall, however, even with some evidence pointing to the technocrats' associations during the war, Farmer concludes that "such legends [...] are quite unsupported by the

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<sup>30</sup>While Farmer's work offers an early example of this revisionist position, his was not the first. Robert Aron's book, *Histoire de Vichy* (1954) claims this honor. Aron, in his very brief presentation of Darlan's ministers, points to "two very controversial questions [that] were put forth: That of the Synarchy and that of the *Banque Worms*. Both, it was said, were more mythology than genuine history." As it applied to the Synarchy, Aron indicates that "every time one attempted to prove [its] existence, all of the phantasms would vanish." Likewise, he highlighted the *Bank's Worms'* loss of nearly 8 million francs during the dark years of the regime to argue that "the influence of the *Banque Worms* in the Vichy government is equally a legend."

Henry Aron, *Histoire de Vichy, 1940-1944* (Paris: Fayard Publishing, 1954), 381-2.

<sup>31</sup>Paul Farmer, *Vichy Political Dilemma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 265-6.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 266.

evidence.”<sup>33</sup> This same position of rejecting the myth, but also not specifying precisely why it should be rejected, became a consistent theme in this area of the revisionist canon for roughly 15 more years.

A second text epitomizing this era of the historiographical evolution is Henry Ehrmann’s *Organized Business in France* (1957). Unlike Farmer, who simply outlines, then dismisses, the coincidences surrounding the narrative, Ehrmann adopts a more phenomenological approach in expounding the affair. While declaring that the stories of Vichy’s technocrats were “less romantic” than orthodox histories may have one believe, his piece also posits that Synarchy represented a unique French political dogma, derived from an amalgam of long-lived philosophical, cultural, and historical constructs:

What existed was tantamount to an ‘objective’ plot: not deliberate scheming, but a common mentality; not identical goals, but similar objectives [...]. Their philosophy, if philosophy there was, had been described long before the war as ‘industrialism,’ a belief that politics ought to be subordinated to the point of view of the producer. While such a creed contained elements of an ideology also to be found in the thinking of the German Rathenau, and of the American technocrats, the legacy of the physiocrats and of St. Simon gave it a distinct French character [...].<sup>34</sup>

Ehrmann’s attempt to offer the myth some degree of context was a novel approach to the narrative generally. Yet he also demonstrates an unwillingness (or perhaps an inability) to delve further into the genesis of the legend itself. Thus, works such as this, while certainly insightful in

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ehrmann, *Organized Business*, 75.

Meynaud forwards his views on Ehrmann’s position by arguing that “H. Ehrmann in a study of this period, underlines the strong similarities in attitude between technicians, but does not believe that it is worthwhile stressing the theory of a mythical, conspiring Synarchy, whose existence has never been proven. It seems that the great majority of commentators on French life agree with this point of view.” (Meynaud, *Technocracy*, 171)

their own right, leave much to be desired in the broader debunking of the Synarchy affair.<sup>35</sup> The true paradigm-shifting work appeared in 1970 with the publication of Richard Kuisel's 34-page English-language article, "The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy."

Synarchy-related works from the 1940s to the late 1960s, as demonstrated above, provided limited efforts to illuminate the geneses of the legend. The unfortunate result of these contributions is that they goaded ongoing discourses concerning the veracity of the rumors. Questions about its validity, however, were ostensibly answered comprehensively in Kuisel's article, as he sought to painstakingly separate the Synarchy's conspiratorial wheat from its chaff. Surgically dissecting the rumors through his thorough use of relevant documents and anecdotal evidence, Kuisel leaves little doubt as to the origins and nature of the conspiratorial Synarchy. In short, he identifies the epicenter of the myth as a few official accounts submitted to Vichy politicians beginning in mid-1941 (*i.e.*, the so-called "Martin Note" and the "Chavin Report," both of which receive attention beginning in Chapter Two), and its main propagators as a few resentful Parisian fascists not invited to participate in the new authoritarian French administration.<sup>36</sup> Kuisel identifies the motives for the creation of the rumor mill by indicating

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<sup>35</sup>Kuisel also makes note of a later work consistent with this early revisionist position: Philippe Bauchard's *Les Technocrates et le pouvoir* ("Technocrats and Power") (Paris, 1966). One novel point that Kuisel stresses with regard to this monograph's position concerns Vichy's formal internal investigation made into the Synarchy affair. Bauchard specifically cites Pétain's closing comments on the inquiry in 1941 as his categorical proof for the narrative's fallaciousness. His translation of the Marshal's ebullient statement is as follows: "Gentlemen, I have learned that people are talking about a plot of the Synarchy. I looked in the dictionary and found: 'Synarchy—meeting of the best men.' Well, in that case, I'd certainly like nothing but synarchs around me." Quoted in Bauchard, p. 145, Kuisel, "Legend," 392. André Ulmann and Henri Azeau, *Synarchie et Pouvoir* (Paris: Julliard Publishing, 1968), 321-2.

<sup>36</sup>Specifically, Kuisel states that "the Martin note and the Chavin report were products of a propaganda mill. Those collaborationists like [Marcel] Déat and [Pierre] Constantini who publicized the affair in the press were the technocrats' rivals for power. They had no evidence for their case except for circulars like the Chavin report. [...] In the past twenty-five years, research has failed to uncover one new piece of evidence to substantiate the thesis that the Synarchy was a political plot of the plutocracy." Kuisel, "Legend," 398.



that “The technocrats’ acquisition of power in 1941, and their reforms [...] generated the legend. In short, the dispute over the Synarchy was an important precedent for the continuing controversy over the progress of technocracy in modern France.”<sup>37</sup> With its instigators identified, and clear motives for their actions revealed, Kuisel concludes by pleading with his readers to finally “lay [the legend] to rest.”<sup>38</sup>

In its complete rewriting of the Synarchy’s history, Kuisel’s article enjoys two scholarly honors. The first is that he ushered in the second era of the revisionist canon, which still persists today. Academic contributions from this period absolutely and utterly deny the existence of the Synarchy as an underground technocratic cabal. The second achievement of his work, naturally, is that his was the first to systematically debunk the most fanciful claims of the orthodox narrative. Apparently, this article’s convincing evidence significantly deflated future ambitions to examine the affair further. This reduction in scholarly contributions has never been explicitly stated by any of the invested academics, but it is axiomatic when reviewing the corpus of literature produced since. As opposed to the immediate postwar years, where dozens of studies and exposés were disseminated, the modern historiographical period has experienced a precipitous decline in Synarchy-related publications. Yagil Limoré’s, Oliver Dard’s and Michel Sitbon’s works represent three prominent, though rare, exceptions to this. Still, by the mid-1970s, the Synarchy, possibly spurred on by the findings of Kuisel’s work, stood as a topic of second-rate academic interest. Though there was a relative rekindling of interest in the topic by the 1990s, during the 1970s and 1980s, few Synarchy-related publications emerged. Two

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

exceptions to this were Jean Saunier's book, *Synarchie* (1971), and a short regurgitation of Richard Kuisel's research in his own 1981 monograph, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France*.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the most recent era of scholarship, although the quantity of studies on the Synarchy decreased, there was also a marked increase in the quality of those conducted.<sup>40</sup> With the revelations provided by Kuisel, contemporary histories of the affair could now position the Synarchy legend within more nuanced historical and cultural contexts. Yagil Limoré's 1992 article, "The Synarchy or the 'Synarchy Empire' Movement and Vichy 1940-1944" represented the first work to comprehensively attempt this. Placing Synarchy in its proper contemporary setting, Limoré attests that "within the collective French memory, the word <<Synarchy>> denotes a secret profiteering movement of gigantic occult powers and that which conspired against the State."<sup>41</sup> Yet he also devotes much of his paper to illuminating how the Synarchy mirrored other French anxieties and antagonisms that predated the German armistice. He argues,

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<sup>39</sup>Of the works on general Vichy history produced since 1970, Kuisel's article (followed closely by Dard's) is the most cited text with regard to any reference made to the Synarchy. One instance of this is in Robert O. Paxton's 1972 watershed monograph, *Vichy France: Old Guard, New Order*, an authoritative history of the Vichy regime. After succinctly stating that "there was no synarchic plot" embedded in Admiral Darlan's ministry, Paxton draws the reader's attention to Kuisel's article. In his footnote, he notes that "the best account of the origins and vagaries of the legend of Synarchie is Richard F. Kuisel, 'The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy.'" Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard, New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Alfred A Knopf Publishing, 1972), 198.

<sup>40</sup>In offering his conclusions on the history and implications of the term "Synarchy," Saunier systematically seeks to resolve the binary between the mythical and factual dimensions of this topic in what he describes as the "Six Certainties" regarding the movement. Kuisel's book briefly reiterates the impact that the opposition to Vichy's economic organizational committees had on the propagation of the Synarchy legend. In particular, he points to the very Parisian fascists (specifically Marcel Déat) and small business advocates who opposed the Vichy ministers' attempts "to turn collaboration into a profitable business deal." The legend of the Synarchy, Kuisel then again attests, represented a direct response to the ministers' implementation of these influential economic affiliations. Saunier, *Synarchie* (Paris: Grasset Publishing, 1971), 262-265. Richard Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 142-3.

<sup>41</sup>Yagil Limoré, "La Synarchy ou Le Mouvement <<Synarchy d'Empire>> and Vichy, 1940-1944," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 165 (Jan. 1992): 72.

for instance, that “undoubtedly, certain aspects of anti-Synarchism, particularly during the period of the occupation, reflected old obsessions concerning Masonic, Jewish-Masonic, or Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik conspiracies.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Limoré indicates that the Synarchy offered the French a unique opportunity to air any number of sociopolitical grievances. This included the *ancien* fascinations still plaguing French culture in the mid-twentieth century as well as the general fears of actual technocratic developments taking place around them.<sup>43</sup> As the 1990s progressed, Kuiselist Synarchy-related histories began to dwindle. Beyond a handful of passing references, however, a second groundbreaking work by Oliver Dard appeared in the scholarly canon by the end of the decade.<sup>44</sup>

In 1998, historian Oliver Dard produced perhaps the most significant and expansive examination of the Synarchy affair episode to-date: *The Synarchy or the Myth of the Enduring Conspiracy*. Because his work arguably serves as the most inclusive revisionist examination of the topic today, it also acts as a suitable centerpiece for the more recent revisionist, Kuiselist-inspired compendium favored throughout this dissertation. Along with the very author of “The Legend of the Vichy Synarchy,” he exposes the Vichy rumor mill that produced the legend;

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 71-2.

<sup>43</sup>Limoré perhaps best summarizes his position on this latter claim with the following statement: “These examples allow one to affix common themes to Vichy [...] and therefore also to the Synarchy: the mystique of the leader, the appeal to creating a new elite, the severe condemnation of the parliamentarianism of the Third Republic, the delivery of the radicalism in question to society before the war, the willingness to totally reorganize society.” (Limoré, “*La Synarchy*,” 88)

<sup>44</sup>One work from the most recent scholarly era of immense importance, but that mentions the affair only in passing, is Henry Rousso’s 1991 monograph, *The Vichy Syndrome*. While the historian merely cites Synarchy twice in his lengthy study of France’s postwar cultural expressions of Vichy’s former ideological framework, he presents them from within the context of the modern historiographical understandings of it. For more information on comparisons made between modern technocracy and the ongoing concerns over Synarchist activities, please see the following:  
Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 172, 355.

along with Yagil Limoré, he provides the historical and cultural contexts in France that allowed such a legend to proliferate and possess the longevity that it ultimately did; and, along with Jean Saunier, he identifies the Synarchy as the epicenter for France's historical and cultural distrust of technocrats, both during the war and after.<sup>45</sup> These points, of course, are in addition to many others that better illuminate the conspiracy's anatomy.

Other general histories of the Vichy regime beginning in the early 2000s also nod to the Synarchy legend (generally in the spirit of Kuisel), yet most only give passing references to it. For the purposes of this historiographical overview, however, they do warrant attention. The first example of this is Julian Jackson's 2001 monograph, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*. After simply stating that "the Synarchy had no basis in fact," Jackson makes the novel claim that Pétain's supporters fashioned the myth when they sought to place the failure of the state's "National Revolution" on the conspiring technocrats. Jackson then goes on to describe Pétain's social project which sought to revive the national identity of France under what was considered by some French ideologues as its authentic cultural destiny: that surrounding its peasant-centered agrarian heritage. Among the various exclusionary practices associated with this program, which were aimed at Jews, Communists, Freemasons, and foreigners, a central tenet of the National Revolution was geared toward having "pure" French citizens return back to the land via state support. As a result, the state offered subsidies to families in order to encourage them to adopt more traditionalist lifestyles. Furthermore, in December 1940, the Vichy government enacted the Peasant Charter to "[institute] a corporatist framework for agriculture." Yet these efforts generally failed by mid-1941, as only 1,561 families took advantage of the funds available to

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<sup>45</sup>Oliver Dard, *Le synarchy, ou Le mythe du complot permanent* (Paris: Perrin Publishing, 1998), 20-1, 135, 179.

them. The Synarchy (along with the many other accusations waged against it) served as a viable scapegoat for the uninspiring results of the Marshal's peasant revival.<sup>46</sup>

A second complimentary work of particular value is David Harvey's *Beyond Enlightenment* (2005). Harvey's unique and erudite assessment of occultism's and mysticism's place in modern French politics is, in part, a study of the life and works of Joseph-Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, the cryptic mystic credited by some with crafting the modern political philosophy of Synarchism at the turn of the twentieth century. Harvey describes the Martinist order as an actual French social movement that represented "a unified and cohesive subset of the broader body of Western esotericism, characterized [by] occult thought and discourse in the period from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century."<sup>47</sup> At the end of his analysis of d'Alveydre's intellectual impact on modern French politics, however, Harvey highlights the inconsistencies between the initial conception of Synarchism (*i.e.*, from his posthumously published *Mission of India in Europe, Mission of Europe in Asia: The Question of the Mahatma and His Solution* (1910)) and that which emerged in 1941 (*i.e.*, that propounded by the *Pacte Synarchiste*). In his assessment of this irreconcilable ideological binary, Harvey queries:

What does the *Mouvement Synarchiste d'Empire* have to do with the Synarchy of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre? The language and the generally utopian tone of the document are evocative of the *fin de siècle* inventor of the Synarchy, but its aims are almost entirely economic and technocratic, with only the occasional nod to the spiritual and cultural issues that were central to Saint-Yves d'Alveydre's thought.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Julian Jackson, *France The Dark Years 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 148-9. Peter Davies, *The Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present: From de Maistre to Le Pen* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2002), 105.

<sup>47</sup>Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 12-3.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 215.

Furthermore, Harvey does well to emphasize the absurdities of many Synarchist iterations that emerged after the war: “Whatever the origin of the Synarchy conspiracy theory, its legend far outlived the Vichy era [...]. The legend of the synarchy became, in effect, an almost infinitely elastic concept, which could be appropriated by authors of all political tendencies and used to advance the most fantastic theories.”<sup>49</sup> Harvey then concludes his analysis with an essential observation regarding Synarchy’s so-called adherents. He states, “It need hardly be said that neither the Vichy technocrats [nor] any of those identified as belonging to a Synarchic conspiracy had anything to do with the Martinist order.”<sup>50</sup> Harvey’s work, although only offering a brief treatment of Vichy’s Synarchy narrative, provides a valuable contribution to many aspects of this dissertation’s anti-conspiratorial position’s framework.

A third and final work from the contemporary revisionist scholarship also offering a novel (if terse) approach to the analysis of the Synarchy is Jackie Clarke’s *France in the Age of Organization* (2014). In her assessment of the modern etymology of the term “technocracy,” Clarke attests that its recent polemical usage rose to prominence only after the Second World War. In particular, critics used it to rationally delineate between the modern technicians “and [the] social traditionalists” who shared power within the Vichy regime.<sup>51</sup> In her critique of these studies, she asserts that “the term technocrat often operates as a kind of shorthand in studies that do not seek to examine the thinking of such figures in detail, but it is a shorthand which effectively imports into these studies many of the assumptions that shaped the polemical debates

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 12-3, 215.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>51</sup>Jackie Clarke, *France in the Age of Organization* (New York: Berghen Publishing, 2014), 9.

of earlier decades.”<sup>52</sup> Where were these attacks derived from? Clarke, in fact, cites the Synarchy affair itself as a chief catalyst for the moniker’s fall from grace. Specifically, she states, “in the 1950s and 1960s, the term became common currency, taking on a new, largely negative, resonance, inherited partly from allegations about a secret network of technicians, known as the Synarchy, which was believed to have operated under Vichy.”<sup>53</sup> In concluding her introduction, Clarke notes that in lieu of the term “technocrat,” which is accompanied by myriad distracting associations, her text on the modernizing currents of interwar and Vichy France instead features the word “technician—in the French sense” to serve the same function.<sup>54</sup> Regardless, while Clarke harbors reservations about the usage of the name, as it features a series of academic problematics, here, it offers a unique opportunity to implement it within its proper modern etymological context. Unlike Clarke’s work, then, this project utilizes the term throughout.

While Dard’s monograph and all of the other complementary works mentioned above offer compelling arguments that seek to demystify the affair, the modern historiographical era has begun to see a reversal of positions. This, in turn, has challenged many of the findings of contemporary revisionists today. The historiographical period from the 1990s to the present is in the midst of a scholarly schism. In one corner is the Kuiselist revisionist camp; in the other is what can be identified as a distinctively postrevisionist movement which presents an amalgam of arguments consistent with those from the 1950s and 1960s. Unlike modern revisionists, who attempt to debunk the conspiracy narrative, others today still do not adhere to such an account. These postrevisionists, by contrast, continue to view the Synarchy as a historically viable

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 10.

phenomenon to one degree or another. Namely, they attest that although the Synarchy was not necessarily a vast international conspiracy, it did appear as a distinctive interwar French plutocratic movement dominated by Machiavellian bankers and industrialists.

Perhaps the most vehement example of this contemporary body of scholarship is represented by Annie Lacroix-Riz's *Industriels et Banquiers Français sous l'Occupation* (*French Industrialists and Bankers under the Occupation*) (1999). Although she primarily devotes her book to the history of Franco-German economic collaborationism during the war, she also surveys the Synarchy canards in her opening chapter. Yet in these early pages, Lacroix-Riz's historiographical analysis of Kuisel and Dard are, to say the least, critical. As for Kuisel's work, which she facetiously refers to as "the authoritative argument," she categorically discounts his evidence, noting that many of his principal claims orbited around the theme of simple denial from the accused. In particular, she points to his evidence surrounding the supposed Synarchs' disavowal of their affiliation with the organization, with the case of Du Moulin de Labarthète highlighted.<sup>55</sup> This, in turn, led to her denouncement of his work, as she simply concludes that such anecdotes "[demonstrate] nothing."<sup>56</sup>

Her criticism of Dard is more scathing. This is best exhibited by her claim that Dard "preferred sarcasm and intimidation in a work where the archive is quasi-absent: all supporters of the <<myth>> are mixed in with an inept coterie."<sup>57</sup> In presenting her own interpretation of the

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<sup>55</sup> Annie Lacroix-Riz, *Industriels et banquiers sous l'Occupation: la collaboration économique entre le Reich et Vichy* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1999), 20.

<sup>56</sup> She applies the same argument used against Kuisel to also counter the claims of entire communities that denied the credibility of the Synarchy rumors following the war. For instance, in specifically targeting the views of "Communists and collaborationists" who denied them as real, she declares that their simple lack of belief is not sufficient enough to "demonstrate its inexistence." (Ibid.)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Synarchy, she totes the very line cited above, which exists between the orthodox and early revisionist narratives. She proffers a vision of the Synarchy in more of an armchair ideologue sense, which characterizes them as an actual semi-political clique. Yet she also distances herself from the argument that the Synarchy represented a viable global conspiracy. Ultimately, then, aside from her censure of Kuisel's and Dard's contributions, Lacroix-Riz's assessment of the Synarchy merely acts as a pre-1970 interpretation of the affair akin to those from Farmer or Ehrmann.<sup>58</sup>

Michel Sitbon's sizable 2014 anthology, *Synarchy at the Roots of Fascism*, represents a final work from this most recent scholarly period. In this collection of "*mémoires*," Sitbon compiled a vast array of historical and contemporary interpretations on what the social inspirations of interwar French fascism were. Although he certainly considers Synarchism, as in the occultist thinking of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, he ultimately devotes much of his text to chronicling the radical activities of the interwar fascist organization, *La Cagoule*, and its associated affiliations. Many throughout Sitbon's book assert that this organization represented the pinnacle of French fascism, as the group's extremist views led to violent attacks across the state during the late-1930s that its other right-wing contemporaries appeared hesitant to carry out. This book's connection to this dissertation, however, is that some within the text contend that "The Hoods" served as the militant wing of the Synarchy itself. Indeed, *La Cagoule* receives

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<sup>58</sup>She best summarizes her impression of the affair in the following way: "The Synarchy was <<a sort of white brickwork>>, <<of about fifteen finance inspectors present at Vichy, of the frail nervous members of the Two Hundred families, also some wrecks from the "Brain Trust" of the national economy, that resembled in 1936, under the socialist president [Charles] Spinasse, a '[crisis] of polytechnicians, a scrawny aggregation of young monetary hopefuls from rightist parties [...]. This strange constellation was reduced to the sole stone of the "Worms group" and its immediate satellites; Jean Bichelonne, Robert Gibrat, Jacques Guérard, Henry Dhavernes, Armans Petitjean and Robert Havard>>." (Ibid., 22-3)

attention throughout this examination, as it first garnered the attention of the State Department in the late interwar period and then became intimately connected with the Synarchy affair thereafter.

Nonetheless, Sitbon's work unfortunately serves as a departure from Kuisel's, Limoré's, and Dard's purely revisionist approaches to the Synarchy affair. He undoubtedly situates his study within the canon of pre-Kuisel thinking and scholarship.<sup>59</sup> This is exhibited in part by the fact that in his chronicling of the events in question, he neither cites Kuisel's nor Dard's works anywhere in his 540-page book!

In their attempts to dispel the rumors of the Synarchy, the findings of those such as Kuisel, Limoré, and Dard are challenged (both directly and indirectly) by the on-going tenacity of the postrevisionists who fail to rebuff the legend wholesale.<sup>60</sup> Yet despite those who refute them, this examination proceeds within the same vein as Kuisel, Limoré, and Dard, as they serve

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<sup>59</sup>Such a position is demonstrated by the following reflections claiming that the Synarchy represented a viable political philosophy stemming from a nineteenth-century mystic and propagated by a number of esoteric followers thereafter: "In the collection of bibliographies that broach the subject, the Synarchy was small-scale technocracy. [...] One speaks of technocracy—the true father of which is [Henri de] Saint-Simon—but the works of Saint-Yves are never on the table. One speaks of the *Cagoule*, the specific enterprise of political terror, but one does not equate this subject with the Synarchist ideology which is behind it. One speaks of the Synarchy like it is a secret society, but not an ideology. One looks for 'synarchs,' to the heights of enterprises, but not of Synarchists, this is to say, of the men that share a collection of ideas, a vision of the world, which follows from a type of practical politics, like one speaks of bolshevism, of which there is a number of adherents. Moreover, as to specific organizations, by the end of the first century of its application, it acted both as a network and a political culture. A less-than-ambitious revolution in appearance, the Synarchists did not pretend to disrupt the real world." Michel Sitbon, *La mémoire n: La Synarchie aux Sources du Fascism* (Paris: Aviso Publishing, 2014), 156-7.

<sup>60</sup>While some actively postrevisionists attempt to overturn the findings of the Kuiselist revisionists, other contemporary historians seemingly implement older scholarship in the crafting of their works. Michael Curtis's *Verdict on Vichy* (2002) provides one example of this. While Curtis's initial sentiments regarding the Synarchy were accurate as he notes that it was "a supposed secret economic society [...] which was set up for technocrats to take over power," his later statements recall earlier interpretations of the affair. As opposed to dismissing the rumors, he instead claims that it "in reality was a kind of pressure group for technocrats such as Jacques Rueff and Jean Bichelonne, to influence policy." Michael Curtis, *Verdict on Vichy: Power and Prejudice in the Vichy France Regime* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2002), 87.

as its historiographical templates. Although this project corrects more trivial errors from their works, it fully sustains the essence of their arguments. This dissertation thus shares their conclusion that the Synarchy affair, understood as an international conspiracy of technocratic ministers in Vichy, was a fictitious, albeit elaborate, conjuring, and the product of a vibrant propaganda campaign.

The historiographical overview of the Synarchy legend, though vital, is merely one component of a wider narrative considered throughout this dissertation. In order to present the Synarchy from within the context of wider American foreign relations and military objectives in France, a brief summary of the relevant literature on these topics also requires consideration.

#### Scholarship Regarding Franco-American Relations during the Second World War

As opposed to histories conducted on Anglo-American or even Soviet-American accords during World War II, studies on Franco-American wartime relations have garnered relatively little scholarly attention.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the various historiographical intricacies of America's relationship with Vichy complicates the possibility of producing a completely unified study of

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<sup>61</sup>During the immediate postwar period in particular, FDR's relationship with Stalin attracted special attention from those who blamed the President for unintentionally igniting the Cold War. While the authors of this so-called "official version" consisted of the typical actors (*i.e.*, ex-government officials close to Roosevelt's administration and wartime journalists), they still balked at supporting many of the President's decisions regarding U.S.-Soviet relations. As historian Mark Stoler indicates, these authors specifically believed that America's wartime support for the regime, both economically and militarily, "had resulted in a massive unnecessary extension of Soviet power." Just some of the critical publications from former policymakers included: General John R. Deane's *The Strange Alliance: The Story of Our Efforts at War-Time Cooperation with Russia* (New York: 1947) and ambassador William Bullitt's "How We Won the War and Lost the Peace" *Life Magazine* (1948). Concurrent publications from journalists included: Hanson W. Baldwin's *Great Mistakes of the War* (New York: 1949); William Henry Chamberlain's *America's Second Crusade* (Chicago: 1950); Chester Wilmots's *The Struggle for Europe* (New York: 1952); and Elmer Barnes's *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (Caldwell, ID: 1953). Mark Stoler, "A Half-Century of Conflict: Interpretations of U.S. World War II Diplomacy," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. by Michael Hogan (New York: Cambridge University Press), 168.

it.<sup>62</sup> Elucidating this body of scholarship, in fact, requires tangential analyses into numerous nuanced areas of the relationship. Just two of these include America's diplomatic and intelligence intervention in Vichy's North African colonies prior to the TORCH Operation and Roosevelt's shifting interactions with influential figures, most notably Pétain and Charles de Gaulle. Indeed, scholarly perspectives on these and other peripheral topics receive consideration throughout this project. Yet assessing how academics interpreted Roosevelt's *grand* wartime French strategy, regardless of the stages of the war they consider, provides valuable insight required for understanding the diplomatic aspects associated with this dissertation.

Since the end of the Second World War, from orthodox to revisionist historians alike, a consistent and sound scholarly argument formed around Roosevelt's French strategy. Simply put, the President desired, at all costs, to avoid Franco-German collaborationism beyond the confines of the June 1940 armistice. This, to one degree or another, included the safeguarding of Vichy's powerful fleet, which escaped the conquest of France relatively unscathed. Furthermore, most historians claim that maintaining ties to the scattered, though potentially useful, Frenchmen still ardently seeking an Axis defeat remained a cornerstone of America's diplomatic program. Ultimately, the bulk of scholars looked to America's policy from the standpoint of strategy, rather than that of morality. The broad historiographical critique of this diplomatic approach, along with the specific arguments behind it, undoubtedly began with the publication of William Langer's contentious work, *Our Vichy Gamble* (1947).

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<sup>62</sup>It must be remembered that formal Vichy-American relations remained largely intact between July 1940 and November 1942, but ended following the German occupation of France's southern zone in response to the Allied landings in North Africa. Though the American Embassy in Vichy closed after the TORCH invasions, informal contacts between the two states remained throughout the remainder of the war. The turbulent transition between Pétain and de Gaulle (as well as other political actors), and its intersection with America's French policy, particularly within the context of the Synarchy, receives attention throughout this dissertation.

Conducted at the behest of former Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, Langer's evaluation broadly surveyed Franco-American relations during the pivotal 1940-1942 period. Hull, "who had been violently attacked in the press because of our Vichy policy," viewed such a study as a scholarly, and thus neutral, assessment of the U.S.'s unpopular relationship with the Pétain regime.<sup>63</sup> Due to the urgent nature of openly addressing America's harshly criticized Vichy foreign policy question immediately following the war, former U.S. policymakers gave Langer unprecedented, *carte blanche* access to intelligence materials that would have otherwise remained sealed for decades.<sup>64</sup> While conceding its shortcomings, the former head of O.S.S.'s Research and Analysis branch ultimately defended Roosevelt's Vichy policy, noting that keeping close ties to the regime kept France out of the Axis camp while simultaneously maintaining a vital lifeline to Allied-sympathetic French figures. In his conclusion, Langer presents the following general defense of the United States' program, which pitted the regime against the more noble (though less feasible) de Gaulle option:

The Vichy policy was, at the outset, a *pis aller*. [...] As time went on, the policy crystalized around certain fairly obvious advantages. From the standpoint of American interests, the policy was always a substantially sound one even though it may have been

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<sup>63</sup>A favorable testimonial from Donovan himself provided potential readers insight into the reliability of his findings in an undated newspaper advertisement for *Our Vichy Gamble*. It states: "OUR VICHY GAMBLE describes in detail and with full authority, one of the most bitterly controversial episodes in the history of American foreign policy. I am sure the public will be intensely interested in Mr. Langer's entirely frank and authoritative account prepared from official materials. Normally, information such as this is not released until decades after it occurs—if at all." Newspaper Clipping, Advertisement for William Langer's *Our Vichy Gamble*, Periodical Unknown, Date Unknown, William Eddy Papers, Box 11 Folder 5; Personal Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

<sup>64</sup>In his preface, Langer provides a list of materials that he was granted special use of by Cordell Hull, William Leahy, and Bill Donovan: "I sifted an immense number of documents in the State Department and, through the generosity of General William J. Donovan, was given full access to the records of my own agency, the Office of Strategic Services. At Secretary Hull's request, the War Department made available a detailed digest of such military records as had political importance in connection with the invasion of North Africa. Admiral William D. Leahy, formerly our ambassador to Vichy France, also took an interest in the work and kindly aided me with some of his papers." Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, vii.

an unattractive one. [...] In the popular mind it all reduced itself to a choice between the authoritarian regime of Vichy and the heroic crusade of de Gaulle. But unless one can demonstrate that de Gaulle and his movement could have contributed more effectively to American interests than could the connection with Vichy, the whole argument against our policy falls flat.<sup>65</sup>

Though Langer certainly had his detractors, many historians over the following decades maintained his basic arguments regarding Roosevelt's decision to maintain a Franco-American alliance.<sup>66</sup> A scrutiny of the relevant scholarship from the 1960s onward demonstrates that a range of academics wholly supported his stated premise for FDR's policy.

To highlight just three of the works also placing anti-collaborationism at the forefront of America's Vichy policy, Milton Viorst's *Hostile Allies* (1965), Frank Costigliola's *France and the United States* (1992), and Warren Kimball's *Forged in War* (1997) all serve as apposite scholarly contributions. Viorst, who principally scrutinized the tense Roosevelt-de Gaulle relationship, still devoted limited energies to examining America's strategic objectives. Though providing a broad exposition of Roosevelt's strategy, the following brief statements best summarizes the historian's views on the relationship: "As long as Vichy had powerful ships and strategic territories [Roosevelt] followed the safest, most conservative course. Roosevelt regarded it as his responsibility, to the nation and the Alliance, to help Pétain resist the pressure

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 397-8.

<sup>66</sup>A virulent criticism of Langer's work during this period came from historian Louis Gottschalk, in his harsh review entitled "Our Vichy Fumble" (1948). In it, Gottschalk directs his critique toward Langer's apologist stance and his overt eagerness to categorically defend Roosevelt and his inner circle: "[Despite Langer's] earnest efforts to [provide unbiased candor], his close association with the office of strategic services and the department of state made him a partisan. Instead of the detached and dispassionate tone that one finds in his [historical] studies of diplomacy in the nineteenth century, here he evinces impatience with conflicting points of view and readiness to accept the testimony of witnesses whose judgment is the very core of the dispute." Louis Gottschalk, "Our Vichy Fumble," in *The Journal of Modern History* 20.1 (Mar. 1948): 48.

of the conqueror.”<sup>67</sup> Regardless of whether or not the Vichy regime challenged this pressure, and to what degree, Viorst offered a persuasive rendering of Roosevelt’s general diplomatic strategy.

Costigliola’s monograph also emphasized Roosevelt’s key diplomatic objective of quelling Franco-German collaborationism beyond the confines of the armistice. In his chapter entitled, “The Difficult Bride,” the scholar, like Viorst, attested that immediately following the fall of the Third Republic in July 1940, American policymakers, led by Roosevelt, but supported by William Bullitt, and the entering ambassador, William Leahy, believed that Marshal Pétain personally offered the greatest counterbalance to Vichy’s full cooperation with Hitler. To this, he wrote that “The United States courted Pétain as the Vichy leader who, because of his stubborn patriotism and substantial popular support, seemed the strongest resistant to German demands for the French fleet and colonies.”<sup>68</sup> Costigliola’s assessment of the Americans’ grand strategy in Vichy reverberated in scholarship throughout the 1990s. One noteworthy resonance of this position appeared in a landmark text on Roosevelt’s wartime diplomatic stratagems.

Like Viorst and Costigliola, preeminent diplomatic historian, Warren Kimball, presented a passing interpretation of Roosevelt’s broad French policy in his momentous 1997 study, *Forged in War*. Kimball, whose work primarily chronicled the intricacies of the evolving Roosevelt-Churchill relationship throughout the war, also insisted that FDR’s rationale for maintaining the French alliance orbited around keeping Vichy’s resources from Hitler’s grasp. In addition, he, like Langer, attests that the President sought to cultivate a lifeline to French politicians and commanders still supporting the Allied cause: “[In] 1940 Roosevelt had maintained diplomatic

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<sup>67</sup>Milton Viorst, *Hostile Allies: FDR and Charles de Gaulle* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), 39.

<sup>68</sup>Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 134.

relations with the Vichy government, hoping initially to keep the French fleet out of German hands and then to gain nonresistance, if not cooperation, from Vichy authorities in the French Empire.”<sup>69</sup> Again, Roosevelt’s chief objective of limiting French collaborationism (though with the ancillary claims of his support of the anti-Vichyite contingents within the colonies) appeared at the forefront of this essential study of Roosevelt’s World War II-era statecraft.

Regardless of their valuable contributions, the works cited above only provide insight into Roosevelt’s policy during the 1940-1942 period, when the Americans and French maintained formal diplomatic relations. Because these texts still represent the consensus of those produced on the topic, however (even as they are limited in their chronological scopes), they do serve as valuable reference points from which to begin this study. The issue of securing Vichy’s fleet, for instance, became a moot point after November 1942, when the French scuttled most of it near the southern French harbor of Toulon, and while Franco-German collaborationism naturally remained an American concern after November 1942, the Roosevelt government possessed little influence over a nation now firmly behind the fog of war. Still, in the assessment of the relevant historiography, one academic study offers a unified, if vague, assessment of Roosevelt’s comprehensive French strategy during the war.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Warren Kimball, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1997), 168.

<sup>70</sup>Another perspective of Roosevelt’s wartime and postwar ambitions with regard to France came from the renowned New Left text of historian Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War* (1968). While Kolko’s claim of the U.S. government preparing its own hegemonic program in Europe beginning in 1943 are, at times, reasonable, especially with regard to stemming a possible future Communist influx, his work only offers supplemental or tangential insight pertinent to this dissertation. Still, a brief survey of his landmark work warrants attention. Specifically, Kolko argues that toward the end of the war, the Anglo-American partnership worked toward sculpting the new postwar role of France, which, after their defeat in 1940, appeared as a second-rate global power. To this, he writes, “no political question proved as decisive to the Anglo-American alliance as that of France. Deprived of political content, the issue of whether to support the Vichy government in France, [Admiral François] Darlan and [General Henri] Giraud in North Africa, or De Gaulle in preference to them all, historians have invariably interpreted it as a disagreement with the British over military expediency or the unique personality of



Julian Hurstfield's watershed monograph, *America and the French Nation* (1986), surveys the formal Franco-American relationship as well as popular American responses to the accords throughout the war. Unlike most other works on the topic that focus on one particular era or theme, Hurstfield traces America's complex grand strategy that emerged in thematic patchworks of objectives that floated between prominent figures, including Pétain, Admiral Darlan, and later, Charles de Gaulle. But unfortunately his summary of these points lacks specificity, as he declares that Roosevelt's regularly shifting French strategy "did have immediate political consequences. Above all it inescapably produced a series of short-term expedients, of which the French policy, more than any other, affords numerous illustrations."<sup>71</sup> Though this overly broad assessment may appear as a hindrance in studying this area of American diplomatic history, as Hurstfield paints an obscure landscape, it, in fact, accurately reflects the chameleon-like appearance of the Synarchy episode. Despite the fickle nature of Franco-American accords, the legend ultimately melded into various, though explicit, American concerns regarding the Vichy regime, and, by 1944, the rising de Gaulle movement. Throughout the war and beyond, the pliable tales of the technocratic cabal firmly fit into narratives central to Roosevelt's shifting attentions in the beleaguered nation, most notably perpetual concerns related to Franco-German collaborationism, global authoritarianism, and the tracking of furtive ultraconservative leagues.

Though providing a foundation for an understanding of FDR's unofficial Vichy policy, most of the prominent historians highlighted above (with the exception of Langer) fail to cite the

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De Gaulle himself. In reality it was a question of whether France should be weak or strong after the war, and how it would align itself in the world power structure."

Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: United States Foreign Policy, 1943-1945* (New York: Random House, 1968), 64.

<sup>71</sup>Julian Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation, 1939-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 198-199.

Synarchy affair as part of America's French wartime diplomatic calculations. In many ways, this story possessed implications for the accords throughout the war which go beyond what previous scholarship outlines. But the study of Synarchism, as it intersected with wartime American intelligence and diplomatic aims, did not completely evade the gaze of scholars after the Second World War. Though small, this collection of texts begins to bring the wider implications of the French scandal into focus.

### Scholarship Regarding the American Response to the Synarchy Affair

Academic works conducted on America's World War II intelligence community and its interaction with the Synarchy affair are certainly rare. Yet they do exist.<sup>72</sup> Throughout a survey of the appropriate literature, only a handful of studies qualify as those which considered these investigations from this particular perspective.<sup>73</sup> And although none of them constitute inclusive narratives by any means, they offer inimitable insight into this community's evaluations that the more Eurocentric texts from the past 75 years simply do not.

The first work fusing these two historical topics is William Langer's previously-cited monograph, *Our Vichy Gamble*. During his scrutiny of America's intelligence reports on noted Vichy collaborationists, the historian's critique eventually gravitated toward the alleged stories of the Synarchy.<sup>74</sup> In implementing these reports, he demonstrated some of the horrors of the

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<sup>72</sup>In historian George Constanindes's literature review of World War II-era intelligence historiography, the scholar's article indicates that though institutional histories of the C.O.I./O.S.S. are somewhat ubiquitous, chronicles of individual investigations (such as the Synarchy affair) are less common. For his terse, yet enlightening, review, please see the following chapter:

George Constanindes, "The O.S.S.: A Brief Review of Literature," In *The Secrets War: The Office of Strategic Services*, ed. by George E. Chalou: 109-121 (Washington D.C.: National Records and Administration, 1992).

<sup>73</sup>Though William Leahy's memoir could also appear on this list, the fact that he failed to explicitly invoke the term "Synarchy" disqualifies his work from such consideration.

<sup>74</sup>In his citation of intelligence documents that, in some cases, proved invaluable for this dissertation, Langer lists the following records in his analysis of the so-called "*Worms group*:" "Dispatch (January 7, 1942) from [ambassador

Vichy regime and indicated that America's diplomatic relationship with it was understandably criticized at the time (even as he defended it). In pointing to the unsavory elements of America's Vichy policy, some of Langer's featured reports pertained to the activities and political *bona fides* of the ministers who aided the Germans throughout the war. Naturally, references to the conspiracy narrative followed.

Unfortunately, Langer provides limited and somewhat disappointing conclusions regarding the Americans' reactions to the Synarchist movement. This is especially true when considering the wealth of intelligence materials that he had at his disposal, and that he devoted energies toward denouncing the relevant political opportunists in this portion of his narrative. The totality of Langer's small contribution appears as follows: "Many of the [ministerial members] had long had extensive and intimate business relations with German interests and were still dreaming of a new system of 'synarchy,' which meant government of Europe on fascist principles by an international brotherhood of financiers and industrialists."<sup>75</sup> Indeed, in many ways, his explanation here does not even assess the American response to the affair *per se*. Rather, it simply acknowledges that the group's political philosophy attracted the attention of the American intelligence community during their investigations into Vichy's plutocratic ministers.

Though falling short of referring to the Synarchy as a viable conspiracy, Langer still does not provide a comprehensive synopsis of the conclusions made by the Americans regarding the movement. Yet even as his evaluation is far from complete (and undoubtedly misguided), it is

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Anthony] Biddle [,] *Worms et Cie*. (Coordinator of Information, Research and Analysis Branch, Report, March 3, 1942), and *Activities of Banque Worms et Cie*. (Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, Report, November 15, 1943)."

Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 169.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 168.

also the first that implemented wartime American intelligence materials to chronicle the activities of Darlan's technocrats and their supposedly secret affiliations.<sup>76</sup> For the purposes of this project, then, this is where the real value of Langer's work lies.

Kuisel's article serves as the second text citing aspects of the American investigations into Synarchy, though only briefly. Beyond arguing that "the fictitious plot" had "deleterious" effects on Franco-American relations, as the affair signaled overt economic and political collaborationism, Kuisel also indicates that the State Department officials appeared "overly credulous" when it came to their assessment of the canards.<sup>77</sup> Both of Kuisel's observations here were astute. In concluding his small section devoted to interpreting the Americans' reaction, Kuisel avers that "contrary to Washington's version, Darlan's team, of course, was neither fascists nor even 'dyed-in-the-wool collaborationists' and it was not controlled by the Maison

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<sup>76</sup>To Langer's credit, he does cite the unsavory characters that the United States ultimately dealt with during its formal relationship with Vichy. These represented the very associations that principally stirred the controversy in this country. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, it is essential to indicate that even this early orthodox history of the Vichy regime identifies the industrialists and bankers (along with Laval, Darlan, and their immediate associates) as the staunchest arch-collaborationist faction in France during the war. He declares: "really about the only sincere collaborationists in France were the industrial interests like the *Banque Worms* group. They not only accepted collaboration—they yearned for it and worked for it. As a matter of fact, they did a thriving business and came off extremely well. Laval and Darlan made full use of these people and sponsored economic collaboration of large dimensions." Contemporary works on Vichy history argue that the list of active collaborationists was much more expansive than just the industrialists and financiers who profited from their relationship with the Nazis. Works, such as Julian Jackson's, attempted to demystify what became dubbed as the "Myth of de Gaulle" in subsequent years. De Gaulle's narrative after the war propounded that only a few hard-lined individuals sided with the Germans, either morally or financially, while the rest of the nation resisted. He states: "De Gaulle's aim in 1944 was to reunite the nation and restore its self-respect. This involved the construction of the myth that, despite a few traitors, the French nation, united behind de Gaulle, had liberated itself. [...] After de Gaulle's return to power in 1958, there was no obstacle to the full development of the myth of the Resistance [...]." But even within de Gaulle's highly conservative estimate of French collaborationism, the technocrats and financiers still represented the principal perpetrators drawn to the promises of German favoritism. This is an important point to consider while reading this dissertation.  
Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 385.  
Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 602-3.

<sup>77</sup>Kuisel, "Legend," 394.

Worms or the plutocracy.”<sup>78</sup> Again, the vacillating and opportunistic nature of most of these men throughout the course of the war indicates that Kuisel’s conclusions regarding them are accurate. In support of his claims, however, Kuisel’s source base was significantly smaller than that implemented by Langer. Kuisel, in contrast to Langer, who made use of copious amounts of still-classified official records, had limited references available to him. Specifically, he cited William Leahy’s memoir, Langer’s *Our Vichy Gamble*, and the State Department’s published *Foreign Relations of the United States* series in his article (the collection chronicling the year 1941 was published in 1959). Therefore, though Kuisel offers a valid interpretation of the Americans’ response to Synarchy using all of the materials available to him, these materials only constitute a minute fraction of the total compendium.<sup>79</sup>

Yet another text scrutinizing the American intelligence community’s reaction to Synarchy is Nerin Gun’s 1979 *Secrets of the American Archive*. Although his work principally focuses on the American government’s surveillance of Vichy’s top political brass and de Gaulle during the war, Gun’s relatively succinct appraisal of the Synarchy emerges in a terse, six-page chapter entitled, “A Hoax?” In his treatment, Gun offers two novel points with regard to the State

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>The declassification of wartime government intelligence records generally did not begin until the late 1970s. 1976 specifically served as the turning point in this process, as popular calls for political transparency on intelligence-related matters resulted in a formal Senate report conducted by the what became known as the “Church Committee.” While this report primarily sought to reveal the functions and early activities of the C.I.A., O.S.S. records also became slated for declassification. Cristof Mauch declares that in that year, “the first group of O.S.S. documents was released, initially by the State Department, and after 1980 by the C.I.A., so that a number of accomplished historians began to take interest in the new source materials.” The accessioning process was completed by 1991. In quoting O.S.S. historian Bradley Smith during the final phase of declassification, Mauch offers his very significant statement as follows: “[It is] the first time in the life of the planet” when “a nearly complete body of records produced by an intelligence organization...has been placed in the public and scholarly domain.” This, in conjunction with the publication of two official histories of the O.S.S., Anthony Cave Brown’s *The Secret War Report of the O.S.S.* and Kermit Roosevelt’s (Editor) *War Report of the O.S.S.* (two volumes) (both 1976), resulted in a veritable revolution in intelligence historiography. Mauch, *The Shadow War*, 3-4.

Department's interest in and responses to the affair. Firstly, he indicates that most American officials who devoted efforts to its study shared similar educational backgrounds with one another, which, as he contends, largely revolved around business curricula or "financial questions." "Therefore," he attests that they "were inclined to believe that governments of modern Europe, like [...] Washington today [...], were animated by the power of moneyed cults."<sup>80</sup> He, in turn, contends that the officials at the American Embassy in Vichy, at least during the latter half of 1941, approached the conspiracy narrative with extreme disquiet.<sup>81</sup>

Second, and more important for the purposes of this paper, is that Gun also indicates where the Americans may have received their initial Synarchy-related materials from. Even as he does not specifically identify what report the Americans received, the quoted excerpts he provides clearly reflects those from the incendiary Chavin Report. Although only relying on hearsay or conjecture, Gun argues that "one top suspect was the busy Henri de Moulin de Labarthète, who had sent the document from Stockholm by courier."<sup>82</sup> Labarthète, if recalled, was the staunch opponent of Synarchy noted above. Unfortunately, no information came to light

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<sup>80</sup>Nerin E. Gun, *Les secrets des archives américaines: Pétain-Laval-De Gaulle (Vol. 1)* (Paris: Albin Michel Publishing, 1979), 125.

<sup>81</sup>Dard notes Gun's assessment of these officials in his text as well. Specifically, in citing Gun on this particular issue, the only time, in fact, he makes note of the Americans' response to the Synarchy at all, he states that "the Americans took this affair seriously, as their diplomats then posted in Vichy, Freeman-Matthews (Top Secretary of the ambassador) or Leahy (ambassador), dispatched alarming reports to their government." Gun's limitations are reflected by the fact that Freeman-Matthews and Leahy were the only two American officials cited in his treatment. As this dissertation demonstrates, many more figures and government offices concerned themselves with the prolonged investigations into Synarchy. Dard, *La Synarchy*, 217.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 126.

at the National Archives which either validated or nullified Labarthéte's role in this matter. Thus, Gun's conclusion here is as valid as any other.<sup>83</sup>

But Gun's text had its shortcomings. Though quoting high-profile figures at the American Embassy at the time (most notably, and only, William Leahy and Harrison Freeman-Matthews), Gun's work contains no formal citations. This significantly compromises his work's scholarly credentials. Further, he limited his assessment of the Americans' response to the Synarchy to 1941 and 1942. He later indicates that substantial examinations of the affair were not pursued after the Nazi occupation of the southern zone in November of 1942, when the American Embassy in Vichy ceased its operations. Gun simply explains that "perhaps the American government guessed that it was a hoax, or perhaps they also preferred not to explore the question too much."<sup>84</sup> In the examination of other intelligence services, however, the Americans' interest in Synarchism continued for years thereafter, as it consistently coincided with a variety of diplomatic and national security objectives. Therefore, far from being a turning point in the historical literature, this chapter merely provided a fragmented version of the intelligence community's investigations into the affair that failed to take into account many other agencies and departments examining the same events. Despite his limited treatment and questionable methodologies, however, his work undoubtedly provides the most inclusive appraisal of the Americans' response to the Synarchy episode to-date.

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<sup>83</sup> Kuisel, in citing Langer, also notes that other agents were responsible for passing along Synarchy-related materials to the American Embassy in Vichy early in the investigations. For instance, quoting Langer's book, Kuisel writes, "the United States ambassador in London [Anthony Biddle] relayed details from the Chavin report while our military intelligence prepared a study on the 'Activities of the Banque Worms et. Cie.'" "Legend," 394.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 131.

The fourth, final, and most recent of the works considering America's reaction to the Vichy conspiracy is Anthony Cave Brown's 1982 biography, *The Last Hero: Wild Bill Donovan*. Brown's evaluation of the Americans' response to Synarchy, unlike the other texts noted above, also briefly delves into specific reports conducted by Donovan's intelligence services. Specifically, his chosen sources concerning the affair were those that reached the highest levels of the American government, as he cites, in the most prominent instance, correspondence sent from Donovan's office to Roosevelt himself. But Brown's historical examination of the Synarchy investigations also features its own scholarly deficiencies.

Unfortunately, Brown's assessment of Donovan's memorandum indicates that the author accepted the director's treatment of Synarchy as an authentic, self-seeking, and esoteric league of French industrialists. For instance, he declares that "the political credo of the group was synarchism- rule by a technocratic elite in concert with capital- and, Donovan went on, the group had succeeded in 'placing men in [position in Pétain's government]'.<sup>85</sup> Brown's principal failure is that he fails to debunk the Synarchy's fantastic rumors. Given the contemporary historiographical and archival sources at his disposal, this, of course, was quite possible. Regardless of his motives for presenting the Synarchy as a viable conspiracy, from a position of academic hindsight, Brown's work appears exceedingly misleading. In presenting the cabal in a light bordering on the surreal, his account strongly reflects comparable orthodox narratives.

So, how does this project enhance, augment, or challenge the existing scholarship on the Americans' pursuit of the Vichy Synarchy? Perhaps most significantly, this dissertation's temporal scope is considerably more expansive than that of any previous project conducted. Each

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<sup>85</sup>Anthony Cave Brown, *The Last Hero: Wild Bill Donovan* (New York: Times Press, 1982), 245.



of the four historical works noted above end their respective evaluations by the year 1942. This dissertation, by contrast, surveys related intelligence documents to 1946. The extended timeframe not only magnifies the narrative itself, but also provides an opportunity to challenge previous scholarship arguing that the Americans showed fleeting or limited interest in the affair.

In the evaluation of the various government documents used in this paper, it is also prudent to highlight how this project deviates from each of the works conducted prior. Moving past the orthodox perception that Synarchy acted as a secret society of French technocrats, this paper dismisses Langer's and Brown's works, which are consistent with them. As opposed to Nerin Gun, who attests that the American intelligence community simply abandoned its pursuit of Synarchism by late-1942, this examination highlights their continued urgency regarding it. And beyond what sources Kuisel contributes to the study, in the "credulous" reports conducted by the State Department from 1941 (valuable as they may be), this evaluation exhibits hundreds of pages of new documentation on the subject that were previously classified or generally disregarded thereafter. Therefore, the four studies that currently comprise the entire historiographical canon of America's intelligence response to Synarchy will now have added to them a more comprehensive scholarly contribution seeking to heavily revise and update the previous narratives.

The Americans' pursuit of Synarchy, in some ways, began its fantastic voyage in the days and weeks following France's military defeat in May and June of 1940, where ghostly "Fifth Column" saboteurs captivated the imaginations of many across the Atlantic. Most theatrical performances are preceded by opening acts. Vichy's phantasmagoria was no different.

Chapter One: The Docile Donnybrook: Neutral America's Policy Aims in a World at War (1939-1941)

*"[Human] freedoms were fundamental in any [American] consideration of a future world order based on cooperation among free countries."*

--Harley Notter on Franklin Roosevelt's "Four Essential Freedoms" Speech (January 1941), *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945*, 41.

*"Can the United States afford to run the risk of seeing Britain and France defeated by the totalitarian regimes? The results of such a defeat would be the disintegration of the last bulwark of democracy in Europe, and the rise of Germany as the sole Great Power in Europe. [...] These conditions [would] cause unrest and dissatisfaction in the United States, creating a soil favorable to foreign ideologies."*

--Memorandum from Joseph Kennedy (American Ambassador to Great Britain) to Franklin Roosevelt, March 3, 1939 (as quoted in David Walker's Dissertation, "Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Creation of the United States Intelligence Community," pp. 52-3)

August 19, 1941, Vichy, France: Among the various notes, dispatches, and intelligence reports circulating around the American Embassy in Vichy during the emotionally-trying summer of 1941, Douglas MacArthur (the State Department official, not the famed American military commander), in a one-page intra-office memorandum, presented the very first image of France's newest "Fifth Column" tale to U.S. diplomats. His urgent report established the groundwork for later iterations of this clique which persisted throughout the war and beyond. Though collaborationist reports of Vichy's notorious "*Banque Worms* Group" captured the attention of State Department officials before this, MacArthur's account was different. Franco-German collaborationism, political subversion in Vichy, and clandestine networks of reactionary industrialists and financiers characterized this new movement, sinisterly dubbed the "Synarchy." MacArthur's report, the first in a long series of Synarchy evaluations for years to come, illustrated the cabal as such:

Maitre Brissoniere, [Georges] Mandel's [(Chief de Cabinet in Bordeaux)] lawyer, called today to tell me about a new movement called 'Synarchy.' Its leading lights [*sic.*] Pucheu, Barnaud, Gerard (Secretary General of the Association of Insurance Companies), the two Leroy-Ladurie brothers, Marion and Lehideux. All of these are connected with

the industrialist group and the Banque Worms. Brisoiere [*sic.*] said that the group of young and ambitious men hoped to get full control of the government concentrated in their hands. They would then follow what they call a 'realistic policy' which would involve playing with the Germans for the time being as long as the latter are in a position to exert pressure on France. When the moment of the Anglo Saxon ascendancy arrived, they would reverse their field and play ball up to the hilt with the British and Americans. Their policy would be one hundred percent materialistic, and by getting control now of the Government, they would be in a position two or three years from now when the war ends of having consolidated their internal position in France, so that they would be the reconstruction Government. Their conception of Government is authoritarian rather than democratic. [...]

Other than the above, he was not able to give me particulars as to this movement.<sup>1</sup>

Even without the benefit of historical context, Vichy's Synarchy appeared in this account as a most menacing political force hidden somewhere in France. For at least the next five years, many in the American government viewed it as such, as the conspiracy permeated throughout numerous and ever-evolving intelligence and diplomatic accounts. In many respects, the stories of Synarchy remained a referent for many U.S. officials scrutinizing the turbulent French wartime political milieu.

Illuminating the true story of Vichy's Synarchy presents numerous challenges. Historically-speaking, the tale featured a rich and serpentine genealogy which oftentimes weaved into and out of reality, where supernatural occultism and vast worldwide conspiracies intersected with banal and petty (though caustic) personal ambitions and political opportunism. Yet for the Americans, Synarchy posed a polygonal danger. MacArthur's report strongly expressed this. But how did the Synarchy affair directly intersect with American foreign policy objectives as they pertained to France and the wider world? To understand this, the following chapter outlines

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas MacArthur, Third Secretary of the American Embassy, Vichy, France, Recipient Unknown, Vichy, France, August 19, 1941, Records of the Foreign Services Posts of the Department of State, American Embassy, Vichy, France, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, Folder 2, 350:56-18-6, p. 1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

America's diplomatic and national security aims prior to the country's entry into the Second World War, setting the stage for concerns pertinent to the affair.

The following chapter isolates three elements of America's foreign policy narrative from 1939-1941, all of which traversed the stories of the contrived *M.S.E.* The first considers FDR's and other high-ranking officials' aims and expectations regarding the Vichy regime and the French Empire in the aftermath of the German conquest in 1940. The second traces the broad contours of FDR's grand political strategy regarding international Statism, where American liberal ideals unambiguously appeared at odds with programs such as the Synarchy. The third illustrates the thinking of William Donovan, a close FDR confidant, by highlighting his and the President's concerns over reactionary subversive movements (*i.e.*, "Fifth Columnists") after the fall of Western Europe. By mid-1941, with the Nazi war machine trudging across the European continent, Synarchy emerged as yet another concern for American officials frantically attempting to stave off Franco-German collaborationism, global authoritarianism, and the menace of right-wing revolutionary activities.

#### The Diplomatic Maelstrom: FDR's Attempts to Stave Off Franco-German Collaborationism

Resistance can take many forms. The United States remained committed to its formal isolationist policy between 1939 and 1941, much to the vexation of its allies across the Atlantic. But the activities of the nation's foreign service corps still stationed around Europe, coupled with American political rhetoric and studies conducted on how to combat the enemies of democracy, provided subtle forms of resistance against the forces of fascism. Ultimately, America's political objectives for France, Europe, and the world at large, rested in the thoughts and actions of those committed to passively combatting the Axis during this period. In attempting to accomplish this

within the context of the Pétain regime, the Americans' diplomatic value in Vichy translated directly to its efforts to indirectly undermine the Third Reich.

As it pertained to the neutral Americans' views of the Vichy regime during 1940 and 1941, the swift demise of the Third Republic left Roosevelt and his inner circle in the precarious position of quickly formulating a new, complex foreign policy. At the heart of this diplomatic conundrum lay the following question: how could the Americans maintain formal relations with Vichy *and* keep the regime at arm's length from Hitler? Although never publicizing an official French policy, FDR and his administration formulated a rough outline of how they expected the Vichyites to conduct themselves. This was, of course, if the latter wanted the continued moral (and later material) support of the United States. Diplomatic historian, Julian Hurstfield, for example, succinctly points to America's perpetually unsettled French question by writing "The precise outlines of America's Vichy policy were vague, and its course lay ultimately in the hands of the president."<sup>2</sup> Still, consistencies in America's diplomatic approach to the Pétain regime lasted until November 1942, when the French fascists and Nazis had the Embassy shuttered. The President's tactics of dealing with the authoritarian regime ultimately framed the bilateral relationship during this period, even if they did not explicitly direct it.

The question of whether or not to continue relations with Vichy also left FDR and his inner circle in a difficult domestic public relations position. Maintaining accords with the regime meant, at the very least, tacitly supporting its oppressive programs. Cutting ties, on the other hand, almost certainly left France no other choice but to gravitate toward the Axis camp. Hurstfield writes that the American public's initial tepid reaction to the Vichy alliance, combined

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<sup>2</sup>Julian Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation 1939-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 29.

with the potential gains to be obtained by keeping the regime within reach, eventually led to FDR's decision to stay the French diplomatic course.<sup>3</sup> In his orthodox account, William Langer likewise offered a cogent defense of FDR's decision to maintain open communications with Vichy. Even by late 1941, Langer attests, the Americans had not yet formerly severed their links to Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, nor militarist Japan (to name but a few authoritarian regimes). Thus, abandoning Vichy not only made little sense from a tactical standpoint, the mere suggestion of it contradicted comparable diplomatic decisions made at the time.<sup>4</sup> Sumner Welles (Undersecretary of State and a close advisor to Roosevelt), in his 1944 memoir, *The Time for Decision*, further argued that an aloof France unnecessarily limited valuable American contacts on the continent and threatened the prospect of creating another Axis-affiliated regime.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, scholars since the end of the Second World War generally contest that although it was not a palatable association, America's relationship with Vichy did pay discernable political dividends for the Allies. To these academics, the prospect of staving off Franco-German collaborationism alone politically counterbalanced the morally questionable consequences stemming from maintaining relations with the authoritarian regime. The Synarchy scandal later threatened this prized objective.

Throughout their official diplomatic relationship, Vichy no doubt proved a difficult ally for the Americans. The Franco-German armistice agreement (June 22, 1940), which carved France into occupied and unoccupied zones (*i.e.*, Vichy), placed the powerful French fleet at the whim of German demands and forced daily French payments for the *Wehrmacht's* occupation

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>4</sup>Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 76-7.

<sup>5</sup>Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944), 156.

costs certainly complicated the accords.<sup>6</sup> Yet even in the fluidity of the Vichy-American relationship, Roosevelt maintained a broad set of expectations of the regime that coincided with his anti-Axis agenda. In his memoirs, Secretary of State Cordell Hull offered the “four main facets” of the American (*i.e.*, Roosevelt’s) French policy, which the President personally articulated to him in mid-July, 1940:

The first was to see that the fleet was not turned over to Hitler. The second was to see that the Axis did not get possession or control of French bases in Africa or in the Western Hemisphere. [...] The third was to see that the Vichy Government did not go beyond the terms of the armistice toward active collaboration with Hitler. [...] The fourth was to restore a degree of friendship between France and Britain.<sup>7</sup>

With Churchill’s attacks on Vichy’s forces in Algeria (*Mers-el-Kébir*) and Dakar in the summer of 1940, the final objective became particularly problematic.<sup>8</sup> Yet because American officials

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<sup>6</sup>Though the terms of the initially lenient Franco-German armistice do not require extensive consideration, they do warrant attention. Some of the more relevant components of the armistice agreement related to this dissertation were perhaps summarized best by the forthcoming interim American ambassador to France, Anthony Biddle. In a cable sent to Secretary of State Hull on June 21, Biddle succinctly wrote of the conditions: “Germany to occupy the entire Atlantic and Channel coasts and leave less than one-third of the French country to the French Government. Demobilization and disarmament to be immediate and complete. The entire French fleet to return to or remain in French ports and dismantled under German supervision, with the exception of units released for the protection of the French colonies. The German Government declared to the French Government that it did not intend to use the French war fleet in harbors under German control for its purposes of war.” Only a few weeks after signing the armistice, however, additional concessions favoring the Germans were ironed out. Paxton, for instance, notes that “On 26 August, after weeks of fruitless negotiations, the French government acceded to a figure of 20 million marks a day for the occupation costs payable under Article 18. [...] Then the [French] prisoners of war, whose liberation ‘even before the peace talks begin’ had been requested by [French] General Huntziger [(Vichy’s Minister of War)], began to be moved in early August from temporary encampments in France to German Stalags.” Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, Vol 1*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 795. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 53.

<sup>7</sup>Hull, *Memoirs*, 804.

<sup>8</sup>In fearing a possible handover of French naval ships to the Nazis, historian Alec de Montmorency states that on July 3, 1940, “the British Navy felt compelled to put those [Algerian units] out of action, sinking or disabling the bulk of them. The French Admiralty announced its casualties. Some two thousand officers and men were killed or wounded. British losses had been nil.” A second joint assault on the city of Dakar by British and Free French forces on August 3 also understandably soured the Vichy authorities toward the notion of Franco-British goodwill. The Vichy government later cut formal ties with Britain over these assaults. Within weeks, they ejected Churchill’s representatives from the North African colonies. Alec De Montmorency, *The Enigma of Admiral Darlan* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1943), 100. *War Report of the O.S.S., intro. by Kermit Roosevelt* (New York: Walker and Co., 1976), 93.

rarely reiterated this facet throughout the war, it is clear that they placed little urgency on it. By contrast, FDR emphasized protecting France's territorial possessions, and preventing excessive political collaborationism beyond the confines of the armistice. Concerns over the fleet coincided directly with the second objective. Historians from Langer to Kimball all indicate that this, in fact, constituted the foundation of the President's foreign affairs objectives regarding the Pétain regime. Roosevelt cited comparable goals for William Leahy when the latter accepted his new post as ambassador to Vichy in late 1940.

Following the recall of William Bullitt from Paris in July 1940, and the short interim ambassadorship of Anthony Biddle thereafter, Roosevelt began his search for a full-time replacement to head the new Vichy Embassy. The President eventually tapped Admiral William Leahy for the job, believing that his history with the American military bolstered his credentials for working with the officer-laden regime.<sup>9</sup> In January 1941, Roosevelt formally installed Leahy as America's top representative to the Pétain government. In describing his official duties and objectives in maintaining cordial Franco-American relations, Roosevelt detailed seven of the most pressing concerns for the new ambassador to consider in a personal letter sent a few weeks before his departure. Most of these merely echoed the President's stated policy from July of that year. Two of the more pertinent points directly related to this dissertation's scope also concerned curbing collaborationism and safeguarding the French fleet. As to the first of these, which

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<sup>9</sup>In his unpublished manuscripts, Leahy notes Roosevelt's initial sentiments regarding the former's unique qualifications for the post in a November 17, 1940 personal correspondence: "We need in France at this time an ambassador who can gain the confidence of Marshal Pétain who at the present moment is the one powerful element of the French Government who is standing firm against selling out to Germany. I feel that you are the best man available for this mission. You can talk to Marshal Pétain in a language which he would understand, and the position which you have held in our own Navy would undoubtedly give you great influence with the higher officials of the French navy who are openly hostile to Great Britain."

William D. Leahy, Notes for Manuscript "I Was There, November 1940-July 22, 1942 (I)," Date unknown, Private Papers of William Leahy, Box 13, Folder 1, p. 1. Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington D.C.



“perturbed” him, FDR’s intelligence indicated that throughout 1940, “resources of France [were] being placed at the disposal of Germany in a measure beyond that positively required by the terms of the armistice agreement.” In addition to woeful personal avarice, the President considered a widespread “belief in the inevitableness of a German victory and ultimate benefit to France” as a chief motivation for Vichy’s businessmen’s decision to economically treat with the Reich.<sup>10</sup>

Closely affixed to the President’s apprehensions regarding collaborationism, constant interest in the powerful French fleet remained a catalyst for FDR’s decision to maintain formal relations with the regime. Keeping it out “of German control” Roosevelt went on to write to Leahy, “is not only of prime importance to the defense of this hemisphere but is also vital to the preservation of the French Empire and the eventual restoration of French independence and autonomy.” Surrendering it to the Reich, by contrast, would result in the permanent loss of “the friendship and good will of the Government of the United States.” FDR warned Pétain about this prospect soon after the Marshal installed himself in power.<sup>11</sup> Thus, identical to the objectives the President outlined earlier in 1940, collaborationism beyond the confines of the armistice and the security of France’s valued fleet continued to serve as the centerpieces of America’s French policy. Furthermore, Roosevelt’s explicit orders to Leahy to be constantly privy to the French economic situation, as he had to “report fully regarding it,” illustrates the pressing nature of this goal. Diplomatic historian Harley Notter also cited this stipulation as a keystone for maintaining formal relations. In *Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation*, he writes: “The vital role of the French

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

fleet was repeatedly emphasized to the French Government during [the days following the armistice], with the warning that American friendship with France was at stake [...].” Robert Dallek and John Harper make similar arguments in their works.<sup>12</sup>

With collaborationism, the colonies, and the fleet constantly in mind, FDR’s French policy emerged as a semi-cohesive one during the 1940-1942 period. Regardless of the intricacies and complexities that accompanied the relationship during this period, Roosevelt never wavered on these points. Yet the Americans’ scrutiny of the Synarchy affair beginning in 1941 exhibited how such a cabal endangered these aims. Much of their anxiety later related to the *M.S.E.* stemmed from the President’s worldview regarding authoritarianism, which he publicly exhibited and privately refined during Europe’s darkest days.

#### The Soul of Civilization: High American Politics and the War Against International Statism

Between Roosevelt’s and Hull’s statements regarding the President’s informal American Vichy policy, it is evident that top officials wished to simply limit any assistance given to the Axis. Admiral Leahy at the ambassadorial helm in Vichy increased the prospect of curbing such French concessions to Hitler. Collaborationism meant a protracted war in Europe, which consequently threatened America’s national security interests at home and its broader political goals abroad. For this reason, undermining and ultimately defeating fascism in Europe (what historian David Walker refers to as FDR’s “overall policy objective”) remained the President’s chief aim.<sup>13</sup> Well-known documents produced by the Allies during 1941, in addition to historical

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<sup>12</sup>*Postwar Foreign Policy Preparation, 1939-1945*, Department of State Publication, written by Harley A. Notter (Washington D.C: United States Government Printing Office: 1950), 31.  
Robert Dallek, *Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 223.  
John Harper, *American Visions of Europe: Franklin D. Roosevelt, George F. Kennan, and Dean G. Acheson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 84.

<sup>13</sup>Walker, “Franklin,” 240.

monographs and articles produced after the war, shed some light on FDR's global liberal project which countered the fascists' global ambitions.

The Americans' global liberal project conflicted with the worldview and ideologies of the reactionary states.<sup>14</sup> Even the New Left historian, Gabriel Kolko, who was critical of America's ambitious foreign policy agendas still asserted that "one must also understand that the American government had a series of immediate objectives [during the war], centered first of all around the desire to win battles and defeat the Axis."<sup>15</sup> Though Kolko, much like his fellow revisionists, rejected the international liberal project that the Americans later cultivated, he also sympathized with the U.S.'s genuine anxieties over a potential Nazi-dominated Europe. Academic studies analyzing Roosevelt's opposition to statism on the continent, at first morally and then militarily, are legion and receive the lion's share of the examinations concerning his grand European strategy.<sup>16</sup> According to this scholarly discourse, his simple binary between "democracy" and "authoritarianism" grew into a common rallying cry, not only for the President, but for American

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<sup>14</sup>More than simply being morally opposed to the Axis powers, scholars such as Robert Dallek also notes that Americans, in the pre-Pearl Harbor period, consistently (though unofficially) renounced their neutrality as FDR unambiguously supported the Allies with war materials. "Openly sympathetic to Britain and France and fearful that a German victory might threaten their security," Dallek writes, "Americans generally lined up behind the idea of limited aid to the Allies."

"Introduction," *Roosevelt Diplomacy and World War II*, ed. by Robert Dallek (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 1.

<sup>15</sup>Kolko, *The Politics of War*, 4.

<sup>16</sup>In demonstrating that FDR's and the American peoples' desire to eradicate fascism emerged as a defined foreign policy objective, diplomatic historian, Anders Stephenson, brilliantly captures the tone of the robust canon of scholarly positions supporting this: "[Across] the political spectrum, among the public and historians alike, it was and is a deeply legitimate war against very bad regimes bent on destroying by colossal aggression an existing order that, whatever its faults, was certainly worth defending. No serious scholar argues that a fascist victory would have been a good thing and it is hard to argue that the United States should not have become involved. [...]. Every other war [in American history] has been contestable on grounds that it was either unnecessary, morally wrong, or politically imprudent—or all of the above. The effort to crush fascism was none of these things." Anders Stephenson, "War and Diplomatic History," *Diplomatic History* 25.3 (summer 2001): 394-5.

interventionists as well.<sup>17</sup> Among the various accounts of FDR's liberal visions for the future, scholars such as Kathleen Burk and John Harper consider his particular notion of a "new world order" in his framing of an equitable global fraternity.

The concept of a new world order emerged as a common Western trope in the post-World War I era, which inspired both liberals and demagogues alike. Certainly, Nazism and Stalinist Communism proffered their own utopian visions of a world delineated by rigid racial and economic lines respectively. In the American experience, however, Woodrow Wilson's attempt to build an international community free of war in his failed "Fourteen Points" articulated a national vision for such an era.

In her article, historian Kathleen Burk identifies what interwar presidents viewed as essential for the creation of a progressive global community. Specifically, she notes that in their pursuit of free trade, global markets, and a comprehensive program of disarmament, these executives hoped to "remake a broken world into a more and liberal and democratic place."<sup>18</sup> Even as Burk attests that each executive "[varied] in their [emphasis]" on how much the United States should intervene in the formation of this order, she broadly argues that "all American

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<sup>17</sup>Though not within the purview of high American political circles analyzing the European crisis, commentary from American scholars during this time mimicked Roosevelt's ideological binary. In 1940 and 1941 especially, such expositions often appeared in works attempting to coax the American people out of their isolationist slumber. For instance, Raymond Buell's *Isolated America* (1940), published before the fall of France, envisioned a scenario where an idle America could very well allow Europe to fall to the forces of Nazism. He contended that after Europe, the United States seemed the next logical target for Hitler's Reich. In concluding his book, he forwarded the two principal alternatives facing Americans in their decision to remain isolationist or not: "America today is confronted with the choice either of travelling a solitary road, ending possibly in dictatorship and war, or of using its vast powers to assist in bringing this war to an end, culminating in a peace based on justice, and some new and realistic form of international organization. [...] Should Germany become the dominant power as a result of this war, America would be left the only great democracy in the world." Raymond Buell, *Isolated America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), 453-4.

<sup>18</sup>Kathleen Burk, "The Lineaments of Foreign Policy: The United States and a 'New World Order,' 1919-1939," In *Journal of American Studies* 26.3 (Dec. 1992), 377.

administrations would have agreed with these policy imperatives.” To this variety of approaches, she highlights Wilson’s overt willingness to craft such a program, though he ultimately overstepped his bounds with the American people and Congress, as he was the only President who “had a plan [to] involve the U.S. Government permanently.” Yet she also indicates that “all other [interwar Presidents] preferred, when feasible, merely to give indicative guidance.”<sup>19</sup> Their efforts to craft such a world (or as Julian Hurstfield broadly referred to it as, “the oft-repeated Wilsonian desire for self-determination”), largely resulted in passive or uninspired endeavors from Washington, however. The Presidents of the interwar period generally believed that realizing these grand ambitions principally required working with the powerful nations of Europe. Yet those such as Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge viewed such prospects ambivalently. Their inconsistent views on America’s place in the global community, in fact, disguised the government’s quest to pursue its national interests unilaterally. Still, on many occasions, contentions with European nations (most notably the British) soured the American people toward treating with diverse cultures a vast Atlantic ocean away.<sup>20</sup> For FDR, however, a noted internationalist, the only thing holding Europe back from helping to create a grand liberal new world order was the Europeans themselves.

The events of the First World War demonstrated to many Americans that long-standing and deep-seated cultural rivalries continued to plague the continent of Europe. FDR personally observed the pernicious results of the entangling alliances that brought the continent to its knees.

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<sup>19</sup>Burk, “Lineaments,” 377.

<sup>20</sup>As to the ongoing competition with the British, both good and bad, which, in some ways, stymied these accords, Burk writes: “[When] Americans did look abroad, the country to which they turned they eyes most was Great Britain. This was the case whether it was as a rival, either economically or with regard to the navy, or as an ally and partner, whether in the financial diplomacy of the period or in [Henry] Stimson’s attempt to have them stand together against Japan in 1931. The United States measured itself against Britain.” (Ibid., 378)

In his monograph on FDR's changing foreign policy objectives toward the belligerent powers, historian John Harper notes that after the Great War, FDR cultivated his outlook on America's place in an international system set to prevent future discord. He gained significant personal insight on this topic when he served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy from 1913-1920. At the root of this debate sat Wilson's and Teddy Roosevelt's ideals for how "to organize the peace."<sup>21</sup> Harper then described "FDR's emerging worldview," as that which "combined Wilson's antagonism toward European power politics with [TR's] more traditional and punitive ideas about how to keep the peace."<sup>22</sup> Although he ultimately sided more with Wilson's guarded position, his pessimism that Europe could maintain its own security (and indeed the security of the world) sculpted his late interwar belief that America, to one degree or another, should eventually intervene in the continent's affairs. To this point, Harper continues: "Despite, or rather because of, his deep-seated hemispherism and cynicism about the Old World, Roosevelt believed that the only calamity worse than entanglement in Europe was the one likely to ensue from leaving the Europeans to their proverbial own devices."<sup>23</sup> The Nazis' *Blitzkrieg* only bolstered his conviction, it did not create it. Starting in 1940, this belief took the form of supporting the

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<sup>21</sup>Harper describes the two sides of this ideological coin as follows: "For Wilson everything was subordinated to the creation of a collective security system. This required not only self-determination for aggrieved peoples, but a German settlement paving the way for liberal democracy and a solution to the problem of British naval power, removing what for Wilson had been the chief cause of German animosity leading to the war. [...] Theodore Roosevelt had himself suggested (in 1910) a 'League of Peace' exercising 'international police power' and (in November 1914) an 'international posse comitatus.' He ridiculed what he saw as the millenarian aspects of Wilson's League but endorsed great-power collaboration with a division of labor along geographical lines. He believed that only a harsh peace would do for Germany, but combined this with a strong awareness of the limits of U.S. power." (Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 34-5)

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 76.

besieged Allies against Hitler, not only for the unmistakable goal of preserving the tenets of liberal civilization in Europe, but also for the physical defense of America itself.

When the German assaults overcame the major continental powers by late 1940, Great Britain remained the sole democracy-defending power in Europe standing between the Reich and the United States. For FDR and some of his fellow policymakers, even with the resistance they encountered in Congress (to say nothing of the American population) over the prospect of entering the war, material support of the British appeared as the best hedge against their defeat. An overthrow of the Churchill government, after all, almost certainly destined America to combat the Nazis, possibly on U.S. soil. When FDR formally committed the nation to aid the faltering Allied powers through programs such as “destroyers-for-bases,” “cash and carry,” and “lend-lease” the President, more than any time before, believed that “American security depended on the successful resistance of [the Allies] to German aggression.”<sup>24</sup> The Americans’ subsequent support of these governments not only demonstrated Roosevelt’s categorical opposition to the aggressive Statist ambitions of Hitler and his allies, it also indicated that the President refused to sit idly by and wait for reactionary threats to materialize against the United States.<sup>25</sup> David Walker’s dissertation, for one, quotes a telling March 1939 memorandum sent

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<sup>24</sup>To this, Dallek also notes the immense risk that Roosevelt took in committing American resources to the fight against Nazism: “By promising to share American supplies with these two belligerents [*i.e.*, France and England], Roosevelt was gambling that they could successfully contain Germany on the European continent and thus end the threat to American security. Given the German military advantages, the risks were enormous. If Roosevelt diverted a large portion of the nation’s limited supply of weapons to England and France and then they surrendered to Hitler, the President would be responsible for leaving his country unprepared to meet a future German onslaught.” Robert Divine, *Roosevelt and World War II* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969), 31-2.

<sup>25</sup>Some questions arise as to when FDR personally concluded that direct American intervention in the war appeared as a near certainty. Harper, for one, insists that, more than likely, Germany’s Barbarossa operation represented that moment: “The turning point in FDR’s mind was probably the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. [...] If Germany were to conquer the Soviet Union and turn its vast resources against the West- a distinct possibility-direct U.S. participation would become all the more necessary and inevitable.” Harper, *American Visions of Europe*, 75.

from Joseph Kennedy (American Ambassador to Great Britain) to FDR which provides some insight into high American political circles and their anxiety regarding the potential collapse of Europe's democratic powers. To this, Kennedy wrote:

Can the United States afford to run the risk of seeing Britain and France defeated by the totalitarian regimes? The results of such a defeat would be the disintegration of the last bulwark of democracy in Europe, and the rise of Germany as the sole Great Power in Europe. [...] These conditions [would] cause unrest and dissatisfaction in the United States, creating a soil favorable to foreign ideologies. Fascist and Communist ideas would spread from Europe and Asia to the Americas, resulting in a serious threat to the very democratic institutions which we are arming to maintain.<sup>26</sup>

Sentiments such as this eventually led to America's material contributions and trade with Britain, France (before the signing of the armistice), and later, the Soviet Union. Though this constituted one form of the President's passive resistance to Statism, FDR's related rhetoric beginning in 1941 further signaled American policymakers' furtive positions opposed to the continuation of fascist aggression on the continent. Groups such as Synarchy later fell under the purview of these international anti-fascist agendas.

Though FDR's and Churchill's Atlantic Charter of August 1941 served as the cornerstone of the President's liberal foreign policy vision in his informal vilification of totalitarianism, other public statements predating it highlighted similar objectives. A lesser known, though still highly pertinent speech from Roosevelt made eight months before the charter, offers a suitable example of this.

Presented to Congress on January 6, 1941, FDR publicly, though nebulously, denounced political ideologies and movements that obstructed any nation's ability to pursue its own self-

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<sup>26</sup>Walker provides the following citation for Kennedy's memorandum in his dissertation: "Report, entitled 'Summary,' an enclosure to Joseph P. Kennedy to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 3 March 1939, Folder: Navy: General Board (Joint Army) 1939-1940, Departmental File, PSF, FDRL." (Walker, "Franklin," 52-3, 59)



determination. To this, his so-called “Four Freedoms” speech begins with the following ostensibly benign, though pointed statement: “[We] look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.”<sup>27</sup> In his explication of these liberties, the President first called upon nations to adopt two of the fundamental liberties provided by the American Constitution’s First Amendment: “freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world.”<sup>28</sup> He listed the final three as the freedom of religion, the freedom to live in an economically-prosperous society, and the freedom from state-sponsored terror and belligerence. Despite this speech’s obvious critique of Statism, Roosevelt’s proclamation failed to single out any particular regime. Still, his oratory undoubtedly represented a turning point in the formal American foreign policy with regard to the nation’s liberal agendas. As Harley Notter argued, after this particular speech, “human freedoms were fundamental in [the Americans’] consideration of a future world order based on cooperation among free countries.”<sup>29</sup> FDR’s Secretary of State cited comparable global visions in a nationwide address just five months later.

Mirroring FDR’s “Four Freedoms” speech, Cordell Hull, in a public radio statement, reiterated the President’s postwar plans for a global order dominated politically by national autonomy and peace. At the near zenith of the Axis powers’ conquests, Hull’s address on May 18, 1941 came at a particularly important time for an anxious American public. In offering a small consolation to those concerned about the prospect of war and tyranny, the Secretary of State presented a vision of the world, free from intolerance and injustice. In it, he once again emphasized America’s grand ambition to see the formation of a United Nations (in the Wilsonian

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<sup>27</sup>Notter, *Postwar*, 42.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 43.

tradition) that fostered the basic liberal rights of men and nations. To accomplish this, Hull insisted, above all, that “we [must] have a world free from imminent military danger and clear of malign political intrigue.”<sup>30</sup> The intelligence community’s investigations into the Synarchy affair later that year indeed confirmed Hull’s statement that the U.S. government ardently pursued anti-statist and anti-conspiratorial agendas. Though Hull, like FDR, failed to specifically cite any particular ideology in his address, the broad objective of combatting authoritarianism was clear. One month later, Hull publicly outlined his State Department’s general tactics for passively pursuing and studying the prospects of the American government’s “desirable post-war policies.”<sup>31</sup> Both FDR’s January speech and Hull’s addresses, though promoting clear liberal worldview aims, functioned as mere dress rehearsals for the President’s *tour de force* declaration made on August 14 of that year.

Moving beyond domestic pronouncements of the Americans’ post-war objective to eliminate authoritarianism, FDR and Winston Churchill sculpted their first joint outline for a world free of destructive ideologies in what became known as the “Atlantic Charter.” Its eight

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>31</sup>Hull’s relevant statements in this address are expansive, and space does not allow for its full citation in the main text. Still, portions of it are relevant to this project. The following offers insight into how Hull’s State Department officials intended on studying and reporting on the changing global situation and how they hoped to pursue America’s grand political strategies with regard to eliminating totalitarianism: “Since the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, the Department of State has been, as a matter of course, assembling and analyzing pertinent information bearing on post-war problems of international relations. This includes careful watching of current developments in various parts of the world in their possible bearing on post-war developments; an examination of past experience for whatever light it may throw on the future; and a study of proposals being put forward from various quarters as to ways and means of handling the many complex problems involved. The Department is concerned with defining and formulating the broad objectives of desirable post-war policies, comprising the restoration of order under law in international relations; the elimination of the crushing burden of competitive armaments; and the creation of a kind of international commercial and financial relations which are essential to the preservation of stable peace and to the promotion of economic warfare for the peoples of all nations. The Department is likewise concerned with studying the various alternative methods of moving toward, and eventually attaining, these broad objectives [...]” (*Ibid.*, 46-7)

points, though repeating two of those from FDR's earlier "Four Freedoms" speech (*i.e.*, freedom of want and freedom of fear), still represented a crucial moment in Anglo-American relations. Beyond establishing the verbal precedent for the international coalition against authoritarian regimes, the Charter also signaled the first moment where Roosevelt explicitly cited Nazism as anathema to his liberal grand strategy. To this, the agreement stated: "[After] the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, [the Anglo-American partnership] [hopes] to see established peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries [...]."<sup>32</sup> With his specific citation of the Nazi regime, FDR's former abstractions regarding the elimination of oppressive regimes had now become concrete.

Roosevelt's and Hull's statements on matters concerning America's vision of the new world order further validates the claim that the United States viewed the elimination of international Statism as one of the nation's most pressing global objectives before, and certainly throughout, the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> Where they could, local diplomatic ventures sought to achieve this end by undermining or limiting the support given to the Axis. Vichy served as one of these forums. Because an aloof France endangered this fundamental aim, having the regime in view served the greater cause well. Despite the historical controversy surrounding America's diplomatic relationship with Vichy, few argued that keeping valuable resources out of Hitler's hands and limiting open collaborationism, in some way, hindered the wider war against Nazism.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>33</sup>Regardless of their gallant assaults on authoritarianism, much of these statements were open to interpretation, and contradictions abounded. In perhaps the most transparent instance of this, Stalin's highly oppressive Communist state constituted a highly malignant form of government, yet America counted the regime among its two closest Allies throughout the war.

But by mid-1941, a new, comparable movement emerged in Vichy that endangered both of the Americans' local and global objectives. Their resistance against authoritarianism, it became clear, did not solely apply to the Axis powers and their acolytes. Synarchy, the virulent technocratic movement in France, also fit this bill as well. In the eyes of many influential Americans, Vichy's *M.S.E.*, the esoteric league of ministers and industrialists, greatly increased the prospect of yet another organization which opposed the global liberal agendas publically outlined (or privately held) by top American policymakers. Although a mere legend, these tales resonated with American officials years after their initial dissemination, as they posed numerous dangers to their objectives around the Western Hemisphere. But the *M.S.E.*'s intersections with the American wartime experience were not limited to the nation's foreign policy objectives concerning collaborationism or its anti-statist agendas. At its core, most viewed Synarchy as a subversive "Fifth Column" organization which threatened to undermine democracy-defending nations from within. France's Third Republic, it was believed by some, represented its first victim. Thus, more than a story of diplomatic repercussions or a grand liberal vision of the world, to understand Synarchy from within the American wartime experience is also to know it from the nation's embryonic foreign intelligence perspective.

#### Spy vs. Spy: Axis "Fifth Columns" and the Genesis of America's Centralized Foreign Intelligence Program

Though the Synarchy personified many American policymakers' concerns regarding Franco-German collaborationism and the proliferation of European Statism, it also fell squarely within the purview of comparable Fifth Column tales, which emerged throughout the West at the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>34</sup> Titles befitting the numerous individuals impugned for

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<sup>34</sup>From the French perspective, the *Historical Dictionary of World War II France* defines the term "Fifth Column" as "a term mostly used during the 'Phony War' to describe a fear of unnamed traitors and spies who were supposed

Fifth Column activities during the war included “spies,” “Trojan horsemen,” “provocateurs,” “blackguards,” and, of course, “traitors.” From France, Belgium, and Norway, to Brazil and Mexico, to the very halls of America’s Capitol Hill, tales of Fifth Columnists loomed large.<sup>35</sup> Mass hysteria took hold in the U.S. much as it did in Europe, as Nazis, Italian Fascists, Japanese *Nisei*, and Communists of all stripes were believed to be behind every door and under every table. In Europe, beginning in 1941, similar Fifth Columnist concerns arose over the Synarchy affair, where it presumably imperiled a number of FDR’s liberal objectives.

With the threat of enemy spies both domestically and in Europe viewed as imminent dangers by the American populous and the federal authorities by 1940, some argued that the United States required a comparable counterintelligence service to combat it. Enter William J. Donovan. His public service announcements, most notably his (and his co-author, Edgar Mowrer’s) “Fifth Column Lessons for America” pamphlet (1940) intentionally stirred the emotions of an already-anxious public, and demonstrated that the future O.S.S. director truly believed in the stories he sold to the American people. Furthermore, such tales had an effect on Roosevelt, the proverbial administrative gatekeeper, and shaped the President’s views on

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to have infiltrated France and who were working for the Third Reich. [...] After the 1940 defeat and armistice, some came to blame the fifth column for the fall of France, while others believed that it was invented to cover up more complex causes of defeat.”

Bertram Gordon, ed., *Historical Dictionary of World War II France*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), s.v., “Fifth Column.”

<sup>35</sup>In speaking to the Fifth Column hysteria from a scholarly standpoint, and not simply from a mass media one, the following academic works published throughout the war attempted to illuminate such activities in a variety of geographic areas around the world: Hugo Fernandez Artucio: *The German Octopus in South America* (London, 1943), Carl Hambro: *I Saw It Happen in Norway* (London, 1940), E.N. van Kleffens: *Juggernaut over Holland* (New York, 1940), and Kurt Singer: *Duel for the Northland. The War of Enemy Agents in Scandinavia* (London, 1945). Even the staunch postwar Fifth Column sceptic, Louis de Jong, whose book is oft-cited throughout this subchapter, conceded in his introduction that “I do not hesitate to admit that I too was a victim of the Fifth Column panic.” In 1941, de Jong published *Holland Fights the Nazis* (London).

Louis de Jong, *The German Fifth Column in the Second World War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), viii.

clandestine warfare. Thus, a short history of the term and its effects on American culture requires some insight.

Despite the prevalence of countless Fifth Column references during World War II, the term's genesis can be traced to the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. In October 1936, with Francisco Franco's armies pushing toward Madrid, rebel general, Emilio Mola offered an ominous message regarding the use of covert advanced troops. A sensationalized 1940 account from American author John Langdon-Davies provides a synopsis of the alarming dispatch conveyed by Mola to the desperate Republican troops besieged inside: "Four columns, [Mola] said, were advancing to the capture of Madrid; but there was a Fifth Column hidden within the city itself, which would achieve more than any of these, a Fifth Column consisting of the rebellious General's own troops."<sup>36</sup> Even the much less credulous Fifth Columnist historian, Louis de Jong, in his debunking of such narratives, confirmed that "there is little reason to doubt that General Mola [...] uttered" these words.<sup>37</sup> Stories of spies dressed as friendly fighters, monks, and even women were pervasive, and whispers of enemies hiding in alleyway shadows, spying from unmarked cars, sniping from trees, or slinking from rooftop to rooftop widespread. Though Mola met his demise in 1937, his psychological battle raged on for the remainder of the conflict. Yet the Spanish Civil War only marked the beginning of the Fifth Column hysteria. It hit its fever pitch during the Second World War.

In beginning to construct a contemporary definition of the term "Fifth Column" as it emerged in the American experience, it is important to first understand how observers

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<sup>36</sup>John Langdon-Davies, *Fifth Column* (London: Wyman and Sons Ltd., 1940), 4.

<sup>37</sup>De Jong, *The German Fifth Column*, 3.

implemented the phrase throughout the war.<sup>38</sup> In many versions of the tale, these villains acted as pernicious spies and saboteurs financed with state funds. Upon closer scrutiny, however, this rendering proved reductive. World War II Fifth Column narratives moved well beyond foreign military or diplomatic representatives to encompass anyone who simply sympathized with the enemy.<sup>39</sup> A widely disseminated American propagandist piece written on the topic, Donovan's and Mowrer's "Fifth Column Lessons for America," offered a short explication of such scoundrels:

The Fifth Column has been defined by one of the Britishers engaged in combatting it, as a body of people who, through political dissatisfaction, self-interest or frank corruption, most easily respond (a) to enemy propaganda, and (b) to the normal activities of the enemy espionage service. Since no country has ever been unanimous, such a Fifth Column has existed potentially in every land in every war.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>De Jong, in his final chapter entitled "The Imaginary Fifth Column" indicates that narratives akin to the Fifth Column panic were omnipresent in previous conflicts as well: "In the United States during the First World War many of the tales that made mention of the sinister activities of Germans abroad were believed in wide circles. When war with Germany had become a fact (April, 1917) the public gradually became convinced that 'any Germans who had stayed in America from 1914 to 1917 had occupied themselves with plots, nothing but plots.' [...] During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 a veritable hunting down of Prussian spies went on in Paris, whom people thought they saw 'just about everywhere.' Houses were stormed whence, so it was asserted, light signals were being made to the enemy. [...] Two generations before, on the eve of the September massacres of 1792, Paris was said to be full of aristocrats disguised as ecclesiastics and soldiers disguised as citizens. And the day before the Bastille was stormed (July 14, 1789) the Carthusian Monastery was captured; the monks were supposed to have weapons concealed beneath their cowls! Nothing was found, however." (De Jong, *The German Fifth Column*, 252-3)

<sup>39</sup>Though the usage of the term during World War II popularized it in this country, there were other outlets for it during the interwar period as well. One prominent example of this was a short play produced by Ernest Hemmingway entitled simply, "The Fifth Column" (1938). The performance articulated the author's somber recollections of such stories while he was in Spain reporting on the conflict. By 1940, however, Hemmingway's play attained new levels of interest when many believed that the Fifth Columns rapidly spread throughout the West. A prescient February 4, 1940 *New York Times* review of the play's premier in Philadelphia exhibits the nature of the growing Fifth Column threat. In referencing a minor character in the play, Max, the journalist tellingly indicates that he "is emphatic in his contention that there is a 'fifth column in every land,' waiting to burrow from within to destroy free institutions." Laurence Davies, "Of 'The Fifth Column,'" *The New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1940, p. 119.

<sup>40</sup>William J. Donovan and Edgar Mowrer, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," intro. by Frank Knox (Washington D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1940), 5.

Though this description omits the traditional image of the state-sponsored spy, it nevertheless exhibits a most portentous message: one's neighbor, even if not an infiltrator on a government's payroll, was just as likely to be an informant or a disgruntled defector. Furthermore, completely well-intentioned citizens could accidentally provide such agents with sensitive information, resulting in disastrous consequences. "Loose lips," as American citizens were frequently told throughout the war, "sink ships."

President Roosevelt perhaps defined the term "Fifth Column" most famously in one of his celebrated Fireside Chats. In this May 26, 1940 oratory, FDR offered his nationwide audience his own cautionary tale: "We know of other methods, new methods of attack. The Trojan Horse. The fifth column that betrays a nation unprepared for treachery. Spies, saboteurs, and traitors are the actors in this new strategy."<sup>41</sup> Though his non-descript and vague outline of the Fifth Column lacked specificity, Roosevelt's wide-reaching and intimate radio presence helped to propel the stories of ominous enemy agent threats in this country and abroad. When historically considering the tales of the Fifth Column, three distinct variants appeared which sculpted the Americans' understanding of its threats.

Perhaps the most recognizable category of Fifth Columnist serves as a suitable starting point for this analysis: Agents who were *introduced* to local populations. The typical spy, soldier, pilot/aeronaut, propagandist, or saboteur sent to create chaos behind enemy lines characterized these agents best, especially (but not always) in preparation for a full-scale invasion. This type of enemy agent posed the most transparent danger to America's national security interests throughout the war.

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<sup>41</sup>Russell D. Buhite and David W. Lewy, eds., *FDR's Fireside Chats* (London: Norman Publishing, 1992), 161.



Stories of this first category of spy often related to foreign infiltrators attempting to spearhead an Axis invasion of the American homeland.<sup>42</sup> An excerpt from the August 28, 1940 edition of the *New York Times*, for instance, paints a bleak picture depicting German troops and technical experts waiting for their chance to strike from just over the Mexican border:

Reliable information obtained in Mexico City last week indicates that Mexico is swarming with Nazi secret agents, actively engaged in trying to develop a fifth column in army and government circles that would represent a serious threat to the security of the United States. [...] Scores, perhaps hundreds, of agents, including army, navy, and aviation officers, technicians trained in the oil industry, transportation and communications and propaganda experts, are known to have entered Mexico since the war began.<sup>43</sup>

Some Fifth Column stories, such as this, highlighted a viable and prospective threat to America's southern border. Others, by comparison, like that from a memorandum sent to President Roosevelt regarding a disrupted Brazilian army instruction session, bordered on the ludicrous:

A showing of [training] films was arranged at the Military Academy, and members of the German Embassy staff were present. The presentation was proceeding normally until Hitler was flashed on the screen. Pandemonium then broke loose; cat-calls and shouts of 'Take him away! Take him away!' by the students ensued, and the showing was immediately suspended. The Director of the Military Academy [reprimanded] the cadets, and all leave was suspended for a week.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>As historian Francis MacDonnell indicates, the domestic fear of Nazi spies first appeared in earnest in 1938 after an event known as "The Rumrich Spy Case." Named after the incompetent Nazi agent who headed the cabal, Guenther Gustav Rumrich, MacDonnell describes the botched German espionage operation as follows: "In 1938 the Federal Bureau of Investigation uncovered an extensive Nazi spy ring centered in New York City. A shocked public learned that Germany had planted agents within America's armed forces and defense industries. The FBI presented conclusive evidence linking German government officials to the espionage network. [...] Experts informed the public that the ring had acquired little intelligence of real value and that the captured Nazi spies had operated in a reassuringly clumsy manner."

Francis MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes: The Axis Fifth Column and the American Home Front* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 49, 52.

<sup>43</sup>Russel B. Porter, "Nazi Agents Found Busy in Mexico; Viewed as Threat to U.S. Defense," *New York Times*, August 28, 1940, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY. As is illustrated below, although the Germans may have dispatched troops to Mexico during the war, the claim that they intended to use them against the United States in 1940 was a dubious proposition at best.

<sup>44</sup>Sumner Welles, Undersecretary of State, to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States, October 16, 1940, Sumner Welles Papers, Box 150, Folder 14; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

Regardless of the absurdity that one can now affix to reports such as this, however, at the time of their telling, similar accounts represented indirect perils to the American homeland.<sup>45</sup> Fear of an enemy in uniform, speaking a familiar foreign tongue, or found under a distinguishable banner is natural in times of war. But the Fifth Columns did not end there. If spies from without did not provide a menacing enough caricature, perhaps those from within could.

Images of the second variant of saboteur undoubtedly did much to damage America's cherished democratic fabric during the Second World War: those who were *embedded* within local populations. This category of subversive was categorized as the cadre of those who sympathized with the enemy cause. In the United States, one's neighbors of German, Japanese, or Italian descent, most often epitomized these suspects. The following excerpt from "Fifth Column Lessons for America" exemplified this type of dissident by specifically implicating German-Americans:

Here is a German colony of several million strong. Here, in thousands of important households, are domestic servants ready to fulfill their duty to the Fatherland by registering and revealing to the German authorities anything of interest that comes their way. Here are thousands of German waiters as snoopers. Here are skilled workmen in arsenals, factories, shops, business houses, many of them naturalized, but still essentially hyphenate, ready to annex the United States as a returning prodigal son.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>In addition to the incredible Fifth Columnist reports from this period, there also existed a short-lived discourse surrounding what became known as the SIXTH Column. Roosevelt's Archival Library, in fact, dedicates a thin manila folder to correspondence regarding this additional stratum of subversive activity. Stephen Early, for instance, on March 21, 1942, received a memorandum regarding a radio address from a Colonel Richard Patterson, who outlined the perceived threats of this group. In defining the Sixth Column, the memorandum from the unknown author states: "The Sixth Columnist, in short, takes on the task of spreading propaganda in every city, town and village—into every home and factory and place of business. Sixth Columnists, are the gossipers, the skeptics, the fault finders, the let-George-do-it crowd. In short, the Sixth Columnists are those who spread the propaganda wittingly or unwittingly, originated by the Fifth Columnists."

"WDH," Title Unknown, to Stephen Early, Secretary to President Roosevelt, March 21, 1942, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1, Folder—Sixth Column, p. 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

<sup>46</sup>Donovan and Mowrer, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," 15.

Atomization and segregation naturally springs from such thinking. Yet Donovan's and Mowrer's pamphlet was far from the only publication singling out ethnic groups in the U.S. as potential enemy agents.

Immediately following the fall of France and the Low Countries in mid-1940, and with the Atlantic nearly open to Nazi U-boat wolf packs, a cornucopia of anti-Axis American societies and periodicals surfaced. All seemed devoted to a similar unified message: Reveal and eliminate the Fifth Column in America!<sup>47</sup> Most proffered preposterous claims of how to identify the embedded Fifth Columnists living among them. In one, from the passionately pro-patriotic publication entitled "The Fifth Column Conspiracy in America," some domestic sources of covert Nazi, Fascist, and Communist spies were directly tied to groups with particular ethnic identities. This publication's "assessment" of the domestic German *Bund* (political organization) associates and *Volksdeutsche* ("Minority Germans") prior to the war, for instance, argued that the potential amount of Nazi moles in the U.S. numbered in the tens of thousands.<sup>48</sup> An attached map of the United States pointed to dozens of suspected German-American organizations, all of

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<sup>47</sup>In a July 28, 1941 correspondence between Albert E. Kahn, editor of the ultrapatriotic newspaper, *The Hour*, and William Donovan, the publicist notified the intelligence director of his organization's commitment to the American cause of uprooting enemy agents; in this way, the editor perhaps saw his periodical as an extension of the investigations already being conducted by the newly-created Coordinator of Information. Kahn states: "Dear Mr. Donovan, It has been suggested to me that you might like to regularly receive our publication The Hour, which is devoted to exposing Fifth Column activities in this country. Accordingly, I have placed your name on our courtesy mailing list."

Albert E. Kahn, Editor of *The Hour*, to William J. Donovan, Director of the Coordinator of Information, July 28, 1941, Washington D.C., Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Records of the Director's Office, Microfilm Series M1642, Roll 65, Slide 35. National Archives Location II, College Park, MD.

<sup>48</sup>To this, Joseph Kamp and Cloyd Gill wrote: "[Hitler] has a horde of spies [...] in America who constitute as dangerous a Fifth Column as any which contributed to the downfall of Europe's conquered countries. [...] The Federal Bureau of Investigation, in 1937, after an 18-month inquiry, placed the German-American Bund membership at 6,500. In 1939, according to its first fuehrer Fritz Kuhn [...], it had 100 local units, a membership of 20,000 and 100,000 'sympathizers.'"

Joseph Kamp and A. Cloyd Gill, "The Fifth Column Activities in America" (Pamphlet), Produced by the Constitutional Educational League, 1941, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1, p. 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

which labeled as such with the use of swastikas. Likewise, Italian *fascies* and Soviet hammers and sickles pointed to domestic Fascist and Communist associations respectively. Though this particular 1941 map failed to address the perceived risk of Japanese-Americans, analogous profiling methods materialized quickly in the days following Pearl Harbor.

Despite the fact that Fifth Column discourse after mid-1941 is largely beyond the purview of this chapter's chronological scope, this subsection would not be complete without briefly addressing the intersection between stories of the Fifth Columnists and its impact on the Japanese-American community. Even as this panic reached its zenith during Europe's darkest days in 1940, the narratives of Fifth Columnists became revitalized in a very significant way after the U.S. officially entered the war.

When many assumed that treachery aided the successful surprise attack on the Hawaiian naval base, the search for scapegoats immediately commenced. As de Jong indicates, some Americans targeted potential sympathizers in their quest for revenge. The historian declares that after the attack, the nearly "110,000 American citizens of Japanese descent, the so-called *Nisei*, who lived in California" were accused of activities tantamount to espionage.<sup>49</sup> In 1942, this resulted in federal authorities interning "them in camps in the western inland areas."<sup>50</sup> Though these internment facilities represent the most indelible artifact of America's Fifth Column episode (and certainly a moment of overt racism), other ramifications of the hysteria have been largely forgotten over time. Most notably, such discourses throughout the nation resulted in the

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<sup>49</sup>De Jong, in continuing to chronicle the wild accusations made against Japanese-Americans, stated: "It was said of them that night after night they made hundreds of light signals to Japanese submarines lying in wait in front of the harbors; that they were in touch with those submarines by means of secret transmitters; that they had made flower-beds, or had planted tomatoes or placed on hay racks, in the shape of signals pointing in the direction of airfields and airplane factories; that they had poisoned the vegetables which they sold to the American housewives." (De Jong, *The German Fifth Column*, 250)

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

rallying of people against those thought of as subversive threats, regardless of their nation of origin.

Decisive and zealous responses around America accompanied various pursuits of enemy Fifth Columnists. A perusal of the President's official records at the Roosevelt Library provides numerous instances of concerned citizens offering to help in the fight against secret enemy agents. One noteworthy example of this came from a resolution signed in Connecticut by the "Improved Order of Red Men." In its November 1940 affirmation, it read that "That Okenunck Tribe [hereby] offers its assistance to the Government of the United States and the State of Connecticut within the limits of their power, to assist in the stamping out and eradication of all Fifth Column and other subversive activities."<sup>51</sup> The residents of the state of South Carolina and the Associated Farmers of California offered similar assurances.<sup>52</sup> Though choleric mobs from the grassroots communities targeted some demographics of sympathizing traitors, others had to be dealt with by those from the highest levels of the government. This was largely because many in the U.S. Government became the focus of Fifth Column investigations themselves.

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<sup>51</sup>Herbert Spencer, Great Council of the United States of the Improved Order of Red Men, to Franklin Roosevelt, President of the United States, Washington D.C., November 25, 1940, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1, p. 2; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

<sup>52</sup>To the former, Governor Burnet Maybank of South Carolina sent Roosevelt this guarantee on June 13, 1940: "In reference to my recent telegram and correspondence, the Adjunct General and I today set up a system to keep down espionage and Fifth Columnists in South Carolina and we want you to know that we will do anything that you desire in this hour of need to make America safe for Americans, and to arrange the affairs of South Carolina so that it will be at your service to perpetuate our democracy."

Honorable Burnet R. Maybank, Governor of South Carolina, to Franklin Roosevelt, President of the United States, Washington D.C., June 13, 1940, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1, p. 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

•To the latter, the following excerpt from the *New York Times*, also dated June 13, 1940, concerned the response by those in the Californian agrarian community to these same threats: "From San Francisco comes the announcement that the Associated Farmers of California have declared 'total war on subversive groups' and 'the most intensive American drive ever directed at a fifth column.' They promise to avoid hysteria and to employ only 'lawful legal methods compatible with our American form of Government.'"

Author Unknown, 'Fifth Columns,' *New York Times*, June 13, 1940, 22.

The third and final variety of Fifth Columnist represented, in some ways, the lowest depths of the Fifth Column panic: Agents who *turned against* their local populations. These domestic, sympathizing conspirators, broadly defined, represented those suspected of being bought, blackmailed, or swayed by enemy agents to work against their own countries' interests. Infamous names in Europe, such as Vidkun Quisling of Norway (whose last name is today synonymous with that of "traitor"), Anton Mussert of Holland, and Oswald Mosley of the U.K. are historically associated with this cadre of turncoats. But while these men certainly favored collaboration, or at least rapprochement with Nazi Germany, none of them truly acted as subversive agents who readied their respective nations for Hitler's conquests.<sup>53</sup> Regardless, similar hysteria found a place in the U.S. as well, where many powerful Americans threatened the nation's domestic security.

Charges levied against government officials in the U.S. for subversive activities were omnipresent by the end of 1940. A July 1940 correspondence from Stephen Early, Secretary to President Roosevelt, to a concerned citizen, broadly captures the apprehension surrounding this panic in high American political circles:

My dear Mr. Goldston:

In response to your inquiry, permit me to inform you that by direction of the President, the Department of Justice is carrying on a vigorous campaign against Fifth Column activities, with a view to prosecuting all offenders. [...] You probably know that

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<sup>53</sup>In his assessment of how these types of accusations played out against the pro-fascists in Great Britain, for instance, de Jong presents the following chain of events which led to the imprisonment of Oswald Mosley and his right-wing cronies: "[On May 22, 1940] a paragraph was added to Defense Regulation 18b, giving the Home Secretary the right to intern persons whom he had good reason to think were members of an organization that sympathized with the enemy. A few dozen leaders of fascist organizations, Mosely included, were at once taken into custody. Many other arrests followed, and by the end of [1940] almost eight thousand people were interned under this Regulation." (De Jong, *The German Fifth Column*, 99)

employees of the Federal Government are being ‘checked and double checked’; they are even being finger printed [*sic.*]. Every precaution is being taken.<sup>54</sup>

Yet fears of such a political Fifth Column were not limited to the rumor mills among average citizens. Investigations conducted by the federal government itself, spearheaded by inimical, fire-eating politicians, sought to uncover the harsh truth behind America’s top blackguard networks.

Before Joseph McCarthy, the Communist witch hunter, Martin Dies, the Fifth Columnist witch hunter, roamed Capitol Hill seeking out high-level subversives. Alongside Hoover’s FBI, the Texan Congressman Chaired a Federal commission aimed at tracking and eliminating all domestic Fifth Columnist endeavors. Even as Dies founded his “Special Committee on Un-American Activities,” prior to the war in May 1938, it experienced an almost exponential increase in its activities after the war commenced in Europe. To put this in perspective from the point of view of the Fifth Column investigations conducted by the domestic intelligence services, Bradley Smith notes that “in the whole of 1939, only 1,600 reports of alleged sabotage were made to the F.B.I., 2,900 such reports were received on a single day in May 1940!”<sup>55</sup> In addition to tracking subversive activities in the private American sphere, however, the Congressman and his commission also investigated it in the Federal Government. Tabloidesque periodicals such as “The Fifth Column in Washington!,” produced by The Constitutional Educational League, kept close tabs on the findings of the so-called “Dies Committee.” For instance, the pamphlet declared that in the Department of the Interior alone in mid-1940, 35 officials emerged as potential “Fifth

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<sup>54</sup>Stephen Early, Secretary to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to Jack Goldston, Title Unknown, Washington D.C., July 26, 1940, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

<sup>55</sup>Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 21.

•Though a survey of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (1938-1968) is certainly an expansive topic, its history is largely beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, for the interested reader, the following monograph provides an exhaustive scholarly treatment of it: Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968).

Columnites.”<sup>56</sup> In quoting Bainbridge Colby, former Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson, it further (though obscurely) indicated how American traitors differed from their European counterparts: “In Europe, the Fifth Column is in disguise. With us, *the Fifth Column is in office*.”<sup>57</sup> High-level Communist and Nazi subversion, as these patriotic Americans contended, devoured the nation from within, and left the country vulnerable to enemy incursions. Yet were any of these fears, of any of the three variants of subversives, both in Europe or the United States, justified? In short, did any of the Fifth Column claims prove true?

In revealing the truth behind the Fifth Column, stories of the implanted enemy spy, the embedded native sympathizer, or the traitorous domestic official were nearly always hokum. The relevant scholarship has since demonstrated this. As Louis de Jong and Francis MacDonnell indicate, Hitler’s *Abwehr* (The Nazi Office of Military Intelligence) only conducted a handful of covert operations during their earliest campaigns in Europe. Additionally, in a few isolated instances, sympathetic German minorities sabotaged strategic targets or attacked defending soldiers.<sup>58</sup> De Jong and MacDonnell disagree as to how many secret agents carried out attacks and where, however. Regardless, the Axis did not coordinate any such missions against the United States prior to December 1941. In the one instance where Hitler authorized such an operation in 1942, the small coterie of German agents sent to destroy American targets were far from being a well-oiled machine. “Within two weeks” of landing, De Jong points out, “all the

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<sup>56</sup>Joseph Kamp, “The Fifth Column in Washington!” (Pamphlet), Produced by the Constitutional Educational League, 1940, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1, p. 16; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>58</sup>De Jong, *The German Fifth Column*, 266.  
MacDonnell, *Insidious Foes*, 109.



saboteurs were clapped under lock and key.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, fears of German-American, Italian-American, Japanese-American or any other ethnic groups plotting large-scale or state-sponsored *coup d'états* in this country merely reflected the citizenry's mass hysteria or the fearmongering by dangerous lobbying groups. The virulent racism surrounding these narratives caused suspicion of one's neighbors and deprived Japanese-Americans of their freedom beginning in 1942. As it applied to the war in Europe, Hitler never favored the idea of accepting assistance from his foreign impersonators. His megalomania, according to de Jong, simply did not allow for it.<sup>60</sup> Finally, no evidence came to light which proved that any American government official intentionally supported the Axis powers throughout the war. Martin Dies' hunt for moles only produced wild geese. Beyond the judicial and investigative activities of men such as Dies and Hoover, which tracked subversives domestically, the inimitably inquisitive and tenacious personalities of Roosevelt and William Donovan ultimately resulted in the formation of America's first centralized foreign intelligence agencies. Fears of Fifth Columnists abroad, after all, also threatened American objectives at home. Synarchy provided a vibrant example of this.

Roosevelt's personal belief in the Fifth Column rumors of 1940-41 undoubtedly spurred him on to sanction a coordinator of information service (under the directorship of Donovan) in July of 1941. Yet as the modern scholarship on American intelligence indicates, FDR's interest in the field of espionage well predated his creation of Donovan's organization. In speaking to the President's personal affinity for and interest in the practice, historian Douglas Waller attested

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<sup>59</sup>De Jong, *The German Fifth Column*, 214-216.

Smith adds additional commentary on “the vigorous effort to create an espionage network” in South America after December 1941. In short, the intelligence historian notes that the Germans' network, which was “concentrated in Brazil, was carried out in such a clumsy manner that it was quickly quashed by the Anglo-American counterintelligence service.” (Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 22-3)

<sup>60</sup>De Jong, *The German Fifth Column*, 289.

that “[FDR] had been enamored since his youth with subterfuge and intrigue.” In Donovan’s recollections of FDR’s interest in the subject, he, in fact, flippantly referred to the President as ““a real cloak-and-dagger boy.”” Throughout the early stages of the war, Roosevelt was personally disturbed by the poor state of the U.S.’s intelligence infrastructure, so much so that the lack of information coming to him in the form of briefs and memoranda “made him physically ill at times.”<sup>61</sup> In direct response to his adverse reactions, FDR formed and secretly funded his own personal espionage service headed by John Franklin Carter, a close confidant, in March 1941, four months prior to the creation of Donovan’s agency.<sup>62</sup> By mid-1941, with an American war with Hitler and his allies seeming more likely by the day, Roosevelt decided to take stock of America’s foreign intelligence capabilities.

Immediately following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Roosevelt commissioned what became known as the Wedemeyer report on July 9, 1941. Named after Major Albert Wedemeyer (who David Walker refers to as “a military intellectual”) of the United States War Plans Division of the Army, the report, in addition to the overall intelligence assessment, also looked to what level of military preparedness the United States needed in order to accomplish possible future international aims.<sup>63</sup> Completed in September 1941, Wedemeyer’s conclusions were underwhelming, even after the creation of Donovan’s C.O.I. Broadly speaking, as Walker writes, it argued that “[the community] was entirely unsuitable to the contemporary

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<sup>61</sup>Douglas Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 70.

<sup>62</sup>For more information on the so-called Carter Organization, please see Mauch, pp. 48-9.

<sup>63</sup>Walker, “Franklin,” 77.

To these goals, Walker writes, “His brief, simply stated, was to work out the size and scope of the armed forces of the United States would require to defeat her potential enemies in the current international crisis, together with the industrial production needed to equip those forces and the armies of the United States’s [*sic.*] allies through Lend-Lease.” (Ibid., 96)

international situation, that carried with it significant potential danger [*sic.*] to the United States.”<sup>64</sup> Presidential neglect and decentralization ultimately hindered the prospects of forming a well-balanced, cohesive intelligence service.<sup>65</sup> Despite previous trepidations over subversive agents, the events of Pearl Harbor fully drove Roosevelt to build a comprehensive foreign intelligence establishment. William Donovan, the director of the new Coordinator of Information and fellow believer in clandestine Axis forces, enthusiastically threw himself into this mission.

Possessing a long line of governmental posts (including Assistant Attorney General), a distinguished record during the Great War, and extensive on-the-ground experience in war-torn areas of the world throughout the interwar period (including Abyssinia), Bill Donovan had much to offer in the way of foreign intelligence skillsets.<sup>66</sup> Following the fall of Western Europe, the British coaxed Donovan across the Atlantic to produce an American study on Nazi Fifth Column tactics.<sup>67</sup> After spending two weeks in England in the summer of 1940, Donovan’s conclusions regarding Hitler’s spies, along with his survey of British military strength in the face of the on-going German onslaught, proved valuable for Roosevelt and his administration in their decision to form an integrated intelligence service. Beyond the President, however, Donovan’s survey

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>65</sup>In supporting the potential of the United States intelligence services, though also noting its under implementation by previous administrations, Walker writes: “The Wedemeyer estimate demonstrates that, even in 1941, the United States foreign intelligence system had significant potential that was, however, not regularly utilized by the nation’s political leadership. Enough potential existed within United States foreign intelligence in 1941 for a powerful and effective intelligence community to quickly come into existence after Pearl Harbor.” (Walker, “Franklin,” 50)

<sup>66</sup>Bradley Smith clarified some of the more popular myths often attributed to Donovan’s and Roosevelt’s complicated rapport: “Many exaggerated accounts of the Roosevelt-Donovan relationship have created the impression that they were the closest of friends, or, as some would have it, old buddies. Donovan was not a personal crony of the president and did not belong to the inner White House circle. [...] But he did have a long association with the president. They attended Columbia University School of Law together and had crossed paths frequently in New York and Washington politics. Perhaps more to the point, they shared compatible personalities.” (Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 31)

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 32-3.

also influenced much of the American population in its understanding of Axis espionage methods.

Arguably the crown jewel of the U.S. Fifth Column literary compendium was Donovan's incendiary pamphlet, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," conducted after his edifying trip to the U.K. and his collaborative effort with Edgar Mowrer. Released nationwide in a series of four articles by the *Associated Press*, the *International News Service*, and the *United Press* between August 20-23, 1940, "Lessons" had a decisive impact on American psychology regarding the threats of such subversive elements around the world.<sup>68</sup> Much of this undoubtedly was attributable to the good name of Colonel Donovan, along with the personal endorsement made by Frank Knox, then Secretary of the Navy. Knox, in fact, provided the introduction for the finalized pamphlet. He wrote that the survey served "a highly useful purpose" in "fore-arming the American people against a subtle form of attack."<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, Mowrer's favorable reputation as a syndicated columnist and Foreign Correspondent in Paris, Rome, and Berlin for the *Chicago Daily News* added additional validity to the accounts. After a brief exchange of Fifth Column stories in London (which Knox himself coordinated and Roosevelt personally approved of), Donovan and Mowrer transmitted the contents of their articles to the American press outlets in mid-August.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Smith, for one, attested that "The impact of Donovan's effort to sell the American people on the dangers of the fifth column is [difficult] to gauge, but it seems accurate to say that it was substantial." Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 38-9.

<sup>69</sup>Donovan and Mowrer, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," 1.

<sup>70</sup>According to an unpublished 1962 interview (and transcribed in 1969) between Allen Dulles and Mowrer, Knox served as the common denominator bringing the two seemingly disparate figures together. Before being appointed as Secretary of the Navy in June 1940, Knox worked alongside Mower as a publisher at the *Chicago Daily News*. And as Donovan was preparing a formal assessment for the President in the summer of 1940 on, in part, Nazi Fifth Column activities in Europe, Knox saw the benefit of having Mowrer share his own recollections of such rumors. In the interview, Mower recalls the series of events that brought himself and Donovan together to begin their association in London: "After a few days in Lisbon, quite unexpectedly I got a long message from Col. Knox

Undeniably, much like most of the anti-Axis propaganda produced during this period, the Donovan/Mowrer articles featured some degree of over-dramatization. Bradley Smith and Christof Mauch, two prominent American intelligence historians, also draw that conclusion.<sup>71</sup> But how much stock did the energetic Donovan actually put into the stories that he and Mowrer forwarded? For some insight into this, the informal 1962 interview between Allen Dulles and Mowrer highlights the latter's experiences with Donovan, enemy espionage, and the related publication. In 1940, Mowrer, who had recently escaped from Bordeaux with his wife, Lilian (the very same Lilian Mowrer who authored the 1944 Synarchy-centered pamphlet, "Concerning France"), possessed extensive on-the-ground exposure to France's Fifth Column stories, as his connections to prominent dignitaries provided him with significant information on the subject.

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telling me that instead of returning to the United States, which had been my intention, I was to fly to London and put myself at the disposal of Col. Donovan. This seemed rather cryptic, but I realize [*sic.*] we were at war and not necessarily fully informed; so in due time, my wife and I fought our way on to a plane (and several other thousand tried to get on the same plane) and get [*sic.*] to London, and I went to Col. Donovan's hotel."

Edgar Ansel Mowrer, 1941; Allen Dulles Papers, Box 106, Folder 2, pp. 4-5; Public Policy Papers, Mudd Manuscript Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University.

- Further, a C.I.A. intelligence review of the Donovan/Mowrer Fifth Column collaboration also makes it clear that Knox coordinated the London meetings. The report indicates that as Knox could not make the trip to London personally, as his new responsibilities domestically necessitated his presence stateside, he sent Donovan in his stead. Quoting a July 10, 1940 cable, British political official, Lord Lothain, notes that Knox "said to me last night that he was most anxious to make survey of the Fifth Column methods, as they have been disclosed in Norway, the low Countries, France, etc. in order to warn the American public. He has appointed Edgar Mowrer, press correspondent now in England and Colonel 'Bill' Donovan who had a very fine war record in the American Expeditionary Force, was Assistant Attorney General and may now become influential advisor to Colonel Knox to make investigations in England from official sources, refugees, etc."

Author Unknown, "British Relations with O.S.S.," In *Studies in Intelligence*, C.I.A. Internal Publications, summer 1974, p. 29, November 10, 2016; CIA-RDP78T03194A000400010009-2, C.I.A. Records Search Tools, (C.R.E.S.T.), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

- Finally, in his 1968 memoir, Mowrer points to the "real" impetus for Knox calling on him and Donovan to prepare their articles in London. The correspondent declared that beyond the Fifth Column study "lay his real assignment-- finding out for President Roosevelt the thing he needed to know: would and could the British hold out against Germany."

Edgar Mowrer, *Triumph and Tragedy: A Personal History of Our Time* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968), 315.

<sup>71</sup>Smith, for instance, states that the pamphlet was "simply [an] inflammatory [exercise] in hysteria and group hatred." Mauch similarly declares that "what Donovan and Mowrer wanted their American readers to envision was a panorama of horror."

Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 39.

Mauch, *The Shadow War*, 22.

His recollections working with French and British foreign officers, along with a decade's worth of experience in Weimar and Nazi Germany, provided the framework for his accounts:

Mr. [Mowrer]: [Sometime] in the course [of speaking with Donovan in London], the question arose of the Fifth Column. Donovan asked me to tell him all I knew about German methods. After all, I had been ten years in the Fatherland, and even after I had come out I had followed it as closely as I could. Incidentally, it was the French Ambassador François Poncet and Sir Robert Van Sittart at the British Foreign Office who went out of their way to furnish me with information concerning what was going on in Germany.

Mr. [Dulles]: Did they know what was going on with Donovan, or was it just on your own?

Mr. [Mowrer]: This had been between 1933 [*sic.*] when I was expelled from Germany and 1940 over the previous five years. Those two, every time François Poncet came home to Paris, why I would go around and he would fill me in. Everytime [*sic.*] I went to London beginning in 1936 and 1937, Van Sittart took me to the Foreign Office and showed me dispatches and such things on a confidential basis so we would be able to carry on the fight.<sup>72</sup>

Mowrer used the information obtained from these seemingly reliable sources to make his contributions to "Fifth Column Lessons for America." This was undoubtedly why Donovan and Knox saw a value in working with the correspondent on this project. In pointing to the fact that "Lessons" served as a collaborative project, Mowrer stated that "I did most of the writing; and Donovan furnished a lot of information, and I furnished information."<sup>73</sup> Mowrer's personal impressions of the Fifth Column and his sense of Donovan's commitment to learning all he could about subversive activities indicates that the future C.O.I./O.S.S. director viewed the topic seriously. Knowing this, then, it is evident that Donovan possessed a genuine personal belief in the menacing clandestine Fifth Column specters that supposedly roamed the Western Hemisphere.

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<sup>72</sup>Dulles Interview with Mowrer, 6-7.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 8.

While the contents of the Mowrer/Dulles interview present novel evidence of Donovan's belief in the German Fifth Column tales, this claim is far from an original one. In exploring the relevant historiography, both Mauch and Smith also argue that Donovan held the conviction that the Nazi Fifth Columns represented a genuine national security threat.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, this conviction sculpted his views on how such a counterespionage service should be organized in the United States. Though evident, Donovan's personal belief in Fifth Columnist specters still reveals one final question: Though Smith and Mauch, in two important instances, emphasize Donovan's commitment to fighting *Hitler's* Trojan horsemen, did he and his intelligence organizations treat Fifth Columnists from other countries with equal disquiet? Their persistent examination of Vichy's Synarchy beginning in 1941 confirms that they did.

Ultimately, accounts such as "Fifth Column Lessons for America" verifies that Donovan strongly believed in the tales of subversives in 1940. Roosevelt, too, who took the council of his close confidants on such matters, authorized the creation of the nation's first centralized intelligence service in July 1941 based on the belief that the United States appeared incapable of staving off undefined national security threats both domestically and abroad. Synarchy emerged as a particularly virulent collection of such subversive villains. For this reason, when the scandal

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<sup>74</sup>Firstly, Mauch, argues that "The London episode had major significance for Donovan as the future architect of the American secret intelligence service. Without Donovan's belief in the importance of the fifth column it would be hard to understand why the O.S.S. placed such an emphasis on analyzing enemy propaganda, strategies of psychological warfare, [and] monitoring ethnic groups in the U.S." In a very similar manner, Smith highlights Donovan's personal animus toward the Axis Fifth Columns as an important premise for crafting America's first coordinated foreign intelligence service. Specifically, he claims that: "From the first days of World War II, Donovan had been captivated by the power and potential of subversive warfare. His own worries about the German fifth column, intensified and amplified by his British friends, produced an awesome mental picture of Nazi subversive prowess that never left Donovan's thoughts. [...] This tendency remained in Donovan's thinking and the mythology of O.S.S. throughout the conflict [...]."

Mauch, *The Shadow War*, 25.

Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 417-8.

surfaced in mid-1941, Donovan and his future team of American spies and researchers, in addition to the American diplomats at Vichy, would be there to meet them head on.

### Conclusion

Returning to the August 1941 findings of Douglas MacArthur exhibited in this chapter's introduction, the legend of the Synarchy clearly reflected the many perils facing Europe and America's cherished objectives regarding it. The urgency these officials later placed on the Synarchy affair came directly from a specific set of beliefs fostered by American policymakers. They strongly believed that, beginning with the creation of Vichy, the French actively contributed to the German war effort; they believed that Statist ideologies threatened the very foundations of civilization; and they believed that robust networks of furtive reactionary movements actually existed which all sought to undermine global democracy from within. These opinions all translated to direct threats to the Americans' proposed liberal program in building a world free from totalitarian tyranny. As the Synarchy embodied (or even aggrandized) these convictions, it was understandable, then, that most of the Americans who engaged with the legend, heeded it.

Although the Americans' concerns over Synarchy undoubtedly stemmed from the various foreign relations' policies crafted domestically and a cultural desire to defend the tenets of democracy abroad, they more fully developed after stories similar to it emerged in the turbulent French milieu of 1940. Without a doubt, the intellectual and ideological genealogical lineage of Synarchy in France meandered through time and space, but the Americans had extensive exposure to its predecessors and antecedents, priming them for trusting in the tales of the fictitious technocratic cabal. Paved with previous narratives of French defeatism, collaborationism, subversion, terror, and Statism, the path toward Synarchy was an



interconnected avenue, not divergent from the collapse of the Third Republic, but intimately tied to it. And the American intelligence officials recognized it as such.

## Chapter One Appendix

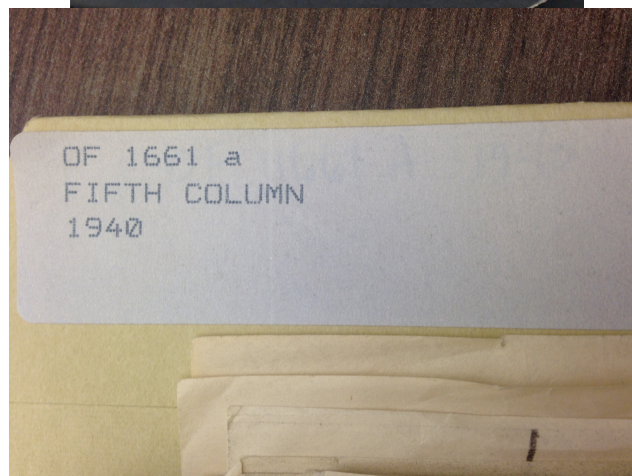
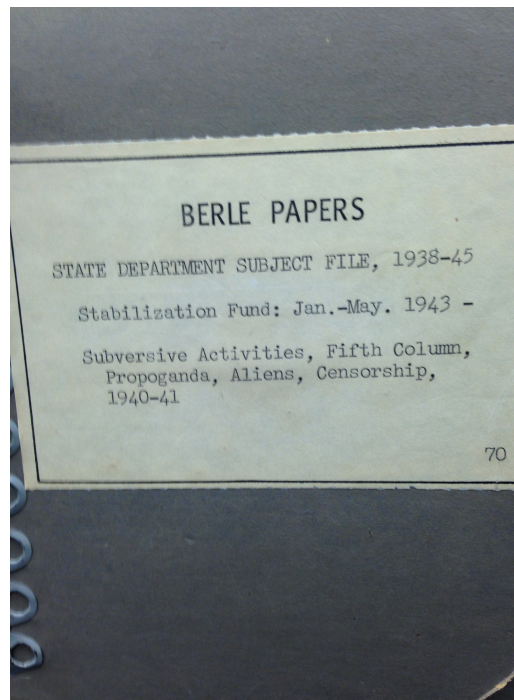


Figures One, Two, and Three: Exhibits of American Fifth Column Propaganda: Figure one points to the versatility of the concept of “Fifth Column,” as it was applied to diverse locales; figure two is representative of the domestic hysteria caused by groups such as the official “Dies Committee” and the ostensibly fanatical “Constitutional Educational League;” figure three was an advertisement for one of the myriad educational texts on the Nazi Fifth Column that appeared beginning in mid-1940.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Artist Unknown, Date Unknown, Records of the Office of Government Records, Record Group 44, National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

•Kamp, Joseph, “The Fifth Column in Washington!” (Pamphlet), Produced by the Constitutional Educational League, 1940, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY. Photograph taken by author.

•“Footprints of the Trojan Horse,” Published by The Citizenship Educational Service, 1942; Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY. Photograph taken by author.



Figures Four and Five: File Covers: The Fifth Column-related materials found in Adolph Berle's (Assistant Secretary of State (1938-1945)) papers as well as in President Roosevelt's Official Records indicates that the highest levels of the American government genuinely viewed omnipresent Axis spies as viable national and international security threats throughout the war.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

## Chapter Two: Traitors!: American Intelligence and the Circuitous French Path Toward Synarchy

*"The animal with the broadest back is the scapegoat."*

--Louis De Jong, *The German Fifth Column in the Second World War*, 259.

*"France was not only beaten far more thoroughly and far more easily than Poland, but unlike Poland France cracked morally as well and a new set of defeatist leaders sought to purchase the German's mercy, if not his respect, by supine submission to France's conquerors."*

--William J. Donovan and Edgar Mower, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," 8.

May 19, 1941, Paris, France: local passersby discovered a man's lifeless body outside a Parisian high-rise. Eight days later, a second shadowy fatality stirred controversy throughout divided France. Jean Coutrot, a prominent French "Polytechnician" and social organizer, and a certain Frank Théalet, his noted personal secretary, were dead. During their investigations, the French police determined that Coutrot recently possessed a mysterious manuscript, of roughly 100 pages, entitled the *pacte synarchiste révolutionnaire*. In its pages, the document communicated an elaborate plan for worldwide revolution. Richard Kuisel indicates that inside its first three gilded pages, it "threatened any outsider who chanced upon the pact with drastic punishment should he fail to destroy it."<sup>1</sup> The work served as the manifesto and mission statement for an esoteric secret society known as the *Mouvement Synarchique d'Empire* (*M.S.E.*), or more simply, "*Synarchie*."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kuisel, "Legend," 380.

<sup>2</sup> Another moniker attributed to the group that occasionally circulated in the earlier accounts was the *C.S.R.* (*Convention Synarchique Révolutionnaire*), or the Synarchist Revolutionary Convention. This largely fell out of favor in the relevant literature by late 1941, however. Organic associations between Synarchy and the interwar terror organization, *La Cagoule* (formerly named the *C.S.A.R.*, the *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire* (The Secret Committee for Revolutionary Action)), undoubtedly led to this conflation. For the remainder of this dissertation, however, *M.S.E.* serves as its preferred designation.

In its proposed reorganization of the global power structure, the eccentric *Pacte* contained “Thirteen Fundamental Points and 598 Propositions.”<sup>3</sup> Its political scheme sought to place technicians, industrialists, and financiers in positions of power, who in turn would reduce politics, economics, and culture into purely efficient systems. In accordance with their grand global objectives, the *pacte* also outlined the radical reorganization of the world’s territorial boundaries into five distinct synarchic governments: “the British Commonwealth, a Pan-American society under the United States, a Eurasian society under the Soviet Union, a Pan-Asian society of uncertain leadership, and an entity called ‘Pan-Eurafrica,’ which was to consist of continental Europe plus the French African empire, under French leadership.”<sup>4</sup> It was technocracy run amok! The following excerpt, taken from Thesis Two of the pact, only begins to illustrate the movement’s ostentatious nature:

## 2. REVOLUTIONARY SYANRCHISM

We recognize and serve the synarchy revolution in continuing to create an empire.

The Synarchy order, which was established to be beyond socialism *en route* to realization, to one degree or another, throughout the entire world, is marked by an imperialist character, for the achievement of the all-powerful spirit of revolutionary action.

The Synarchist order is therefore imperialist and not socialist.

It claims to command the masses and not a harmonious equilibrium with a distribution of work and profits.

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<sup>3</sup>Henri Chavin, location unknown, date unknown, “*Rapport sur la societe secrete Polytechnicienne dite Mouvement Synarchique d’Empire (M.S.E.) ou Convention Synarchique Revolutionnaire (C.S.R.)*,” Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 672, p. 2; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>4</sup>Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 214.

This is a Caesarean conception, the emperor will be replaced by a party of technocrats.<sup>5</sup> Yet it was believed that the group's objectives to these ends in some way had been compromised. Coutrot and Théalet, both accused Synarchist traitors, paid the ultimate price for renegade actions taken against the secret cabal. Their deaths, in tandem with the discovery of the *pacte synarchiste*, served as the sparks for the legend's powder keg.

A few months later, in the late summer of 1941, the American diplomats serving in Vichy first came into contact with the tales of Synarchy. The conspiracy of aristocratic French technocrats and financiers quickly intensified the Americans' concerns regarding the nation's commitment to collaborationism, the prospects of the nation falling into the abyss of authoritarianism, and the possible role that reactionary cabals played in both. But American concerns pertinent to Synarchy did not emerge in a vacuum. Similar reports chronicling defeatism, interwar French experiments with radical Statism, and related political conspiracies all appeared in the American intelligence canon before Synarchy. These tales later coalesced to form not only the French myth itself, but also the Americans' ardent recognition of it.

Though having other forerunners, which this chapter also chronicles, the road to the Synarchic conspiracy, to these American officials, began with the dissolution of the Third Republic in 1940, where the fears of defeatism and collaborationism first truly emerged. As the legends of the galloping Trojan Horse later persisted in France, scapegoats and malefactors became quickly vilified. Observed by the anxious Americans as France fell to the Nazis, these

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Riche, Paris, France, August 21, 1941, "A Mysterious Association of Polytechnicians, Inspectors of Finance has Established a Seizure of Power over the Past 10 Years in France...", *L'Appel*, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6, p. 12; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

so-called “Men of Bordeaux” set the new Vichy regime on a direct course toward treating with the Axis.

### The Men of Bordeaux

In May-June 1940, France’s Third Republic (along with Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburg) suffered a humiliating military defeat at the hands of Nazi Germany. Perhaps more than humiliating, however, most argued that the swift collapse of France’s supposedly impregnable Maginot Line was unexpected. Countless stories of French troop disorientation and disorganization proliferated, as *Wehrmacht* tanks and *Luftwaffe* planes scoured the Western Front seemingly at will. Concomitant rumors of covert Nazi and Soviet agents infiltrating the highest ranks of the French government and military only heightened the panic. The Germans did not conquer France with airpower, armor, and infantry alone; they also implemented their clandestine “Fifth Columns” to defeat her. So it was said.

Stories of French subversion began before the formation of the Vichy regime. Even for the American officials witnessing the German invasion from afar, myriad rumors of treachery reached the uppermost echelons of their Paris Embassy. A May 17, 1940 State Department report from ambassador William Bullitt to Cordell Hull on the deteriorating French military situation, for instance, typified the omnipresent fear of abstruse traitorous agents:

Two [serious] ‘fifth column’ operations have taken place in the French Army. Nearly all the French heavy tanks were manned by Communist workmen from the Renault works in the outskirts of Paris. When they were given the order at a most critical moment to advance against the German tanks they did not move. [...] Furthermore, the men in the tanks in a number of cases smashed vital parts of the machinery. I am informed that these men will be shot tonight.

An even more serious ‘fifth column’ action in cooperation with the Germans on orders by the Soviet Government are the Chasseurs.<sup>6</sup> One regiment of Chasseurs which was comprised of Communists from the Paris industrial suburbs revolted 3 days ago, seized the vital town of Compiègne on the German path to Paris and are still in possession of the town. They number 18,000 [...].<sup>7</sup>

From a position of hindsight, the claim of a German-Russian Fifth Column collaboration may seem alien. However, after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact (*i.e.*, the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact) of August 1939, American policymakers perhaps naturally assumed that this constituted a long-term totalitarian alliance. Understandably, then, such stories provided a certain degree of disquiet for many in the American government. Rumors in this same vein set the stage for later and analogous iterations of political duplicity, which were also received with great anxiety by these officials. By mid-1941, a curious coalescence of coincidences intersected with similar accounts, resulting in the legend of the Synarchy. But before Vichy, the political events in the city of Bordeaux first stirred the imaginations of those seeking out elaborate tales of conspiracy. This included top American officers.

With the German armies pushing through France almost unchallenged by early June, the besieged French Republicans opted to temporarily move their nation’s capital in order to regroup. In their chaotic exodus, the government hastily relocated to the city of Bordeaux on June 15 where they vigorously debated France’s future. The following day, numerous voices bombarded the new President, Paul Reynaud, as deliberations concerning capitulation or

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<sup>6</sup>Oxford dictionary defines the term “Chasseur” as “a soldier, usually in the light cavalry, equipped and trained for rapid movement, especially in the French army.”  
Oxford, s.v., “Chasseur.”

<sup>7</sup>William Bullitt, Ambassador to France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, May 17, 1940, Paris, France, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1940* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 226.



continued fighting raged.<sup>8</sup> The idea of moving the government to the North African colonies was floated about the makeshift political chambers, yet this proved untenable.<sup>9</sup> If the Republicans signed a moderate armistice with Hitler, some believed that the French could save some semblance of a state and preserve her culture. Over the next 24 hours, the pro-armistice supporters won out. Phillipe Pétain, the popular World War I military commander (the so-called “Hero of Verdun”) and the former parliamentarian, Pierre Laval, formed the outline for a new government, and Reynaud stepped down due to growing pressure on June 16. As France raised its white flag, and the armistice was presented on June 21 (and accepted the next day), the Reich officially secured its lopsided military victory. The French signed a separate ceasefire with Mussolini’s Italy on June 24.

The resulting armistice divided France into four principal zones.<sup>10</sup> In an act not seen anywhere else in Nazi-occupied Europe, Hitler allowed the remaining French authorities to establish their own government seemingly free from German intervention. The resulting “unoccupied zone,” which comprised the southeastern two-fifths of the state, became known

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<sup>8</sup>In the turmoil of the final months of the Third Republic, Reynaud rose to the undesirable rank of French President, which Édouard Daladier renounced on March 30. Reynaud consistently pressed against offering the Germans an armistice in the final days of the Republic. Still, the quickly deteriorating military situation, along with a growing number of armistice advocates in the government, eventually forced him from his seat.

<sup>9</sup>As Jackson contends, a move to North Africa, while gallant, was almost certainly also doomed to failure due to the insufficient infrastructure needed to support a war-waging government-in-exile. He writes, “The problem was that France lacked economic or logistical bases there. In the inter-war years North Africa had been seen only as a reservoir of men. In July 1939, 400,000 soldiers were stationed there, but by June 1940 only four full units were left. All the rest had been sent to the mainland.” (Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 121)

<sup>10</sup>The first, the northwestern industrial sector (of which Paris was located) and a thin western corridor reaching to the Spanish border, was occupied by *Wehrmacht* authorities, and placed under the watchful eye of the German Foreign Minister, Otto Abetz. German authorities administered this so-called “occupied zone” remotely from the city of Wiesbaden. The small Italian region of occupation in the southeast corner of the state and the northeastern German-controlled territory ominously called the “Reserved” or “Forbidden” zone represented the second and third districts respectively.

popularly as Vichy France.<sup>11</sup> Though the officials geographically relocated the new capital in the obscure city of Vichy, the influential men at Bordeaux carved out its political foundation in mid-June.

After the resignation of Reynaud, the disjointed parliament asked Phillipe Pétain to formulate a new political establishment. According to historian Julian Jackson, the Marshal, who prepared for such a decision, “had a list of ministers ready in his pocket.”<sup>12</sup> Yet it took a few days for Pétain to consolidate his power. Pétain did not seal the internal destruction of the Third Republic. Rather, the persuasive Pierre Laval convinced the French to give up their democratic ghost with a silver-tongued speech.<sup>13</sup>

When raising the armistice debate at Bordeaux, Laval wasted no time in building a coalition of likeminded individuals who supported ending the hostilities. As Langer writes, “At the *Hôtel de Ville* [Bordeaux] Laval was gathering about him a group of politicians who were soon to become the shock troops of the defeatists.”<sup>14</sup> Among them included Paul Baudoin, Vichy’s future French Foreign Minister, and Yves Bouthillier, the regime’s forthcoming Minister of Finance. Both figures also figured prominently in the Synarchy affair one year later. Not only

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<sup>11</sup>Vichy served as the informal title of the new government; the official name of the regime was simply *l’etat francaise*.

<sup>12</sup>Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 126.

<sup>13</sup>Laval’s political career prior to Vichy was, to say the least, a turbulent one. Elected to his first post in parliament as a Socialist in 1914, he initially rode on a platform devoted to left-wing values. He later lost this seat in the 1919 elections. By the mid-1920s, however, he began to gravitate toward more right-wing circles. Jackson attributes this to his personal “growing prosperity and social success,” as his thriving law practice “made him into an extremely wealthy man.” In 1931, he was elected prime minister and then appointed as foreign minister from 1934 to 1936. The Popular Front government of 1936 threw Laval into political limbo, as the right-leaning politician’s values failed to mesh well with those of the extreme-left policies of the new Communist and Socialist-led administrations. This *de facto* exile cemented his personal commitment to, one day, leading France again in a firmly conservative government. Vichy provided the opportune moment. Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 129-31. Paxton, *Vichy France*, 26-8.

<sup>14</sup>Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 36.

did Laval help these young technocrats soar in political influence, but he did so while plotting the demise of the Republic. He accomplished this with implacable efficiency after the new administration migrated once again.

The idea of keeping the Marshal's government in Bordeaux after the signing of the armistice was quickly jettisoned, as the city now resided in the new German occupation zone. Thus, Pétain, Laval, the cadre of defeatists, and the disaffected Republicans decided to establish their new regime in the spa town of Vichy. The government completed its relocation on July 1.<sup>15</sup> In an impassioned speech, Laval then convinced the remaining parliamentary deputies to grant Pétain the power to revise the French constitution as he saw fit. Whether these deputies knew it or not, they had sounded the death knell of the Third Republic. On July 11, Pétain formally nullified the office of the French President, disbanded France's parliament indefinitely, and named himself Head of the French State and Laval his Vice-Premier and "dauphin."<sup>16</sup> But as stories of the new Vichy government began to emerge in mid-1940, the American officials' belief in France's willingness to stave off rapprochement with the Nazis was quickly shaken.

From day one, Vichy proved a political and diplomatic quagmire for the Americans. Most pressingly, the nation wavered uncomfortably between the binary of Franco-German rapprochement and the anti-Hitler combine of nations. For more than a year after Vichy's formation, the non-interventionist United States and the United Kingdom represented its principal democracy-defending allies. Yet, for much of this period, Great Britain also teetered on

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<sup>15</sup>After passing on the towns of Lyons and Clermont-Ferrand as the potential new capitals, Jackson offers the following description of Vichy, which proved a highly unsuitable locale for the provisional French government: "Pétain installed himself on the third floor of the Hôtel du Parc, Laval on the floor below. The Ministry of the Interior took over the Casino [...]. Lesser ministries inhabited lesser hotels. Conditions were indescribably cramped: bedrooms doubled up by day as offices; bathtubs had to be used as filing cabinets." Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 142.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 128, 132-3.

the brink of military collapse. The Anglo-French relationship suffered further complications when Churchill's forces waged its two brief campaigns against the Vichyites in July and August. Thus, the United States served as the last remaining major democratic power reliably keeping France fully out of Germany's Axis camp in late 1940. Still, the rapport was not without its complications. Far from it. For the American representatives still stationed in France, the first suspicions of overt collaborationism came to them in the weeks following the armistice. What they heard from these officials blatantly threatened their increasingly urgent anti-Statist agendas in Europe.

As the American diplomatic representatives attempted to ascertain the tone of the new French government, much to their surprise, they discovered that Vichy's officials did not wallow in any nihilistic despair. Quite the opposite. At first, the regime was marked by ebullience, by enthusiasm, and most dangerously, by hope. Much of this positivity revolved around the prospect of a perceived German victory on the continent. For the non-combatant yet democracy-defending Americans, this signaled a foreboding blow to the prospect of France supporting the liberal powers against the then-unstoppable Hitler. A July 1, 1940 correspondence from William Bullitt to Cordell Hull exemplified these very sentiments during the latter's discussions with the new French establishment:

I had long conversations today with [Albert] Lebrun [Interim President of France], Pétain, [François] Darlan, and [Camille] Chautemps [Vice President of the French Council of Ministers]; many Senators and Ambassadors. The impression which emerges from these conversations is the extraordinary one that the French leaders desire to cut loose from all that France has represented during the past two generations, that their physical and moral defeat has been so absolute that they have accepted completely for France the fate of becoming a province of Nazi Germany. Moreover, in order that they may have as many companions in misery as possible they hope that England will be rapidly and completely defeated by Germany and that the Italians will suffer the same

fate. Their hope is that France may become Germany's favorite province—a new *Gau* which will develop into a new Gaul.<sup>17</sup>

A September 1940 telegraph from Harrison Freeman Matthews (American diplomatic *attaché*) to Hull regarding comments during a Paul Baudoin press conference also pointed to the regime's commitment to its new authoritarian government. In this report, Matthews indicated that “Baudoin made a prepared speech which dealt largely with an effort to convince his hearers of the sins of the pre-armistice governments and system of government [...]”<sup>18</sup> So, were there defeatists in Vichy, the type who yearned for the death of the Republic, perhaps at any cost? Certainly, Bullitt and Matthews, two top State Department officials, believed this was true. But did this defeatism necessarily translate into deliberate subversion and treason against the foundations of French Republicanism? Many chronicling the turbulent events in Vichy undoubtedly thought so.<sup>19</sup>

As the budding wartime French narrative blossomed, theories of internal conspiracy became affixed to the very genesis of the Vichy regime itself. The political events at Bordeaux, signified most by the expedited death of the Republic, resulted in a simple conflation of the

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<sup>17</sup>William Bullitt, American Ambassador to France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, La Bourboule, France, July 1, 1940, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1940 (Vol. 2)* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 462.

<sup>18</sup>Harrison Freeman Matthews, *Chargé* in France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Vichy, France, September 19, 1940, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1940 (Vol. 2)* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 382.

<sup>19</sup>Historian Frank Costigliola's monograph offers a broad interpretation of these French sentiments featured in this same State report. Specifically, he writes that “For the Vichy leaders, the sooner the war ended and the worse England was defeated, the better. Germany would satisfy itself with booty from England, and, the happy scenario went, France would join the Reich in rebuilding Europe. With its superior intelligence and civilization, France would eventually command this new order. Most French shared what then seemed like a sensible view: Germany had apparently won the war; defeated France should try to learn from its mistakes and work with the new reality to build a viable future; America lay far away and had given little aid; Great Britain would probably soon surrender and had refused to commit its air force to defend France.” Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 13.

actual facts surrounding the nation's fall and rumors of Fifth Column activities. In turn, purple prose of treachery quickly whirl pooled around the West.

As the perspicacious, and, as it turns out, iconoclastic, Alec de Montmorency chronicled in 1943, many reporting on French political subversive stories presented them as a series of similar narratives orbiting around a central theme. In identifying this simple premise, Montmorency quotes an unidentified "British correspondent" who also viewed the Fifth Column narratives as bunkum. This unnamed figure argued that "writers returning from France, [had] found that their chief editors, who had remained in London, already 'knew' all about the French collapse. 'France was not beaten,' they were told, but were betrayed by the 'men of Bordeaux' who entered into a plot with the Nazis to establish a Fascist regime in France."<sup>20</sup> Consequently, Montmorency asserted that "if a journalist wanted his story printed he had to take one of the official canards, and embellish it with his own personal trimmings. The canards ran as follows: France has not been beaten. France has been betrayed. And who betrayed her? The 'men of Bordeaux,' who sold out to the Nazis."<sup>21</sup> Prominent American correspondents, to academics, to Bill Donovan himself, received and disseminated these tales in much the same way, as they consistently portrayed the Bordeaux politicians as France's most pernicious Fifth Columnist scapegoats.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>De Montmorency, *Enigma of Admiral Darlan*, 105.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>22</sup>A short yet unnerving correspondence in FDR's personal records regarding French Fifth Column activities points directly to the overall media attention directed toward France's Fifth Column narratives in mid-1940. The letter, sent from a Mr. Jack Danciger to Texas Congressman, Frank Boykin's office, indicates the following: "[It] has been charged over the radio and press that a number of high officials in the French Government were disloyal to their government, -5<sup>th</sup> columnists in fact."

Jack Danciger, Title Unknown, to Frank Boykin, Member of Congress, House Office Building, Washington, D.C., June 24, 1940, Official Records of the President (OF) 1661, Box 1; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

A prominent example of French conspiracy stories came from *The New York Times* in the paper's June 18<sup>th</sup> article entitled "Nazis Superiority in Equipment Too Great for Courageous French," published during the very heights of the Fifth Column hysteria in the United States. In staying consistent with Montmorency's astute observation that Western media publishers advocated for the existence of French conspirators, the piece, written by Harrold Denny, advanced elaborate rumors of collusion. In it, the journalist definitively declared that "one of the most appalling features of the present war has been the amount of treachery revealed—too late. The Germans must have been preparing it methodically for years. [...] We cannot doubt that France [...] was riddled with German agents or pliant sympathizers."<sup>23</sup> Yet mass media reports only provided the tip of the proverbial iceberg when it came to the incessant topic of French political subversion. Academically-oriented works also strove to add an element of legitimacy to such tales.<sup>24</sup>

By the end of 1940, a flurry of semi-scholarly publications regarding the Nazis' Fifth Columns in France hit American bookstore shelves. One such work, *Fifth Column in America*, written by Harold Lavine, saw the republic's collapse as the result of virulent German propaganda. Lavine illustrated the nation's demise not from a perspective of conscious treason, but rather, as a systematic whittling down of the state's leaders' resolve to defend its democratic values. The successful implementation of the propaganda campaign, Lavine stressed, reduced

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<sup>23</sup>Harold Denny, "Nazis Superiority in Equipment Too Great for Courageous French," *The New York Times*, June 18, 1940, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup>Additionally, in considering Edgar Mowrer's impressions of the Fifth Column stories after the war, it is clear that he also believed in the tales of French subversion presented to him. For instance, in recalling his exposure to the stories related to the collaborationist contingent during the war, he indicated in his memoir that "[...] the combination of the pro-Nazis and defeatists in France, skillfully nourished by 'pro-French' Germans Otto Abetz and Friedrich Sieburg, [were] part of Hitler's diabolically effective plan of softening up his adversaries." Mowrer, *Trimuph and Tragedy*, 317.

France to a population of compliant, autocrat-seeking automatons. In illustrating this claim, he attested that “The question for America is why [the collapse] happened in France. One answer-- though not, of course, the complete answer-- is Fascist and Communist propaganda, native propaganda mostly, which threw France into turmoil and made parliamentary government impossible.”<sup>25</sup> Though the implementation of covert external forces was one explanation for the fall of France, others attempted to academically analyze the French debacle through the same lens.

Perhaps the most virulent American writer contributing to the Fifth Column canon during the Second World War was the effusive Edmund Taylor, who had spent time in France prior to and after its defeat. Under the personal patronage of Donovan, Taylor later worked for the C.O.I./O.S.S.<sup>26</sup> In his incendiary publication, *Total Attack: Smash Hitler's International*, Taylor, along with his co-writers, Edgar Snow and Eliot Janeway, outlined what they perceived as a deeply embedded political Fifth Column that suffused the Third Republic well before the war.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Harold Lavine, *Fifth Column in America* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1940), 15.

<sup>26</sup>The Fifth Column writings of Taylor were, to say the least, hyperbolic and radical. Bradley Smith, for instance, goes so far as to refer to them as “militant.” In merely one example of the propagandist’s flippant and stream-of-conscious writing style, Julian Hurstfield states that “In the first edition of *Strategy of Terror* [another popular book published by Taylor in 1940] he assumed that Hitler and Stalin were plotting together to destroy democracy; in the second edition, two years later, after the German invasion of Russia, he wisely concluded that ‘there was no plot.’” (Hurstfield, 60) Still, as Mauch notes, Taylor was not only given a position in Donovan’s intelligence organizations in counterpropaganda operations, but his “book [*Strategy of Terror*] would become recommended reading for staff at the C.O.I. and O.S.S.” Mauch, *The Shadow War*, 25-6.

<sup>27</sup>Oddly enough, Taylor’s other 1940 work, *The Strategy of Terror*, takes a similar tack to that of Lavine’s book in insisting that the Third Republicans were innocently deceived by propagandists. In fact, pernicious forms of Fifth Columnist propaganda (or what the author calls “psychological attacks”) appear in the nucleus of Taylor’s general assessment. As to the French-specific accusations, however, he attests that the constant bombardment of propaganda dissolved the social cohesion of the state. “When group morale dissolves,” in instances such as this, he concludes that “organization breaks down, leaving the group prey to better-organized forces.” In briefly summarizing their mutually-exclusive, yet identical theses, then, both Lavine and Taylor believed, absurdly, that the politically-weakened French were more susceptible to the forces of propaganda than their more coordinated fascist counterparts.

Edmund Taylor, *The Strategy of Terror: Europe's Inner Front* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), 203.



In his particular account, however, the Nazis used financial enticement and extortion to turn the French political caste against their nation's interests and ultimately, its survival:

Political espionage as understood by the Nazis includes personal information on the public and private lives of notables in democratic countries for purposes of blackmail, bribery, or strategy. [...] In France such items culled out of the weekly gossip often gave Nazi political spies valuable clues about prominent Frenchmen who might be bribed or blackmailed and suggested avenues for approaching them.<sup>28</sup>

Even as psychological persuasion, as posited by Lavine, or soft coercion, as offered by Taylor *et al.*, certainly appeared as damaging theories in and of themselves, they still only implied that France's Fifth Column represented a cadre of unwilling participants.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, however, Donovan's and Mowrer's pamphlet went a step further by attesting that the French consciously solicited, if not actively pursued, help from Hitler in undermining the Republic.<sup>30</sup>

The actual attacks committed or plans charted by German Fifth Columnists in reality only represented a minute fraction of what many thought. Still, countless Americans heeded the myths of the subversive traitors that threatened their homeland and the democratic-defending nations of Europe. As it pertained to France, though academics and journalists played their own part in

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<sup>28</sup>Edmund Taylor, Edgar Snow, and Eliot Janeway, *Smash Hitler's International* (New York: The Greystone Press, 1940), 26-7.

<sup>29</sup>Regardless of the source of France's failures, Hurstfield indicates that the disparate American theories all coalesced around a central motif: the state's demise was not the result of German military prowess, but rather from some form or another of domestic treachery. He states that the slightly conflicting interpretations "[postulated] different villains in the tragedy of France's downfall-Nazi sympathizers and Communist agents, social reformers and political reactionaries, selfish workers and greedy businessmen, appeasing politicians and bellicose publicists, treacherous generals and pacifist soldiers. But the common ground is plainly the belief that France was defeated not by external blows, but by identifiable 'enemies within' whose counterparts already lurked in the United States." Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation*, 43.

<sup>30</sup>While some examined the fall of France via the use of complex social factors, others approached the question quantitatively. Hurstfield, for instance, makes note of one work, "written by an economist, Hartley W. Barclay, for the journal *Mill and Factory*, in July 1940," that "documented, with an array of tables and statistics, the 'planned sabotage of national defense by social reformists' in France, who had 'opened the door to Hitler's triumph in a way which can be paralleled by a Fifth Column in any democratic country.'" (Ibid., 41)

proliferating stories concerning the Third Republic's demise, Donovan and Mowrer also did much to forward the theory that France's own sons defeated her.

In addition to alerting the American people to the prospect of domestic traitors, the contents of "Fifth Column Lessons for America" illustrated the insidious tactics employed by the Germans in a number of conquered European states. Donovan's and Mowrer's evaluations of the Belgian, Dutch, or Polish responses to German propaganda, for instance, are beyond the scope of this dissertation.<sup>31</sup> With regard to France, however, the work argued that the fall of the Republic resulted from a combination of a successful fascist propaganda campaign and a committed defeatist population that suffused the government. To the former, they claimed that "in France, [the] decision of Pétain, Weygand, Baudoin and Laval to lay down their arms and seek salvation in French submission to the Nazis [was not] possible without the long and tireless activity in that country of [German] 'intellectuals.'"<sup>32</sup> To their second point, however, the two authors somewhat abandoned their initial argument, instead citing that traitorous, Nazi-sympathizers ran rampant throughout France's crumbling pre-war government. In illuminating this "masterpiece of the Fifth Column," they declared that "here everything that Hitler had promised came to pass with almost mathematical precision. He did not strike until he was in touch with certain Frenchmen who were ready to treat with him. [...] As a [result,] France [...] cracked morally [as] a new set of defeatist leaders sought to purchase the German's mercy, if not his respect, by

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<sup>31</sup>Their assessments of each nation's willingness or capability to withstand German propaganda (or not) were offered in the rudimentary form of informal National Character studies. Writing for the prominent Margaret Mead in the early 1950s, Geoffrey Gorer defined the term "National Character," which signified the prevalent form of anthropological thinking during the wartime years, as the study that "isolates and analyzes the principal motives or predispositions which can be deduced from the behavior of the personnel of a society at a given time and place." Geoffrey Gorer, "National Character: Theory and Practice," in *The Study of Culture at a Distance* by Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 58.

<sup>32</sup>Donovan and Mowrer, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," 5.

supine submission to France's conquerors."<sup>33</sup> The remainder of the pamphlet's French-related contents painted an almost farcical picture of how the Germans tricked France's generals and simply bamboozled its beleaguered and gullible ground troops.<sup>34</sup> Though bordering on the absurd, this work provided a context for Americans in their understanding of the fall of France in 1940. More importantly, however, similar ideas of political subversion and collusion led many officials (most notably Donovan himself) to ardently believe France's new political establishment actively sought out collaboration with the Nazis. This, in turn, increased the prospect of a German victory on the continent, the principal threat to America's national security interests in mid-1940.

Despite modest variations, commonalities abounded in the narratives recording the fall of France in June 1940. American diplomats on the ground in Paris (and later Vichy) as well as journalists and scholars alike domestically generally assumed the fall of the Republic was simply not possible without previous German intrigue or sympathetic defeatist traitors. For this reason, in the months following the formation of the Pétain regime, tales of the infamous Bordeaux men garnered credence. As noted above, some of the regime's influential French technocrats, such as Paul Baudoin and Yves Bouthillier, exemplified prominent members of this demonized group. Thus, the bridge later needed for the American intelligence community to bond the traitorous and collaborationist "Men of Bordeaux" scandal to the pernicious Synarchy was not built over a canyon, but rather, a crevice.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>34</sup>To this, it specifically states that "[Hitler] terrified the soldiers by his noise-making engines, he demoralized the officers by the surprise and power of his attacks, [and] he bewildered the generals by the daring of his strategic conceptions [...]." (Donovan and Mowrer, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," 8)

By mid-1941, the tales of France's political conspiracy began to bend toward a new chapter, where the *M.S.E.* quickly supplanted (though to some degree, enriched) the Bordeaux accounts. Yet unlike the conspiratorial tales of 1940, which reached a wide American audience, the 1941 legend of Vichy's Synarchy confined itself almost entirely to the American diplomatic community stationed locally. One notable exception to this was the November 1941 *Fortune* article first cited in the literature review above.<sup>35</sup> Still, in formulating their understanding of what the conspiracy represented, and, more importantly, exactly what threats it posed to America's foreign policy objectives, the American officials in Vichy received and scrutinized their own compendium of materials directly responsible for the myth's creation.

### Instruments of Illusion

In his 1986 article on America's pre-Pearl Harbor espionage capabilities, historian David Kahn assessed the various foreign intelligence sources available to the Roosevelt government in 1941. He listed six principal categories: "diplomatic reports; information from friendly nations; military attaché reports (technically a subspecies of diplomatic reports [...]); radio intelligence; the press in all forms (newspapers, magazines, books, radios, and newsreels); and information from private individuals."<sup>36</sup> As it applied to the agents' initial investigations into Synarchy, they were heavily reliant on five of these, save for radio intelligence, which most often encompassed cryptographic projects. In their acquisition of these source materials, the legend of the Synarchy quickly inundated the halls of the American Embassy much as it did in the taverns, casinos, and

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<sup>35</sup>The citation information for the full *Fortune* article is as follows: Author Unknown, "Report from France," *Fortune Magazine* (Nov. 1941): 180-183.

<sup>36</sup>David Kahn, "The United States Views Germany and Japan in 1941," In *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars*, ed. by Ernest May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 479.

hotels of Vichy. The first of these, and certainly the genesis of Synarchy's mythology, came from a short assessment of the group known today simply as the "Martin Note."<sup>37</sup>

As historical works have since demonstrated, Jean Coutrot's brother-in-law stole his copy of the *Pacte Synarchiste* in March 1941 in a fit of rage following an altercation.<sup>38</sup> Though perhaps making for a more appealing narrative from a dramatic literary standpoint, the Vichy police did not discover the document during their search of his apartment following his untimely death. Instead, Coutrot's in-law submitted it to a Vichy intelligence officer by the name of Colonel Heurteaux soon after its pilfering. Intrigued, Heurteaux passed it along to Henri Martin, the head of Vichy's security group, who, in turn, delivered it to Philippe Pétain. A "professional conspirator" as Kuisel dubs him, Martin had a penchant for promoting the surreal. And being

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<sup>37</sup>As Kuisel attests, "the path of the legend's origins leads from Coutrot's Parisian apartment to Dr. Henri Martin's office at Vichy and from there to the editorial rooms of some Parisian journalists." ("Legend," 383-4)

<sup>38</sup>The elusive *pacte synarchiste* also demands some consideration. While the pact is indeed an authentic relic, in that physical copies of it did and still do exist, its exact origins are steeped in scholarly controversy. The principal debate surrounding the text concerns, simply put, its authorship. The general scholarly discourse surrounding the *Pacte's* dramatist is presented as follows: if some actual organization promoting the very Synarchist ideals found in this work in 1941 actually existed, it is possible (though not altogether certain) that its followers composed it. If it was a fabrication, however, it is much more likely that it was produced by the very polemicists seeking to propagate the conspiracy outlined in its pages. Kuisel, defending the former position, argued that the *M.S.E.* represented an actual splinter Martinist sect originating in 1921 (this project returns to the Martinist movement below) led by the interwar French politician, Victor Blanchard. He writes that "it was Blanchard's schematic Martinist order that spawned the mysterious [*M.S.E.*], a society founded in 1922 to win the world's elite to synarchical principles, and it was the *M.S.E.* that, in turn, produced the key document in the legend of the Vichy Synarchy—the *M.S.E.* pact." Yet he also goes on to indicate that "though the *M.S.E.* existed, its conspiracy was only a paper plot." Dard, by contrast, attests that the Synarchy's global aspirations, as presented in the *pacte synarchiste*, were nothing but an elaborate forgery. This, according to him, was most evident due to the fact that the occultist nature of the work was a "simple replica of its predecessors." He specifically compared the pact to the completely fabricated, but distinctively similar, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the supposed manifesto from an early twentieth-century conspiratorial organization, later revealed as a hoax. Kuisel, "Legend," 379-80, 383. Dard, *La Synarchy*, 120.

that Synarchy appeared as a pernicious Fifth Column in the heart of Vichy, the Marshal himself gave the detective permission to investigate the affair further.<sup>39</sup>

The resulting “Martin Note,” prepared at the conclusion of his brief inquiry, emerged as a slipshod attempt to support the existence of the Synarchy conspiracy with the intent of offering doubt to the true motives of Darlan’s ministerial team. Since he had already claimed that these men directly contributed to the fall of France in 1940 through subversive activities, Martin ran with the Synarchy story, arguing that the group constituted a dangerous “infiltration” within the regime.<sup>40</sup> As Kuisel notes, “the content of the Martin Note is important since it presented the original version of the legend of the Vichy Synarchy.”<sup>41</sup> Martin produced the final document shortly after Coutrot’s death (which, of course, only enhanced its mystique) and disseminated it throughout Vichy by late May.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Kuisel, “Legend,” 384-6.

<sup>40</sup>It is also important to note here that the Vichy regime officially banned all covert social movements during its earliest days. Kuisel notes that “in August 1940 a series of decrees outlawed all clandestine organizations, and confiscated their property and records. [...] Pétain even attached to his staff a special anti-Masonry agency, headed by Bernard Fay. [...] Under Pétain the French administration experienced a kind of anti-Masonic McCarthyism in which the unmasking of Freemasons in high places became a patriotic act.” Under these oppressive laws, members of a group such as the *M.S.E.* would certainly have been *persona non grata* to the Vichyites. Thus, local rumors (bolstered by those such as Martin) purported that many of these “suppressed societies” could lash out against the Marshal’s National Revolution. Indeed, the relevant documents often presented Synarchy as a group dedicated to undermining Pétain’s various social programs. (Ibid., 385-6)

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 386.

<sup>42</sup>Kuisel noted that at the end of Pucheu’s tenure, the Interior Minister played a significant role in quashing the legend’s public dissemination, at least for a time, by punishing both Chavin and Martin: “Pucheu was [irritated] with Chavin, the *directeur* of the Sûreté nationale, for assisting the rumormongers. Pucheu gained satisfaction by sacking Chavin; even Martin, who had vainly counted on Pétain for protection, eventually fell victim to Pucheu’s vengeance. The doctor was put in prison in March 1942, where he remained until the Liberation. Pucheu’s repressive measures succeeded in keeping the affair out of the press for almost two years, but did little to halt the spread of the rumor in government circles where the credulous, of course, believed that his reaction only proved the veracity of the charge.” (Ibid., 386, 391)

Research at the National Archives yielded three transcripts or documents closely fitting the description of the Martin Note. A French-language document entitled “*Synarchie and the Banque Worms*” (dated July 14, 1941), which was enclosed in a State Department report dated October 15, 1941 constituted the first of these. The second came from an assessment cryptically entitled “*Resumé No. 6*” (also dated July 14, 1941) attached to an October 27, 1941 State examination. Upon scrutiny, the latter is merely a translated copy of the former. The authorship of the second document and of the memorandum’s cover sheet as well as its desired recipient remain unknown.<sup>43</sup> The third copy appeared in an August 1942 correspondence between the American Embassy in Vichy and Washington, and served as an addendum to the various reports on Synarchy already conducted. But the contents of each copy slightly diverged from the others. As Kuisel indicates, “The Martin note [...] set the mimeograph machines at Vichy to work producing copies, summaries, critiques, and a few imaginative embellishments of the story.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is also possible that none of the sources uncovered at the archives were true iterations of the original note.

Despite their origins or time of dissemination, all three copies largely fit the profile of Henri Martin’s note as offered by Kuisel. They were exceptionally indicative of the hyperbolic accounts of the affair as they, for instance, identified Coutrot and Théalet as the victims of the Synarchists’ retribution, laid out the various schemes of the group’s subversion of France’s

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<sup>43</sup>The opening line of this report stated: “The attached document is a résumé of a Report made by the French [Secretary of State], Vichy, regarding the activities of a Secret Society known as ‘Mouvement Synarchique d’Empire’ which is said to aim at protecting international business interests in France, Germany and Anglo-Saxon countries.”

Author unknown, Lyon, France, October 27, 1941, “*Resumé No 6*,” p. 1, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>44</sup>Kuisel, “Legend,” 389.

government and economy through elaborate Fifth Column tactics, indicated that the *Worms Banque* served as the central hub for Synarchist activities, and generally spoke of the esoteric character of the group. In perhaps the most ominous line of the documents, which encapsulates these sentiments, the “*Resumé*” concludes with a particularly horrifying description of the group: “To summarize, a veritable mafia of former Polytechnicians and inspectors of finance, gathered in the heart of a secret society with international ramifications, has seized the quasi-totality of levers of command of the State in favor of the military defeat of May-June 1940.”<sup>45</sup> Though each of these reports featured trivial differences, it is evident that the three documents found in the embassy’s archival holdings came from a shared source. The Martin Note, the first official document advocating for the existence of the Synarchy, offered the initial picture of the group to the American intelligence community as a malevolent clandestine Statist organization. Though his analysis provided the first investigative evidence of the secret cabal, additional attempts to capitalize on the mythical scandal arose soon thereafter.

The oft-cited “Chavin Report” signified perhaps the most substantial document in the formation of the Synarchy affair. As it applies to this project, an understanding of the implications behind this document is of the utmost importance, as it provided the centerpiece of the Americans’ Synarchy investigations. The original author of the essay, interestingly enough, was not Henri Chavin, the Chief of Vichy’s Security Services, but rather, Roaul Husson, another resident conspiracy theorist (and general ne’er-do-well) in Vichy. After receiving a copy of the Martin Note and consulting a copy of the *M.S.E.* pact, Husson produced his own study, arguing that the secret society (led by the Martinists) had a definite role in the French defeat of 1940. Yet

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<sup>45</sup>Author Unknown, “*Resumé No. 6,*” (October 27, 1941), 5.



his research caught the attention of both the Vichy and German authorities. Husson was consequently arrested and his studies impounded. His manuscript then crossed the desk of Chavin, who had his own axe to grind with Darlan's technocrats. By the end of July, Chavin fully appropriated Husson's study, affixed his own name to it, and circulated it under the extensive title, "Confidential Report on the Secret Society of Polytechnicians called the Movement of the Synarchic Empire (*M.S.E.*) or the Revolutionary Synarchic Convention (*C.S.R.*)."<sup>46</sup>

At least five copies or transcripts of the Chavin Report are currently held at the National Archives and one in Lilian Mowrer's private papers at the Library of Congress.<sup>47</sup> Though some members of the intelligence community ultimately dismissed some of the rumors concocted by the report, Chavin's analysis demonstrated significant longevity. For instance, O.S.S. agents closely examined a copy of it at their Algiers outpost in July of 1944. Undeniably, the Chavin Report represented the principal document forging the most fantastic conceptions of the Synarchy, and the information it offered functioned as the archetype for the incredible narratives

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<sup>46</sup>Dard, *La Synarchy*, 139.

Kuisel, "Legend," 388-9.

Kuisel surmises that Chavin's dispute with the Darlan administration was derived from personal animosities toward Pierre Pucheu. Pucheu, during his tenure as Minister of the Interior, reorganized the Vichy Secret Service and discharged a number of its agents, much to Chavin's dismay. (Kuisel, "Legend," 389)

<sup>47</sup>The copies of the Chavin Report uncovered at the National Archives, both in State Department and C.O.I./O.S.S. records, can be found in the following archival locations: (1) RG 226, Entry 16, Box 672, (2) RG 226, Entry 16, Box 934, (3) RG 226, Entry 16, Box 1008, and (4) RG 84, Entry 2490, Box 2 (two pocket-sized copies). The sixth copy in Lilian Mowrer's private paper collection was used to compose her 1944 cautionary pamphlet, "Concerning France." The citation information for this copy is as follows: Articles and Pamphlets 'Concerning France,' Background and Notes, Private Papers of Lilian Mowrer, Box 138, Folder 4. Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington D.C. In many respects, Mowrer's work essentially acts as an Americanized rendering of the Chavin Report.

eventually received and cultivated by the Americans already weary about the proliferation of clandestine reactionary organizations.<sup>48</sup>

While the American State Department very likely uncovered copies of the Chavin Report by mid-1941, the first verifiable citation of it appeared in a correspondence between the American ambassador to Vichy, William Leahy, and Cordell Hull on December 1, 1941. In beginning his memo, the former reported to the latter that:

I have the honor to refer to the Embassy's Strictly Confidential despatches [...] with reference to the rôle played in the current French political situation by the so-called Banque Worms group and its affiliated organization, 'Synarchie,' and to enclose what is purported to be the confidential report of the French *Sûreté* [Security Services] concerning the membership, aims and objectives of this powerful group.<sup>49</sup>

As the historical record shows, Chavin's report was anything but "confidential." Beyond Kuisel indicating that he "[circulated] it in Vichy" and the fact that copies of it emerged in future secondary sources (Saunier's monograph, for instance, features a picture of its cover page), the sheer number of reports that fell into American hands (including Lilian Mowrer's) indicates that its secrets were far from safeguarded.<sup>50</sup> Still, for the Americans considering its contents

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<sup>48</sup>In its conclusion, the report blatantly offered validity for the prevalence of Fifth Column activities leading to France's military defeat. Within a new context, Chavin affixed the Synarchy affair to the collapse of the Third Republic: "There is enough evidence for a deeper meaning behind the 'study of the war' of 1939-1940, which at last appears in the light; a camouflaged revolution, hidden behind a military disaster obtained by battle, rigged and organized, the concentration of the national economy between the hands of a mafia of powerful international financiers." (Chavin, "Confidential Report...", p. 18)

<sup>49</sup>Admiral William Leahy, American Ambassador to Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, "Banque Worms and Affiliated Organization, 'Synarchie,'" December 1, 1941, Records of the Foreign Services Posts of the Department of State, American Embassy, Vichy, France, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, Folder 7, 350:56-18-6, p. 1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>50</sup>Kuisel, "Legend," 389.  
Saunier, *Synarchy*, 260.

throughout the war, the Chavin Report wholeheartedly presented the Synarchy as an organization diametrically opposed to their global agendas.<sup>51</sup>

Moving beyond the “official” Vichy reports conducted on Synarchy, press releases from prominent Parisian collaborationists served as yet another source of the varied Synarchy narratives for the Americans. Yet these renditions of the myth only served as simple regurgitations of the Martin Note, the Chavin Report, or one of their many retellings that followed. Though Kuisel lists other press outlets critical to the technocrats during this period, such as Marcel Déat’s *L’Oeuvre*, no other sources presented themselves during this project’s research phase.<sup>52</sup> As it pertained to the intelligence community’s holdings, the most prominent example of this was the August 21, 1941 edition of *L’Appel*, the periodical owned and operated by one of the technocrats’ most virulent detractors, Pierre Constantini.<sup>53</sup> Kuisel indicates that this edition was when “the fascist press campaign reached its climax.”<sup>54</sup> Arguably the volume’s most intriguing feature came from a short excerpt entitled “*J’Accuse*” (“I Accuse”), located at the beginning of the edition. In it, Constantini’s op-ed offered an impassioned public, yet personal, plea to Marshal Pétain to take “implacable” action against the secret *M.S.E.*<sup>55</sup> The one-page tirade attested that the group’s supposed “Cheka” activities, “where the smallest indiscretion is

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<sup>51</sup>If recalled from Nerin Gun’s contribution in the literature review above, the historian attested that Henri de Moulin de Labarthète initially transmitted the Chavin Report to the Americans. Once again, however, no information came to light during the project’s research phase which can support nor deny his claim.

<sup>52</sup>Kuisel, “Legend,” 391.

<sup>53</sup>As opposed to Kuisel and Dard, Limoré claims that Constantini originally promoted the myth. While perhaps true from a mass media standpoint, as is now known, he did not singlehandedly fabricate the *M.S.E.* conspiracy theory. (Limoré, “*La Synarchy*,” 71)

<sup>54</sup>Kuisel, “Legend,” 390.

<sup>55</sup>Constantini, “*J’accuse*,” 1.

punished by death,” constituted the principal threat against the stability of the regime.<sup>56</sup> Though the radical claims from the paper met with mixed responses from the Americans, it still evinced a discernable impact.

Once again, the American Embassy at Vichy was the first point of contact for these propagandist documents. Yet as opposed to the Martin Note and the Chavin Report, whose initial transmitters to the diplomats remain unknown, the intelligence reports clearly indicate how the American officials chanced upon *L'Appel's* excerpts. Woodruff Wallner, Third Secretary to the American Embassy, in a memorandum to Harrison Freeman Matthews, revealed that he personally received the copy of *L'Appel* from his French associate, Max Brusset. He described his late-September 1941 discourse and his year-long relationship with the French official as follows: “I have had a number of conversations about ‘Synarchie’ with Max Brusset, whom I first met as [Georges] Mandel’s Chief de Cabinet in Bordeaux and whom I have seen on and off on various occasions during the last year.”<sup>57</sup> Brusset, a clear opponent of the Vichyites, then made available to the secretary the inflammatory periodical. Wallner continues: “Brusset lent me a copy of the Paris newspaper, L’APPEL, which I attach. You will see that the issue is devoted almost entirely to ‘Synarchie.’”<sup>58</sup> A full chronicling of Wallner’s impassioned responses to the paper’s claims appears in the following chapter. His credulous intelligence reports, in tandem

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<sup>56</sup>Pierre Constantini, Paris, France, August 21, 1941, “*J’Accuse*,” in *L’Appel*, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>57</sup>Woodruff Wallner, Third Secretary of American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary of American Embassy, Vichy, France, September 23, 1941; “*Synarchie*,” Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

with other American assessments from the time, pointed to the prospect of Synarchy posing an authoritarian threat to the United States' diplomatic objectives abroad.

Another media source the intelligence community drew from in late 1941 appears to have eluded all previous Synarchy scholars. Specifically, an excerpt from the November 1941 edition of the American periodical, *Fortune Magazine*, entitled "Report From France," appeared in a December 18, 1941 Treasury Department investigation of the "*Worms* clique." Compared to the caustic assaults found in *L'Appel*, for instance, the unnamed *Fortune* author approached the Synarchy affair as a contrived scandal. In pointing to the motives of a rival right-wing league (*Action Française*) in disseminating the myth, the article's unnamed author presented a novel theory:

The *Action Française*, jealous of [the *Banque Worms* Group's] prerogatives, joined those critics with its own argument and denounced the worms [*sic.*] company for maintaining secretly a sort of occult government. [...] The arrest of all those on the list [named in Coutrot's copy of the *Pacte Synarchiste*] was predicted. But no one was arrested. [...] It was said that the police who found the 'Synarchie' document were *Action Française* men and glad of an opportunity to compromise the worms [*sic.*] company.<sup>59</sup>

Though not without flippant assumptions, this piece undoubtedly approached the Synarchy rumors from a more skeptical position, and was, in the main, correct in its claims of a manufactured conspiracy. While the police officials involved in the investigation (most notably Chavin) were indeed critics and opponents of the ministerial team, no evidence exists connecting them specifically to the *Action Française*. Still, noting the faction-driven elements of the regime, the unknown author seemed keen at the time to decipher the affair as little more than a fanciful condemnation of the bankers crafted by political rivals and not as a radical conspiratorial

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<sup>59</sup> Author unknown, November 1941, transcribed excerpt from "Report from France," *Fortune Magazine*; Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Entry 67A1804, Box 5; 450: 80-34-3, pp. 1-2. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

revelation. Regardless, outside of this report's inclusion in one Treasury Department file, its impact on the Americans' overall impressions of the lurid affair appears nominal.

The intelligence community's use of informants, though perhaps axiomatic, appeared as their final chief source of information.<sup>60</sup> Word-of-mouth communication, after all, has always been the cornerstone of human intelligence gathering. This is especially true when assessing the intelligence collecting practices from diplomatic sources. Kahn, for example, notes that "diplomatic reports were based on personal observation, newspapers (or translations made by embassy staffs), talks with officials and private citizens of the host countries, and exchanges with other diplomats."<sup>61</sup> More often than not, at least within the briefs examined for this project, the American agents placed a primacy on maintaining their sources' anonymity. Others, while still preserving the privacy of their informants, also opted to provide additional background information in order to bolster their credibility. In a September 2, 1941 State Department correspondence, for instance, Secretary Matthews noted that "we have received confirmation [of the Synarchist movement's existence] from two separate sources, one of whom is a close personal advisor of the Marshal and a friend of his for many years [...]"<sup>62</sup> Yet most agents failed to divulge more information about their informants than was necessary. The above case where

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<sup>60</sup>William Leahy's memoir offers a fascinating example of how American officials obtained such information during his description of intelligence gathering practices in Vichy: "Vichy was full of spies. We knew our activities were under close observation by the Gestapo. All of the diplomatic missions there were trying to get information. Much of this work was concentrated in the hands of our various attachés. There was a popular bar in downtown Vichy that came to be known as 'the international spy house.' I never went there, but our attachés reported it was quite a place for picking up stray bits of information."

Leahy, *I Was There*, 71.

<sup>61</sup>Kahn, "United States Views of Germany," 479.

<sup>62</sup>Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary of American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Washington D.C., September 2, 1941, "Rôle Played in French Government Policies by the Banque Worms," Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350:56-18-6, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

Third Secretary Wallner cited Max Brusset as his source of the *L'Appel* newspaper appears as somewhat of an anomaly. Regardless of the individuals consulted for their impressions of the story, however, they generally appeared haunted by the Synarchy legend's terrifying potentialities.

The amalgamation of stirring media sources, coupled with credulous or apprehensive informants, built Synarchy's groundwork within American intelligence circles. Yet much like the French Fifth Column stories that preceded it in 1940, the Americans had prior knowledge of some of the elements later forged together to craft the legend of the Synarchy. In piecing together what the Americans knew before mid-1941, with what was featured in the stories from Martin's note and Chavin's report from that summer (among others), it appears obvious why the myth's resonance increased exponentially for those officials seeking out a dangerous esoteric confederation of reactionary industrialists.

### The Anatomy of Synarchy

The instruments of illusion needed to craft the Synarchy legend merely provided the groundwork for an understanding of the mythical movement for those in the American intelligence community. Undoubtedly, the tales of the *M.S.E.* emerged from a baroque combine of widely-disseminated rumors, based on kernels of truth, hearsay, and conjecture, most of which emerged in the incendiary propaganda pieces noted above. The mysterious movement's strictly authoritarian and secretive nature sculpted the image for the Americans of an organization diametrically opposed to their liberal objectives, both in France and abroad. But the Synarchy did not completely emerge from a propagandist vacuum. Its numerous components were all tied to other events, groups, or figures from recent French history that all provided convincing evidence

supporting the existence of the conspiracy. In some instances, the State Department officers were privy to these components prior to mid-1941; in others, the Parisian polemics introduced them to Synarchy's complex anatomy.

The vicious *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire* (The Secret Committee for Revolutionary Action (*C.S.A.R.*)), or, as they were popularly dubbed, *La Cagoule* (The "Hoods" or "Cows") or *Cagouards* ("The Hooded Ones"), provided a suitable foundation to the lore of Synarchy.<sup>63</sup> This secretive reactionary terror organization threatened the Third Republic during the late interwar period until French law enforcement agencies thwarted an attempted *coup* by them in 1937. An undaunted Marx Dormoy, France's Minister of the Interior, said of the extinguished *Cagoule* threat on January 11, 1938 that "the criminals did not have much foresight when they imagined that they could overthrow the republican regime by an act of force."<sup>64</sup> Dormoy was later assassinated by the *Cagouards* in 1941.<sup>65</sup>

During their peak years of activity during the mid-1930s, the *C.S.A.R.* committed numerous acts of murder and sabotage, had stockpiled numerous Italian, British, Spanish, and German weapons in caches around France, and had actively prepared for a ferocious grassroots

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<sup>63</sup>Historian Valarie Deacon notes that despite their popular nickname, the *C.S.A.R.* "neither wore hoods, nor did they actually use the name *Cagoule* to describe themselves. This commonly used label was first used by the *Action Française* [a rival protofascist faction] to describe the *C.S.A.R.* and to suggest that it was a rather ridiculous organization, disguising its incompetence with puerile games of dress-up."

Valarie Deacon, "The Art of Secrecy and Subversion: The *Cagoule* and French Politics in the 1930s" (Master's Thesis, University of Victoria, 2005), 32.

<sup>64</sup>Author Unknown, Translation of "Declaration of Marx Dormoy," January 11, 1938, Records of the Department of State Microfilm Collection, M1442, Roll 5, Slides 233-5. National Archives II Location, College Park, MD.

<sup>65</sup>Paxton, *Vichy France*, 251.



uprising.<sup>66</sup> This planned overthrow of the Republic offered the Synarchy myth's disseminators an exceedingly convenient Fifth Columnist link to the affair.

Unlike the more cryptic aspects associated with the *M.S.E.*, the American diplomats in Paris were keenly aware of the *Cagoulard* conspiracy prior to the Second World War. In his December 30, 1937 report entitled "The 'Cagoularde': Alleged fascist plot against the State,' for instance, Edwin Wilson (Counselor of the Paris Embassy) outlined the shocking findings of the French *Sûreté* (Secret Service) from the previous month:

The present series of discoveries, now known as the plot of the Comité Secret d'Action Révolutionnaire or the 'Cagoularde,' was first given prominence in the press of November 18 [1937] with the announcement by the police of the findings of a blind arsenal containing, among other things, 400 hand grenades, 16 sub-machine guns, and 100,000 cartridges, said to be of British, German, and Italian manufacture. [...] The search made at the headquarters [...] has established the existence of a secret paramilitary organization, modeled entirely on the army. It consists of a general staff, a first, second, third, and fourth intelligence service and a sanitary train. The formation of the effectiveness in divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, etc. shows beyond doubt that this organization was intended for a civil war.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>The Deloncle brothers, Eugène and Henri, founded the *C.S.A.R.* between June and November of 1934. As Deacon attests, the movement immediately found support from a number of disenchanted reactionaries seeking stronger leadership within a viable movement. This became an ever-more pressing matter after the failed right-wing Paris street riots of February of that year. Both Deacon and Gayle Brunelle and Annette Finley-Croswhite estimate that, at its zenith, the group claimed around 3,000 devoted acolytes. As to the group's regulation of its adherents, historian G. Warner writes that "discipline was rigid and disloyalty was punishable by death after a court martial. There are, moreover, cases on record of Cagoularde who were executed in this way."

Deacon, "The Art of Secrecy and Subversion," 18.

Gayle Brunelle and Annette Finley-Croswhite, *Murder in the Mâetre: Leatitia Toureaux and the Cagoule in 1930s France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 105.

G. Warner, "France," in *Fascism in Europe* (London: Methuen Publishing, 1968), 318.

<sup>67</sup>Edwin Wilson, Counselor of the American Embassy, Paris, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State of the United States of America, "The 'Cagoularde': Alleged Fascist Plot against the State," December 30, 1937, Records of the Department of State Microfilm Collection, M1442, Roll 5, Slides 162-172, pp. 2,4. National Archives II Location, College Park, MD.

For the next few months, the *Cagoulard* conspiracy occupied many in the American State Department, as they produced numerous exposés and dossiers on the topic.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, in conjunction with the Fifth Column hysteria in the United States after the war began, Donovan's and Mowrer's and Edmund Taylor's written assaults on clandestine cabals also targeted the *Cagoule* for implementing similar reactionary initiatives for the benefit of the Nazis.<sup>69</sup> So, although a central element of the affair, the Synarchy did not introduce the Americans to the tales of the *C.S.A.R.*; it merely revitalized them.

The violent and arcane nature of the group made the interwar tales of the *Cagoule* ripe for its later connections to the Synarchy scandal within American intelligence circles. Thus, numerous references to the reactionary organization appeared throughout the intelligence canon. For instance, the Chavin Report asserted that the *M.S.E.* financed the *Cagoule's* seditious

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<sup>68</sup>Just a handful of the other *Cagoulard*-related reports from the U.S. Embassy in Paris dated between November 1937-January 1938 can be found in the following archival locations:

William Bullitt, American Ambassador to France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, November 20, 1937, Paris, France, Records of the Department of State Microfilm Collection, M1442, Roll 5, Slide 32. National Archives II Location, College Park, MD.

Author Unknown, Department of State, Division of European Affairs, Paris, France, "Summary of Dispatch No. 1426, from Embassy, at Paris, dated 30, December 1937, 'Subject: The 'Cagoulards': Alleged Fascist Plot Against the State,'" January 14, 1938, Records of the Department of State Microfilm Collection, M1442, Roll 5, Slides 158-161. National Archives II Location, College Park, MD.

Edwin Wilson, Counselor of the American Embassy, Paris, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, "The *C.S.A.R.*: Alleged Fascist Plot Against the State," January 17, 1938, Records of the Department of State Microfilm Collection, M1442, Roll 5, Slides 225-232. National Archives II Location, College Park, MD.

Additionally, the following news report on the *Cagoulards*, written by Edgar Mowrer, is at the following Library of Congress location:

Edgar Mowrer, "France Stirred by New Defense for Cagoulards," Chicago Daily News, December 10, 1937, Private Papers of Edgar Mowrer, OV 2, Portfolio 2. Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington D.C.

<sup>69</sup>In demonstrating how pervasive the tales of the *Cagoule* became in the United States, Donovan and Mowrer offered rumors of its financing and origins in their "Fifth Column Lessons for America" pamphlet. In an attempt to affix the ultraconservative French faction to Germany's and Italy's theorized network of clandestine agents, the pamphlet forwarded that "There was considerable evidence that the Cagoulard Conspiracy in France (1937) was organized and paid for by Germany and Italy. The French Government had the evidence—and failed to produce it lest the international scandal became too noisome." (Donovan and Mowrer, "Fifth Column Lessons for America," 13)

activities and recruited its members to its own ranks after the failed uprising.<sup>70</sup> While the *Cagoule* subplot certainly, to some degree, sculpted the Americans' future understanding of Synarchy, it often resided on the myth's periphery. By contrast, concerns over the so-called "*Banque Worms* Group's" affiliations with the cabal resided at the epicenter of the conspiracy.

During the war, the men associated with the *Banque Worms* appeared among those most closely tied to the Synarchy legend. These young and ambitious men rose to positions of prominence under Admiral Darlan as the Vice Premier as Marshal Pétain required knowledgeable administrators to oversee many of Vichy's state programs and regulate the nation's finances.<sup>71</sup> Undoubtedly, many figures in this group were self-seekers and opportunists who used their ministerial positions to garner favoritism with the German occupation authorities or to realize their own national revitalization programs.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, some (though certainly not all) of them possessed connections to the firm itself.<sup>73</sup> Others subscribed to apolitical or semi-

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<sup>70</sup>Chavin Report, 18.

<sup>71</sup>Technocracy in Vichy, although more fully adopted by early 1941, did not completely take root under the influence of Admiral Darlan. Pétain initially decided to appoint a handful of them during the short-lived Laval administration of late 1940. Kuisel refers to this as the "first generation of technocrats:" "Yves Bouthillier, Jacques Barnaud, Jean Bichelonne, and René Belin. The first three were either Polytechnicians or inspectors of finance, and only Bouthillier, who was minister of finance both before and after the armistice, had held high office under the Third Republic." To this list, Jackson adds Jean Berthelot (Minister of Communications) and Pierre Caziot (Minister of Agriculture). As for a rationale of why the Marshal and Laval invited these men to join the administration, Kuisel indicates that sheer pragmatism drove the decision: they understood economics and finance in ways that neither Laval nor Pétain did.

Kuisel, "Legend," 367-8.

Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 148.

<sup>72</sup>The story of the Vichyites' financial associations with Germany was surely not limited to the *Worms* affiliates. "In the first weeks after the occupation," Jackson, for instance, notes, "industrialists [throughout France] displayed almost indecent haste in making contact with the Germans." (Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 293)

<sup>73</sup>A Coordinator of Information report from march of 1942 provides a terse, yet suitable description of the *Worms Banque's* functions and industrial operations prior to the war. In one of the government's first comprehensive reports on the institution, it noted: "The firm of *Worms et Cie.*, has its principal offices [in] Paris. Its announced activities are as 'bankers, shipowners [*sic*], coal merchants, shipbuilders.' They also extend to aviation, petroleum and public utilities. [...] Before the armistice it had some 20 ships at its command. [...] The firm was established in 1848."

political interwar technocratic organizations aimed at revitalizing France through rationalist means.<sup>74</sup> Still others had personal contacts to pre-war fascist leagues. But to consider them a unified clique before and during the war also fails to regard their diverse personal backgrounds.<sup>75</sup> Thus, despite sharing some commonalities, the group, in the strictest sense, never truly constituted an organized faction at any time. Still, in their attempts to understand the links to Synarchy, the Americans often resorted to labeling them in reductive terms such as the “*Worms*

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Coordinator of Information, Economics Division, location unknown, March 3, 1942, “*Worms et Cie. (Revised)*,” pp. 2-3, Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Entry 67A1804, Box 5; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>74</sup>Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 148.

<sup>75</sup>Upon close scrutiny, the simple assertion that there existed a coalition which could reasonably be titled the “*Worms clique*,” or the “*Worms group*” before the war largely falls flat. Three distinct categories ultimately defined the group. The first featured individuals from the highest ranks or inner circles of the *Worms* firm. Jacques Barnaud and Gabriel Leroy-Ladurie (who did not hold a post under Vichy, but rather, was a political consultant to some of the members) firmly fit into this class. Both worked as top *Worms* directors. The second category consisted of those peripherally associated with the firm. Pucheu, Lehideux, and Bichelonne all represented members of this faction. Pucheu served as the director of *Japy* steel company (a post he received via his connections to Leroy-Ladurie) and manager of a *Worms* tool subsidiary. Lehideux’s connections to *Worms* were both fiscal and industrial, as he was heir to his father’s bank, *Lehideux et Cie.*, and enjoyed close associations with other top French financial companies, including the *Banque de Paris et de Pay Bas* (Bank of Paris and the Netherlands) and the *Credit Lyonnaise*. Through marriage, Lehideux was also director of the Renault automobile manufacturer. Bichelonne, a respected mining engineer, was closely linked with the Dutch Coal Company a trading partner of the *Banque Worms*. The third and final category, which perhaps most discredits the myth of a tightly knit cabal, is that which features those with no ostensible links to either the *Worms Banque* or, for that matter, any other French industry. These men trained in the ideological schools, rather than the technological ones. Paul Marion (Vichy’s propaganda minister), Rene Belin, and Jacques Benoist-Méchin were all figures of this stripe. Marion, perhaps the only true “fascist” of the clique, was an ex-Communist who later joined France’s P.P.F. Belin served as a prominent syndicalist during the late years of the Third Republic who abhorred the power of high industrialists. Finally, Benoist-Méchin, although labeled as an “authority of the *Banque Worms*” by the Chavin Report, actually demonstrated little interest in the world of industry or finance. He, instead, had an extensive background in journalism. Benoist-Méchin’s true value to the Vichy government stemmed from his time working for the French-German Committee, a pro-collaborationist organization of the 1930s. As Jackson notes, “the passion of his life was the search for Franco-German reconciliation.” Hence his ministerial role as Coordinator of Franco-German relations.

Kuisel, “Legend,” 370.

Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 148, 158.

Coordinator of Information, Economics Division, location unknown, March 3, 1942, “*Worms et Cie. (Revised)*,” Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Entry 67A1804, Box 5, pp. 10-11; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

Farmer, *Vichy Political Dilemma*, 266.

Paxton, *Vichy France*, 213.

Clique” or the “*Worms* Group.” Though experiencing some resistance by some in the American intelligence community, this convoluted title remained germane throughout the war.<sup>76</sup>

The Americans’ interest in the group originated from its dealings with powerful German financial counterparts. Indeed, their concerns over the group’s collaborationism predated those regarding Synarchy. In a report from Harrison Freeman Matthews to Cordell Hull just days before the Synarchy scandal officially broke in the American Embassy, the First Secretary succinctly outlined why the American officials should concern themselves with the activities of the group now firmly imbedded within the Vichy ministry. “For them,” Matthews wrote, “collaboration means profits and protection and they do not intend to lose either [...]”<sup>77</sup> Thus, beyond the group later constituting a clandestine reactionary threat in the form of the *M.S.E.*, it first represented a firm crux of collaborationist activity in Vichy, perhaps the single greatest hazard to continued Franco-American relations as outlined by FDR. Reports such as the Martin Note further identified the bank’s business locales as the centers of Synarchist activities. It

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<sup>76</sup>Even some American intelligence officials during the war discouraged the use of the simplistic titles given to the men considered in the *Banque Worms* accounts. For instance, in one of the later documents from the Synarchy canon, simply entitled R&A Report 1015 (March, 30, 1944), the unnamed O.S.S. agent urged his readers to avoid broad-sweeping titles to describe the clique, as these terms only promoted diluted short hands: “It is perhaps necessary to guard [against] a false impression which might arise from the use of convenient collective expressions for the individuals concerned, such phrases as ‘the Worms clique’, ‘the Banque Worms Group’, ‘the men of Worms’, and similar labels, should not be taken to mean that all of the individuals concerned were bound together by explicit relationships or acted in concert as the result of specific central policy decisions. [...] The ‘Worms Group’, then, should serve simply as one convenient center of collaborationist activity which may be observed in order to gain a typical picture of action by individuals, some central and some peripheral to the bank itself.” Author Unknown, Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, Washington D.C., March 30, 1944, “Activities of *Banque H. Worms et Cie.* and its Associates” (National Archives Microfiche Publication, M1221, Report 1015), pp. 2-3, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 59; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>77</sup>Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary of American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., August 2, 1941, “Rôle Played by the Banque Worms in Present French Policies,” Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, p. 5, 350: 56-18-6; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

specifically argued that “the seat of the movement [...] is said to be a restaurant connected with the Worms Bank [where] the initiated belonging to the Government and to the Administration come for their orders.”<sup>78</sup> But unlike *La Cagoule* and the *Banque Worms* Group, which the American officials knew much of prior to the Synarchy affair, information regarding other elements of the *M.S.E.*’s anatomy were introduced to the American intelligence community as the scandal itself broke in mid-1941.

The most palpable topic, especially as it intersected with American foreign policy objectives, concerns the history of the group calling itself the “Synarchy,” which principally reflected later anxieties pertinent to authoritarian technocracy. A brief account of the name’s origins therefore requires illumination. The moniker did not emerge spontaneously in 1941. Rather, its etymology was derived from a largely marginalized Judeo-Christian French esoteric society known as the Martinists, whose roots date to the late eighteenth century.<sup>79</sup> Though surviving, and in some instances, thriving from the period of the French Revolution to the post-World War I period, the Martinists, and their later reincarnation, the neo-Martinists, did not affect broader domestic French affairs in any significant way. Still, the writings of the utopian theorist, St. Yves d’Alveydre (1842-1909), who led the neo-Martinists from the 1880s until his death, constructed Synarchy’s modern technocratic political philosophy, just one in a line of many throughout France during the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>“*Resumé No. 6,*” 1.

<sup>79</sup>For an in-depth analysis of the various Martinist sects, please consult David Harvey’s *Beyond Enlightenment*.

<sup>80</sup>Regardless of what St. Yves contributed to the theory of technical political leadership, technocracy enjoyed a long and rich intellectual and political traditional in France well before the Vichy era. Two of its most well-known progenitors were Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Saint-Simon, one of the original so-called “utopian socialists” and a direct influence on the later writings of Marx, believed that after the failure of the French Revolution, the future of French political leadership needed to come from the industrial

D'Alveydre's emphasis on the proliferation of technocrats in his millenarian movement stemmed directly from a then-popular European belief that the continent began a precipitous decline toward decadence and, subsequently, destruction. The scholar's proffered panacea envisioned an applied fusion of Judeo-Christian principles and the physical sciences to revitalize the West through a cogent union of the physical/metaphysical binary. These proposed "occult sciences," Harvey states, represented a "synthesis of past and present to meet the needs of the future."<sup>81</sup> This ambitious program's *telos*, modestly put, intended to bring unity ("synarchy") back to a troubled European civilization ("anarchy"). The spiritual guide believed that his so-called "initiates," or those trained in the scientifically-spiritualistic rituals, could best lead this new global community. Despite its ostensibly authoritarian nature, however, d'Alveydre's neo-Martinists largely advocated for a proliferation of their program through persuasive means, not coercive ones. Though remaining minimally relevant in French culture until after the First World War, the sect eventually experienced a final and debilitating schism in 1921.<sup>82</sup> How then, did a

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classes. Some of Saint-Simon's followers, simply called "Saint-Simonians," found a certain degree of political success under the leadership of Napoleon III (1808-1873) and his Second Empire (1852-1870). Comte, a protégé and personal secretary to Saint-Simon for seven years, forwarded his own vision for technocracy in his explication of his sociopolitical framework known as "Positivism." Rule by the technical and industrial elites resided at the heart of his elaborate plan for what he envisioned as the new social order, a society completely governed by the laws of scientific principles (along with an exceptionally complex amalgam of Judeo-Christian underpinnings). Thus, regardless of how well-versed any of the future Vichy ministers were in the writings of Saint-Simon, Comte, or even the marginalized d'Alveydre, there certainly existed a robust historical precedent for technocracy in France well before the Second World War.

Saint-Simon, Henri de, "Industry (2)", in *The Political Thought of Saint-Simon*, edited by Ghita Inonescu, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 120-1.

Stuart L. Campbell, *The Second Empire Revisited: A Study in French Historiography* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978), 158.

William George, "Auguste Comte: Sociology and the New Politics." *American Journal of Sociology* 33.3 (Nov. 1927): 373-4, 377.

<sup>81</sup>Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 8.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 212.

seemingly irrelevant league of non-violent utopians attract the attention that it did by the spring of 1941?<sup>83</sup>

The popularity affixed to Synarchy by the Parisian propagandists who crafted the most lurid accounts of it stemmed mostly from the movement's clandestine practices. The Martinists did, in fact, foster esoteric rituals akin to the Free Masons and other secret leagues of the day. Some of the Martinists' actual practices, such as their "Chain Connection" recruitment ritual, garnered special attention from those seeking to demonize the sect.<sup>84</sup> And, of course, the movement promoted a distinct brand of French technical leadership. The group's trademark

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<sup>83</sup>Some historians of the Synarchy affair disagree as to the true history of the group calling itself the Synarchy Empire Movement. Although Harvey insists that two fringe and separate Martinist factions formed after 1921, he does indicate that neither one of them were reincarnated under the specific moniker of the *M.S.E.* Richard Kuisel and Jean Saunier independently constructed one side of the historiographical dispute. Both advocated for the existence of an actual political movement known calling itself the Synarchy. Though according to each, any possible sect responsible for the composition of the pact synarchiste was a nominal one at best. Saunier, although never mentioning an organization by name, argues that "far from being at the root of the economic and political currents that appeared after the First World War, this group, on the contrary, was towed behind them [...] Its political importance was more or less nil [...]" Kuisel, by contrast, offers more explicit evidence, arguing that the *M.S.E.* represented an actual splinter Martinist sect originating in 1921, led by the interwar French politician, Victor Blanchard. He states that "it was Blanchard's schematic Martinist order that spawned the mysterious [*M.S.E.*], a society founded in 1922 to win the world's elite to synarchical principles, and it was the *M.S.E.* that, in turn, produced the key document in the legend of the Vichy Synarchy—the *M.S.E.* pact." Yet he also goes on to write that "though the *M.S.E.* existed, its conspiracy was only a paper plot." As opposed to Kuisel, who indicated that Blanchard certainly founded the marginal movement that composed the pact synarchiste, Dard, by contrast, notes that he merely constructed an "orthodox" interwar variant of St. Yves's organization. At no point does he argue, however, that Blanchard was also the creator of a group calling itself the *M.S.E.* nor that his organization had any hand in composing the pact. Saunier, *Synarchy*, 263. Kuisel, "Legend," 379-80, 383. Dard, *La Synarchy*, 68.

<sup>84</sup>A description of this ceremony from the Chavin Report emphasized the secretive nature of the group: "The Martinist affiliation has a [secretive] existence. It is made man-by-man, according to the particular rules of new initiates who meet with their initiator face-to-face. Each new initiate takes on two numbers: his is the first, the second is that of his initiator. This mode of recruitment is called the Chain Connection and is specifically martinist. This results in a member not knowing who else he is related to, except his initiator and a few of his subjects that the initiator permits. [...] This relationship, specifically martinist, gives credit to the probability that a bond exists between the *M.S.E.* and the sect given to St. Yves d'Aveydre, the divine Grand Master [...]" Chavin Report, 3-4.



element of secrecy, in conjunction with its emphasis placed on technocracy certainly piqued the intelligence agents' interests when the affair arose. This later led many American officials to the misplaced belief that the group constituted an underground statist Fifth Column of technicians with marks on seizing power in the beleaguered French government. Regardless, before the war, the Americans demonstrated no knowledge of the Martinist order, St. Yves d'Alveydre, or the occultist history of the pre-war Synarchists. The same can also be said of Jean Coutrot, the enigmatic figure inexorably tied to the affair.

As Richard Kuisel attests, Jean Coutrot's defenestration, whether suicide or not, along with his possession of the *M.S.E.* pact, provided the two triggers that ignited the Synarchy legend.<sup>85</sup> Adding to the possibility that the cabal represented a malicious technocratic movement, the Parisian propagandists utilized Coutrot's personal background, highlighting his actual technocratic agendas in France prior to the war, to denote him as a chief member of the mythical movement. A graduate of the esteemed *Ecole Polytechnique* before the First World War, the sheer number of modernizing organizations that Coutrot directed or participated in during the pre-World War II period was astonishing. A veritable alphabet soup of organizations with such

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<sup>85</sup>The historiographical consensus surrounding Coutrot's death is still a point of significant debate. Suicide, even in the collaborationist press, was posited as a possibility. Paul Riche's text, however, attested that retaliating Synarchists forced Coutrot to take his own life by ordering him to jump from his apartment window. The author of *L'Appel's* article wrote: "One had pushed Coutrot to commit suicide. Coutrot, before the violent unyielding of some men, was ordered to commit suicide." (Riche, "A Mysterious Association," 2) More contemporary theories assert that Coutrot's death, if it was indeed a suicide, was emotionally inspired. Dard, for instance, cites "personal motives," for his decision (Dard, *La Synarchy*, 95). Kuisel, likewise, indicates that "the evidence points to suicide." (Kuisel, "Legend," 377) As for the death of Frank Théalet, Dard goes on to cite a 1948 police interview of Théalet's mother in which she "had given specifics of her son's death." She noted that his demise (which occurred on April 24th, 1941, not May 27th), "was caused by <a poisoning [presumably an accidental overdose] of sleeping pills>" in an attempt to cure his prolonged insomnia. (Dard, *La Synarchy*, 222, endnote 45) Finally, as to why Coutrot possessed a copy of the *pacte synarchiste*, Kuisel argues that "a copy had come into his possession more or less by accident, and he had kept it as a curiosity." "Furthermore," Kuisel continues, "no evidence exists that he was ever interested in any form of Freemasonry, and he was surely not the conspiratorial type. His method of reform was through study groups not subversion." (Kuisel, "Legend," 383)

revitalization programs cropped up within just a few years' time.<sup>86</sup> Many of Vichy's future ministers, such as Jacques Barnaud and Jean Bichelonne, frequented these interwar institutions, thus adding further legitimacy to the connections between Coutrot and the relevant technocrats. Clarke, for instance, notes that Bichelonne "frequented *X-Crise* in the 1930s" while Barnaud was "a veteran of the *X-Crise*," and *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*.<sup>87</sup> Regardless of his impact on significant areas of French life and culture, the American diplomats did not cite Coutrot as a prominent figure during the interwar period. Their first true exposure to his political exploits came after his mysterious death. In staying true to a distinct pattern between them, the Martin Note, the Chavin Report, and *L'Appel* all depicted Coutrot or his organizations as having some bearing on the proliferation of the *M.S.E.*<sup>88</sup> Still, what these documents claimed, and what many American

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<sup>86</sup>Just three of the more prominent technocratic organizations that Coutrot was associated with were as follows: 1. *X-Crise* (X-crisis) (1931) ("X" is a colloquial term denoting "Polytechnician"). The *X-Crise* operated as a technocratic think tank self-charged with offering solutions for the Third Republic's persistent economic ineffectiveness. Coutrot was a founding member of this group. 2. The *Comité central de l'organisation professionnelle* (Central Committee for Professional Organization) (C.C.O.P.) (1936). This organization assisted industrial managers with strengthening their networks with one another in order to combat the rising power of labor unions. Although not a founder, Coutrot acted as an active member of the C.C.O.P. 3. *Centre d'études de problèmes humains* (Center for the Study of Human Problems) (C.E.P.H.) (1936). The C.E.P.H.'s ambitions were multifaceted, yet its overarching goal was to scientifically construct France's "new man" via the use of eugenics, social hygiene, and a practice known as "psycho-biology" (the supposed foundation for the 'sciences of man,' predicated on the faith of artificially creating both cognitive/emotional and physical enhancements). Though this group's mission and scope was somewhat akin to that of the Nazis from the same period in that it attempted to scientifically purify the French population through neo-Lamarckian means, Clarke insists that "Coutrot and other members repeatedly condemned the 'negative' form of eugenics espoused in Nazi Germany, with its emphasis on the elimination of those deemed unhealthy elements." Again, though not a founder of the C.E.P.H., Coutrot served on its Executive Committee. By 1941, the C.E.P.H. was transformed into the "French Center for the Study of Human Problems," under the auspices of Dr. Alexis Carrel. Aside from Carrel's organization being a state-funded entity, it also placed a primacy on medical research with the explicit goal of ameliorating the "physical quality of the population." Marjorie Beale, *The Modernist Enterprise: French Elites and the Threat of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 149. Clarke, *France in the Age*, 61, 113-115, 143-4.

<sup>87</sup>Clarke, *France in the Age*, 129, 176.

<sup>88</sup>The Chavin Report argued that "Mr. Coutrot was certainly a member, and an outspoken member of the *M.S.E.*," while the Martin Note connected the conveyance of the *pacte synarchiste* to Pétain to Coutrot's association with the cabal in declaring that "the delivery of these documents to the Marshal was made possible through the indiscretions committed by one of the organizers of the movement named M. Jean Coutrot." Martin Note, 1.

intelligence reports later reiterated, was that Coutrot had some role in a movement directly opposed to the Allies' liberal agendas. But the Americans of 1941 and beyond lacked a specific lexis when they attempted to grasp what types of individuals Coutrot and other accused Synarchists courted for the nefarious activities. Therefore, much like the French, the intelligence officials implemented prestigious educational designations for their collations.

The titles "Polytechnicians" (such as that typically associated with Coutrot) and "Inspectors of Finance" also became intimately affixed to the Banque Worms Group/Synarchist narrative. As the term "technocracy" had not yet entered into common parlance in the United States (though, interestingly enough, it did appear a handful of times throughout the intelligence documents consulted for this project), such labels often offered suitable substitutes. Graduates from the most prestigious of France's acclaimed *grandes écoles*, the *Ecole Polytechnique* (The Polytechnical Institute) garnered the most attention from those seeking Synarchist scapegoats.<sup>89</sup> Many of those implicated in the Synarchy scandal, such as Jean Bichelonne, Pierre Pucheu, and Francois Lehideux, held degrees from this institution. The nation's Finance Inspectors (graduates from the *Ecole libre des Sciences politiques*) also gained the ire and suspicion of many due to their supposed stranglehold on France's fiscal assets. For this reason, they, too, became targets of

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Chavin Report, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Institutions within this elite network of universities often specialize in one particular area of scholarship and includes (among many others) the *Ecole des Mines* (School of Mining), *École supérieure de guerre* (The Great War College), and the most prestigious of them all, the *Ecole Polytechnique* (The Polytechnical Institute). Napoleon Bonaparte initially established or revitalized these premier institutions during his reign. The *Ecole Polytechnique* (founded in 1794) offered a unique curriculum as it trained scientifically-minded engineers for future civil service. Robert Gilpin, *France in the Age of the Scientific State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 83.

the propagandist press, and subsequently, the pointed American intelligence agents' Synarchist studies.<sup>90</sup>

Once again, the American intelligence community exhibited little interest in the two titles, nor any knowledge of their French cultural implications, prior to the war. Still, "Polytechnicians" and "Finance Inspectors" quickly transformed into polemical devices for Synarchist hunters once the affair fully surfaced. The Martin Note, for one, placed this aristocratic subculture squarely at the crux of the cabal's membership. To this, it surmised that "The movement is composed almost exclusively of polytechnicians and inspectors of finance having given ample proof of their devotion and having sworn blind obedience to orders which must determine their public acts."<sup>91</sup> The two monikers soon became indistinguishable from the Synarchy lore, as the Americans consistently referenced them in their investigations. Tied to all three of their principal apprehensions affixed to the affair, the Americans identified Vichy's ministerial Polytechnicians and Finance Inspectors as significant dangers to their foreign relations' objectives abroad.

In scrutinizing the foremost elements that did much to craft the *M.S.E.* myth, it is clear why top American officials regarded the rumored cabal as a genuine threat to their various foreign policy and national security goals throughout the war. Certainly, the legend of Synarchy, France's leading Fifth Column syndicate, featuring its complex cacophony of clandestine cults,

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<sup>90</sup>While also requiring training in France's *grandes écoles*, and while also holding positions within France's top civil services, the nation's Finance Inspectors, as the name suggests, principally devoted themselves to monitoring the nation's public monetary centers. As it related to the Synarchy, however, the architects of the myth often presented them as mere profit-seekers, whose thirst for power rivaled the Polytechnicians'. Gilpin, *France in the Age*, 110.

<sup>91</sup>Author Unknown, "Resumé 6," 1-2.

cut throated *Cagoulaards*, the curious Coutrot, and conspiratorial civil chiefs, fit squarely within FDR's anti-collaborationist, anti-statist agendas.

### Conclusion

Largely lost within the World War II subversive narratives from 1940 are those from the newly-crafted Vichy French state. As the Third Republic quickly crumbled, American apprehensions regarding the nation's defeatist politicians immediately gravitated toward the very real prospect of Franco-German collaborationism, the continued proliferation of European Statism, and the existence of esoteric leagues of reactionary malcontents. As some in the U.S. government observed privately, and as those such as Bill Donovan pontificated publicly, Vichy was, in large part, the product of a palace guard insurgency. To the top State Department officials looking in from the outside into the French political situation, traitorous activities secured the armistice, the fall of the Republic, and ultimately, the birth of the regime itself. When the stories of the pernicious technocratic cabal later surfaced in mid-1941, it only validated these suspicions.

In understanding the Synarchy affair as it resided within American intelligence circles during the remainder of the war, then, it is evident that it fell well within the purview of widespread French Fifth Column narratives, which began in the beleaguered town of Bordeaux. The sheer ubiquity of these French accounts, in both political and popular narratives, strongly indicates that many American officials heeded such tales. Thus, by 1941, to Cordell Hull's diplomats, Synarchism represented a formidable shadow force threatening American foreign relations' objectives in both Europe and France's North African colonies. And for the agents in Donovan's new Coordinator of Information, which FDR formerly established on July 11, 1941, they not only devoted themselves to, among many other tasks, tracking the movements and

activities of Nazi and Communist spies, but also to chasing all variants of pernicious Fifth Columnists, Synarchists included.

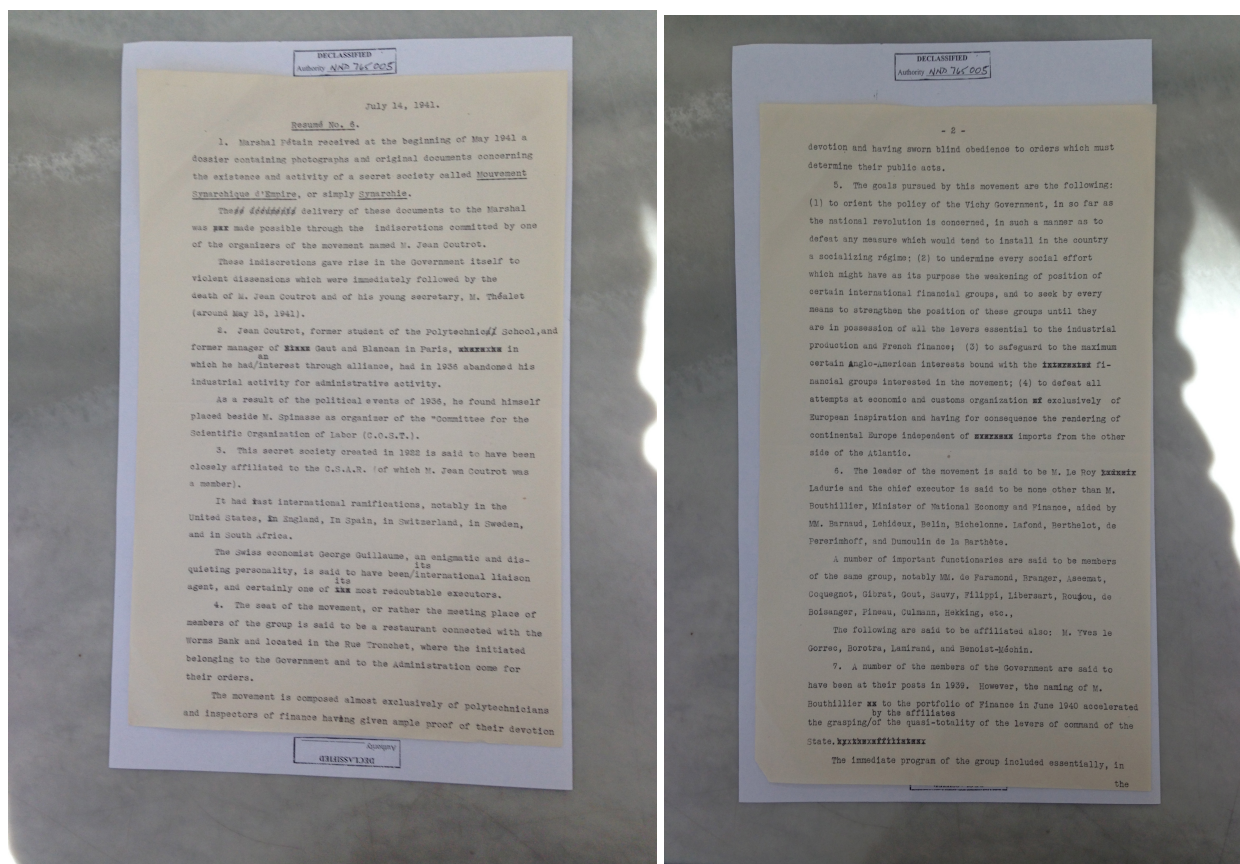
Chapter Two Appendix



Figure One: The “Men of Bordeaux:” The new Vichy government poses for a photograph in July of 1940. Individuals of note include Philippe Pétain (French Premier) (second to right of photographer) and General Maxime Weygand (Minister of National Defense) (fifth to right of photographer). Defeatists, such as Paul Baudoin (Minister of Foreign Affairs) (first to left of photographer) and Pierre Caziot (far left), were depicted as Fifth Columnists by many Western press outlets. Both figures became intimately tied to the Synarchist conspiracy one year later.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Vichy Cabinet (July 1940), Photographs of the New York Times, Paris Bureau, Principal Personalities, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, RG 306-NT, Box 313, Folder 1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.



Figures Two and Three: Pages One and Two of the Martin Note (translated): Largely responsible for the creation of the Synarchy myth, the American State Department's records contains at least three copies of this incendiary mid-1941 document. Some of the more common motifs associated with the Synarchy legend (e.g., Jean Coutrot, *La Cagoule* (the C.S.A.R), conspiring "Polytechnicians" and "Finance Inspectors," and connections to the *Worms Banque*) are all present in the above document.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Author unknown, Lyon, France, October 27, 1941, "Resumé No 6," Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, pp. 1-2, 350: 56-18-6; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.





### Chapter Three: Chasing Vichy's Phantasmagoria (August-December 1941)

phan•tas•ma•go•ri•a /fan'tazmə'gôrēə/

noun

2a: a constantly shifting, complex succession of things seen or imagined (as in a dream or fever state).

b: a scene that constantly changes or fluctuates.

--Webster's Dictionary

*"During the war, [...] 'Synarchie' worked for a French military defeat. Only thus, it was felt, could the grip which the Leftist elements had on French politics be broken up once and for all, and a régime of authority set up on the basis of Franco-German collaboration. (In other words, there were two Fifth Columns in France during the war- one run by the Nazis and another, 'Synarchie,' working independently of each other but for the same ends.)"*

--Woodruff Wallner (Third Secretary of the American Embassy in Vichy) to Harrison Freeman Matthews (First Secretary of the American Embassy in Vichy) (September 26, 1941).

December 18, 1941, Washington D.C.: Over the previous six months, William Donovan's Coordinator of Information regularly reported to President Roosevelt on a wide variety of topics.<sup>1</sup> After the events at Pearl Harbor, however, stacks of intelligence briefs quickly ballooned to bundles. In order to ensure that the updates arrived safely to the Oval Office, Donovan often took it upon himself to personally hand deliver them.<sup>2</sup> Among the reports received at the White House on this day from C.O.I.'s Research and Analysis (R&A) division,

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<sup>1</sup>The official National Archives Microfilm Publication described the "three responsibilities" of Donovan's Coordinator of Information as follows: "to collect and analyze all information and data relating to national security, to correlate such information and make it available to the President and other government departments and officials, and to carry out, when requested by the President, such supplementary activities as might facilitate the securing of information important for national security." As opposed to the O.S.S., which functioned within the purview of the new Joint Chiefs of Staff (J.C.S.), C.O.I. operated as an "explicitly civilian agency" and reported directly to the President's office.

Author Unknown, National Archives Microfilm Publications, s.v. "Research and Analysis Branch," p. 1, date unknown; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>2</sup>Bradley Smith, for one, noted that "Donovan had organized C.O.I. so that it was an agency that reported to the Oval Office rather than to a cabinet-level department of government. C.O.I. materials were not to be sent to the White House by mail or routing slips for, according to the procedural rules established by the colonel, every item had to be carried to the president's office, most frequently by Donovan himself." Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 75.

one chronicled the activities of an increasingly threatening cabal consolidating its power within the Vichy regime. The summary, simply entitled “The Banque Worms,” informed Roosevelt on similar concerns circulating around the French foreign service post in Europe. In doing so, it also provided the first explicit reference of Synarchy for the President:

The Banque Worms is an association of French financiers and industrialists who have organized themselves into a political pressure group for the maintenance and extension of their economic power in the [Nazis’] New Order. The group operates not as a party, but by insinuating its members into the most important political positions in Vichy France. [...]

The Banque Worms neither constitutes nor controls a political party. It calls itself, in its political aspect, the Mouvement Synarchique, but remains an amorphous small clique. It exerts control not through wide political agitation, but through pressure of persons in high places.<sup>3</sup>

Far from a fleeting or irrelevant study on French reactionaries, this report, most importantly, demonstrated that the tales of Synarchy garnered enough credibility within the foreign intelligence community to warrant the President’s attention. The analysis highlighted typical tropes associated with the movement: the intricate machinations of Franco-German collaborationism, the faction's inherently authoritarian nature, and its supposed clandestine activities operating behind the scenes in Vichy. Hence, Donovan’s, and ultimately Roosevelt’s interest in the topic.

Though only a minor episode within the broader totality of the Second World War, the mythical tales of the Synarchy still burned intensely at times. From the perspective of the American intelligence community, the secondary literature as well as the primary documentation indicates that it attracted the most attention between the summer and early winter of 1941. To the

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<sup>3</sup>William J. Donovan, Director of the Coordinator of Information, to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States, December 18, 1941, Washington D.C., Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Records of the Director’s Office, Microfilm Series M1642, Roll 22, Slides 783 and 785; National Archives Location II, College Park, MD.

officials observing the tales emanating from the Parisian propaganda, the stories offered them numerous founts of concern, ranging from the conceivable (and in some cases or to some degree, true) to the uncanny. What began as a local tall tale circulating around the American embassy in Vichy in August 1941 quickly climbed the bureaucratic ladder, eventually reaching the President himself by mid-December. Although having no discernable bearing on Franco-American accords during the summer, the virulent rumors ultimately culminated in the so-called “Weygand affair” in late November, threatening the very continuation of the diplomatic relationship. More importantly, the intelligence reports from 1941 fashioned the template for future American understandings of the *M.S.E.*, firmly cementing its legacy for them as a collaborationist, statist, and surreptitious organization. At a time of great trepidation for the Allied war effort in the summer of 1941, Synarchy only fueled the American State Department’s anxieties that the fascist international had yet another cadre housed in Vichy.

### Ear to the Ground, Finger on the Pulse

On December 13, 1940, a palace-level Vichy *coup* ousted Pierre Laval from power, the conspirators placing him under house arrest in Paris.<sup>4</sup> Pétain briefly filled the political vacuum by a untenable triumvirate of men. Due to growing German pressure for an acceptable replacement to Laval, however, the Marshal eventually selected François Darlan as Vichy’s new Vice-Premier in February of 1941. In his new role, the admiral wholeheartedly continued the

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<sup>4</sup>Led by men such as Darlan, Bouthillier, and Pierre Flandin (Vichy’s short-lived Foreign Minister (December 1940-January 1941), and approved by Pétain himself, the sudden political reshuffling was perhaps unsurprising. Julian Jackson, for instance, attributes Laval’s upending to a handful of factors: his personal close contacts with the German authorities (of which he often kept Pétain in the dark), his “scruffiness,” which personally offended the Marshal, his associations with the ostracized Parisian fascists (such as Marcel Déat), and the fact that he represented the regime’s last remaining vestige of the Third Republic. Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 145-6.

official French collaborationist policy set forth by Laval and the armistice of 1940.<sup>5</sup> Yet for the later spectators of Synarchy, his new wave of technocratic ministers gained the most attention. Indeed, the increased presence of industrialists, bankers, and financiers in Darlan's cabinet made the Synarchy rumors of mid-1941 appear more plausible. With collaborationism remaining a principal concern for the American State Department officials, now directed by Admiral William Leahy, their first studies of Synarchy from August of 1941 greatly stoked this prospect.

Though Donovan's fledgling Coordinator of Information commenced studies of Synarchy by the end of 1941, the American Embassy in Vichy, in fact, produced the first reports on the topic.<sup>6</sup> Even as the Martin Note, and later, the Chavin Report and the Parisian propaganda circulated around the various social circles throughout France during the early summer, it still took weeks for the Americans to officially report on the topic. Far from a comprehensive analysis of the cabal, however, Harrison Freeman Matthews (now First Secretary of the American Embassy) provided the initial indication that a dangerous, Nazi-sympathetic group operated behind the political scenes in Vichy.

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<sup>5</sup>As Paxton indicates, "he came to power as the figure most closely identified with Laval's policies [...]. Darlan was determined to make the most of France's assets in order to make a place for her as a neutral member of the New Europe."  
Paxton, *Vichy France*, 111.

<sup>6</sup>Part of the C.O.I.'s lackluster contributions in assessing this topic prior to December of 1941 was that Donovan had yet to fully construct his fledgling organization. As Mauch indicates, "the months between the founding of the Coordinator of Information in July 1941 and Hitler's declaration of war in December 1941 were completely preoccupied with building the Coordinator of Information." (Mauch, 26) Yet this is not to say that the new intelligence collection agency completely disregarded the topic of Vichy collaborationism, particularly as it applied to French industrial and business concerns. An unsigned C.O.I. memorandum, dated August 4, highlighted those deemed "100% 'collaborationists'" as presented by an informant dubbed simply "a Frenchman:" "They are fervent admirers of the 'New Order'; industrialists determined to make money irrespective of the source." Regardless of smaller, vague memoranda produced by the C.O.I. such as this, however, detailed investigations into the stories of Synarchy or its ministerial members only appeared after the United States entered the war.  
Author Unknown, Report on French Political Sentiments in the Occupied Zone, Fribourg, Switzerland, August 4, 1941, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 17, p. 1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

Though the Vichyite ministerial members concerned the American State officials for some time due to numerous collaborationist rumors surrounding them, Matthews reported to Cordell Hull that they also played a vague role in an internal political infiltration of the Pétain government. The genesis of the legend of the Synarchy within American intelligence circles began in his report, dated August 2, which described the influence the clique exercised in Darlan's administration. In his opening comments, the First Secretary of the Embassy indicated that "[while] it is difficult to ascertain the true facts, the importance of the rôle played in French Government policies by the Banque Worms seems sufficiently great to warrant bringing it to the Department's attention."<sup>7</sup> The term "Synarchy" never appeared throughout the report, however. Whether intentional or not, Matthews shirked it. Instead, the First Secretary largely devoted the remainder of his assessment to the biographies of the chief members of the group (*e.g.*, Jacques Barnaud, Yves Bouthillier, Pierre Pucheu, and Henri Lafond (Secretary General of Electric Power)) and their specific ties to the firm as well as to the Vichy government. Still, references to the technocratic "Polytechnicians" (implemented with quotation marks) and ambiguous descriptions of a nameless though secret subversive cabal also featured prominently.

Notwithstanding the absence of the Synarchy title, Matthews' first intelligence report on the topic intimately tied the "*Worms* group" members to collaborationism and some degree of Fifth Columnist activities at Vichy. His critique of Jacques Barnaud's aspirations in the government, for example, spoke to both of these apprehensions, and provided a vibrant foreboding of how France's technocrats might assist the German war effort.<sup>8</sup> But beyond the

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<sup>7</sup>Harrison Freeman Matthews, to Cordell Hull, August 2, 1941, "Rôle Played by the Banque Worms in Present French Policies," p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>To his important reference of Barnaud and a related technocratic euphemism, Matthews wrote: "Just when he conceived the political possibilities of using his banking and Polytechnician connections to work for Franco-German

reports of Vichy collaborationism, which pervaded the American Embassy even before this, the First Secretary also began to bridge the collaborationist policies of the officials to the surrealist stories soon associated with the Synarchy affair. In speaking to the clandestine nature of “the group,” he attested, it “seems also to have formed some secret organization operating in Paris in a building owned by the Banque Worms [...]”<sup>9</sup> Yet regardless of the pressing nature of the accusations made, he concluded his report with a slight sense of skepticism arguing that “we do not wish to exaggerate the rôle played by the Banque Worms in high policies of to-day.”<sup>10</sup> At the time, Matthews exhibited apt pragmatism. Collaborationism, to him, appeared glaringly apparent, as it did with other officials. Stories of conspiracies, on the other hand, were perhaps best put aside until additional information made itself available. Still, in also arguing that the group’s “influence” in the government “is certainly not negligible,” Matthews encouraged further studies into the rumors.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Matthews’s account touched off a flurry of *ad hoc* State Department investigations which proliferated for months to come.<sup>12</sup>

Chapter One’s introduction established that Douglas MacArthur, the Third Secretary of the American Embassy, first explicitly mentioned the Synarchy affair in his August 19 report.<sup>13</sup>

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‘collaboration,’ we do not know, but it is generally believed that it coincided with the period of the Armistice negotiations and some whisper even considerably before.” (Ibid., 3)

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>12</sup>In the final two pages of the assessment, Matthews cited the sources of the information provided to him. To this, he indicated that the materials received by his unnamed informant were “prepared by a not over intelligent police official from voluminous documents with the result that the objects of the organization were given in the memorandum in a somewhat confused fashion.” This appraisal, of course, applied to either Martin or Chavin. Both were Vichy police officials, and both composed their respective documents from myriad nuggets of hearsay and conjecture. (Matthews to Hull, “Rôle Played by the Banque Worms in Present French Policies,” August 2, 1941, 6)

<sup>13</sup>Embassy officials composed additional accounts purporting the various associations between *Worms* members to one another and their roles in the Vichy government, but outside of MacArthur’s, they offered no other specific

Matthews followed suit a month later on September 2, himself calling it a “new movement under the name Synarchy,” the first time, in fact, Cordell Hull learned of the cabal.<sup>14</sup> Clarifying the ambiguity offered by Matthews’s own August 2 report and providing a specific vocabulary for the forthcoming tales, the mythical components of the movement began truly taking shape by September. The documents from this period honed the ethos of the Synarchy affair for the American agents eager to unravel the true aspirations of the organization. As was also consistent with the accounts of the “Banque Worms group,” collaborationism provided the groundwork of the Synarchy affair.<sup>15</sup>

Surprisingly enough, the topic of Vichy collaborationism played a relatively small role in the Synarchy intelligence reports from September and October. The American officials largely opted to chase their new leads concerning Fifth Columnism and technocracy in lieu of reiterating

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references to the Synarchy nor to the group’s clandestine nature. For instance, a two page French-language report entitled “Worms Men in the Government” (August 22) illustrated an intricate web of these figures’ associations, some of which were concrete while others appeared as opaque vagaries. To the former, it listed François Lehieux as a “friend of Leroy Ladurie, huge shareholder of the Bank Worms, Renault and others.” The connections of Pierre Caziot, by contrast, spoke to the latter: “Caziot- On very good terms with the Banque Worms.”

Author unknown, location unknown, August 22, 1941, “*Les Hommes de Worms au Gouvernement*,” Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>14</sup>Matthews to Hull, “Rôle Played in French Government Policies by the Banque Worms,” September 2, 1941, 1.

<sup>15</sup>In a second MacArthur report, dated October 15, the Third Secretary outlined a theorized (though conservative) view of the psychology behind Vichy collaborationism. The conclusion from his source, simply named “Gauquié,” is that the ministers believed that in order for France to survive as a semi-independent nation in Hitler’s New Europe, collaborationism appeared as the state’s only viable option: “He said that he feared that the German successes, coupled with their subtle propaganda to the effect that the war would go on a long time and that France could only live if she collaborated fully and was permitted to share in the advantages of an organized Europe was having a considerable effect in high Vichy Government circles. [...] When faced with the appalling possibility of several years more of war it would adopt the argument ‘we must collaborate to live,’ and he was very much afraid that it would make the concessions which the Germans wished.”

Douglas MacArthur, Third Secretary of the Vichy Embassy, Vichy, France, October 15, 1941, Records of the Foreign Services Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, Folder 9, 350:56-18-6, p 4. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.



topics which already received significant treatment. Still, the subject appeared at times. These rumors perhaps featured most prominently in a September 23 report from Woodruff Wallner (Third Secretary of the American Embassy in Vichy) to Harrison Freeman Matthews, in his report entitled simply, “*Synarchie*.”<sup>16</sup> Wallner’s credulous report highlighted two modes of Synarchist collaborationism: economic and political. To the former, Wallner cited the group’s control over the state’s so-called economic organizational committees.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, the secretary argued that Synarchy used its “tightened” “grip on French industry” to “[work] almost entirely for the Germans.”<sup>18</sup> To the latter, Wallner and Brusset emphasized the ministers’ actual

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<sup>16</sup>Wallner derived his intelligence from the reports from *L’Appel* and the accompanying comments of Max Brusset, a virulent opponent of the Vichy ministers. Brusset also provided the American official with his copy of the periodical in order for him to conduct his research. Ultimately, the Synarchy melodrama presented in Pierre Constantini’s and Paul Riche’s fascist newspaper swayed Wallner into believing the unbelievable. Though Brusset discounted “the anti-Semitic, anti-British slant that inevitably appear in all Nazi publications,” and that they noted *L’Appel* as a “cheap sheet,” Wallner attested that “the facts in the articles on ‘Synarchie’” were “in the main exact.” As surprising as it may appear from a position of hindsight, Wallner accepted *L’Appel* as a reliable primary source!

Woodruff Wallner, Third Secretary of American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary of American Embassy, Vichy, France, September 23, 1941; “*Synarchie*,” Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, p.2; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>17</sup>In the regime’s earliest days, the Vichy government constructed (with some qualified successes) a new industrial system with the intent of crafting a ‘coordinated’ national economy. Paxton described the principal duties of the “Organizational Committees,” which were officially established by the one-time minister of industrial production, René Belin, on August 16, 1940, as follows: “Each Organization Committee was empowered to make a census of the capacity of all enterprises in that sector of the economy, assess stocks, close down some enterprises, allocate scarce resources [...] and propose price schedules to the government.” The Minister of Industrial Production oversaw the committees which featured 321 distinct branches of French industry. Prominent businessmen from the related field directed each committee. Furthermore, by February 1941, with the entry of prominent industrialist technocrats into the ministry of industrial production (*i.e.*, Pucheu then Lehideux), the group’s comprehensive control over all business and industrial activities began to seem plausible. The Chavin Report, for one, asserted that the Organizational Committees merely acted as pretenses for the *M.S.E.* which sought to direct France’s economy under their rule. To the supposed genius of the Synarchists’ creation of the committees, the propagandist wrote: “This is the elegance of this monumental organization of industry and commerce in that all economic activity of countries is to be controlled by a small number of bankers and industrialists and monopolized for their profit.”

Paxton, *Vichy France*, 216.

Chavin Report, 16.

<sup>18</sup>Wallner to Matthews, “*Synarchie*,” September 23, 1941, 6.

antipathy to France's liberal forces. In his version, however, Wallner argued that the Vichy Synarchists and their German business and industrial counterparts used the Reich's military to "unrelentingly [pursue]" Communists and other leftist forces.<sup>19</sup> Of course, this portion of the story is based on some degree of truth. An examination of Pierre Pucheu's tenure as Vichy's Interior Minister (July 1941-April 1942), for example, exemplified these destructive terrors, as he targeted numerous groups with his ruthless paramilitary forces.<sup>20</sup> Yet even as collaborationism appeared in the pages of the intelligence reports of the time, it largely remained a side note within the broader narrative. By contrast, the topic of Fifth Columnism appeared as central to the Americans' Synarchist accounts from this period.

As they received their initial reports on the suspicious cabal, American officials quickly came to associate the Synarchy affair with the French defeat of 1940 or as a generally clandestine force operating in Vichy. Some references were obscure or short. In his September 2, for instance, Matthews referred to the organization as a "semi-secret" one.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, both Matthews (on September 2 and October 15) and later, ambassador Leahy (on December 1), referred to the "Banque Worms group and its affiliated organization, 'Synarchie,'" as a "powerful" one.<sup>22</sup> But these passing references offered little to the Americans' Synarchy lore.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>As to the agencies he forged during the latter half of 1941 Jackson indicates that "Pucheu created three new police services in October: The Anti-Communist Police (S.P.A.C.), the Jewish Police (P.Q.J.), and the Secret Societies (i.e. Freemasons) Police (S.S.S.). These were staffed by professional anti-Semites or collaborationist activists who made up in zeal what they lacked in professionalism-another indication of the porousness of the frontier between Vichy and collaborationism." (Jackson, *France: The Dark Years*, 260)

<sup>21</sup>Matthews to Hull, "Rôle Played in French Government Policies by the Banque Worms," September 2, 1941, 2.

<sup>22</sup>Matthews to Hull, "Rôle Played by the Banque Worms in Present French Policies," August 2, 1941, 3.  
Leahy to Hull, "Banque Worms and Affiliated Organization, 'Synarchie'" (December 1, 1941), p. 1.  
Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary to the American Embassy at Vichy, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Washington D.C., "Subject: Banque Worms," Vichy, France, October 15, 1941; Records of the Foreign Service Posts

Wallner's fantastic accounts of the cabal, by contrast, painted a vibrant picture of Vichy Fifth Columnism, which placed the Synarchic conspiracy squarely within the Third Republic's 1940 collapse.

In the credulity of his reporting, Wallner fully supported Brusset's claims that Synarchy represented the principal French Fifth Column with designs on implementing its reactionary programs through the establishment of the Vichy regime. In explicitly citing Fifth Columnism, collaborationism, and the tales of the "Men of Bordeaux," Wallner's report largely reiterated the tall tales proffered by *L'Appel* and the periodical's associated scandalmongers:

During the war, said Brusset, 'Synarchie' worked for a French military defeat. Only thus, it was felt, could the grip which the Leftist elements had on French politics be broken up once and for all, and a régime of authority set up on the basis of Franco-German collaboration. (In other words, there were two Fifth Columns in France during the war—one run by the Nazis and another, 'Synarchie,' working independently of each other but for the same ends.) [...]

We saw all this happen in Bordeaux. Brusset attributes to 'Synarchie' the chief role in bringing it about. Our own experience in Vichy in July and August of 1940 affords at least an echo of confirmation to his brief exposé of 'Synarchie' at work in Vichy during those months—scrapping of the Constitution; dissolution of the Parliament; a 'French State,' with Pétain as sovereign, taking the place of the Third Republic; a régime of authority, police, anti-Semitism, Franco-German collaboration gradually taking form.<sup>23</sup>

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of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>23</sup>Wallner to Matthews, "Synarchie," September 26, 1941, 4-6.

In tandem with his claim of overt Fifth Columnist activities, Wallner, at an earlier point in his assessment, attested that Philippe Pétain and Pierre Laval both benefitted from the Synarchists' activities during the pre-war period. After the movement's founding, which Brusset argued was in 1934 and not 1922 (he most likely misconstrued the *M.S.E.* (or rather, the *C.S.R.*) with the *C.S.A.R.*, which, if recalled, the Deloncle brothers established in 1934), he chronicled how these two men fit into their grand political design: "It was at this time [1934], claims Brusset, that the movement took as its instruments two men who have served it well: Pétain and Laval; the first to be the figurehead of authority behind which the movement could run France; and the second, the technician of practical politics to pilot the movement through the tricky political waters of Paris." Brusset's claim here is particularly dubious, however, as some of the accused Synarchists had a direct hand in ousting Laval in December of 1940. *Ibid.*, 3.

Such a conception of the French Fifth Column, of course, partially deviated from prior theories of the resident fascist sympathizers, which asserted that these subversive elements solely aligned themselves with the German authorities. Instead, the unique modification of the myth from Wallner here envisioned Synarchists and Nazis organically establishing and installing their own respective clandestine syndicates in positions of power prior to the war. Still, like is often said of old habits, rumors of France's Fifth Columns seemed to die hard. Though Wallner's report offered a new iteration of an old hat theory of top-level political subversion, it still continued to support the popular belief that France did not lose to the Germans in 1940. Rather, some of France's own citizens defeated her through internal treachery. Regardless of Wallner's eccentric interpretation of the French political situation in 1940-1941, which other officials later dismissed, other reports supported the theory that Synarchy was, if nothing else, a reactionary political movement of technocrats.

Statism, when applied to Synarchy, meant technocracy for the Americans examining the Vichy phenomenon. Beginning with Matthews' August 2 report, the intelligence community consistently referenced the titles "Polytechnicians" and "Finance Inspectors" in their description of the supposed adherents of the movement.<sup>24</sup> In further adding to its Fifth Column mystique, Wallner added that "the movement received support from every large industrial concern or cartel [...] the whole capitalist structure of France was studded with its agents." And in speaking to the Statist component of the legend, Wallner interpreted their ideal general power structure as one where "the public should have no voice in the Government."<sup>25</sup> Though failing to use a synonym for technocracy, Wallner's explicit references to these technical designations makes it

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<sup>24</sup>Wallner to Matthews, "*Synarchie*," September 23, 1941, 2-3.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 3.

abundantly clear that Brusset believed Synarchy threatened an oligarchy of industrial elites. Yet of all the officials weary about the prospect of a revolution boiling underneath the surface at Vichy, Admiral Leahy's concerns proved most potent.

If recalled from the treatment of his memoirs above, Leahy claimed that he was impervious to the power of the rumor mills that swirled around Vichy. He specifically indicated that he "discounted" the various canards he encountered during his time as ambassador.<sup>26</sup> While perhaps true in retrospect, Leahy, during the war, became a keen observer and believer of Vichy's various gossips. The Synarchy affair was a prime example of this. As a November 10 report on France's communications ministry demonstrated, Leahy expressed a sharpened understanding of Synarchism and its overtly technocratic overtones. Accordingly, the admiral treated the topic with an appropriate amount of disquiet.

Before submitting a lengthy translated dossier originally composed by Jean Berthelot (Vichy's Minister of Communications) on the reorganization of French transportation and communication systems to Cordell Hull in Washington, Leahy's office took the liberty of adding its own commentary in the form of footnotes in a November 10 intelligence assessment.<sup>27</sup> Illuminating references to the "Banque Worms group" and "Synarchists" were sprinkled throughout them. Berthelot's description of building efficient human systems throughout France

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<sup>26</sup>Leahy, *I Was There*, 40.

<sup>27</sup>In his general description of Berthelot's report to Hull, Leahy prompted the Secretary of State with the information that "It will be remembered that Mr. Berthelot is a member of the so-called Worms Bank Group (please see Embassy's dispatch No. 479 of October 15, 1941) [which is cited just below] and his report, which is more than a mere factual listing of the material achievements of his Ministry, gives voice to a number of the political, social, and economic views of his Bank Worms associates. Respectfully yours, William D. Leahy" Admiral William Leahy, American Ambassador to Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, "The Situation of the French Communication Systems," November 10, 1941, American Embassy, Vichy, France, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, Folder 7, 350:56-18-6, p. 2. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

via the use of overtly technocratic means arguably represented the most prominent example of this.<sup>28</sup> To the minister's specific proposal to eliminate wasteful bureaucracy, Leahy's report contended that "If confirmation were required of Berthelot's adherence to the principles of the Worms-Synarchist theories, this and similar expressions which, it will have been noted, are reported in this report, are almost verbatim repetitions of the principles and plan of action of this group as reported in the Embassy's [despatch of October 15 from Matthews to Hull]"<sup>29</sup> Via Leahy's comments here, it is clear that the American State Department officials in Vichy understood the notion of Synarchism as what might today be called "technocracy." But for the Americans eagerly attempting to grasp the concept of Synarchism, and with no ostensible knowledge of earlier French political theories on the subject, the conspiracy's name served as a reasonable dysphemism for their sophomoric understanding of the ministers' actual sociopolitical ambitions.<sup>30</sup> Yet beyond the topic of an academic nature, such as those presented

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 5.

Berthelot's report, in this sense, offers a fascinating vision of a quasi-utopian program for France akin to Saint-Simon or Comte, both of whom sought to eliminate redundant and inefficient human systems and functions by reconstituting them into ones headed by only the most proficient technicians. Additional studies of this 20-page report alone could yield new scholarship on the actual political philosophies of Vichy's ministerial technocrats, even detached from the legend of the Synarchy.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Despite the intelligence officials' lack of knowledge related to the robust history of French technocracy, other American intellectuals took note of the parallels between Vichy's ministers' state revitalization programs and comparable nineteenth-century French political theories. For instance, in the October 1942 edition of *Foreign Affairs*, Louis Franck offered the following psychological (and arguably cultural) assessment of the clique's aspirations: "in the darkness, the business intelligentsia were trying to lay down the new rules for the government of tomorrow. In this projected government MM. Gabriel Leroy-Ladurie, Barnaud, Baudoin, Pucheu were to be the foremost leaders. None of these men wished for the defeat of France, nor did they work for it; but they could not help knowing that the political convulsions which would follow defeat would finally make a clean sweep of the past and give them the possibility of realizing their program. In a way they were 1940 followers of Saint-Simon." Franck, as opposed to many of the voices from within France, openly dismissed the prevailing Fifth Column theories associated with these men.

Louis Franck, "In Defeated France: The Forces of Collaboration" *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 21 (October, 1942): 50.

•Franck's academic knowledge of the French industrialists later garnered the attention of the O.S.S. Donovan's organization subsequently integrated some of his theories into their French human intelligence reports. For one such assessment, please see the following:

in Berthelot's report, actual political discord also pervaded the Vichy government, which threatened the very stability of the regime itself in late 1941. At the heart of the conspiracy lay the demonized technocratic clique.

Moving into October through December of 1941, the evolution of the Synarchy narrative began to shift in a very significant way. Namely, during this period, the Americans most widely accepted the Synarchy legend as an imminent threat to the political stability to France, and, in turn, the U.S. government's foreign relations with it. Beyond the technocrats' actual consolidation of power within the government and economy (regardless of how they achieved this consolidation), a much more threatening development began to appear. Throughout 1941's fourth quarter, the most aggressive official and, at times, accused Synarchist leader, saw a rise in real authority within the regime. The aspirational Pierre Pucheu, now Minister of the Interior, attempted to politically maneuver his way around Pétain and Darlan in order to ingratiate himself with the Germans. Therefore, if a sinister conspiracy truly boiled under the surface at Vichy, it was perhaps reasonable to believe that the final months of 1941 signaled its culmination.

When it came to the question of Admiral Darlan's political status during this transition period, the Americans were accustomed to dealing with the devil they knew rather than those they did not. Diplomatic officials generally viewed the Vice-Premier as a valuable lynchpin in maintaining their relations with Vichy. Pucheu and the other Vichy ministers, by contrast, remained shrouded in mystery. But by October, new apprehensions concerning the future political role of Darlan, the changing state of Vichy collaborationism, and the shifting relevance

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Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch: Psychological Warfare, Location unknown, September 25, 1943, "The Background of Certain French Financial Leaders," Prepared by Louis Franck (National Archives Microfiche Publication M1221, Report 1226), Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

of the ministerial technocrats, inspired new American evaluations. In his October 2 memo, Felix Cole (Consul General at Algiers) reported to Cordell Hull that a handful of the ministers proceeded to make moves toward upending Darlan's authority. And while merely one figure on this list, Pucheu epitomized the collective of virulent German sympathizers seeking to control the government's power base via Nazi support. Cole declared that "[our] contact said that the Germans during the past month have disregarded Darlan. [...] The contact declared that until the Marshal discovers a way to rid himself of the four German henchmen-[(Benoist-Méchin, Pucheu, Lehideux, and Marion)]—French policy fatally will continue on the wrong road."<sup>31</sup> The group's dangerous political ambitions were transparent here, despite a lack of specific reference to the Synarchy movement. Other reports provided more explicit evidence to support the prospect of a Pucheu political ascendancy as well as his ties to the Synarchy.

Matthews' October 15 assessment of "the so-called Banque Worms group and its affiliated organization Synarchie" offered little new information regarding the affair not already covered in the August and September reports. However, beyond providing an enclosed Martin Note variant, Matthews conceded that the only recent development worth mentioning was that with regard to "the growing political ascendancy of the ambitious and unscrupulous Pucheu." "Concurrently with his rise," Matthews continued, "opposition to his predominance has also naturally developed."<sup>32</sup> Much of the remainder of this report delved into the supposed palace *coup* led by the Interior Minister and his Vichyite cronies. Matthews first noted his conflict with the Vice-Premier. He then chronicled one way in which Pucheu attempted to cripple Pétain's

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<sup>31</sup>Felix Cole, Consul General at Algiers, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Algiers, Algeria, October 3, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 441.

<sup>32</sup>Matthews to Hull, "Banque Worms'," October 15, 1941, 1-2.



inner circle. To this, the secretary indicated that the interior minister, along with “his henchmen,” temporarily banished Dr. Bernard Ménétral, “the young physician who is in constant personal attendance on Marshal Pétain” from the regime.<sup>33</sup> Although Pétain reinstalled Ménétral a few weeks later with a higher rank, the State Department used this and similar claims as impetuses to intensify its surveillance of Pucheu’s attempted intrigues.

Just a few days later, another report pointed to similar troubling shifts in the regime’s power structure. An urgent letter sent from MacArthur to Matthews indicated that the heated Pucheu/Darlan strife neared its apex. The growing lacuna within the Vichy’s government pitted “the Pucheu crowd” against “the Darlan boys.”<sup>34</sup> The ultimate objective of the former, MacArthur noted, was simply “to do Darlan in.”<sup>35</sup> Though the stimulus for this particular episode of the feud pertained to a letter sent from Vichy to Berlin, which harshly criticized Germany’s execution of French resisters (Pétain appealed for more leniency while Pucheu believed the policy was justified), the state’s commitment to collaborationism resided at the nucleus of the broader debate. Darlan, who wavered on his collaborationist policies at times throughout late 1941, began to lose ground in his favoritism with Hitler’s High Command. Pucheu, by contrast, had “gained greatly with the Germans who believe that he may be their man for the future.”<sup>36</sup> As

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>34</sup>Douglas MacArthur, Third Secretary of the American Embassy, Vichy, to Harrison Freeman Matthew, First Secretary of the American Embassy, Vichy, France, October 27, 1941, Records of the Foreign Services Posts of the State Department, Record Group 84, UD 2490, Box 7, Folder 6, 350:56-18-6, p. 1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>35</sup>The following men were listed as those in Darlan’s corner: “[Admiral Charles] Platon [Minister of Colonies], [General Jean] Bergeret [Secretary of State for Aviation], [Henri] Moysset [Secretary of State], [Lucien] Romier [Minister of State], and Darlan;” the usual suspects comprised Pucheu’s ministerial comrades. (Ibid.)

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

the quintessential statist Vichy technocrat attempted to open broader collaborationist avenues with the Reich, Pucheu's status positioned him as an individual of great interest for the American State Department officials. Their belief that he was tied to the cryptic Synarchist movement only bolstered this prospect. For these reasons, the Interior Minister garnered the Americans' attention well beyond 1941.

From August to early November, 1941, at no time did the phantasmagoric tales of the *M.S.E.* (nor the wide spectrum of responses to it) directly influence American foreign relations' decisions vis-à-vis Roosevelt's tenacious Vichy policy, regardless of how threatening the accounts appeared at times. Officials such as Wallner, Matthews, Leahy, and Hull simply observed or reported on the phenomenon as it unfolded and attempted to keep close tabs on its affiliated members. Though Matthews most frequently played the State Department's resident naysayer, the American officials' general belief in Synarchy and its technocratic Fifth Column activities at least provided an outlet for such a diplomatic break to occur.<sup>37</sup> In this spirit, however, November 1941 provided the first real test of the Americans' resolve with regard to the conspiracy. By the end of the month, the Synarchy affair intersected with a crucial internal

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<sup>37</sup>The First Secretary's interpretation of Wallner's report was notably temperate as compared to Wallner's assessment of Brusset's findings. His denouncement of the Third Secretary's chosen sources provided a suitable basis for this claim. As for Max Brusset, Matthews asserted that "the Embassy's informant is not without certain personal grievances against the French Government and the picture that he has painted of Synarchie may therefore lack all the objectivity to be desired [...]." And as to the *L'Appel* articles, he noted "similarly, [the] excerpts from L'APPEL can hardly be considered samples of understatement, [as they] deliberately play up the sinister and melodramatic aspects of Synarchie and the men who guide it [...]." Ultimately, however, Matthews conceded that portions of Wallner's account were "founded partly on fact." Akin to Schrodinger's cat paradox, Matthews at times simultaneously accepted and rejected the canards of the covert cabal, and could therefore best be characterized as pragmatic, yet guarded.

Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary of American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Washington, D.C., September 23, 1941, "Banque Worms and Affiliated Organization 'Synarchie,'" Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6, p. 2; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

French resolution to cashier General Maxime Weygand in France's North African colonies.

Vichy's contentious personnel reorganization, in conjunction with the belief that the Synarchist cabal had a hand in its implementation, threatened the very continuation of Franco-American relations.

### The Weygand Affair

Only a handful of affairs did much to disrupt or unsettle the fragile Franco-American relationship prior to the German occupation of the whole of France in November 1942. Langer, for one, argued that the Paris Protocols in the spring of 1941 served as the most detrimental of these.<sup>38</sup> Yet the dismissal of General Weygand (1867-1965) on November 18, 1941 also had an immediate and deleterious bearing on the two nations' rapport.<sup>39</sup> But who was General Weygand to the Americans, and why did his dismissal cause such an adverse response? In order to answer these questions, a brief history of Franco-American relations in the North African colonies in

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<sup>38</sup>The Protocols, as outlined by Langer in both *Our Vichy Gamble* and his unpublished manuscript, was a critical juncture in Darlan's attempt to establish long-term Franco-German relations: "On May 28, [Darlan] signed three so-called *Paris Protocols*, by which, in return for vague promises of concessions in political and economic matters, France agreed to [facilitate] the staging and supply of German planes passing over Syria; to provide the Germans with an air base at Aleppo; and to permit the use of ports, roads, and railroads for transport of supplies across Syria. With respect to Africa, the French agreed to the use of the port of Bizerte to Gabés [Tunisia]; French trucks and guns were to be sold to the Germans; French ships were to be made available for carrying supplies across the Mediterranean, and French warships were to serve as convoys; finally, Dakar was to be made available to the Germans as a supply base for submarines, warships, and planes." Within days, however, members of Vichy's top brass categorically rejected the Protocols. General Weygand, for one, threatened to defend the African colonies with force if the Germans stepped foot on them. This placed significant pressure on Darlan who "reconsidered" and eventually annulled the protocols. (Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 156-7)

<sup>39</sup>To the crisis that sparked questions concerning the expansion of overt Franco-German collaborationism, historian Waldo Heinrichs wrote that "On November 21 the press reported the ousting of General Weygand as Vichy's supreme authority in Africa-at the express demand of Hitler, it was said. This opened the way to further Nazi penetration of Africa and left in tatters Washington's policy of encouraging French North African autonomy." Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 212.

early 1941, which culminated in the so-called “Murphy-Weygand agreement,” demands consideration.<sup>40</sup>

Weygand, in contrast to his more overtly collaborationist counterparts, consistently and fervently fought against many of the policies set forth by the Pétain government. His propensity to reject Nazi pressure began during the battle of France, where, in May 1940, he, along with some of the remaining Third Republicans, opted to fight to the end in lieu of signing the armistice.<sup>41</sup> Still, once the French sued for a ceasefire, he opted to stay on in the Vichy government, first as Minister of National Defense and then (by Laval’s appointment) as Delegate-General of the North African colonies in September 1940, a position which commanded comprehensive regional authority. Langer asserts that Laval relocated Weygand to the colonies explicitly in order to get him “out of the way [so] the road to collaboration [would be much] smoother.”<sup>42</sup> A pro-Allied rabble-rouser, Weygand committed himself to resisting the Nazis by using his undervalued post in the colonies to undercut German authority and zealous French collaboration. For instance, in a report to Hull, Leahy noted that Weygand had a “practice of shooting [North African] natives who [associated] with members of the German commission” and was “firmly determined [to] restrict the field of activities of the German ‘Consuls’ and all

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<sup>40</sup>For a full overview of the agreement presented directly by Weygand to Murphy, please consult the following archival record: Robert Murphy, Counselor of American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, “Subject: Weygand Memorandum of February 26, 1941, Regarding Economic Cooperation with French North Africa” (French), Lisbon, Portugal, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 40, File 9607, 190:3-12-2. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>41</sup>Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 17.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

other Germans in North Africa.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, for the American officials frantically attempting to stave off Franco-German collaborationism, Weygand emerged as a tremendously valuable diplomatic weapon and a dependable ally.

Once positioned in the colonies, however, a critical dearth of supplies for the region’s citizens threatened imminent economic collapse. Weygand made constant calls to Washington in order to aid the area in any way possible.<sup>44</sup> Roosevelt’s chosen representative to the region, Robert Murphy, arrived in mid-February 1941 to parley with the general in an attempt to remedy the situation. By March 10, they successfully completed their negotiations, resulting in the Murphy-Weygand Agreement, which Darlan himself signed.<sup>45</sup> The 12 American officials sent to oversee the trade deal in the colonies, as is now known, also doubled as spies, as they allied themselves with some of the North African commanders and kept a watchful eye on local German activities. The official *War Report of the O.S.S.* notes that G-2 (Army Intelligence),

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<sup>43</sup>Admiral William Leahy, Ambassador to Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Vichy, France, October 21, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 448.

<sup>44</sup>In a December 11, 1940 memorandum between Murphy and Hull, the former’s enclosure of an interview with a certain Paul Thiriet, a news correspondent in the colonies, noted Weygand’s desperation concerning his administration’s lack of supplies: “In the course of his conversations, Weygand appears to be much concerned by the difficult economic situation in which the North African colonies found themselves. [...]. A few tons of this and a few tons of that, he said, would make all the difference and would permit the Colonies to maintain themselves economically and to be almost self-sufficient.”

Robert Murphy, *Charge d’Affaires ad Interim*, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, “Conversation with Paul Thiriet Regarding his Trip to Algeria and Conversations with General Weygand,” December 11, 1940, Records of the Foreign Services Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 1, Folder 8, 350:56-18-6, p. 2. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>45</sup>Langer succinctly outlined the trade arrangement as follows: “The main points of the accord were that the United States would supply North Africa with needed American products, provided that shipments should not be allowed to accumulate in North Africa and that the consumption of all products so imported should be exclusively in North Africa. American officials were to control the handling of the shipments in North African ports and on the railways.”

Langer, *Our Vichy Policy*, 234.

O.N.I. (The Office of Naval Intelligence), and the State Department initially selected these men.<sup>46</sup> As early as July 1941, the agents, under the guise of overseeing the transportation and distribution of American goods in North Africa, began to use their posts to conduct espionage operations. Weygand willingly participated in these affairs. To this, Langer asserted that “With Weygand’s permission the American agents were able to have diplomatic-pouch service and to use a secret cipher in their communications with Washington.”<sup>47</sup> However, these obscurely titled “Vice Consuls” eventually aroused the suspicion of both the Nazi authorities and the hard-lined Vichyites. By late 1941, the general’s close association with the American officials led by Murphy, in tandem with his history of anti-collaborationism, painted an indelible target on his back.<sup>48</sup>

To some of those in the Axis camp concerned with French activities, the American presence in North Africa obviously represented more than simple transportation oversight. Thus, it did not take long for Weygand to stir the ire of many in both Vichy and Berlin. On November 18, this culminated in Pétain’s decision to dismiss him. As to the direct cause of his discharge,

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<sup>46</sup>Roosevelt, *War Report*, 93.

<sup>47</sup>Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 180.

<sup>48</sup>The *Foreign Relations* series thoroughly demonstrated Weygand’s approval and support of the Vice Consuls’ activities in the colonies. A June 10 memo from Murphy to Felix Cole, for instance, makes this abundantly clear: “I was told by General Weygand’s diplomatic officer this morning that there is no objection whatever to the presence of this personnel. [...] Investigation of the question of German infiltration in this area could well occupy the time of several officers.” In response to Cole’s message, Hull ordered the following the next day: “For Murphy. The [State] Department fully approves the disposition you have made of the Vice Consuls. In view of the statement made to you by General Weygand’s diplomatic officer, they should devote themselves, pending the entry into effect of the economic plan [Weygand-Murphy Agreement], to such matters as investigating the situation with respect to German infiltration. Reports of this and related subjects would be of great interest to the Department.”

Felix Cole, Consul General of Algiers, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Algiers, Algeria, June 10, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 314-5.

Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, to Felix Cole, Consul General of Algiers, Washington D.C., June 11, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 315.

the Americans unanimously viewed his close relationship with their agents as its principal catalyst. For instance, Murphy, in a memo to Felix Cole (American Council General of Algiers), declared that “from several reliable official sources I learn today that the ground on which Vichy relies for justification of its decision to cashier General Weygand [is] his position was hopelessly compromised as a result of his dealings with the United States.”<sup>49</sup> An earlier report from Leahy to Hull also supported this conclusion. In it, the ambassador indicated that the Germans’ “dislike for Weygand is due in part to their suspicion that he is ‘negotiating for military aid from the United States.’”<sup>50</sup> Yet while the Nazis at first appeared as the obvious triggermen forcing Pétain’s hand, additional conjecture on the subject also emerged. Due to his growing number of adversaries, Weygand’s exact political hangmen remained an important topic of debate within the American intelligence community.

The initial theories of who signed Weygand’s political death warrant naturally gravitated toward Hitler. Hours following his dismissal on November 18, Leahy’s office received a letter from Marshal Pétain’s Cabinet Chief, Du Moulin de la Barthète (which was handed to him from Benoist-Mechin in Paris), outlining a portentous message from Berlin if Vichy failed to cooperate with the Reich’s demands. “As a result of German pressure which has been exerted for several months and which this morning took an imperative form,” it reported, “the Marshal has taken the decision to suppress the Délégation Générale in Africa which involved the recall of General Weygand.” “If the Marshal had not made this decision,” it went on to threaten, “there is

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<sup>49</sup>Additionally, Cole referred to “the unfortunate publicity regarding Weygand in the British and American press and radio” as a second stated reason for the decision. Felix Cole, Consul General at Algiers, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Algiers, Algeria, November 19, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 466.

<sup>50</sup>Leahy to Hull, October 21, 1941, *FRUS*, Europe, 448.

every indication to believe that German troop penetration into Africa would have been inevitable and would undoubtedly have occurred very soon.”<sup>51</sup> On its surface, the ultimatum seemed to offer a fitting explanation for the decision: in order to preserve the sovereignty of the French colonies, Weygand had to leave. Still, some of the collaborationist Vichy ministers also appeared as the potential masterminds behind the Marshal’s decision. Only one day after Pétain informed Leahy of the German provocation, a new sinister hypothesis surrounding the Weygand firing appeared equally as credible.

Some Americans did not view the written German demand as a genuine artifact. If it indeed was a forgery, however, the natural concern for the diplomats revolved around the question of who produced it. In Robert Murphy’s November 19 memo, he proffered a theory concerning this very topic. At the heart of Murphy’s narrative resided the very men often accused of virulent Synarchist activities:

My conversations with [my informants] convince me that there was no German ultimatum demanding Weygand’s dismissal. That decision, I am told results from a combination of German pressure and the eagerness of the cabal consisting of Darlan, Benoist-Mechin, Pucheu, Lehideux, and Marion to eliminate Weygand. For that purpose [*sic.*] they relied on Marshal Pétain as a decoy who is always ready to sacrifice any man no matter how loyal to his country if it serves the Marshal’s immediate end. The group undoubtedly convinced the Marshal that dire consequences would follow if he retained Weygand.<sup>52</sup>

In his article, Richard Kuisel also indicated that Murphy’s correspondence here heightened the Americans’ suspicions that a technocratic faction wielded increasing levels of power within the regime. The group’s suspected role in Weygand’s dismissal, Kuisel wrote, shook “Washington’s

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<sup>51</sup>William Leahy, Ambassador to the American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Vichy, France, November 18, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959), 460.

<sup>52</sup>Murphy to Cole, November 19, 1941, *FRUS*, Europe, 466.



confidence in Vichy's will to resist" the German government.<sup>53</sup> It is fascinating to note that in his memo, however, Murphy failed to explicitly implement the term, "Synarchists." He, instead, referred to them more generally, as a "cabal."<sup>54</sup> The implications attached to such a label are immediately evident, however. Other American studies examining Weygand's rivals and his removal, both before and after November 18, also cited the ministers and sympathetic French industrialists for plots against the general.

Weeks before Weygand's firing, the American Embassy reported that the ministers made headway in the general's removal. A September 9 memo from Cole to Hull regarding German trade concerns indicated that the expanding divide between Weygand and numerous high-profile figures resulted in a growing list of antagonists. In refusing to accept Nazi manufacturing and mining equipment for use in Morocco, which the Germans presumably intended to use to further their war effort, Weygand pitted himself against "certain French industrialists as well as some members of the Government at Vichy" seeking further rapprochement.<sup>55</sup> An October 21 report from Leahy to Hull later told of more specific French plans to remove the general from his North African post:

The principal force behind these efforts [Weygand's personal representative] said was not the Germans [...] but a number of his rivals in the Vichy Government. First and foremost, he said was Admiral Darlan who with 'his unlimited personal ambitions' is intensely jealous of Weygand's authority and prestige and sees him as a dangerous rival.

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<sup>53</sup>Kuisel, "Legend," 395.

<sup>54</sup>Interestingly enough, the term "Synarchy" never appeared in any the diplomatic communiques from the *Foreign Relations* series, despite its numerous appearances in State Department reports held at the National Archives today. Speculation aside, with perhaps the exception of the topic's continued classification status of the topic in the 1950s and 1960s when Washington's printing office produced the compendiums, this demonstrates the U.S. government's uneasiness to publically address it during this period.

<sup>55</sup>Felix Cole, Consul General at Algiers, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Algiers, Algeria, September 9, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1941* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 428.

Pucheu, Benoist Mechin, and Marion, he said, are likewise eager to get the General out of Africa, hoping that his removal might likewise not redound to Darlan's advantage but might serve to increase their own relative personal positions and authority.<sup>56</sup>

In an undated assessment after Weygand's cashiering, Donovan's Coordinator of Information also placed the onus on Pucheu, Darlan, and some "representatives of French heavy industry." The anonymous agent indicated that "in spite of Pétain's opposition," this group "had played a considerable part in bringing about the forced resignation of General Weygand."<sup>57</sup> Additionally, a January 1942 F.B.I. report from J. Edgar Hoover to Donovan indicated that even as "the Germans sought Weygand's removal," it appeared as though "Darlan and Pucheu [were] in agreement with the Germans."<sup>58</sup> Though still not referencing the Synarchy scandal, the intelligence reports vibrantly chronicled the animosity between the collaborationists and Weygand and made sound arguments for their role in his cashiering. Furthermore, the rivalry between the clique and Darlan, which appeared unbridgeable only weeks before, now seemed reconciled in their mutual hatred of the general. With the future of the Vichy government now uncertain, and full state collaborationism seeming increasingly plausible, an imminent termination of America's relationship with the regime appeared conceivable.

By the end of the month, Franco-American relations teetered on a dangerous precipice. In a personal letter sent to Roosevelt dated November 22, Leahy described "the Government of France today" as "headed by a feeble, frightened old man surrounded by self-seeking

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<sup>56</sup>Leahy to Hull, October 21, 1941, *FRUS*, Europe, 448.

<sup>57</sup>Author Unknown, Coordinator of Information, Date Unknown, Location Unknown, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 47, File 10730, 190:3-12-3, p. 1. National Archives II Building, College Park, MD.

<sup>58</sup>John Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to William J. Donovan, Director of the Coordinator of Information, January 21, 1942, Washington D.C., Records of the Office of Strategic Services, RG 226, Entry 16, Box 43, File 9981, 190:3-12-3, p. 2. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

conspirators [that] is altogether controlled by a group which, probably for its own safety, is devoted to the Axis philosophy.”<sup>59</sup> Needless to say, the American admiral was incensed. Leahy’s lack of confidence in the Marshal’s authority soon led them into a direct confrontation with one another. In a moment that could have severed or drastically altered the relationship between the two nations, Leahy’s manuscript recalled his own verbal petition issued to Pétain. With specific regard to the Weygand affair, the American ambassador berated the Marshal for losing control of his government and allowing Vichy’s ministers to facilitate increasing levels of collaborationism:

I told him that in my opinion such an unnecessary surrender to Axis demands, particularly at a time when Germany is so thoroughly involved in Russia, would have a definitely adverse effect on the traditional amity between our two peoples, that it would probably bring about an immediate suspension of the economic assistance that is being given to the French colonies, and that it might very possibly cause America to make a complete readjustment of its attitude toward his Government of France.<sup>60</sup>

At this critical juncture, the principal debate within the State Department concerned how stringent a stance the Americans should take with the Vichyites. If Weygand’s removal only represented a small sampling of the collaborationists’ future efforts at Vichy, as officials such as Leahy argued, perhaps cutting ties was necessary. If, on the other hand, Pétain somehow reeled the ardent collaborationists in, and if the Americans overlooked Weygand’s dismissal, other formal diplomatic options remained viable.<sup>61</sup> The former option could result in African bases,

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<sup>59</sup>To support the claim that Leahy wrote of the Synarchists, or at least of the ministerial clique in question, he listed the “Leaders of this group” as Darlan, Pucheu, Benoist-Mechin, Fernand de Brinon (French Ambassador in Paris), Marion, Bouthillier, and Lehideux. Leahy, *I Was There*, 469.

<sup>60</sup>Leahy, *I Was There* Manuscript, 194-5.

<sup>61</sup>Langer argued that Leahy, in retribution for the Weygand decision, felt that that Washington needed to “[suspend] economic aid to North Africa and [recall] the ambassador for consultation, but he did not recommend any positive action.” (Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 195)

and perhaps even the prized French fleet, falling into German hands before too long. The latter allowed the Americans the opportunity to keep a valuable finger on Vichy's pulse, thus depriving the Nazis of valuable material and financial support.

Prominent American officials, most notably Robert Murphy, made impassioned pleas to resume the former policy. In the days following his dismissal, Weygand personally contacted Murphy and indicated that he ardently wished for the continuation of American aid to the colonies. This, of course, was contingent on the continuation of Franco-American relations. In Murphy's translated version of the general's letter, Weygand "[begged]" him "to continue to supply North Africa." In defense of this request, Weygand attested that "As the Marshal told Admiral Leahy, nothing is changed in French policy by my departure. [...] I count on your friendship for France, and your political sense to maintain the necessary union between our two countries for the near future of the world."<sup>62</sup> Ultimately, however, cooler heads prevailed and the Americans decided to maintain its Embassy in Pétain's provisional capital. The State Department overturned a short-lived and injudicious decision to revisit the aid program to North Africa, and they soon fully restored full formal relations.<sup>63</sup>

The Weygand affair, thought by some Americans as a palace-level conspiracy orchestrated by a cabal of technocratic mandarins embedded in the Vichy cabinet, was a narrowly-averted diplomatic crisis.<sup>64</sup> Yet even as they righted this particular political ship in late

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<sup>62</sup>Robert Murphy, Counselor of American Embassy, Algiers, Algeria, "Retirement of General Weygand," November 21, 1941, Algiers, Algeria, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, RG 226, Entry 16, Box 66, File 14097, 190:3-12-6, p.1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>63</sup>Langer, *Our Vichy Gamble*, 196.

<sup>64</sup>Langer provided a more substantive explanation of how the Weygand affair actually unfolded which indicated that the Germans probably played the most substantial role in Pétain's decision: "We now know more of the actual details. In September [Otto] Abetz [the German representative in Vichy] had summoned a written demand for the

November, December turned a new page in America's relationship with the conflict. Vichy collaborationism remained a principal concern for them throughout 1941, though especially so after FDR declared war on the Axis, when the direct stakes for the United States swelled. Because of this, Synarchy, a relatively new threat to the American intelligence community, received arguably its most momentous attention in the days immediately following Pearl Harbor.

### Roosevelt, Donovan, Synarchy

America's December investigations into Synarchy began at a similar pace and took a similar tone as they had during the previous four months, with Leahy transmitting the aforementioned copies of the Chavin Report to Cordell Hull for the Secretary of State's scrutiny on the 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>65</sup> Yet when the United States formally entered the war, the value of new foreign intelligence increased substantially.<sup>66</sup> As historian Cristof Mauch asserted, Donovan's new Coordinator of Information underwent particular scrutiny after the Japanese attack in the Pacific, an event characterized by some policymakers as a critical lapse in intelligence forecasts.<sup>67</sup> However, Bill Donovan, FDR's hardnosed intelligence officer, had his office produce more reports for the President in order to maintain the nascent agency's utilitarian credibility. Even

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general's removal, on the grounds that his very appointment had been an act of hostility and that the Germans had no confidence in him. Pétain evaded and temporized for several weeks, but in November Abetz reappeared and became insistent. [...] By the time [Weygand] arrived in Vichy [on November 18], his fall was already a foregone conclusion." (Ibid., 192-193)

<sup>65</sup>Leahy to Hull, December 1, 1941, "Banque Worms and Affiliated Organization, 'Synarchie,'" 1.

<sup>66</sup>As to the primacy placed on the need for an organization such as C.O.I. after Pearl Harbor, Mauch writes, "After Pearl Harbor President Roosevelt got a clear mandate for America's total mobilization. Like the rest of the military and government administration, the Coordinator of Information could count on a considerable boost in its budget. It was no longer questioned that there was a need for secret information channels into enemy territory abroad [...]." (Mauch, *The Shadow War*, 32)

<sup>67</sup>Mauch, *The Shadow War*, 57-8.

with America's intelligence energies now directed toward the Axis, Vichy still provided ample areas of concern. Indeed, French collaborationism remained the chief distress for Roosevelt, but C.O.I.'s three reports to him on December 18 greatly expanded the scope of potential concerns. Most importantly, it was the first (though as the research suggests, only) time that the community briefed President Roosevelt on Synarchy's supposed existence and the great power that the cabal wielded in the Pétain regime.<sup>68</sup> If there was any doubt as to the earnestness placed on the Americans' anxieties over the *M.S.E.* scandal in the second half of 1941, one need to look no further than to these documents.

Donovan's office delivered the first document, which concerned the recent political activities of Pierre Pucheu and his associates, at 8:30 AM. The second, pertaining to the ambitions of the "*Banque Worms* group" found its recipient at 6:00 PM. The third, which reiterated many of the *Worms* intelligence from the previous two reports, possessed no time stamp. While the former failed to invoke the title "Synarchy," its contents certainly dovetailed with the themes presented in the latter two. They all thus offered complementary accounts of a looming conspiracy coalescing in Vichy. As the third report largely echoed the contents of the second, a recounting of it is unnecessary here. A short evaluation of its elements appears in the following chapter.

C.O.I.'s revitalized interest in Pucheu in the weeks following Weygand's dismissal again designated the Interior Minister as the architect behind an elaborate reactionary conspiracy.

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<sup>68</sup>While it is reasonable to assume that other officials in Roosevelt's inner circle informed the President of Synarchy prior to December, such as Hull or Leahy (both trusted advisors of FDR who possessed detailed knowledge of the canards), no such reports confirming this emerged during this project's research phase. Similarly, to assume that Bill Donovan had no knowledge of Synarchy prior to mid-December, though within the realm of possibility, is also unlikely. Once again, however, no archival documents demonstrated that the director possessed any knowledge of the affair prior to this.

Though not mentioning any connections to a specified syndicate, the first report from December 18 on Pucheu's political "intrigue to undermine Darlan's position" placed the familiar names associated the *Worms* clique at the heart of a palace-level *coup*. As the document claimed, Paul Marion, for one, attempted to construct a Goebbels-like propaganda machine in France in addition to a fascist "corps of shock troops." Pucheu sought to place such an organization "directly under the Ministry of the Interior," under his direct command. The report likewise argued that Benoist-Mechin had designs on constructing a sizable policing body within Vichy intended to forcibly seize the entire unoccupied zone.<sup>69</sup>

As was the case with previous State Department reports, Pucheu's ruthless, fire-eating tendencies also appeared as central to Donovan's office's assessment. The "bitter" rivalry between him and Darlan and a reiteration of his culpability in the Weygand affair emphasizes this. He asserted that "Weygand's dismissal was not desired by Pétain, but was maneuvered by Pucheu, with Darlan's complicity, in close collaboration with the Germans, the plan being to force Pétain with a 'fait accompli.'"<sup>70</sup> With supposed plans to usurp both Pétain and Darlan and with his ambition to convert France into a totalitarian state, the C.O.I. report judged Pucheu as 'Germany's man,' for the foreseeable future. Among those still exercising significant authority in Vichy, the Interior Minister emerged as the staunchest Nazi-sympathizer and thus, their most palatable successor to the Marshal or Darlan. Though the claims of the 8:30 AM Pucheu report did not propound the existence of a secret cabal called the Synarchy for the President, it

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<sup>69</sup>William J. Donovan, Director of the Coordinator of Information, to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States, December 18, 1941, Washington D.C., Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Records of the Director's Office, Microfilm Series M1642, Roll 22, Slides 769-770. National Archives Location II, College Park, MD.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 769.

indicated that a pivotal internal conflict threatened the political future of France and implied that a fascist Vichy revolution was near completion. The second memorandum, however, received by the President's office only nine-and-a-half hours later, not only enhanced the Pucheu sub-plot in a most fantastic way, but painted a more vivid picture of a defined conspiracy.

Arguably the most crucial work in the American intelligence community's canon of Synarchist documents was C.O.I's 6:30 PM installment of the Vichy ministerial narrative. Its six pages illustrated a horrifying political landscape for the President, prominently exhibited by the presentation of the cabal. Despite some claims which proved untrue later in the account, actual collaborationism ultimately provided the groundwork for this study of the "*Worms* group." The report's introductory points, in fact, began by reiterating common concerns for FDR surrounding his brittle French diplomatic policy. "The political aims of the Banque Worms," for instance, at first listed their ambitions as "[advocating] maximum political and economic collaboration with Germany," and "[facilitating] a negotiated peace between the Axis and Allies, should the opportunity present itself."<sup>71</sup> A consistent theme throughout the assessment, the latter sections of the document continued much in the same vein in arguing that the group steadfastly committed itself to a wide array of disconcerting collaborationist ambitions, all of which directly threatened the Allied war effort and potentially the long-term political life of France. In a conclusive though telling excerpt from the document's subsection entitled, "Foreign Policy," the report argued that ardent collaborationists comprised the team's confederates: "The aim of the group [is] to achieve complete economic collaboration with Germany. Its members patently expect to preserve their economic position by acting as Hitler's faithful apostles of the New Economic Order in

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.



France.<sup>72</sup> Beyond contributing to the German war effort, of course, the report also argued that those guiding France emphatically accepted and supported a future German-dominated continent.

Yet Roosevelt was already long keen to the collaborationist aspects of the ministerial group. His personal correspondence to Leahy from late 1940, for instance, demonstrated this. FDR and his inner circle knew that most of the ministers blatantly sold their souls to the devil early in Vichy's history in order to achieve their various ideological and personal aims. But new stories in the report brought the French collaborationist narrative to a completely different realm for the President. After a short overview of the bank's history and brief biographies of its principal members in the introduction (*e.g.*, Leroy-Ladurie, Baudoin, Lehideux, and Pucheu), the memorandum turned to a new concern: that of the clandestine society.

After providing the broad abstract of the minister's activities, the final two sections of the *Banque Worms* report delved further into what is understood today as the legend of the Synarchy. The report's second chapter, simply titled "POLITICAL POWER," provided the first of two references made to the conspiratorial organization. It maintained that the group dedicated itself to achieving its various plots via the use of subtle administrative persuasion, not vehement coercion:

The Banque Worms neither constitutes nor controls a political party. It calls itself, in its political aspect, the Mouvement Synarchique, but remains an amorphous small clique. It exerts control not through wide political agitation but through pressure on persons in high places.

The group has succeeded in placing its men in the following positions:

Paul Baudoin - Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Pierre Pucheu - Minister of the Interior

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 775.

Rene Belin - Minister of Labor  
Jean Berthelot - Minister of Communications  
Jean Bichelonne- Secretary General for Industrial and Domestic Commerce  
Henri Lafond - Secretary General for Electric Power  
Jacques Barnaud- Secretary of State for Franco-German Economic Relations

The group thus controls all the truly strategic positions in the Vichy cabinet.<sup>73</sup>

Regardless of its urgent tone, the report refrained from claiming that Synarchy functioned as an underground cult of financiers and industrialists tied to groups such as the Martinists. It even sidestepped more common references, such as “Polytechnician,” “Finance Inspectors,” or any synonyms for technocrats. Unfortunately, it remains uncertain whether the report’s author intentionally omitted these phrases or not. Still, the unspecified force placing the group’s members in their various ministerial positions demonstrated that the rumors typically associated with the powerful cabal transitioned to the account prepared for Roosevelt’s office.<sup>74</sup>

The final chapter of C.O.I.’s report, entitled “POLITICAL OBJECTIVES,” added further legitimacy to the theory that the Synarchists sought to augment or even openly challenge Pétain’s authority in Vichy. This description of how the group’s technocrats opposed the Marshal’s labor agendas also housed the second of two citations of the Synarchy moniker found in the report: “While temporarily supporting Petain, the Mouvement Synarchique outspokenly opposes all aspects of the Marshal’s program which smack of social reform. It stands for an intransigent

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 772-3.

<sup>74</sup>Pucheu’s grandiose ambitions also appeared in this document. As the day’s earlier report laid a concrete foundation for an understanding of the Interior Minister’s recent activities, C.O.I.’s second examination reinforced his growing influence for the President: “Pierre Pucheu in particular has made the most of the vital post which he commands. He has revamped the entire prefecture and police system of France and has thus built up a personal following of well-entrenched office holders.” Much like the previous report did, the later intelligence contribution presented an accurate portrayal of Pucheu, most notably his multiplication of Vichy’s police forces. In these maneuverings, the accused Synarchist solidified his position with a loyal band of acolytes. (Ibid., 774)

[sic.] anti-labor policy.”<sup>75</sup> This latter claim was partially true. Pucheu and Lehideux, for instance (despite the counter-efforts of minority voices, such as the syndicalist, Belin), understandably abhorred any programs aimed at destabilizing the power held by France’s industrialist managers.<sup>76</sup> Labor laws aside, however, the C.O.I. intelligence indicated that the Synarchist movement opposed Pétain, which in turn threatened his standing as Vichy’s chief. An approaching *coup* aimed at deposing the Marshal endangered not only the political future of France, but also the foreign objectives of the Americans, already weary about increased levels of collaborationism. Furthermore, such an image clearly reflected their apprehensions regarding the power of an ominous technocratic and pro-Hitler cabal taking hold in Vichy.

C.O.I.’s December 18 assessment of the “*Banque Worms* group” presented them as a nebulously esoteric society, as a threat to Vichy’s political stability, as a group devoted to building the *Führer*’s Germanic utopia, as an avarice-driven clique seeking to maintain their social prestige at any cost, and, most importantly, as a danger to American diplomatic and military aims abroad. With this in mind, how did FDR respond?

Though the urgent tone of C.O.I.’s reports concerning both Pucheu and Synarchy could understandably have spurred on a heated reaction by the executive to vigorously uncover the

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Regardless of their apparent strife with the Marshal, they did not completely oppose his National Revolution’s broader position on work. In her 1998 article on paternalistic articulations within the Vichy regime, Kathryn Amdur indicated that, in fact, French industrialists welcomed aspects of Pétain’s re-envisioned labor system: “Despite the language of collaboration and community, Vichy’s National Revolution remained a vision of authority and hierarchy. ‘The false idea of national equality,’ said Pétain, must yield to a new order of ‘labor and talent’; ‘the genuine elites destroyed by the previous regime shall be reborn.’ Vichy technocrats and employers shunned some of the corporatist discourse but embraced most of the hierarchical substance as the basis for rethinking France’s industrial future. [...] Paternalism also fostered overt economic collaboration with Germany, including complicity in the forced labor program, even if that was rarely its initial intent.” Kathryn Amdur, “Paternalism, Productivism, Collaborationism: Employers and Society in Interwar and Vichy France,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* (53) (spring, 1998): 145-6.

goals and ambitions of the clandestine group, it, in fact, did not. Additionally, scrutiny of a detailed rejoinder from Roosevelt's office regarding these reports will not be found here. As far as the research for this project indicated, the Oval Office failed to produce a response to Donovan's fantastic Vichy claims. Thus, the question concerning Roosevelt's personal reaction to Synarchy must remain unknown, at least for now.

Due to the influx of intelligence crossing his desk during the days following Pearl Harbor, it is quite possible that FDR simply never consulted these reports. Regardless of these potentially discouraging facts, however, C.O.I.'s two reports most importantly demonstrated that the director's office viewed Synarchy (with the Pucheu side story highlighted) as significant enough to necessitate the President's attention in these matters. As Donovan saw it, Synarchy required FDR's consideration, especially as the narrative spoke directly to the President's and the broader intelligence community's concerns over zealous Franco-German collaborationism, the proliferation of European Statism, and the existence of dangerous cabals.

Despite its mythical nature, the tales of the Synarchy conspiracy successfully traversed America's turbulent foreign service waters in 1941 as it completed its journey from the Embassy to the Oval Office in just a few months' time. But this was far from the end of its American trek. Soon, Synarchy's adaptable nature fused it to new and related chronicles, only heightening the intelligence community's concerns over it. Beginning as a localized rumor mill in defeated France, far from North America's shores, the stories of the cabal's existence later spread to all corners of the West where it materialized as a direct national security threat against the United States.

## Conclusion

What do America's investigations of Synarchy during the second half of 1941 reveal about the conspiracy's impact on Franco-American diplomatic relations as well as on the intelligence community's initial impressions of the affair overall? First, the State Department documents demonstrate that the omnipresent canards had a discernable (though not catastrophic) impact on America's accords with the Pétain regime. Charged by Roosevelt in late 1940 to help ensure that the Marshal curbed his government's collaborationism, ambassador Leahy and his embassy officials became personally rattled by the many Synarchy accounts during the end of the year. Beyond the Weygand affair, which represented the episode's most obvious and acute intersection between American foreign policy objectives, the intelligence continually indicated that unsettling and opaque powers were at play in Vichy. But even the Weygand debacle revealed that Roosevelt opted, above all, to have eyes and ears in Vichy at nearly any cost. A functioning Embassy meant that the Americans could keep close tabs on collaborationism, the hard-lined Vichyites' ambiguous commitment to fascist ideologies, and the related tales of secret cabals, to name but a few areas of interest. The legend of the Synarchy, of course, fit neatly into all three of these categories.

Second, the investigations also indicate that the intelligence community's understanding of Synarchy (*e.g.*, its specific ideology, its history, its membership, its reactionary political affiliations, etc.) by the end of 1941 was inadequate. In quickly taking stock of what they did not believe the technocratic movement represented, however, it is evident that even the most credulous accounts from the period shirked the eccentric elements of the legend. At no time, for instance, did the reports connect Synarchy to French occult mysticism or the pre-World War I Martinist movement. Yet regardless of the short list of items that the intelligence community

knew conclusively Synarchy was not, their broader understanding of what Synarchy *was* proved more fluid or misguided.

A generally problematic feature in analyzing the 1941 reports is that, oftentimes, the community treated the “*Banque Worms* group” and the Synarchy as mutually exclusive topics.<sup>77</sup> The former typically implied genuine collaborationism and political opportunism, while the latter unfailingly gravitated toward the handful of theories concerning clandestine underground societies akin to the *Cagoule*. When treated as interchangeable phenomena, however, “Banque Worms’/Synarchy’s” objectives appeared much more opaque. The intelligence agents still viewed financial gain and political prestige as specific aims of the group, but other, seemingly simple questions did not pose such transparent answers. Some presented the Synarchists as favoring perpetual Nazi collaborationism; others believed they simply used the war and the Germans to stage their own domestic Fifth Column revolution. Some alleged that they diametrically opposed Admiral Darlan, the man responsible for many of their appointments; others contended (most notably during the Weygand affair) that they operated as allies of sorts. But even then, opinions conflicted as to the exact nature or scope of this alliance. And so on. Finally, the consistent misconceptions of Vichy’s actual technocratic developments led the community toward distorted assumptions and conclusions regarding the group’s domestic aspirations.

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<sup>77</sup>One example of this, though not included in the main text above, was an October 28 memorandum from Hugh S. Fullerton (American Consul General at Vichy) to Matthews regarding the purported connection of the *Banque Worms* members to the Darlan government. The unnamed source provided Fullerton with a hand-drawn chart connecting these men as well as their affiliations with known fascists and financial institutions. The piece, however, did not mention Synarchy nor any other specific conspiratorial plot opposed to the regime. Please see this chapter’s appendix (Figure 8) for a copy of this work.

Though these confusions and conflicting findings perhaps reflected analytical blunders made by the newly-established C.O.I. or an overly credulous or zealous embassy staff, the Americans generally demonstrated great restraint in their conclusions of the topic. As the Synarchy hysteria of mid- and late-1941 came to its zenith in France, it may have been understandable (if not expected) for the American diplomats and the analysts in the C.O.I. to adopt the legend wholesale. But they did not. Instead, officials such as Matthews and Donovan (who intelligence historians often describe as both overly ambitious and manic) approached the canards with a healthy dose of skepticism, though without dismissing it entirely.<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, both groups placed a primacy on safeguarding the fragile Franco-American accords and limiting Franco-German collaborationism in lieu of pursuing cultish specters.

Still, the community heeded the nearly incessant stories of *coup d'états* by Fifth Columnist reactionary bankers and industrialists, regardless of their affiliations to arcane technocratic cabals. And wisely so. Pucheu, Lehideux, Barnaud, and the rest of the ministerial team patently and consistently challenged Roosevelt's Vichy foreign policy objectives. Each of these men jeopardized the future stability of France and the valued relationship between the regime and the United States, regardless of how the Americans measured its worth. As the State Department and Donovan's intelligence community saw it, the phantasmagoric rumors of Synarchy in 1941 only further complicated the enigma of Vichy's government and the men behind its curtain. In this regard, little would change in 1942.

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<sup>78</sup>Douglas Waller, for example, writes "The Coordinator of Information office became a reflection of Donovan's creative and eclectic mind—constantly exploring, expanding experimenting. He launched new projects, rearranged priorities, and shuffled personnel—so fast his harried staff was forever catching up with his directives." (Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan*, 74-5)

### Chapter Three Appendix



Figures One, Two, and Three: Suspected Synarchists: (From Top Left) Pierre Pucheu (Minister of Industrial Production and Minister of the Interior), Yves Bouthillier (Minister of National Economy), and Jean Berthelot (Minister of Communications).<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup>Pierre Pucheu, 1942, Photographs of the New York Times, Paris Bureau, Records of the Civilian Agency, RG 208-Pu, Box 158. National Archives II, College Park, MD.

•Yves Bouthillier, July 6, 1948, Photographs of the New York Times, Paris Bureau, Principal Personalities, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, RG 306-NT, Box 21. National Archives II, College Park, MD.

•Jean Berthelot, Date Unknown, Photographs of the New York Times, Paris Bureau, Principal Personalities, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, RG 306-NT, Box 15. National Archives II, College Park, MD.





Figure Four: General Maxime Weygand (Right)<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>General Maxime Weygand, July 7, 1945 (Pétain's trial), July 31, 1945, Photographs of the New York Times, Paris Bureau, Principal Personalities, RG 306-NT, Box 313, Folder 1. National Archives Building II, College Park. MD.



Figures Five and Six: Cordell Hull and Admiral William Leahy: Beginning in mid-1941, Secretary of State Hull (top) and ambassador Leahy (bottom center) were two of the foremost American officials with extensive knowledge of Vichy's Synarchy affair.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Cordell Hull, 1945, 19 Photographs of the New York Times, Paris Bureau, Principal Personalities, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, RG 306-NT, Box 298, National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.  
Admiral William Leahy, April 4, 1950, Photographs of the New York Times, Paris Bureau, Principal Personalities, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, RG 306-NT, Box 310, National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

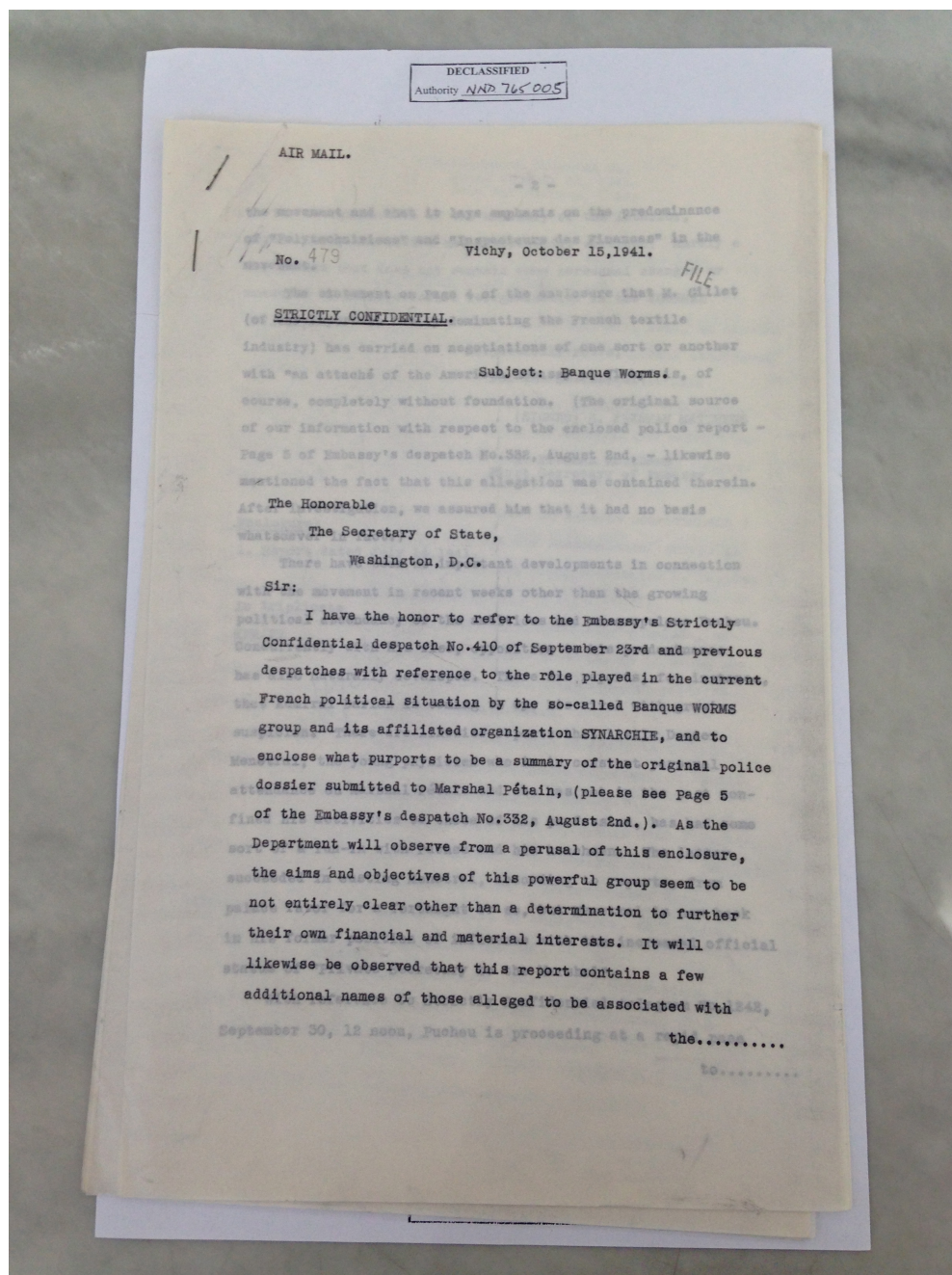
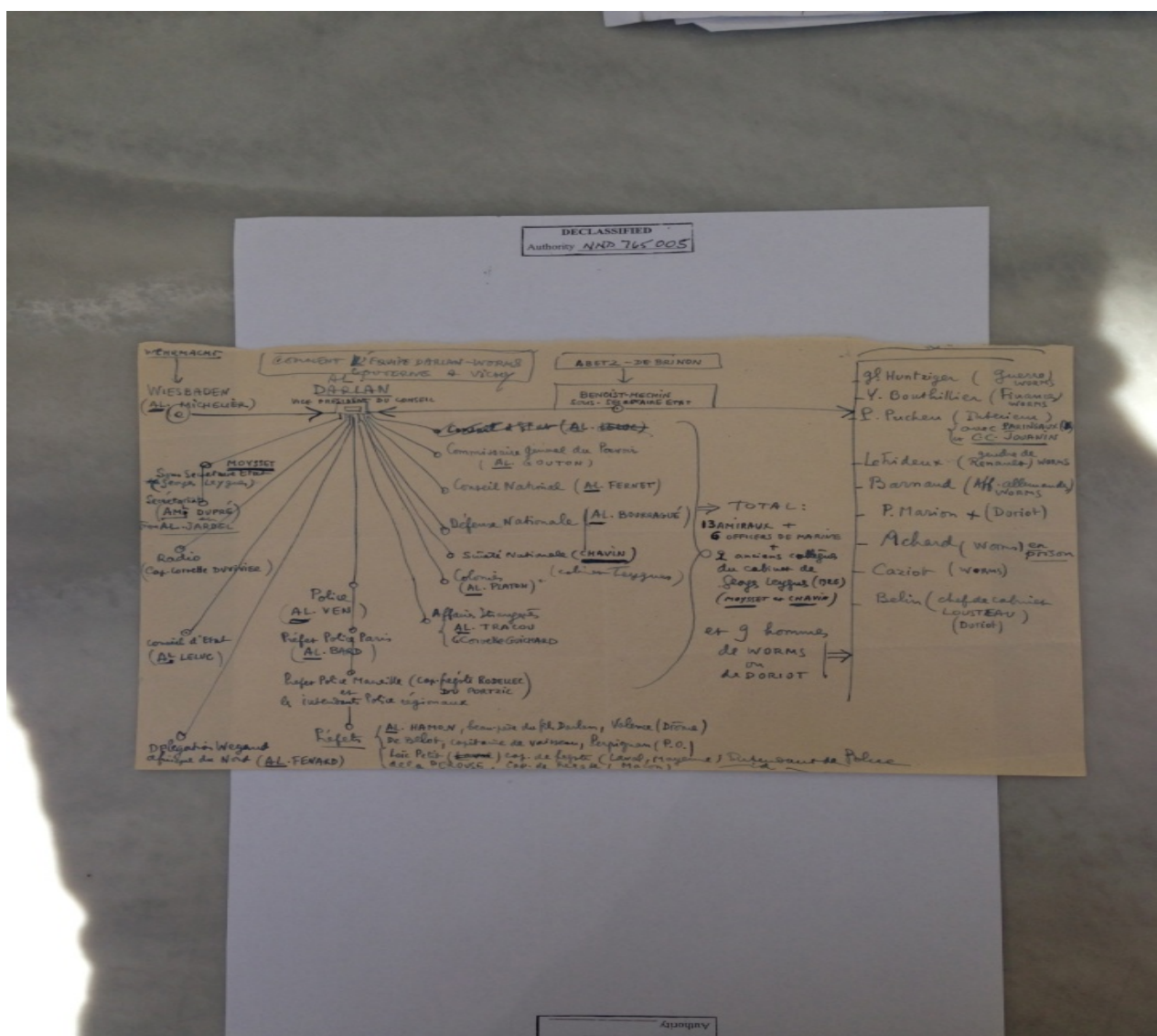


Figure Seven: State Department Intelligence Report: Page one of the October 15, 1941 State Department report from Harrison Freeman Matthews to Cordell Hull assessing *Synarchie*. Please note the reference made to the reviewed “original police dossier,” which was a derivative of the Martin Note.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary to the American Embassy at Vichy, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Washington D.C., “Subject: Banque Worms,” Vichy, France, October 15, 1941; Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.





**Figure Eight: Hand-Drawn Diagram (Anonymous Author):** This piece was attached to a memorandum from Hugh S. Fullerton (Consul General to Vichy, France) to Matthews regarding Darlan's ministers' financial and political affiliations. Please note that it denoted Jean Achard (Minister of National Food Supply), Bouthillier, Lehideux, Barnaud, and Caziot as *Worms* members, while also dubbing Belin a Doriot (P.P.F.) acolyte and Benoist-Méchin as the intermediary (under-secretary of state) between German and French authorities (right margin). Curiously enough, the author failed to list Pucheu as a *Worms* affiliate. Finally, it noted General Léon Huntzinger (Vichy's Minister of War) as a confederate of the industrial group; such a claim is wholly unsubstantiated by contemporary scholarly evidence. Because it never explicitly mentioned Synarchy, this diagram demonstrates that a discernable binary existed within the "*Worms* group"/Synarchy intelligence narrative, both of which featured certain fallacies.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Hugh S. Fullerton, American Consul General to Vichy, France, to Harrison Freeman Matthews, First Secretary of the American Embassy at Vichy, Vichy France, October 28, 1941; Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6, p. 2; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

#### Chapter Four: *Terra Incognita* (1942-1943)

*"There is, undoubtedly, a deep-seated human need to establish familiar patterns of agency and causation to explain frightening, unpredictable events, and dastardly human villains are easier to grasp than complex socioeconomic factors."*

--David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment*, 4.

*"The reactionary movement known as 'Synarchie' has been in existence in France for nearly a century. Its aim has always been to carry out a bloodless revolution, inspired by the upper classes, aimed at producing a form of government by 'technicians' (the founder of the movement was a 'polytechnician'), under which home and foreign policy would be subordinated to international economy. The aims of the Banque Worms group are the same as those of 'Synarchie,' and the leaders of the two groups are, in most cases, identical."*

--Coordinator of Information (Agent Unknown) (February 17, 1942)

Mexico City, Mexico, April 22, 1942: Thousands of miles away from the European war, a sinister echo of the Vichy regime inexplicably emerged in populist Mexican political circles. Over the past few months, a new ultra-conservative peasant movement had gained significant traction in its rural principalities, which many believed threatened the country's nascent democracy. The movement's name: *El Sinarquismo*. Led by the cryptic Manuel Bueno and the reactionary ideologue, Licendo Salvador Abascal, *Sinarquismo*'s acolytes (known popularly as "*Sinarquistas*"), numbering in the tens of thousands, soon gained the attention of America's Foreign Service post. A chief concern for the State Department officials stationed in the capital pertained to any possible connection between them and the identically-named movement in Vichy. If they established a definite link between the two, this increased the prospect that *Sinarquismo* also affiliated with Axis Fifth Columnists hiding in North America. This, above all, would signify a defined national security threat to the United States via its porous southern border. An excerpt from the Mexican periodical, *El Popular*, transmitted by the American Embassy's First Secretary, Raleigh Gibson, to Cordell Hull categorically asserted that a Synarchist international indeed existed and that its agents operated only a stone's throw away

from the American homeland. The document, which specifically reported on the “belief that Mexican Sinarquism [was] connected with French Sinarquism,” subsequently drove the narrative of Vichy’s *M.S.E.* in a startling new direction:

Mr. Julian Dekook [a prominent Belgian labor leader] states that the French Sinarquista Party started in the dramatic moments of the defeat of France, June, 1940, in the Nazi occupied zone, under the direct influence of the Nazis, and made up all of the discontented members of the most reactionary political parties and groups of that nation. The name given to this movement was explained by the French Sinarquistas in the same terms which the Mexican Sinarquistas use to explain their movement; that is, they banded together to strive against anarchy, against the lack of order which the Leftist policy toward democracy had produced, against plutocracy, against socialism, against communism, against syndicalism, against Judaism, through the introduction of a new order, energetic, violently nationalistic, and held together by the most anti-democratic traditions. [...]

[What] is evident and what we must insist on before the Mexican people, is the perfect ideological affinity between the French and the Mexican sinarquism [*sic.*], the similarity of their methods, the identity of their watchwords, and their common paternal origin. [...]

[This] is so apparent, so conclusive, that it eliminates the need of concrete proof of the organic connection between them.

[The Sinarquistas] insist that they have no connection with French Sinarquism [but] it is evident, on the other hand, that they have relations, here in Mexico, with the agents of [the] French Sinarquistas, the agents of Hitler.<sup>1</sup>

No longer solely bound to the various foreign objectives pertinent to Vichy, the proliferating Synarchist movement now posed a direct danger to the United States. The *El Popular* article, though menacing, also epitomized this particularly bizarre chapter in the Americans’ pursuit of Synarchy, where novel leads and stories led to convoluted understandings of its threat. The Americans’ principal objectives of curbing French collaborationism, eliminating international statism, and undermining subversive organizations remained. Synarchy continued to exemplify

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<sup>1</sup>Raleigh A. Gibson, First Secretary of American Embassy in Mexico, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Mexico City, Mexico, “Subject: Editorial and Newspaper Comments on the Belief that Mexican Sinarquism is Connected with French Sinarquism,” April 22, 1942, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 101, File 17483, 190:3-13-4, pp. 2-3; National Archives II Building, College Park, MD.

the hard-lined Vichyites' opposition to these goals. Yet the revelations provided by the Mexican periodical also pointed to a new threat. While before 1942, Synarchy principally affected American interests abroad, the new narrative now indicated that the organization endangered its national security interests as well.

The years 1942-1943 offered numerous turning points in the events of the Second World War. The United States now fully employed its armed forces and industry in the conflict; North Africa fell to Allied diplomacy, and later, Mussolini's Italy began to succumb to its military might; Great Britain staved off imminent defeat in the west; and the Germans suffered significant setbacks at the hands of Stalin's Red Army in the east. Yet even as the winds of change blew a bit stronger toward Hitler's Berlin, the Allies still had much to do to defeat the scourge of fascism. And, according to those dealing with it in the American intelligence community, the same was also said of French Synarchism.

This chapter chronicles these two years of the American investigations into Vichy's *M.S.E.*, a period that featured a relative dearth of reports on the subject as compared to 1941 and, to a lesser extent, 1944. As indicated in the literature review above, historians broaching the subject of Synarchism in the intelligence community ended each of their respective works, at the latest, with accounts from 1942. Nerin Gun's chapter, in fact, explicitly argued that the Embassy's closure in November of that year simply signaled the end of the United States' ability to collect intelligence on the topic.<sup>2</sup> While the Embassy's shuttering effectively ceased the State

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<sup>2</sup>To this, the historian declared: "The rupture of diplomatic relations between Washington and Vichy deprived the Department of State additional information [on Synarchy]. It was therefore impossible to retrieve an evaluation at the ministerial level of these studies."

Gun, *Secrets of the American Archives*, 131.

•Also, as historian Jean Paul Pallud asserts, ironically "it was Vichy that finally decided to sever diplomatic relations with the United States following the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa in November 1942."

Jean Paul Pallud, "The Vichy Government in France," in *After the Battle* 170 (Nov. 2015): 9.

Department's role in the Synarchy investigations, other espionage entities, most notably Donovan's O.S.S., quickly picked up where Leahy's team left off.

The title *Terra Incognita* therefore raises significant historiographical implications. Namely, this chapter chronicles new memoranda and correspondence regarding the Synarchy affair previously overlooked or undocumented by other scholars since their declassification. The reports from Donovan's agencies alone constitutes uncharted territory in the academic chronicling of the community's investigations into Synarchy.<sup>3</sup> And as the excerpt from the American Embassy in Mexico City above demonstrates, the uncanny and fantastic stories from these two years even rivaled their 1941 predecessors.

Even as the vicissitudes of the war continually bombarded American intelligence officials during this period, the Synarchy affair was constantly in tow. Yet as the political and military situations fluctuated in Europe and North Africa, the narrative necessarily evolved with the changing times. The name "Synarchy" itself took on new meanings, but it still posed new threats to the United States, both abroad and domestically. Thus, when America's newest shadow warriors from the C.O.I./O.S.S. finally got their footing on the ramshackle intelligence trade, Vichy's *M.S.E.* continued to offer a most tempting siren coaxing them forward.

#### The Numbered Days of Admiral Darlan (January-April 1942)

The first four months of 1942 in Vichy appeared as a near mirror image of the final two months of 1941 for those in the American intelligence community. The same disreputable characters of Pucheu, Bouthillier, Benoist-Méchin, Marion, Barnaud, *et cetera* still all operated

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<sup>3</sup>Langer's book represents the one small exception to this. If recalled, he offered a list of C.O.I./O.S.S. reports on the *Worms* group's activities in his brief discussion of Synarchism, the last of which was from November of 1943.



with full discretion within the French ministry, and Admiral Darlan, for the moment, maintained his position as Vice-Premier. Similar canards of scandal, intrigue, and conspiracy accompanied these men heading the provisional French capital. The American diplomats, with their ears constantly perked, became well acclimated to such tales. In his memoir, ambassador Leahy recollected what such exigent rumors resembled during this time. One in particular, he noted, “asserted that friends of the Interior Minister Pucheu, with approval of German authorities, were organizing a cabal to oust Darlan.”<sup>4</sup> In this vein, comparable tales of Synarchy also emerged.<sup>5</sup>

Vichy’s relative political idleness also reflected the conspiracy reports conducted by the Americans during this period. Collaborationism still remained the principal concern, but political intrigue and Vichy Fifth Columnist activities also continued to stoke the intelligence community’s interests. Indeed, all three topics intermingled with one another much as they had the previous year. Rumors of the *M.S.E.*, of course, resided somewhere within the crux of all of these fears. As the State Department’s reports on Synarchy began to dwindle in 1942, Donovan’s now-proficient intelligence machine took up the mantle.<sup>6</sup>

During the early months of the year, the intelligence community only conducted two comprehensive studies on the representatives of the so-called “Banque Worms group.” Yet when

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<sup>4</sup>Leahy, *I Was There*, 79.

<sup>5</sup>With the exception of a single State Department report from August of 1942, no other Vichy Embassy-produced documents emerged during the research phase at the National Archives. Of course this does not indicate that the American secretaries abandoned their investigations of Vichy’s Synarchy. The August report certainly featured a sense of urgency comparable to previous memoranda. It is important to note, however, that for the remainder of this dissertation, relatively few documents from America’s diplomatic functionaries in Europe appear.

<sup>6</sup>As the official *War Report of the O.S.S.* indicates, February 1, 1942 specifically proved a watershed moment in the brief history of the organization as it signaled the date where “all of the C.O.I. branches were organized [...]. [Their] intelligence, together with intelligence secured by other agencies and departments of the Government, was processed by R&A [Research and Analysis] into comprehensive reports upon desired subjects.” Roosevelt, *War Report*, 18.

contrasted with one another, they epitomize the fickle approach the community took to the Synarchy affair. The first report from February 17, entitled “‘*Synarchie*’ and the Policy of the Banque Worms,” presented the most credulous depictions of the clique, while the latter, simply called “*Worms et. Cie*,” offered urgent, though more grounded accounts of it.

Despite C.O.I.’s increased investigations into Vichy political matters between January and April, Donovan’s organization only produced one appraisal of Synarchy which provided some indication of the intelligence community’s developed understanding of the affair during Darlan’s final weeks. Though another assessment from February 12 presented compelling evidence of a novel Pucheu *coup* narrative, the unknown American agent did not connect the story to the oft-related *M.S.E.* legend.<sup>7</sup> But much like their State Department counterparts from 1941, C.O.I. did not limit its interest in France’s byzantine ministerial situation to the stories of the determined Pucheu. The February 17 report, above all, reiterated the American government’s on-going commitment to understanding the Synarchy cabal and the part it played in Vichy politics as well as the broader war in Europe.

Far from being dismissed as a product of hysteria or an elaborate hoax, the Coordinator of Information’s “*Synarchie*” account demonstrated how the cabal represented an increasingly threatening force in the beginning of 1942. To some degree, the report inflated the boundaries of

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<sup>7</sup>The telegraph by an unnamed C.O.I. agent provided a portentous vision of a new Pucheu-led uprising: “(1) A plot for overthrowing the Petain Government has been discovered at Vichy. According to the information at hand, Deat, Pucheu and certain other collaborationists are the ringleaders, and the [plan] has been known to, and has the support of the Germans. [...] (11) The plan apparently has been to place the Marshal and a number of ministers under detention, to invite the German forces into unoccupied France as a protective measure against so-called Communist activity, to eliminate the line of demarcation, and then gradually to raise the strength of the French army to 400,000 for the defence [*sic.*] of France and her overseas possessions. (111) It appears that Darlan has not been involved, and there are grounds for stating that he is not as collaborationist as he has been.” Author Unknown, Recipient Unknown, Location Unknown, February 12, 1942, “Part 11 Special Summaries February 12, 1942,” Coordinator of Information, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 54, File 12492, 190:3-12-4, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

what the Synarchy affair symbolized and bolstered its menacing potentialities for all those who scrutinized it. In keeping true to previous concerns, the report continued to emphasize the clique's technocratic and Fifth Columnist aspects. However, in challenging some earlier accounts, the C.O.I. report also augmented prior claims regarding Franco-German collaborationism.

The intelligence community's assessments of Synarchy from 1941 largely (though not universally) asserted that the *M.S.E.* and Nazis worked together to facilitate the fall of France's Third Republic. Moreover, after the establishment of Vichy, these agents surmised that ties remained between the two camps as they continually sought to suppress leftist movements in France and resistance to the Nazi's New Order; the Weygand affair, as one example, embodied this partnership. But the 1942 C.O.I. report took a different stance on this subject entirely. Instead of pursuing ties with Germany's politicians, the author argued that the Synarchists used French collaboration as merely a means to an end in their quest for achieving closer ties with powerful German industrialists. A union of likeminded technocrats, it attested, increased their chances of establishing a formidable economic federation. The report also contended that the Synarchists sought to expand an economic bloc beyond western Europe. To this end, the author argued that "some headway is claimed to have been made in securing the adhesion of big U.S. industry to the movement."<sup>8</sup> Hitler and his cronies, by contrast, were expendable. Synarchy's supposed aversion to the Nazi party is explained below. But aside from a new interpretation of Synarchy's objectives regarding Franco-German collaborationism, the report also harkened back to themes reminiscent of those from 1941.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 2.

Following its opening statements regarding previous intelligence findings about “the political power of the Banque Worms group in France,” the report’s findings, undoubtedly sculpted by the various Chavin-, Martin-, or Riche-inspired canards, quickly turned to hyperbolic technocratic perceptions of the movement.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in its historical background of the organization, even non-specific (though discernable) references to Saint-Yves d’Alveydre and his nineteenth-century neo-Martinists appeared:

The reactionary movement known as ‘Synarchie’ has been in existence in France for nearly a century. Its aim has always been to carry out a bloodless revolution, inspired by the upper classes, aimed at producing a form of government by ‘technicians’ (the founder of the movement was a ‘polytechnician’), under which home and foreign policy would be subordinated to international economy.<sup>10</sup>

The grandiose aspirations of the group beginning in August 1940, the report went on to claim, included their zealous fight against labor-centered reforms, their creation of Vichy’s Organizational Committees in order to personally direct the French economy, and their goal of obtaining “ultimate complete control of all [European] industry.”<sup>11</sup> References to France’s Polytechnician community again pointed to the belief that Synarchy’s threats to American foreign policy aims came in the form of authoritarian technocracy. And like previous accounts, the document went on to assert that Synarchy’s successes came from underhanded Fifth Columnist tactics. However, as the unnamed C.O.I. agent claimed, their capacity to infiltrate political institutions now endangered both Axis and Allied countries alike.

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<sup>9</sup> Author Unknown, Location Unknown, February 17, 1942, “‘Synarchie’ and the Policy of the Banque Worms Group,” Coordinator of Information, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 52, File 12025, 190:3-12-4, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

As opposed to the previous State Department accounts, which principally described Synarchy's domestic ambitions (as well as their methods for achieving them), the latter subsections of the February 1942 report expanded the geographic scope of the cabal's possible international purview. Of the utmost importance to the Synarchist order was the safeguarding of the group's financial domains. To this, the author noted that "the group desire [*sic.*] a speedy conclusion to the war, the continuation of which they believe could only lead to the ruin of heavy industrial interests."<sup>12</sup> In their attempt to accomplish this, the report averred that the conspirators sought the political destabilization of both Great Britain and Nazi Germany, each of which favored "the reciprocal bombing of industrial centers" to further their respective military campaigns.<sup>13</sup> To the former, the Synarchists purportedly pursued the collapse of Churchill's government with the intent of supporting politicians agreeable to the prospect of having Britain join the then-forming Franco-German economic bloc. Sir Samuel Hoare (Churchill's Foreign Secretary) appeared as a suitable replacement for the Prime Minister. Despite the fantastic and, at one point, contradictory postulations (Lord Beaverbrook (the head of Churchill's cabinet), strangely enough, was to be both undermined in the existing government *and* positioned within the new Synarchy-sympathetic establishment), the tales of the *M.S.E.* undeniably reached new heights of fantasy. A similarly surprising claim also accompanied the report's later subsection in its survey of Synarchy's plans to upend Hitler's Reich.

In an earlier portion of the C.O.I. document, the author briefly noted that the group, in protecting its financial interests, sought "to neutralize any attempt to extend Socialism under the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Hitler program.”<sup>14</sup> After its outline of Synarchy’s plot to undermine Great Britain, it then offered a more explicit description of their theorized designs against the N.S.D.A.P.’s inner circle to achieve this end. In the sub-section entitled “Policy in regard to Germany,” the report posited that the movement “hoped ultimately to eliminate Hitler, Goebbels, and Himmler with his Gestapo, from the political scene, thus facilitating the formation of an Anglo-Franco-German economic bloc.”<sup>15</sup> No specifics beyond this were offered, however. As the report asserted here, the C.O.I. now believed that the Synarchists no longer simply threatened American objectives concerning narrow French social and political topics. They now represented a subversive force capable of endangering the entire Western Hemisphere! The February 17 document emboldened the conspiracy theories of Synarchy with its emphasis placed on not only collaborationism, but on its furtive activities in Vichy. The threats to Franco-American relations, as well as to American foreign objectives abroad were thus multifaceted. Yet not all of the C.O.I.’s intelligence from early 1942 succumbed to the ongoing Synarchist hysteria. In fact, the March report on the *Banque Worms* avoided it all together.

On December 18, 1941, along with the two crucial documents distributed by Donovan’s office to FDR’s office, C.O.I.’s Office of the Director of Research also produced a third dossier on the ministerial group. Its contents provided the first comprehensive analysis of the clique. The 33-page survey, entitled simply, “The Banque Worms,” clearly drew heavily from Donovan’s

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>One final note regarding this crucial C.O.I. report warrants attention. Namely, the report’s final subsection, which briefly summarized Synarchy’s attempts to build an army of fascist shock troops in France, supplemented concurrent theories of Pucheu’s ambitions to do the same as the regime’s Interior Minister. The two-line overview, entitled, “The ‘Legion,’” which, was most likely a reference to the *Legion des Ancients Combattants*, indicated that “the Synarchists have not so far (early November [1941]) succeeded in obtaining control of the ‘Legion’, but a campaign to that end continues.” (Ibid., 3)

memorandum on the topic. The first four pages were, in fact, pulled *verbatim* from it, as it featured two identical references to the “Mouvement Synarchique” on pages two and three respectively. Yet this report also added significant supplemental information on the various members simply not present within Donovan’s shorter evaluation transmitted to the President. On March 3, the Economics Division of the C.O.I. released a revised edition of this expansive *Worms* report. Interestingly enough, it drastically altered its findings of Darlan’s team when compared to its predecessor.

In many respects, the second edition of the assessment was similar to its previous iteration, as it, for instance, presented detailed biographies of the ministerial members and exhibited why the clique offered one of the most pernicious political elements in Vichy. To Pucheu, for instance, the first assessment indicated that he “was probably mixed up with the Cagoulard plot of 1937 and participated in Spanish politics during the Civil War on the side of General Franco.”<sup>16</sup> The introductory summary of the second report again pointed to the group’s unwavering commitment to collaborationist activities and the members’ ardent determination to further reactionary programs on the continent, regardless of the war’s outcome. Ultimately, it argued that the group continued to pose a distinct danger to America’s foreign objectives:

The members of the group may be expected to seek their own protection in the event of an Allied or of a German victory and to use their wide international relations for the benefit of whichever side seems to be prevailing. They would particularly be likely to work for a negotiated peace which would bar any recognition of Europe along liberal lines and would leave them in possession of their financial, industrial, and political authority. [...] [They] constitute a threat to Allied success.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Author Unknown, Coordinator of Information, Office of the Director of Research, Washington D.C., December 18, 1941, “The Banque Worms” (National Archives Microfiche Publication, M1221, Report 79), p. 8, Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>17</sup> Author Unknown, Coordinator of Information, Economics Division Report, Location Unknown, March 3, 1942, “*Worms et. Cie.* (Revised),” Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Entry 67A1804, Box 5, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

The report also examined the familiar figures of Pucheu, Benoist-Méchin, Lehideux, Marion, Bichelonne, and Bouthillier, to name but a few, as well as their business histories and affiliations. And, in its final subsection, “The Aims of Functions of the Worms Group,” the report linked the members together under their common ultraconservative ideologies and their known antagonisms against France’s interwar Leftist movements. It examined these topics much as the previous study had. However, as opposed to Donovan’s *Worms* report and other similar C.O.I./O.S.S. briefs that followed, this exposé failed to address the group’s supposed connections to Synarchism.

To researchers considering the chronology of the Synarchy documents from 1941-1942, it may appear as though Donovan’s C.O.I. had finally and fully abandoned the myth with this evaluation’s findings. Though O.S.S. reports conducted later in the war clearly demonstrate that the spy agency continued to pursue the more fantastic claims surrounding the cabal, this assessment still possesses value in its own right. Namely, it provides insight into the American intelligence community’s priorities regarding its broader examination of the Vichy ministers not simply limited to the Synarchy conspiracy.

In considering the March 1942 report as an important text because of the *absence* of Synarchy references, the document represents merely one frame in a vast landscape encompassing a variety of intricacies within the “*Worms* group” narrative. The Synarchist plots, after all, represented merely one of its many subplots. The clique garnered arguably the most interest from the Americans due to their flagrant financial and political opportunism. This sizable document, although ostensibly a dismissal of Vichy’s conspiracy narrative, instead signified a perpetually vacillating interpretation of the “*Banque Worms* group,” which provided a space where the imaginary and the real often co-mingled. But more fanciful stories of Vichy’s Fifth



Columnists were forthcoming, and the Synarchy affair reemerged alive and well. Within weeks of the dissemination of the third C.O.I. *Worms* report, significant changes occurred within the Vichy regime that modified the legend to fit a new milieu. In a particularly bizarre twist, stories of the French cabal resurfaced with regard to an associated narrative just south of the American border.

#### N.I.M.B.Y.: American Intelligence Investigations into the Mexican *Sinarquista* Movement

Beginning in late 1941, an exceptionally peculiar, though utterly coincidental, series of events occurred in North America which drove the French Synarchist narrative in a curious new direction. At exactly the same time that Martin's, Chavin's, Constantini's, and the other French fascists' documents circulated around Vichy, an identically-named yet vastly disparate political movement known as the "*Sinarquistas*" or "*Sinarquismo*" experienced a notable rise in influence in Mexico's rural regions. Perhaps reasonably, many attempted to connect the French Synarchist movement to its theorized counterpart. By mid-1942, documents collected or produced by the State Department, the O.S.S., and even the O.N.I. (Office of Naval Intelligence) demonstrated that American officials indeed viewed the two movements as unified. Due to its cryptic nature and its propinquity to the United States, a comprehensive O.S.S. study of the movement from 1943 highlighted exactly why the movement garnered such intelligence attention: "In view of the characteristics of *Sinarquismo* and its current significance in Mexico, the existence of the movement is clearly a matter of direct concern to the United States. Of first and immediate interest is the fact that the *U.N.S.* is serving the Axis in its struggle against this country."<sup>18</sup> In

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<sup>18</sup>Author Unknown, O.S.S. Research and Analysis Branch, Washington D.C., June 1943, "The *Sinarquista* Movement in Mexico," Report Number 843, p. 141, Denver Public Library Holdings.

later establishing a link between them, Vichy's Synarchy quickly moved from a foreign relations' concern in Europe to one of national security in North America.

As opposed to the Vichy Synarchist movement, which proved an exercise in propagandist misdirection, Mexico's *Sinarquistas* (officially known as the *Unión Nacional Sinarquista*, or *U.N.S.*) was a genuine political movement. As historian John Sherman attests, much in the same fashion as their alleged European equivalent, the "ultra-Catholic" *U.N.S.* emerged from "a secret society in May 1937 known as *La Base*."<sup>19</sup> Though *Sinarquista* scholar Héctor Hernandez believed that the faction attracted "nearly a million people" at the movement's zenith in 1940 and 1941, Sherman avers that they only recruited "tens of thousands of peasants."<sup>20</sup> Regardless of how large the movement became, it undoubtedly gained significant strength after Mexico's revolutionary regime reversed many of its progressive policies beginning in 1940.<sup>21</sup> The grassroots composition of their movement, of course, diverged wildly from the supposed French variant, as the latter represented a cabal exclusively comprising financial and social elites. While the robust membership of Mexico's Synarchy certainly made it a formidable force in its own

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<sup>19</sup>John W. Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929-1940* (Westport CT: Praeger, 1997), 122.

<sup>20</sup>Héctor Hernandez, *The Sinarquista Movement with Special Reference to the Period 1934-1944* (London: Minerva Press, 1999), 375-6.  
Sherman, *The Mexican Right*, 122.

<sup>21</sup>Even as the agrarian populations of Mexico won significant social concessions after the bloody revolution of 1910-1920, such as higher wages, land concessions, and universal education, by 1940, Mexico's government began moving toward more rightist programs, which negated most of the progressive successes of the previous twenty years. As historians Donald Hodges and Ross Gandy attest: "The second act [of the revolution (1920-1940)] had [...] proclaimed socialism to be the goal of the ruling party in the distant future. By 1940 the triumphant but exhausted government decided that the revolutionary process had gone far enough-the time had come to 'institutionalize' the Revolution. [...] So after 1940 the pendulum of Mexican politics swung to the right as the regime favored industrial elites with government subsidies, high tariffs, easy credit, and low taxes. Enraged peasants immediately stabbed at the government from the left." Understandably, groups such as the *Sinarquistas* were easily able to capitalize on such marginalizing measures in 1940 and 1941.  
Donald C. Hodges and Ross Gandy, *Mexico, The End of the Revolution* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 2002), 6-7.

right, the group's proffered political ideology (especially prior to November 1941) also pointed to virulent reactionary tendencies.

Between 1937 and late 1941, the movement forwarded a distinctively extremist identity. Much of this was attributable to the *Sinarquista*'s chief during these years: Licenciado Salvador Abascal. Abascal promoted a number of emblematic semi-fascist agendas, which, to outside observers, proved undeniably discomforting.<sup>22</sup> Hernandez indicates that he personally sought to protect "the fatherland from the revolution, the communists, the Americans, the freemasons, the Protestants, [and] the Jews."<sup>23</sup> Additionally, Abascal's followers offered the Axis powers tacit moral support during the middle phases of the war, as Europe's ultras attempted to crush Soviet Communism, an ideology that some *Sinarquista* leaders also emphatically abhorred. But Abascal's radical rule did not last. In November 1941, he stepped down in order to pursue a

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<sup>22</sup>Hernandez notes that there are ongoing scholarly debates as to whether or not Mexico's Synarchists indeed constituted "fascists" or not. In his attempt to settle this discourse, he offers the following academic position, which ultimately refutes claims that the *U.N.S.* affixed their political mission to such philosophies: "Certain elements of Synarchist ideology were found in fascism, but also elsewhere: the strong criticism of party democracy and of elections; the rejections of the Right-Left division; the opposition to all other groups and political parties. Synarchists were opposed to the class struggle, which they viewed as a factor of social dissention; they combatted Marxist ideologies because they repudiated nationalism but they were also opposed to Mexican capitalists, whom they judged timorous and as having sold out to the foreigner. In the Synarchist vision, workers and employers had common interests. All that is not sufficient to make the *U.N.S.* a fascist movement, and other ideological components (especially the Christian social factor [which resulted from a series of anti-clerical laws in Mexico during the late 1930s]) and its favoured methods (the condemnation of violence and the resort to arms) preclude any perfunctory assimilation." (Hernandez, *The Sinarquista Movement*, 393-4)

<sup>23</sup>The *Sinarquistas*' anti-American qualities also extended to their aversion toward democratic political frameworks. As Daniel Newcomer notes in his *Sinarquista*-centered monograph, *Reconciling Modernity*, "U.N.S. leaders originally charged that democracy represented an unworkable ideal [...]." "Nevertheless," Newcomer goes on, "the *U.N.S.* increasingly resembled a reform movement as the 1940s wore on." Eventually, the *Sinarquistas* came to resemble a corporatist movement, which placed a primacy on the rights of low-income workers and peasants. In augmenting their initial position toward progressive political values, then, Newcomer states "by 1946, the *Sinarquistas* had revised their original denial of the validity of democratic government. This coincided directly with their increased effort to organize labor." Hernandez, *The Sinarquista Movement*, 375.  
Daniel Newcomer, *Reconciling Modernity: Urban State Formation in 1940s León, Mexico* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 72-3, 78.

number of domestic projects, including a *U.N.S.* colonization project on the Baja Peninsula.<sup>24</sup> In his place, a more moderate leader in Manuel Torres Bueno took the reins. Torres held this post until 1946, when irreconcilable internal divisions resulted in the permanent fracturing of the organization.<sup>25</sup> *El Sinarquismo*'s size, coupled with some of its member's extremist leanings and anti-Americanist sentiments, led the U.S. intelligence community to take an ardent interest in this political faction.

In the community's scrutiny of *Sinarquismo*, multiple agencies tasked themselves with formulating a defined threat assessment. Josephus Daniels (American Ambassador to Mexico (1933-1941)), for one, urgently reported on the immense size of the organization to Cordell Hull in late 1941.<sup>26</sup> J. Edgar Hoover also personally took a human intelligence interest in Salvador Abascal, at one point calling him "an able and intelligent fanatic" in a memorandum sent to Assistant Secretary of State, Adolf Berle. Hoover further noted that the "Sinarquista organization

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<sup>24</sup>On their motives for the building of the Baja utopian community, Hernandez wrote that "Abascal and his followers were convinced that this mission would provide an excellent and startling example of Synarchist determination and the materialization of Synarchist philosophy. It was an enterprise for the salvation of the Americas and the world: the model Synarchist republic. Thereon, he expected to forestall an American invasion of the peninsula, long attracted by its emptiness and strategic value." (Hernandez, *The Sinarquista Movement*, 284)

<sup>25</sup>Hernandez, *The Sinarquista Movement*, 343.

<sup>26</sup>In his report, Daniels impressed upon the Secretary of State that the sizable movement was one certainly worth the U.S. government's attention. A convention of *Sinarquista*'s "chiefs" in Mexico City in November 1941 demonstrated to him that it grew to a vast, nationwide organization: "[Abascal], 'the chief' of the movement, presided at the public meeting which is reported by the press to have been attended by about 600 'chiefs' from all parts of Mexico, each delegation sitting under a banner showing the name of the locality from which it came. According to the press, about 100 such banners were displayed." Josephus Daniels, American Ambassador to Mexico, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Mexico City, Mexico, November 5, 1941, "Subject: Meeting in Mexico City October 30-November 1, 1941, of the 'Chiefs' of 'Sinarquismo,'" Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (Central Decimal Files), Record Group 59, File 31822, 250:33-13-4, p. 2; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

in Mexico” had become “increasingly ‘audible.’”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Donovan’s Coordinator of Information also obtained information about the *Sinarquistas* through American intelligence channels, though the Mexican movement remained far outside the director’s established geographic purview. In speaking to the *U.N.S.*’s supposed anti-American platform, Hoover wrote to Donovan in January 1942 that “a recent publication of the *Sinarquistas* praised the Japanese for their attack on the United States and added that ‘Mexico has suffered long enough from North American aggression.’”<sup>28</sup> Yet regardless of the attention the American intelligence community devoted to the reactionary tendencies of the group, these subjects largely reside outside this dissertation’s thematic scope. By contrast, *Sinarquismo*’s theorized connections to Nazi Fifth Columnists served as the initial bridge that also validated similar affiliations between the Mexican and French organizations.

In an internally disseminated monthly F.B.I. publication entitled “Totalitarian Activities-Mexico Today” from September of 1942, J. Edgar Hoover’s office offered a theorized relationship between the Mexican Synarchists and the Nazi government. Beyond pointing to specific geographic concerns in Mexico, especially those which may have acted as staging grounds for an Axis invasion (*e.g.*, lightly defended ports, landing zones, sparsely populated coastal communities, etc.), the document also noted potential local German or Japanese sympathizers who might aid in future operations. Because the Baja Peninsula was of particular concern for topographical reasons, and because many of Abascal’s Synarchist colonists had

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<sup>27</sup> John Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to Adolf Berle, Assistant Secretary of State, Washington D.C., October 31, 1941, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State (Central Decimal Files), Record Group 59, File 31816, 250:33-13-4, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>28</sup> John Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to Colonel William J. Donovan, Director of the Coordinator of Information, Washington D.C., January 30, 1942; Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 47, File 10697, 190:3-12-3, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

recently settled in the region, some viewed the province and its few inhabitants as possible threats to American territorial interests.<sup>29</sup> In the report's subsection titled "General Attitude of Inhabitants of Baja California Toward the United States and Potential Fifth Columnists," the F.B.I.'s report's assessment of the region's population placed a special emphasis on the *U.N.S.* colonists and their ideological affinities:

It is most difficult to estimate the attitude of the majority of the local inhabitants throughout Baja California. [...] It is true that there is considerable jealousy and apprehension that the United States might have designs in regard to annexing Baja California as other portions of Mexican territory were previously annexed. [...] It should be noted that a number of Sinarquistas (members of a strongly nationalist organization) are located on the peninsula, mainly around Santo Domingo. These can be estimated at about 600 in number and were previously transported to this area as colonists. The Sinarquistas are reported to be pro-Nazi. Although it is not definitely known that they are individually pro-Nazi, they are bitterly anti-Communist.<sup>30</sup>

With possible ties established between the *U.N.S.* and the *N.S.D.A.P.*, and with previous accounts asserting that the *M.S.E.* also affiliated with Hitler's European agents, an organic association between the French and Mexican Synarchists seemed natural.<sup>31</sup> By late April 1942, the first

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<sup>29</sup>With regard to the geographic survey portion of its analysis, the F.B.I.'s assessment of the Baja Peninsula's suitability for enemy landings appeared markedly pessimistic: "It has been stated that large sections of the Pacific coast of Baja California are suitable for ordinary landing operations from ships, the coast line being generally uninhabited, desolate and barren."

Author Unknown, "Totalitarian Activities- Mexico Today," September 1942, p. 363, Federal Bureau of Investigation, November 10, 2016, CIA-RDP83-00415 R001100050011-1, CIA Records Search Tools, (CREST), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>While some Synarchists under Abascal harbored both anti-American and pro-German sentiments during the war, they did not flourish to the extent that the American intelligence assessments generally assumed. Beginning in mid-1941, with the Americans moving closer toward the conflict, many Mexican citizens believed that a U.S. decision to join the Allies would ultimately drag its southern neighbor into the fray with it. This is what, in fact, occurred. Mexico broke relations with the Axis nations on December 11, 1941, and formerly joined the Allies on June 1, 1942. In response to such a prospect prior to Pearl Harbor, however, Hernandez indicated that the *Sinarquistas'* "opposition to any type of co-operation [found] its *raison d'être* in the perception of a threat of territorial expansion and cultural penetration by the United States." As for their moral support for Germany, the *Wehrmacht's* incursion into Soviet territory in June of 1941 signaled, in the view of some Synarchist leaders, the beginning of the end of global Marxism. Members of the movement therefore followed Hitler's early victories in eastern Europe with great enthusiasm. Still, it should be clarified that the *U.N.S.* generally "made a distinction between the German people and its army and the Nazi Government, which they condemned." Regardless of their

intelligence accounts officially linking the two emerged.<sup>32</sup> Much of the community's interest in this new topic stemmed from Pierre Laval's return to office in Vichy on April 22.<sup>33</sup>

Marshal Pétain's decision to reinstall Laval as his Vice Premier had wide-ranging ramifications for both Franco-American relations as well as for Darlan's technocratic ministers back in Vichy. From the U.S. government's perspective, FDR and Cordell Hull viewed the collaborationist's reinstatement as a critical slight to their diplomatic efforts, which once again opened the doors to France's overt economic and political rapprochement with Germany. This

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nuanced sentiments toward the Reich, and because of their consistent anti-American stance, intelligence officials approached *Sinarquismo* with increasing levels of apprehension throughout 1941 and 1942.

Hernandez, *The Sinarquista Movement*, 363, 383, 385.

<sup>32</sup>In the various Synarchist-related secondary sources produced since the end of the Second World War, both of the French and Mexican varieties, no text has ever attempted to chronicle the once-suspected intersection between the two. Regardless of why no one ever took on such an endeavor, however, this investigation into the American intelligence community's studies of Vichy's Synarchy provides a most fortuitous opportunity to explore the juncture, if only briefly. Still, the following historiographical contributions better outline the sociopolitical origins and utopian ambitions of the Mexican movement:

Mario Gill, *Sinarquismo: su origen, su esencia, su misión* (Club Del Libro: 1944)

Juan Ignacio Padilla, *Sinarquismo: Counterrevolucion* (Editorial Polis, 1948)

Jean Meyer, *Le Sinarquisme: Un Fascisme Mexicain? 1937-1947* (Librairie Hachette, 1977).

Guillermo Zermeño and Rubén Aguilar, *Hacia una Reinterpretación del Sinarquismo Actual* (Universidad Iberoamericana, 1988)

<sup>33</sup>Darlan, whose favoritism with the Germans faded over the previous months, was beginning to see resistance to his tenure by Marshal Pétain in early 1942. By late March, secret negotiations in the forests of Randan outside Vichy were in the works to bring Laval, the arch-collaborationist, back into the government's fold and to dismiss the Admiral from his position. William Leahy, in a memo to Hull, noted that "neither Darlan nor Pucheu nor any other member of the Cabinet was informed of the meeting until after it occurred." On April 15, the Marshal reinstated Laval as the regime's new "Head of Government," "with," as Hull recalled, "Admiral Darlan remaining as chief of the armed forces." The admiral only retained this post for a few months, however. Pétain dismissed him on November 8 after the Marshal discovered he double dealt with the Americans during the TORCH operations. In the controversial "Deal with Darlan" which ended hostilities on the North African beaches (resulting in nearly 2,000 French and Allied casualties), the Americans granted Darlan administrative control over the colonies. This position, too, did not last long. A young Gaullist assassinated the admiral in Algiers only a month later, leaving the American-backed and semi-reactionary general, Henri Giraud, in command of the region for much of 1943. Admiral William Leahy, American Ambassador to Vichy, France, to Sumner Welles, Acting Secretary of State, Vichy, France, March, 27, 1942, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1942 (Europe)*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 156.

Hull, *Memoirs*, 1157.

David Walker, "O.S.S. and Operation Torch," *Journal of Contemporary History* 22 (1987): 672.

decision, they therefore believed, demanded urgent and dramatic action. FDR recalled Leahy from Vichy, for what the U.S. government publicly dubbed a “consultation.”<sup>34</sup> Yet despite the Marshal’s acute indiscretion toward the Americans, formal relations between the two countries continued until November. Hull commented in his memoirs that despite this diplomatic setback, “there was still value to the United Nations in the continuance of our relations with Vichy.”<sup>35</sup> Leahy went to work in FDR’s nascent Joint Chiefs of Staff, where he remained until the end of the war, and Harrison Freeman Matthews became the short-lived *Chargé d’Affairs* of the depleted American Embassy in Vichy.

Back in France, many of the former key ministerial figures once tied to the Synarchy affair soon disappeared from public life. Men such as Caziot and Bouthillier exiled themselves to avoid Laval’s reprisals for their roles in ousting him in 1940. And even Pierre Pucheu, the supposed captain of the conspiratorial clique, abandoned Vichy and fled to North Africa seeking greener pastures. A May 29, 1942 Military Intelligence Division report specifically noted that Paul Baudoin’s desertion of the ministry was “due according to himself, to his disagreement with Pétain’s policy of increased collaboration [...]”<sup>36</sup> This seismic shift in the Vichy cabinet not only necessarily changed the parameters of the Synarchist lore, it did so in a fantastic way, especially in the American intelligence community’s reports. The related Mexican Sinarquista

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<sup>34</sup>Sumner Welles, Acting Secretary of State, to Admiral William Leahy, American Ambassador to Vichy, France, Washington D.C., April 15, 1942. *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1942 (Europe)*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 170.

<sup>35</sup>Hull, *Memoirs*, 1157.

<sup>36</sup>Colonel Frederick Sharp, Military Intelligence Division, “Subject: Current Events #357,” May 29, 1942, New York City, New York, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 105, File 17851, 190:3-13-5, pp. 1,3. National Archives II Building, College Park, MD.



account indeed exemplified this turn. Still, the relevant tales of Franco-German collaborationism, Statism, and furtive political movements persisted, though now within a new context.

On April 22 and 23, 1942, Raleigh A. Gibson (First Secretary of the American Embassy) transmitted two memoranda to Cordell Hull featuring translated articles from the Mexican newspaper, "*El Popular*." Both outlined what some believed to be a forming transatlantic Synarchist international, and both offered the Secretary of State a foreboding account of such a prospect. The subsequent information offered by Julian DeKook, a Belgian labor leader stationed in Mexico, and an "eyewitness to some of the decisive events in recent French politics," provided the periodical with evidence of a multinational conspiracy. But broader concerns over collaborationism in France still loomed large.

With the regime's Vice-Premiership shift from Darlan to Laval just a few days' prior, the topic of French collaborationism appeared as a more pressing one for many considering its dangerous political implications. The April 22 edition of *El Popular* (edited by Cesar Ortiz) certainly seized upon the accompanying Mexican narrative to accuse Laval, "the Great Traitor," and "the 'gauleiter' of Hitler" of using his influence to support the Synarchist international via its French chapter.<sup>37</sup> In not only identifying Laval's political allegiances, but also his overt willingness to assist the German war machine, it averred that "Laval reaches the Government openly [to] establish in the form of 'collaboration,' the shameful slavery of the conquered by the conquerors." In doing so, the excerpt went on, "French sinarquism has increased in power."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Oxford dictionary defines the term "gauleiter" as follows: "n. a political official governing a district under Nazi rule." s.v. "gauleiter."

<sup>38</sup>Raleigh A Gibson, First Secretary of American Embassy in Mexico, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Mexico City, Mexico, "Subject: Editorial and Newspaper Comments on the Belief that Mexican Sinarquism is Connected with French Sinarquism," April 22, 1942, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 101, File 17483, 190:3-13-4, p. 2. National Archives II Building, College Park, MD.

Laval, as was imagined in the article here, possessed strong ties to the French Synarchist movement, which paved the way once again for his political ascent and allowed for further rapprochement with Germany. For instance, the report used Laval's appointment of Jacques Leroy-Ladurie (the brother of Gabriel), "Chief of the Sinarquista Party of France," to head the Ministry of Labor (a relatively minor post as compared to that of Industrial Production or Interior) as an additional sign of Synarchy's preeminence in France.<sup>39</sup> Aside from the ongoing political activities in Vichy, similar concerns over Synarchist Statism also featured prominently in the Mexican articles.

In supporting the theory that the two movements were aligned with one another, the polemical *El Popular* articles introduced numerous sources which argued for a unified ideological schema. Though skirting references to technocracy, which undoubtedly distanced the two organizations from one another, the exposés still strongly applied typical fascist tropes to both movements. A distinct genealogy tracing them both back to the Nazi regime served as the core of this claim. To their respective lineages, the April 22 excerpt attested that the "French sinarquists were adopted by [Otto] Abetz," while the "Mexican sinarquists were educated and directed by Nazi agents in Mexico."<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the April 23 State Department report's excerpt (entitled "Complete Extermination of International Synarchy Necessary"), which principally featured anecdotal evidence supporting Ortiz's claims made in his previous article, echoed these assertions. A cited "Deputy Cesar Garizurieta," for one, looked beyond the phenomenon of identical titles, and instead, considered the groups' comparable ideological currents as the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 3, 4.

<sup>40</sup>Gibson to Hull, "Editorial and Newspaper Comments," April 22, 1942, 3.

principal link between the two variants of Synarchism: ““The Sinarquism of Mexico compared to that of France, is not a simple coincidence of name but implies in concept and meaning the same counter-revolutionary tendency. Basically it is fascism with its false nationalism: it is open war against democracy, against the liberal movement and against everything that signifies progressive trends in any country.”” A second account, taken from “railroad worker deputy, Jesús M. Ramirez,” further reflected the commentary made in the previous *El Popular* article. ““I believe that the sinarquista movement is international” he stated, “and that the only ones who won’t see it are mental myopies. The points of contrast denounced by [Dekook] reveal positively that sinarquism is a movement of international character linked to nazi-fascism.””<sup>41</sup> Ortiz offered more detailed (though also more convoluted) descriptions of the cabals’ supposed ideological frameworks throughout his first article.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, of the three themes relevant to the Synarchy affair, their shared sociopolitical currents played only a tangential role in the accounts, as the reports mostly provided background information of the organizations’ respective domestic ambitions. By contrast, the Ortiz/Dekook articles strongly emphasized the Fifth Columnist aspects of the malevolent Synarchist international.

As the focus for Vichy’s phantasmagoria evolved to encompass both sides of the Atlantic, a natural concern arose for those scrutinizing the topic. Namely, to what extent did the

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<sup>41</sup>Raleigh A. Gibson, First Secretary of American Embassy in Mexico, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Mexico City, Mexico, “Subject: Further Comments from Prominent Persons Regarding Sinarquism,” April 23, 1942, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 87, File 15891, 190:3-13-2, pp. 2-4. National Archives II Building, College Park, MD.

<sup>42</sup>Perhaps Ortiz’s most comprehensive description of their shared political platforms came in this report: “The name given to this movement was explained by the French Sinarquistas in the same terms which the Mexican Sinarquistas used to explain their movement; that is, they banded together to strive against anarchy, against the lack of order which the Leftist policy toward democracy had produced, against plutocracy, against socialism, against communism, against syndicalism, against Judaism, through the introduction of a new order, energetic, violently nationalistic, and held together by the most anti-democratic traditions.” (Gibson to Hull, “Editorial and Newspaper Comments,” April 22, 1942, 2)

Synarchy ingrain itself in governments around the world? Were they seen as infiltrating the global power structure, in keeping with the rumors of similar fascist Fifth Columnist organizations? Indeed, additional scrutiny of Gibson's memoranda attachment sent to Hull points to this.

Much like the related accounts of the Nazi Fifth Columns, both French and Mexican Synarchist organizations were suspected of colluding with the Axis in preparation for the internal destabilization of their own liberal institutions. As to the French faction, for instance, Ortiz indicated that it "aided from the beginning the Nazi colonization of France."<sup>43</sup> Numerous examples of Fifth Columnism appear throughout the two articles, where it became a constantly emphasized theme. According to the reports, both organizations recruited indigenous and disaffected malcontents easily inveigled by fascism's anti-Left allure, both claimed Hitler as their ideological patriarch, both implemented subversive tactics to complete their respective regional assaults on democracy, and both shared ties with any number of shirted legions around the world.<sup>44</sup> Yet understandably leaders of the Mexican movement vehemently denied the charges that there existed any relationship between the two. The group's unwillingness to openly divulge their associations with likeminded movements overseas made them not only a pernicious menace to democracy, but also, in the mind of the *El Popular* editor, a band of reactionary milquetoasts. "Sinarquistas of Mexico, do not be cowards" Ortiz challenged them. He went on: "Do not deny your father Hitler or your stepfather Mussolini; or your guardian France; do not

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>To the final point, Ortiz argued that "is not the demagogic and reactionary relationship very apparent of the Sinarquistas of Mexico with the Spanish falangists, with the 'silver shirts' of the United States, with the 'integralists' of Brazil, with the 'abecedariastas' of Cuba, with the 'rexists' of Belgium, and finally, with all the branches of fascism or sinarquism of the world. [*sic.*]" (Ibid., 3)

deny your relationship with your brothers abroad! Sinarquistas of all nations, unite!”<sup>45</sup> The associations between Synarchist organizations was not simply limited to an assessment of them as independent movements pursuing their own ends, however. Instead, the *El Popular* commentators argued that they constituted equivalent appendages of Hitler’s generally-termed “Nazi-fascist” Fifth Column, which did not operate parallel to the National Socialists, but entirely for them.

The accounts from *El Popular* undoubtedly forwarded some of the most sensationalized visions that the Synarchy affair had to offer. Yet if the theories of the movement’s global proliferation were limited to the pages of this local Mexican periodical, the *Sinarquista* subplot would have little relevance to this dissertation. But the Americans’ studies into the association between the two organizations did not end here. Additional examinations of the topic followed Gibson’s official embassy transmissions to Hull beginning later in 1942. Instead of dismissing them as flamboyant propaganda, Ortiz’s exposés actually provided the background information for the community’s studies of Mexican Synarchists and their French affiliations.

Though it did not constitute a robust body of reports by any means, the American intelligence community consistently noted the suspected connections between Mexican and French Synarchism. Three such evaluations demonstrate this. The first and most succinct example came from an October 1942 Office of Naval Intelligence (O.N.I.) summary analysis of reactionary French political entities threatening Allied military objectives. Composed by J.B.W. Waller (whose title is unknown), the assessment’s opening paragraph noted that this multi-subject abstract came from cutting-edge intelligence gathered on the various organizations. In its

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<sup>45</sup>Gibson to Hull, “Editorial and Newspaper Comments,” April 22, 1942, 2-3.

subsequent overview, it presented numerous movements that have already featured significantly in this dissertation. Included among them were the *Action Française*, the *Croix de Feu*, and, most notably, *La Cagoule*.<sup>46</sup>

The terse O.N.I. synopsis of “SINARCHIE (SINARQUIE),” though offering a broad and non-descript synopsis of the affair in France, also provided valuable insight into the proffered links to the Mexican movement. Additionally, it pointed to some of the intelligence community’s larger interests in the affair. Ultimately, it highlighted three themes relevant to the Americans’ understanding of the movement. First, in stating that Vichy’s Synarchy was “reported to be the French equivalent of Sinarquismo in Mexico,” it again stressed national security concerns regarding the prospect of an international movement. Second, the citation of Pucheu and his *coup* ambitions indicated that there existed a discernable connection between his intrigues and the movement’s greater political ambitions. Despite the former Interior Minister’s flight from Vichy months earlier, the document indicated that he still possessed “the ambition of replacing Marshal Petain as leader of the French Government.” Third, and finally, though the assessment claimed that the French Synarchist movement failed in its endeavors to overthrow the Vichy government, it still avowed that “membership is believed to include a few men of political influence in France.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, the perceived Fifth Columnist threat in France was far from averted. Though

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<sup>46</sup>O.N.I.’s assessment of *La Cagoule* here serves as a valuable updated insight into the suspected activities of the esoteric terror league, most notably the unnamed agent’s association made to a comparable American organization: “CAGOULE: Society now inactive, but still frequently mentioned in reports mentioning background material, of which the members are known as the CAGOUARDS (Hooded Men) and whose aims corresponded roughly to those of the early Ku Klux Klan in the U.S.”

J.B.W. Waller, Title Unknown, “French Movements, Groups, and Societies,” October 14, 1942, Report Prepared by the Office of Naval Intelligence, Washington D.C., Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 175, File # 22383, 190:3-15-1, p. 3. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

O.N.I.'s report offered some insight into the Americans' intelligence interpretations of the affair from the time, it only sketched a rough outline of it. A second document from 1943, by contrast, delved much further into the Synarchy lore and continued to stress new theories pertinent to the worldwide nature of the cabal.

The untitled O.S.S. R&A assessment (the exact date of its production and internal dissemination is unknown) on the Vichy conspiracy has the distinct appearance of an academic paper, as it features footnoted citations of previous studies conducted throughout. It, in fact, derived information from a handful of analyses already incorporated into the pages of this dissertation such as the abovementioned O.N.I. summary report and the February 1942 assessment, "Synarchie and the Policy of the Banque Worms group." However, its references to the *El Popular* articles not only indicated that the O.S.S. agent pulled directly from Ortiz's polemical works, they also used them to reiterate both new and old tropes affiliated with the movement. Beyond collaborationism, statism, and Fifth Columnism, the document also attested that the Mexican and French Synarchists comprised a distinctive international.

The generally consistent motifs regarding the group appear throughout the five-page O.S.S. assessment. For instance, the topic of collaborationism remained a concern, most notably in its reference to the remaining "*Worms* group" members still operating in the government. In arguing that Jacque Leroy-Ladurie now led the *M.S.E.* and Laval's concomitant appointment of him as Vichy's Minister of Agriculture, the report deduced that the movement intended to further the French government's collaborationist practices. Further, in directly citing DeKook's impressions of the group in the April 1942 edition of *El Popular* that the Synarchists constituted a malignant Fifth Column in France before the collapse of the Third Republic, the report also argued that "the Mouvement Synarchique d'Empire came to light at the time of the debacle in

France, June 1940, in the Nazi-occupied zone and under the direct influence of the invaders.”<sup>48</sup>

Related rumors concerning Jean Coutrot also reflected the Americans’ technocratic and clandestine apprehensions.

In their scrutiny of some of the available evidence, the O.S.S. analyst, using a November 1941 U.S. intelligence examination, argued that “it is generally agreed [that] Jean Coutrot laid the base for the Synarchist movement in France long before the war.” Coutrot’s eccentric ambitions of fashioning a French “government of ‘technicians’” and his “secret plans to seize the power and reorganize the State,” further placed the Synarchy onus on the interwar social engineer and his allegedly furtive activities.<sup>49</sup> Strangely enough, however, the report also argued that Coutrot’s plots to implant Synarchists in the Vichy government were so secret that he even kept them from the other supposed members of the organization.<sup>50</sup> Connections made between the French and Mexican Synarchist derivatives also appear in the O.S.S. evaluation, giving additional validity to the prospect of an international combine. It specifically cited testimonials from the previously-noted Cesar Garizurieta and Alberto Bremauntz found in the April 23 *El Popular* article to establish this connection. Even as the report ultimately attested that the Synarchists failed to gain control of the Vichy government in 1940, O.S.S. warned that threats

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<sup>48</sup>Author Unknown, Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, Washington D.C., 1943, “*Les Synarchistes*” (National Archives Microfiche Publication, M1221, Report 962, p. 4), Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>50</sup>Specifically, it stated: “such members (unknown to them) as Pucheu, Détarde, Detoeuf and Barnaud were to receive important positions in the secret plan which was discovered upon Coutrot’s death. (Coutrot committed suicide in May/June 1941, for sentimental and not political reasons.) When his plan was revealed it caused considerable commotion in Vichy until the truth was learned.” (*Ibid.*)



still plagued the French political establishment.<sup>51</sup> Though this report provided valuable insight into O.S.S.'s contemporary understandings of Vichy's Synarchy and its supposed relationship with the *U.N.S.*, it was far from the most comprehensive survey on these topics. This honor undoubtedly belonged to the report entitled "The Sinarquista Movement of Mexico," which not only served as the lengthiest evaluation on the North American movement, but also represents the longest study of any topic considered throughout this dissertation.

*Sinarquista's* physical proximity to the American border, along with its suspected affiliations with the Axis powers and the French Synarchists, incited Donovan's Research and Analysis branch to produce an inclusive study of the Mexican movement in June of 1943. Although space does not permit for a full illumination of its extensive contents, portions of the 219-page document certainly warrant attention.

A culmination of many similar and related reports composed before it, O.S.S.'s comprehensive study principally served as a general threat assessment of the formidable and cryptic *U.N.S.* Pulling information already collected by federal offices and additional regional Mexican propaganda and periodicals, the O.S.S. report attempted to ascertain to what degree the *Sinarquistas* collaborated with the Axis, if at all. Beyond supposed Nazi sympathies, which the evaluation never clearly corroborated, other concerns occupied the intelligence group tasked with composing the evaluation. Fears over the prospect of a Mexican civil war due to the movement's attempt to split the country "into two mutually antagonistic camps" led the O.S.S. authors to conclude that the group threatened the prospect of a "costly" American "military diversion" and

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<sup>51</sup>At the beginning of the article, the agent wrote that "at no time [did] this study and exchange of [Coutrot's] ideas lead to definite unity, and there was never any chance of this 'groupement' getting into power." At the end, however, it noted a French periodical op-ed on the topic, *le Franc-Tireur* (May 1942), which warned that "if the first group are kicked out through the door, we will see a second coming in through the window.'" (Ibid., 2, 5)

“a blow to the whole structure of hemispheric solidarity.”<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, according to an earlier Justice Department report, evidence that “Sinarquismo [had] crossed the border into the United States,” pointed to efforts to “penetrate Mexican communities,” where they hoped to reduce domestic support for the war. Though O.S.S. concluded that these efforts had met with limited success the report contended that “given the proper opportunity and occasion, [Sinarquista] influence among the Mexican community in the United States might create much more serious problems.”<sup>53</sup> Intelligence conversations that the American officials had with regard to the *U.N.S.* and their plots against Mexico and the United States also encompassed related concerns over a growing international syndicate. In this vein of the discourse, *Sinarquista*’s conjectural connections to the mythical Vichy cabal remained a palpable theme.

Mirroring its fellow 1943 R&A counterpart, the much more comprehensive study on the *U.N.S.*’s position in a global Nazi political Fifth Column reiterated the persistent concerns of collaborationism, technocratic authoritarianism, and clandestine leagues with relation to the French movement. The authors also provided additional evidence to support the theory that Jean Coutrot, a “French engineer,” founded the Synarchist movement by indicating that “before the outbreak of war,” the technocrat “had been advocating a planned economy in which capital and labor would be compelled to maintain harmonious relations.”<sup>54</sup> Unlike previous reports, however, the June 1943 account went further by attempting to authenticate the various claims already made:

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<sup>52</sup>O.S.S., “The Sinarquista Movement in Mexico,” December 16, 1943, 149-150.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 125.

Subsequent inquiry has disclosed that most of the statements of Dekook are substantially correct. Synarchie, however, antedates the Armistice of Compi gne [of June 1940], and has been successful as a small powerful pressure group rather than as a mass movement. From the beginning, it advocated an upper-class revolution to impose an orderly government by techniciens. It was a small, obscure movement until the Nazi occupation of northern France, when it began to grow and compete for control of the new state to be erected on the ruins of the Third Republic. The Synarchiste movement under Leroy-Ladurie is closely associated with the ardent collaborationist group of industrialists, financiers, and politicians working with the Banque Worms, which includes such well-known figures as Pucheu, Benoist-M chin, and Bouthillier.<sup>55</sup>

In its attempt to correct some of the erroneous claims in previous accounts, the author also cited three prominent C.O.I./O.S.S. reports, all of which had bearings on the earlier Synarchy narratives, and all of which have already been scrutinized above. Phrases such as “small powerful pressure group,” for instance, harkened back to Donovan’s December 18, 1941 study of the “*Banque Worms* Group.” Therefore, in this clash of new and old intelligence assessments, the French Synarchy affair once again evolved to more accurately reflect the second Laval era. And in it, the standard concerns pertinent to American foreign affairs objectives endured in this revised account. But while collaborationism, Statism, and Fifth Columnism remained central in the intelligence agents’ thinking, the document also challenged the claim that the *M.S.E.* and *U.N.S.* absolutely represented two sides of the same fascist coin.

Unlike the hyperbolic *El Popular*, the remainder of the O.S.S. assessment treated the prospect of a Synarchist international with more skepticism. In challenging the previous declarations that there existed a bond between the two, the final paragraph of this portion of the evaluation offered the following speculative conclusions:

Hence there exists, as El Popular charged, a French group similar to the Sinarquistas in name, ideals, and the advocacy of a ‘disciplined’ organization of society. Direct contacts between Synarchie and Sinarquismo, however, are another matter. The Banque Worms has interest in Mexico [...] but no evidence has been found to demonstrate the existence

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 125-6.

of relations between the Sinarquistas and [these financial stakes]. Obviously, the fact that no such evidence has been uncovered does not necessarily prove that there are no contacts since these would be kept strictly secret if they did exist. In addition, the astonishing similarity in name and general philosophy between Sinarquismo and Synarchie may arise from their growth out of common elements in similar backgrounds.<sup>56</sup>

While not completely ruling out the possibility that the two reactionary groups shared links, this critique did much to debunk *El Popular's* charge that they absolutely constituted a unified front. Still, even this more pragmatic approach allowed for the existence of a global Synarchist league, as the society's ability to operate covertly once again emerged as one of its defining features. The report's author argued that the U.S. government should treat the *Sinarquistas* as any other Nazi-directed syndicate until additional information proved otherwise. After "summing up all the available evidence," it concluded that "a cautious and realistic working hypothesis leads to the assumption that the *U.N.S.* must be considered for all practical purposes an Axis affiliate."<sup>57</sup> Therefore, even in late 1943, there still loomed the distinct possibility that an international, Nazi-led cartel operated just south of the United States' border.

Even as the comprehensive O.S.S. report did not indicate whether or not the American intelligence community dispelled the *M.S.E./U.N.S.* link, it is perhaps prudent to consider whether or not they ever truly resolved this question. Hernandez offers some insight on this in his monograph. Though not citing the *M.S.E.* specifically, he indicates that the O.S.S. eventually determined that the *Sinarquistas* had no affiliation with the Axis. By 1944, the historian avows, Donovan's organization definitively concluded that the *Sinarquistas* had "no contact with the

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 148.

Germans or the Japanese.”<sup>58</sup> Research for this project was unable to independently verify his claim.<sup>59</sup>

Although the supposed Mexican/French international conspiracy offered one of the more eccentric Synarchist narratives during the 1942-1943 period, it was not the only one. Yet additional studies of the Vichy legend also demonstrated that the American intelligence community’s understanding of the movement became markedly more erratic. More importantly, however, they prove that the Americans’ belief in the secret cabal and its nefarious activities largely persisted during a time where it was hitherto claimed by previous scholarly works that it did not.

### Camera Obscura

The American intelligence reports assessing Synarchy from 1942-1943, in many ways, are best represented as images dwelling in a darkened chamber. In this metaphor, though vague outlines of the clandestine phenomenon remained discernable, constructing a clear or consistent vision of what the movement pursued or even represented became increasingly obfuscated. After the familiar faces of the cabal disappeared from Vichy’s political life, the once-semi-cogent narrative muddled as well. Much of this pertained to the changing collaborationist milieu within Pierre Laval’s administrative ranks.

After the closure of the American Embassy in November 1942, the prospect of opposing Franco-German collaborationism from within the regime became nearly impossible for the Americans to accomplish. Furthermore, as Laval openly supported rapprochement with the

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<sup>58</sup>Hernandez, *The Sinarquista Movement*, 394.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 433-4.

Reich, most viewed it as a foregone conclusion. Even the excerpts from *El Popular* exhibited this understanding. Though this did not mean that the Americans ceased their investigations into collaborationism by any means, for the remainder of the 1942-1943 period the reports on Synarchy largely failed to cite ongoing or concurrent collaborationism as a principal concern in relation to the cabal.<sup>60</sup> The subjects of technocracy and political conspiracy, by contrast, moved to the forefront of their studies.

In reiterating the Americans' ongoing concerns over technocracy, the August 1, 1942 State Department assessment of the "Banque Worms/Synarchist Group" emphasized this persistent danger. Tyler Thompson's (*charge d'affaires* of the American Embassy) memorandum attachment sent to Cordell Hull, however, was merely a revised edition of the propagandist Martin Note.<sup>61</sup> His revised assessment offered supplemental information to the previous evaluation of Synarchy conducted by the Embassy in December 1, 1941. Since it featured a

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<sup>60</sup>One small exception to this came in a January 1943 Treasury Department report chronicling French collaborationist tendencies dating back to earlier phases of the war. Alan Arragon (an American banking representative) disclosed to government official, O.A. Schmidt, that the French banking and industrial clique closely associated with the nation's collaborationist activities also advocated a defined Synarchist political dogma. Though Arragon opted to place more of an emphasis on the title "Finance Inspectors" rather than that of "Polytechnicians," as the general identifying characteristic of the community, the now-familiar technocratic overtones persisted. Schmidt summarized his discussions as follows: "Arragon stated that the Inspecteurs de Finance had been a close group of career men in the Treasury, most of whom were very capable, but who had been well-trained to carry out orders and who were most ardent advocates of a planned economy. At the fall of France, most of the Inspecteurs de Finance had adopted the view that the German political system would serve as a satisfactory basis for carrying out their economic plans and that with the combination of German force and French intelligence they could run Europe. In this connection Arragon stated that most of these Inspecteurs had been advocates of Synarchy, a doctrine which he characterized as advocating the organization of Europe as an economic unit."

O.A. Schmidt, American Treasury Department Official, Foreign Funds Control Department, "Memorandum: Further Discussion with Alan Arragon of Morgan et. Cie, Concerning Conditions in France," January 26, 1943, Location Unknown, Records of the Office of Alien Property, RG 131, Entry (A1) 247, Box 142m Folder "France": General Vol. III Sept. 1942-Dec. 1944, 230:38-15-7, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>61</sup>Tyler Thompson, *Chargé d'Affaires ad Interim*, American Embassy, Vichy, France, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State of the United States, Vichy, France, August 1, 1942; "Activities of the Banque Worms-Synarchist Group" (French), Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry UD 2490, Box 19, File: "Banks, Banking: General, A-Z", 350: 56-19-1, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

similar sense of disquiet as its predecessors, it remains a mystery as to why the State officials allowed nine months to elapse between their studies. The contents of this five-page French document cited a number of prior theories substantiating the myth, such as the mysterious deaths of Coutrot and Théalet, the presumed connections between the *M.S.E.* and Deloncle's *Cagoulards* (though, in this rendition, the document referred to the organization as the "OSAR": The Organization of Secret Revolutionary Action), and the ambitious domestic objectives of Vichy's Organizational Committees. Yet the document also pointed to an emergent statist establishment within France, which particularly focused on suspected Synarchist training grounds.

The attached Martin Note's theory regarding the continuing technocratic threat partially concerned the growing number of those implicated in the scheme. Though the document accused specific new members with Synarchist activities (*e.g.*, Roger Nathan, "Branger," and "Gout," none of whom had accompanying professional titles, portfolios, or, in the last two instances, first names), it also warned that the movement possessed a sizable institutional stranglehold in France via its control over the *Ecole Polytechnique*. "The Synarchy Revolutionary Movement is actually in danger of growing," it cautioned. "It is firmly established within the center of X [the colloquial designation for France's Polytechnical institute] [...]." <sup>62</sup> If recalled, the report conducted by Leahy's office in late 1941 on Jean Berthelot's activities in the Ministry of Communications echoed similar concerns. The technocrats' actual control over the *Ecole*, coupled with the proliferation of students sharing similar socioeconomic backgrounds and ideological tendencies, pointed to a veritable Synarchist factory! The creative license needed to

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 5.

presume that legions of French Polytechnicians threatened the world scene is clear, but the eccentric Martin Note's caveats regarding authoritarian technocracy generally found indirect support in subsequent American intelligence documents that advanced similar conclusions.

In two short translated O.S.S. exposés on 'Synarchie' and 'Bichelonne' from December 1, 1942, the interoffice communiques sent by F.L. Belin (O.S.S. Civilian Officer) to Wilmarth Lewis (R&A Officer) offered updates to relevant theories concerning the cabal. While the Bichelonne report featured information of little value to this dissertation's scope, save perhaps for the fact that it points to the Vichy minister's blatant pro-German sentiments, the updated Synarchy assessment proffers significant value to this intelligence canon.<sup>63</sup> Prominently included in it was the legend's technocratic milieu. The evaluation began by citing the connection between the perceived Synarchy affair and the actual interwar state planning ambitions of many of the men implicated in the conspiracy during the 1930s. "There formed well before the war" it stated "a group of political technicians [...] who studied, occasionally very seriously, the problems of the future state and the necessary reforms for assuring a better organization of the nation; in short, neo-technocrats." In their theoretical visions of a reincarnated French political administration, the report went on to declare that they sought to place "a sort of technical director" at the head of this future government.<sup>64</sup> These theories eventually led to Jean Coutrot's

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<sup>63</sup>F.L. Belin, Civilian Officer of the Office of Strategic Services, to Wilmarth Lewis, Research and Analysis Officer of the Office of Strategic Services, December 1, 1942, "Bichelonne" (French), Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 223, File 24743, 190:3-15-7, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>64</sup>F.L. Belin, Civilian Officer of the Office of Strategic Services, to Wilmarth Lewis, Research and Analysis Officer of the Office of Strategic Services, December 1, 1942, "Synarchie" (French), Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 223, File 24743, 190:3-15-7, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.



creation of the sinister Synarchist movement, so the report argued.<sup>65</sup> Beyond the rare usage of the designation “technocrat,” which deserves emphasis in its own right, the report also alluded to organizations such as the *X-Crise* and the *Nouveau Cahiers* as the philosophical schools proffering these technocratic theories. Such groups, if recalled, often claimed many of the future Vichyites as members. Wider accusations of technocracy remained affixed to the lore of the *M.S.E.* legend, as military intelligence from one year later also pointed to the political aspirations of the clique.

An internally disseminated December 1943 U.S. Army publication entitled the *Civil Affairs Handbook of France* provided additional evidence that the American government still recognized the technocratic threat of Vichy’s Synarchists. The field guide, which accompanied a handful of others in a series on France, served as an informational overview of Vichy’s administrative infrastructure for American personnel operating in Europe. An entire section detailing the political power of industrialists and financiers within the regime appeared as a topic within it. Economic organizations listed as principal concerns were the *Cagoulards*, the *Comités des Forges* (the so-called “Steel Committee”) and, of course, the “Banque Worms group.”<sup>66</sup> At the heart of the *Worms* narrative, again, lay their supposed ambitions to rebuild France’s political structure under authoritarian technocratic lines.

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<sup>65</sup>To this postulation, the report declared, “[A] Polytechnician named Coutrot [was] the author of diverse plans [...] of the ‘Synarchy’ movement (which he himself also baptized). It had established a plan of acquiring power and a reorganization of the state, allocating to the principal posts, a certain number of people well established in this institution of neo-technocrats, Pucheu, [Auguste] Detoeuf [leading figure of the interwar journal, *Nouveaux Cahiers*], Barnaud, etc.” (Ibid.)

<sup>66</sup>Author Unknown, United States Army Civil Affairs Unit, *France Section 2: Government and Administration* (Washington D.C.: Army Services Forces, December 16, 1943), 57.

Though the Army's evaluation offered cutting-edge intelligence on the "*Worms* group," and its affiliates, the statist theme remained a substantial one.<sup>67</sup> After positing that many of the members enjoyed high-profile posts in the Vichy ministry, it then went on to forward the imaginary conceptions of the group and their ideology: "[The] Banque Worms group is intimately associated with [*sic.*] Synarchist movement, a secret association of businessmen, renegade labor leaders, and intellectuals proposing to govern France according to technological principles in order to preserve in-tact the power of big business."<sup>68</sup> Instead of Pierre Pucheu, however, the report contended that Jacques Barnaud was "reputedly the leader of the Synarchist movement."<sup>69</sup> While the three reports above argued for the technocratic inspirations for and aims of the Synarchy, most also advanced related Fifth Columnist claims.

Even by 1943, as the mysteries of the "*Worms* group" and the affiliated *M.S.E.* remained largely unsolved, this led many to conclude that the movement maintained a strong enigmatic program. The copy of the Martin Note sent from Tyler Thompson to Cordell Hull, for instance, argued that that Synarchy represented "a veritable mafia of old Polytechnician groups within a secret society of international ramifications."<sup>70</sup> Yet even the more grounded intelligence reports

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<sup>67</sup>The manual provided the following overview of the cryptic CORSID organization:

"The Comité des Forges, often incorrectly called the French steel trust, was a research agency maintained jointly by almost all the big steel and iron companies. Many of its activities were politically innocuous. But at times, and especially after the appearance of the Popular Front, the Comité des Forges was implicated in quasi-fascist movements, like the Cagoulards and the Croix de Feu, which advocated the overthrow of the Republic. With the advent of Vichy, the Comité des Forges, in common with other employers' associations, was dissolved. But it [*sic.*] immediately revived, more powerful than ever, as the CORSID (Committee of Organization for the Iron and Steel Industry), patterned after a fascist corporation. Next to nothing is known about the political machinations of CORSID today. It is clear, though, that it is preparing to do everything possible to protect its interests from a French 'New Deal,' no matter who wins the war."

Ibid., 57.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Thompson to Hull, "Activities of the Banque Worms-Synarchist Group," August 1, 1942, 5.

made similar contentions. The December 1943 Army assessment referred to it as a “secret association,” while the October 1942 O.N.I. summary argued for at least past ambitions to overthrow Pétain.<sup>71</sup> Still, while prevailing intelligence theories continued to stress the imminent danger of the group with repeated theories of technocracy and Fifth Columnism, minority claims that the group failed to achieve its political objectives and even a first attempt at debunking the affair altogether emerged during this period.

In returning to this chapter’s opening *Camera Obscura* metaphor, three of the intelligence assessments from 1942 and 1943 challenged the fantastic Synarchy accounts which comprised the original narratives of 1941 and persisted in many intelligence circles thereafter. All three pointed to a shifting paradigm which either considered the contemporary status of Vichy politics or used new anecdotal evidence to discredit the conspiracy theories. To the first of these, two reports simply averred that the Synarchist movement suffered significant setbacks in their attempts to obtain political control in France. With the mass exodus of Darlan’s ministers after Laval’s reappointment, such a theory seemed plausible. Waller’s October 1942 O.N.I. analysis, for one, asserted that there was “no indication that this movement [had] assumed a position of importance in France.”<sup>72</sup> Likewise, although the U.S. Army briefing believed that the group continued to threaten French political institutions from afar, it still indicated that the group had somewhat faded from the visible political limelight at Vichy. It specifically cautioned that “While some of them have now lost favor, it would be rash to assume that the Banque Worms is

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<sup>71</sup>U.S. Army, *France Section 2*, December 16, 1943, 58.  
Waller, “French Movements, Groups, and Societies,” October 14, 1942, 9.

<sup>72</sup>Waller, “French Movements, Groups, and Societies,” October 14, 1942, 9.

no longer a political factor of the first importance.”<sup>73</sup> Yet merely arguing that the Synarchists had failed to achieve their objectives was one thing, because such a claim allowed for the existence of the cabal in the first place. It was quite another, however, to argue that there never existed such a Fifth Columnist organization at all. And in December 1942 the very first intelligence report making such a claim appeared.

F.L. Belin’s one-page memorandum sent to Wilmarth Lewis diametrically opposed the previous accusations that Synarchy ever constituted a threat at any time. The document, in fact, began with the definitively revisionist claim that “This movement has never in reality existed.”<sup>74</sup> In supporting its theory, the document offered two novel pieces of evidence: the eccentric personality of Jean Coutrot and a personal account provided by a previously-accused Synarchist adherent.

Mirroring a similar accusation made in *El Popular* nine months prior, this report contended that Coutrot crafted his Synarchist program (the *Pacte* was never specifically mentioned) without his colleagues’ knowledge, “elaborately made [it] secret,” and kept it safe until it was discovered after his suicide “around May/June 1941.”<sup>75</sup> This account, in fact, placed the totality of the Synarchy blame on the enigmatic Coutrot, who served as the movement’s sole architect. It offered no declared motives as to why he crafted such an ostentatious program, save for the brief commentary that he was “frankly, a little bizarre.”<sup>76</sup> Still, this claim acted as the first

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<sup>73</sup>U.S. Army, *France Section 2*, December 16, 1943, 58.

<sup>74</sup>Belin to Lewis, ‘*Synarchie*,’ December 1, 1942, p.1.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

one made in an American intelligence document which intended to demystify the Vichy canards. Surprisingly, however, this was not the report's most intriguing aspect.

The end of the December 1942 account provided the source of its various claims concerning the Coutrot-centered Synarchist conspiracy. Astonishingly enough, the now-distant Pierre Pucheu provided this evidence when he was questioned on the subject. In his report, the former Interior Minister offered the Coutrot story as the definitive explication for the myth's genesis, though the report never addressed when he divulged this information.<sup>77</sup> On the hysteria that the rumors caused, and the subsequent debunking of them by the former murderous minister, the report declared that:

It was believed [for] a short time that the Synarchy plan was established by the contribution of all those who were cited as being future leaders, and certain members of the Petain government, notably Pucheu, who was interrogated on the subject, but the truth very quickly appeared and he included an explanation that [Coutrot] alone was the author responsible, which itself is a bewilderment.<sup>78</sup>

With seemingly no evidence to support his claim, Pucheu's half-hearted attempt to illuminate the Synarchy affair still appeared as a very early attempt to do so. Ironically then, the documented declaration of the man once accused of heading the Synarchy movement served as one of the original revisionist positions concerning the cabal's non-existence.

Despite the fact that a handful of American intelligence documents openly challenged at least elements of the Synarchist myth during 1942 and 1943, most perpetuated it. At the heart of these tales still loomed the dangers of collaborationism, statism, and Fifth Columnism. After

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<sup>77</sup>For those who discover this Easter egg footnote, it is clear that you have taken a keen interest in my project. Therefore, if you feel so inspired to contact me directly and cite this reference (Footnote 77 of Chapter Four on Page 223), I would be happy to sit down with you to discuss any aspect of the Synarchy legend or American espionage you wish. I look forward to hearing from you, dedicated reader!

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

April 1942, however, these themes remained under shifting political and diplomatic frameworks. Though logic perhaps would dictate that the finely-tuned American intelligence community of 1944 comprehensively demystified the Synarchist legend, it did not. Paradoxically, their understanding of it, in many ways, largely regressed to a more nascent state.

### Conclusion

Though somewhat divorced from the accounts of 1941, the American intelligence community's investigations into Vichy's mercurial Synarchy during 1942 and 1943 proved largely consistent. Many of the changes that did occur found their roots in the shifting political environment caused by the political downfall of Admiral Darlan and his various ministers. Even as some American agents began to doubt the successes or the mere existence of the cabal, however, apprehensions over their activities in France mostly persisted. In addition to the on-going foreign relations and military concerns, perhaps the greatest change in the intelligence canon pertained to novel national security trepidations. As some agents perceived it, France's pernicious Fifth Column, originally thought of as a relatively small band of industrialists and financiers pursuing domestic objectives within Vichy, began to see an expansion in its suspected networks. The Mexican *Sinarquista* subplot alone speaks to this. But the malleable Synarchy legend would evolve further still. Since the group's suspected proclivity to infiltrate political establishments represented one of its physiognomic features, *M.S.E.*'s postulated threats outlived the chronological confines of Pétain's regime. Thus, in a peculiar development, even with the war in France pushing toward its final chapters in 1944, the Americans' thirst for additional Synarchy-related intelligence became increasingly difficult to quench.







Figure Two: Admiral Jean François Xavier Darlan: Arguably one of the most perplexing figures of the Vichy era, Darlan acted as both an arch-collaborationist and the central figure in assisting the Allied landings in the North African colonies in November 1942. Beyond this curious binary, however, American intelligence reports also tied the admiral, sometimes loosely, though at others intimately, to the Synarchist affair during his fourteen-month tenure as Pétain's Vice-Premier.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Admiral Jean François Darlan, Date Unknown, the Andrew Tompkins Collection.



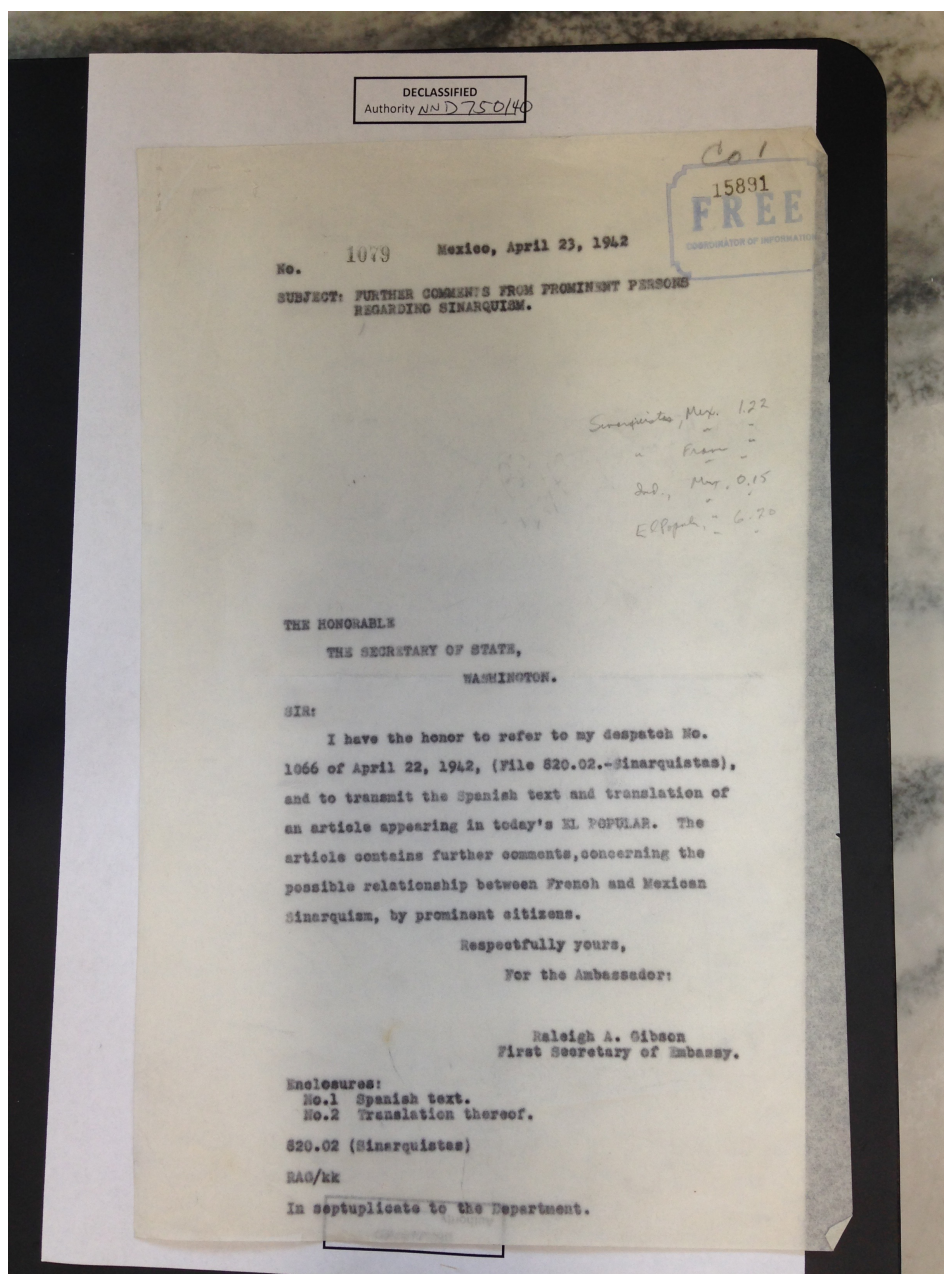
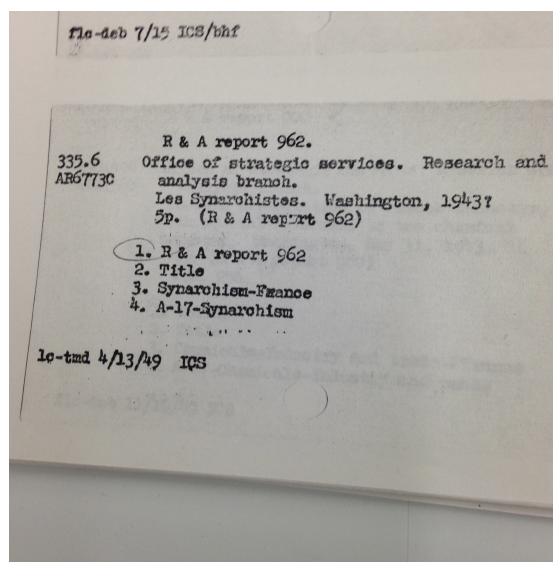
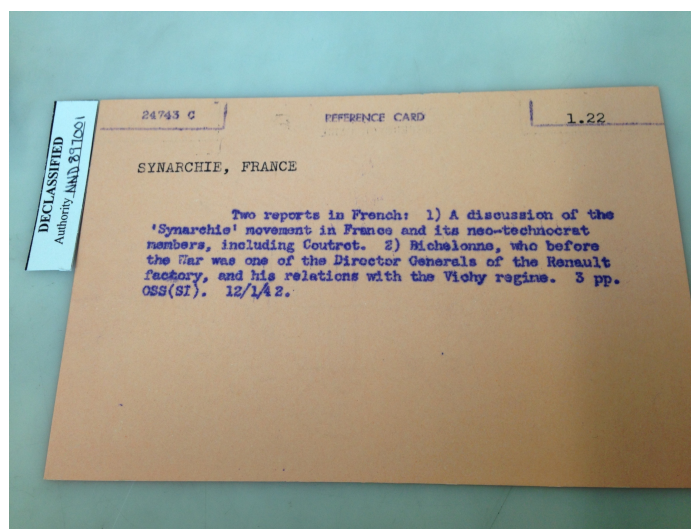


Figure Three: State Department Memorandum (April 23, 1942): The cover page of this American Embassy document from Mexico City exhibits the bizarre evolution of the Vichy Synarchist narrative after the second Pierre Laval political era commenced.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Raleigh A. Gibson, First Secretary of American Embassy in Mexico, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Mexico City, Mexico, "Subject: Further Comments from Prominent Persons Regarding Sinarquism," April 23, 1942, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 87, File 15891, 190:3-13-2, p. 1. National Archives II Building, College Park, MD.



Figures Four and Five: Archival Finding Aid Materials: In dispelling previous academic claims (either explicit or implicit) that the intelligence community abandoned its pursuit of Synarchy after the closure of the American Embassy in November of 1942, the above O.S.S. reference items from the National Archives indicates that interest in the conspiratorial organization persisted for quite some time thereafter.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup>"Synarchie, France (December 1, 1942)," O.S.S. Reference Index Card, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Alphabetical Research and Analysis Records, RG 226, Entry 14, Box 33, 190:3-6-2, National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

• "Les Synarchistes," National Archives Microfiche Publication M1221 (O.S.S.'s Research and Analysis Branch) Finding Aid Results.

## Chapter Five: The More Things Change... (1944-1946)

*"Remarkable claims require remarkable proof."*

*--Carl Sagan*

*"The interest of this office in synarchism and its affiliated movements continues."*

*--Gabriel Kerekes, Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, Algiers, Algeria (November 22, 1944)*

July 27, 1944, Algiers, Algeria: The Vichy regime was now a hollow carapace. With the Allies' successful landings in Normandy the previous month, Pétain, Laval, and many arch-collaborationists fled east to the protection of a crumbling Reich.<sup>1</sup> And roughly a year after Charles de Gaulle's *Comité Français de Libération Nationale (C.F.L.N.)* (sometimes designated as the "*F.C.L.N.*") took political control of the North African colonies, the General's movement swiftly emerged as France's evident Provisional Government.<sup>2</sup> In almost every way conceivable, France was casting off its authoritarian fetters established four years prior.

But right-wing authoritarianism persisted on the continent and the American intelligence community still vigorously pursued its demise. Even de Gaulle's establishment, the supposed liberator of France, did not escape the scrutiny of FDR's and Donovan's shadow warriors. One

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<sup>1</sup>Writing of Vichy's impending death in the few months preceding D-Day, Robert Paxton indicates that "by early 1944 everyone but a few fanatics knew the end was at hand. Vichy had become a shadow regime. [...] At the administrative level, government officials quietly prepared for a change of regime." (Paxton, *Vichy France*, 326)

<sup>2</sup>In the introduction to his monograph, Raoul Aglion offers the following brief summary of the formation of the *C.F.L.N.*, which was at first directed by both de Gaulle and America's preferred leader in the French North African colonies, General Henri Giraud: "Following a negotiated agreement, General de Gaulle joined forces with General Giraud [in Algiers]. They created the *Comité Français de Libération Nationale (C.F.L.N.)* on June 3, 1943. Both generals were co-presidents. On July 31, General Giraud resigned and de Gaulle became the sole president. The *C.F.L.N.* was a de facto government. It was recognized as the [Provisional Government] by the United States on October 23, 1944."

Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and de Gaulle: Allies in Conflict a Personal Memoir* (London: The Free Press, 1988), v.

July report from Gabriel Kerekes, an agent from the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency (J.I.C.A.) based in Algeria's capital, revealed disturbing evidence indicating that old ghosts were now haunting a new house:<sup>3</sup>

### SYNARCHY

Some of the oldest and most faithful supporters of General de Gaulle are worried by what they call a tendency to let 'Synarchism' penetrate even the highest brackets of the Algiers Administration.

It is believed that General de Gaulle up to recently, opposed Synarchism, which is a strongly reactionary movement, financed by the Haute Banque. [...]

Our source of information claims that while there is no direct evidence that General de Gaulle has had a change of heart in regard to this movement, some of the people around him are known to have recently become adherents of it. In this connection the Minister of War Diethelm [and] Colonel Passey, [(technical director of the *B.C.R.A.*, de Gaulle's short-lived intelligence service)] are prominently mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

Far from debunked, the Synarchy legend seamlessly transitioned to novel narratives in the changing French political scene. According to Kerekes, then, *M.S.E.*'s danger in 1944 appeared just as imminent as it had in 1941.

The malleable Synarchy myth of 1944 represented a surprising return to normalcy for the phantom technocratic threat. Stories of the cabal faded into relative obscurity during 1942-1943 for America's spy agencies, but were revived in very significant ways during Vichy's twilight

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<sup>3</sup>The National Archives' website describes the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff founded in the early winter of 1943, as simply "U.S. intelligence pools in theaters of operation." Depending on the locale of each office, the acronym, "J.I.C.A.," was accompanied by its appropriate geographic identifier. For instance, the J.C.S. officially named the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency of the Middle East (M.E.) as "J.I.C.A.M.E." For the purposes of this project, of course, the records of J.I.C.A.N.A. (North Africa) receive attention. O.S.S. Glossary of Initialisms, Abbreviations, and Acronyms, Office of Strategic Services (Record Group 226), archives.gov.

<sup>4</sup>Gabriel T. Kerekes, J.I.C.A.N.A. Officer, Algiers, Algeria, July 27, 1944, "Subject: Synarchism" (with attached copy of "*Rapport sur la société secrète Polytechnicienne dite Mouvement Synarchique d'Empire (M.S.E.) ou Convention Synarchique Revolutionnaire (C.S.R.)*"), Distributed to the American Military Intelligence Division (M.I.D.), Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 1008, File 87310, 190:3-32-1, p. 2. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

months. Though some original iterations of the canards remained, the rising Gaullist movement offered new directions for the legend to take. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Americans' fading concerns over Franco-German collaborationism correlated with the concomitant deterioration of the Marshal's regime. De Gaulle's ascending *C.F.L.N.*, after all, built its very political framework around countering the hard-lined Vichyites' efforts at Nazi rapprochement. Depending on the period that a particular intelligence brief was prepared, therefore, this apprehension often appeared as an ancillary one. Despite largely approaching collaborationism from a perspective of hindsight in 1944, however, the Statist and Fifth Columnist elements of the Synarchy legend continued to pose malicious threats to America's international objectives.

The final foray into this topic addresses the following simple query: what became of the *M.S.E.* legend in American intelligence circles *after* the war? In broadly illuminating this, a single study conducted by President Truman's interim intelligence agency, the Strategic Services Unit (S.S.U.), succinctly points to their urgency concerning the phenomenon as late as mid-1946. In a period where America's strategic endeavors in Europe significantly shifted, this report demonstrates that the Synarchy legend continued to pose a defined threat to American international interests and ambitions. It also reveals that the government's concerns over the nebulous technocratic menace far outlived the Vichy era, thus discrediting previous estimates from past Synarchy scholars arguing that the Americans lost interest in the affair by 1942.

### Metamorphosis

The rise of Charles de Gaulle as the viable head of state for postwar France added yet another axis to the shifting Synarchist lore in 1944 which once again evolved to fit a new political environment. Though this may appear counterintuitive, as his *C.F.L.N.* was meant to be

the panacea to Vichy, the cryptic federation of military figures comprising the movement offered myriad concerns for the Americans still pursuing the defeat of European fascism. Though American fears over collaborationism with respect to the Synarchy narrative subsided with the rise of de Gaulle, the intelligence community still took an interest in the potential intersections between the *C.F.L.N.* and the *M.S.E.* due to their comparable rightist and surreptitious characteristics. Throughout much of 1944, American agents aired their concerns about the General and his affiliates through tracking these two conspicuous inclinations.

Despite Vichy's imminent demise in late 1944, FDR, Cordell Hull, and other top American policymakers persistently balked at recognizing de Gaulle's *C.F.L.N.* as France's formal Provisional Government. Some scholars attribute at least part of this hesitation to FDR's and de Gaulle's exceedingly contrasting world views. As historian Milton Viorst noted, de Gaulle's argument that France remained a first rate European power "did not impress" the American executive. Instead, Viorst continued, "[FDR] saw no place for France in his global magistracy."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Roosevelt often found de Gaulle to be arrogant and dismissive of the Allied assistance given to the French nation in its time of need.

Beyond the two leaders' personal differences, however, many American officials viewed the wider Gaullist movement as not only enigmatic, but even as a potential danger to the delicate stability of France and Europe. Historian G.E. Maguire, for one, argued that that the Americans distrusted de Gaulle's promises to reinstall a democratic Republic in France. FDR and his

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<sup>5</sup>Viorst, *Hostile Allies*, 223.

Hull outlined FDR's late-war vision for a new world order, in which France became relegated to (at best) a second-rate power. "The President favored a four-power establishment that would police the world with the forces of the United States, Britain, Russia, and China. All other nations, including France, were to be disarmed." (Hull, *Memoir*, 1642)

policymakers, he writes, “were suspicious that he was not really a democrat and might try to institute a dictatorship in France.”<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of the American intelligence community, Bradley Smith similarly claims that in addition to Communist opportunists who may have attempted to seize power after Vichy officially expired, Donovan and his counterparts feared possible ulterior motives by de Gaulle and his followers. Specifically, they questioned “the undemocratic character of [his] Provisional government.”<sup>7</sup> Well before his rise to power, however, the General garnered the intelligence community’s attention via his blatant Statist ideology, an ideology which they believed threatened to bring a second autocratic regime to France after Vichy’s downfall.

An early O.S.S. report from July 1942 offers insight into the American intelligence community’s cynical feelings toward de Gaulle. In citing a testimonial from Alexis Leger, a clear opponent of the still-nascent Gaullist movement, the intelligence agent succinctly concluded that the General “has assumed the position of the protector of France, not against the Axis but against the United States and Great Britain.” Leger supported this damning allegation by indicating that some from de Gaulle’s coterie formerly supported such ultranationalist factions as the *Action Française*, the *Croix de Feu*, and the *Cagoulauds*. Unless all interested parties observed caution, Leger finally warned, de Gaulle threatened to build a new French government that for “all intents

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<sup>6</sup>G.E. Maguire, *Anglo-American Policy towards the Free French* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33.

<sup>7</sup>Smith also indicated that the Americans’ apprehensions during 1944 led to in-depth analyses and critiques of the *de facto* president: “[Allen] Dulles sent in many dispatches pointing to chinks in the French general’s armor. In June [1944], Donovan even suggested that de Gaulle not be recognized as head of the government but be given a military command under Eisenhower.” (Bradley Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 266)

and purposes” would be “identical with that of Vichy.”<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this early evaluation scrutinized a movement that had not yet gained significant political traction. As time passed and the events of the war played out, however, similar concerns over de Gaulle’s fascist ties persisted.

In March of 1944, the U.S. Military Intelligence Division conducted another survey of de Gaulle and his associates which painted them in an equally unfavorable light. In first noting that “the difficulties between the U.S. and De Gaulle are numerous,” the report discouraged America’s support of the General, as they believed that he intended to “[build] himself up as a dictator of France.” Aside from de Gaulle’s personal political ambitions, the document also argued that former *Cagouards* covertly infiltrated his inner circle, which further threatened the prospect of a post-war statist takeover. Colonel Charles Mettler concluded in his assessment that “The penetration of the Cagoule inside the De Gaullist movement can be a source of difficulties for the U.S. after the war.”<sup>9</sup> As it turns out, Mettler conflated the Fifth Column tactics of the *C.S.A.R.* with the comparable tales of the Synarchy. Still, the report clearly indicated that some Americans intelligence agents viewed de Gaulle’s associates as counters to FDR’s foreign relations’ objectives of eliminating authoritarianism and Fifth Columnist cabals. Related distresses over the possible future loss of French self-determination accompanied assessments of the General’s nascent Provisional Government later that year.

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<sup>8</sup> Author Unknown, “Subject: The Fighting French, Alexis Leger, General de Gaulle, and Prime Minister Churchill,” July 27, 1942, Location Unknown, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Records of the Director’s Office, Microfilm Series M1642, Roll 50, Slide 237. National Archives Location II, College Park, MD.

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Charles Mettler, Chief of U.S. Military Intelligence Division, “Subject: French Political Problem,” March 14, 1944, Miami, FL, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, RG 226, Entry 16, Box 782, File 64722, 190:3-27-4, pp. 2,5. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.



Even by September 1944, FDR hesitated to officially recognize the *C.F.L.N.* because of persistent difficulties related to de Gaulle's uncertain political agendas. Top-level American politicians furthered the general belief that he sought to abandon France's cherished democratic values once he took power. Cordell Hull clearly exhibited his position on this in an official communique sent to Jefferson Caffery, the U.S.'s new diplomatic representative to the Gaullist French authority in Paris. In it, the Secretary of State wrote:

The question of this Government's relationship with the *de facto* French authority and, more particularly, the question of the recognition of that authority as the provisional government of France continues to receive the most careful study. [...]

One of the factors which we have always regarded as being of the highest importance is the broadening of the base on which the French governing authority rests in order to insure that the authority represents the will of the majority of the French people.<sup>10</sup>

Despite all of the rumormongering surrounding him, the Americans eventually recognized de Gaulle and his *C.F.L.N.* as the official French Provisional Government in October of 1944.<sup>11</sup> But similar anxieties plagued the intelligence community well after his ascent. Reports from as late as January 1945 echoed the belief that the general sought to plunge France back into the grips of fascism. One report, which was disseminated to an unnamed O.S.S. argued that "fundamentally,

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<sup>10</sup>Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, to Jefferson Caffery, American Representative to the French Committee of National Liberation at Paris, Washington D.C., September 29, 1944, *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1944 Volume III, The British Commonwealth and Europe* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1965), 738.

<sup>11</sup>Aglion offers the following reasons as to why Roosevelt ultimately decided to change his previous diplomatic course: "[de Gaulle] was considered by the French to be the president of a provisional government which was more or less self-appointed, composed as it was of Frenchmen from London and Algiers, and members of the Resistance. This government had been accepted by the underground Resistance Council of France and in many ways represented the consensus of a very large majority of Frenchmen. [...] Roosevelt's position was rendered even more awkward when Stalin declared his willingness to recognize General de Gaulle as President. [...] President Roosevelt's recognition of France's Provisional government was brought about in large part by the actions and influence of Edward Stettinius, the new Secretary of State [and a noted pro-Gaullist], and by Army Generals George Marshall and Dwight D. Eisenhower. They were backed by a free and independent press that had supported the Free French cause during the entire course of the war." (Aglion, *Hostile Allies*, 195)

de Gaulle is suspected of being a reactionary who swims, in spite of himself, with the irresistible current.”<sup>12</sup> Because authoritarianism remained a common theme in their studies of de Gaulle, it is perhaps not surprising that the concept of Synarchy emerged once again as an embodiment of the American agents’ apprehensions. Thus, related stories of imminent fascist political permeation in France continued to occupy the minds of some of those in the American intelligence community. In this respect, similar concerns over Vichyite cabals also transitioned to new narratives about de Gaulle’s movement.

The first report sounding the alarm for specific Fifth Columnist activities in de Gaulle’s inner circle came from the previously-cited Military Intelligence Division study from March of 1944. But instead of Synarchists, the study offered a muddled, though related, tale of a *Cagoule* political conspiracy. Appropriating previous *M.S.E.* subversion narratives, Colonel Mettler’s M.I.D. analysis determined that the *C.S.A.R.* “was able not only to rule inside France when the Germans took over the country, but [had penetrated] into the De Gaulle movement.” Instead of harboring or even supporting the dangerous *Cagoule*, however, the report further suggested that “De Gaulle himself has been deceived.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, instead of welcoming them into the new political fray, de Gaulle’s rightist movement merely allowed hard-lined reactionary spies the opportunity to operate with greater impunity. This particular theory remained a general consensus within the intelligence assessments. Only days later, lurid stories of *Cagoule* Fifth Columnism gave way to

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<sup>12</sup>Author Unknown, From “Security & Intelligence Division Headquarters, Second Service Command,” to Colonel S.V. Constant, Director of Security and Intelligence Division, “Opinions of French Journalists,” January 30, 1945, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, RG 226, Entry 16, Box 1281, Folder 112873, 190:4-2-5, p. 1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>13</sup>Mettler, “French Political Problem,” March 14, 1944, 5.

more dominant and lasting impressions that it was instead the Synarchy that had infiltrated the general's *C.F.L.N.*

With the ongoing belief that Synarchists possessed the keen ability to wheedle their way into the prevailing French power base, some in American intelligence community believed that if the movement could no longer survive under Pétain, it could now do so under the inscrutable de Gaulle. In this spirit France's industrialists and bankers which previously constituted the original Synarchist factions, now had added to them military figures and other statesmen closely tied to the nation's future political nucleus. The end of a March 23 O.S.S. assessment entitled simply "*Synarchie*" pointed to this very horrifying prospect by singling out a handful of accused cabal members:

In De Gaulle's general entourage, there are at least three Synarchistes, [Gaston] Palewski, his Directeur de Cabinet, Colonel Billotte, Secretary of the Committee of National Defense, and Colonel Passy, technical director of the *B.C.R.A.* Some have charged that De Gaulle himself is 'marching with Synarchie.' This appears questionable, however [...].<sup>14</sup>

In this account, the Synarchy legend once again swelled to now encompass other influential Frenchmen not cited in previous accounts. Yet the O.S.S. report also clearly invoked the authoritarian and Fifth Columnist natures of the organization, natures which still served as the backbone of the lasting myth. Later in the year, comparable intelligence investigations into the *M.S.E.*'s activities in de Gaulle's clique shifted from the O.S.S. to the smaller J.I.C.A.N.A.

Whether intentional or not, by the middle of 1944, the American intelligence community had acquired a resident expert in the topic of French Synarchism. Gabriel Kerekes, a J.I.C.A.

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<sup>14</sup> Author Unknown, Office of Strategic Service, Research and Analysis Branch, Algiers Outpost, March 23, 1944, "*Synarchie*," Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 772, File 63810, 190:3-27-2, p. 9; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

agent stationed in Algiers, personally produced three studies on the topic in July, September, and November of that year. These reports constituted the last of those produced on the subject for the remainder of the war. While the November document reported on the supposed financial supporters of the movement (and thus receives treatment in the final subsection of this chapter), Kerekes' first two studies considered the possible links between the Synarchy and the increasingly influential *C.F.L.N.* Once again, the J.I.C.A. agent concerned himself with the defined Statist and clandestine qualities of the cabal.

Kerekes' July assessment of Synarchist activities in Algeria, which was subsequently distributed to Donovan's O.S.S. and the Military Intelligence Division (among other entities), treated the topic with a marked sense of urgency as the *C.F.L.N.*'s star rose. In this updated appraisal of the cabal (simply entitled: "Subject: Synarchism"), Kerekes summarized his various findings in six bullet points.<sup>15</sup> In citing the movement's nefarious infiltration capabilities, Kerekes began his study by noting that "some of the oldest and most faithful supporters of General de Gaulle are worried by what they call a tendency to let 'Synarchism' penetrate even the highest brackets of the Algiers Administration." Furthermore, the J.I.C.A. officer referenced the cabal's statist tendencies by noting that Synarchism constituted "a strongly reactionary movement."<sup>16</sup> The Americans were not the ones producing these new reports on the organization, however. Fearing an imminent Synarchist *coup*, de Gaulle's acolytes authored them.

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<sup>15</sup>As to the source of his information, Kerekes indicated that it was derived from an unnamed "French politician [who was] perturbed by the present tendencies of the de Gaulle administration." Kerekes, "Synarchism," July 27, 1944, 1.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

Working closely with prominent Gaullists, the Americans collaborated with the General's supporters to track supposed Synarchist activities via the use of shared intelligence assessments. An "original study" that both the French and Americans used to conduct their surveys, according to Kerekes, was a copy of the Chavin Report.<sup>17</sup> Yet de Gaulle himself also instructed his agents to produce their own assessment, which would identify and flush out any dangerous adherents of the contemporary movement. Isolating three specific figures, the assessment indicated that "the Minister of War Diethelm, Colonel Passey, and Commandant Pelabon" all acted as covert Synarchist agents embedded within the *C.F.L.N.*<sup>18</sup> In these documents, both intelligence communities made concerted efforts to analyze and expose the supposed fascist and Fifth Columnist threats against the new French establishment.

As the mythical cabal's activities seemingly shifted from France proper to the colonies, similar names connected to its North African activities once again appeared. Colonel Passey, who appeared in the March 23 O.S.S. report (though spelled as "Passy"), in addition to other dubious figures, seemingly fit the new Synarchist mold the report constructed. Moreover, other familiar characters once intimately associated with the movement were notably absent from this study, even for contextual purposes. A brief mention of Synarchy's supposed financial center (what Kerekes meaninglessly dubbed the "*Haute Banque*" or "High Bank") represented the sole homage to the legend's original iterations. But strangely enough, neither the French nor American intelligence agents specifically cited the "*Banque Worms* group" as the movement's original cadre. Yet the scope of Synarchist disciples grew further still. Kerekes' follow-up

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<sup>17</sup>A copy of the Chavin Report's cover page from this J.I.C.A. assessment appears in Chapter Two's appendix section (Figure 4).

<sup>18</sup>Gabriel T. Kerekes, "Synarchism," July 27, 1944, 2.

assessment on the topic two months later provided portions of the Gaullist's updated study of the movement, where numerous other French officers and politicians underwent similar scrutiny for their suspected reactionary sympathies.

In remaining consistent with the general notion of Fifth Columnism, where spies and traitors were thought to be everywhere, Kerekes' September 5 J.I.C.A.N.A. examination of Synarchy greatly expanded the aperture of those accused of affiliating with the movement. Fearing that the expansion of Synarchist ideals internally threatened the new French establishment, the Americans and their Gaullist allies viewed the identification of traitorous sympathizers as increasingly imperative. Pointing to the reinvigorated interest in the topic of Synarchism, the stated source for the information provided to the J.I.C.A.N.A. office during their preparation of the second study was tellingly noted as "various."<sup>19</sup> Beyond providing updated military intelligence assessments from the area, the report also featured excerpts from a translated propagandist French text speaking of the elaborate Synarchist danger to North Africa.<sup>20</sup> The passages, offered as the appendix to Kerekes' report, came from a study "prepared by a group of early adherents to de Gaulle on Synarchist penetration of the Algiers government."<sup>21</sup> The American agent provided a synopsis of his previous evaluation of the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>20</sup>Gabriel Kerekes, J.I.C.A.N.A. Officer, Algiers, Algeria, September 5, 1944, "Subject: Synarchism," Military Intelligence Division Report, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 1008, File 87310, 190:3-32-1, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>21</sup>Of additional interest here is the final destination of the report's findings. Beyond its incorporation into his assessment, Kerekes' overview of the study also noted that "it is not known whether or not this report was prepared upon the orders of General de Gaulle but he now has a copy in his personal file." Though the J.I.C.A. analysis provided the first three pages of the study, the remainder of it did not emerge during this project's research phase. For scholars who attempt to further the study of Vichy's Synarchy, a perusal of de Gaulle's records on the topic would undoubtedly offer priceless insight into France's Provisional Government's intelligence understandings of the movement. (Ibid.,2)

reactionary movement before moving on to updated intelligence concerning the expanding subversive base.<sup>22</sup>

In continuing his assessment, Kerekes included an inclusive list of names of those thought to be associated with both de Gaulle's entourage or the French resistance and the Synarchist movement. In fact, the J.I.C.A. officer added dozens of new names to the already-sizable Synarchist roster which hitherto never graced the pages of the Vichy-related American intelligence assessments. In his first appendix, the J.I.C.A. office ostensibly compiled its own register. All told, the docket (simply entitled "Synarchistes") implicated nearly 100 individuals, with only a handful of the original Vichyites mentioned, including Bichelonne, Benoist-Méchin, Barnaud, and Baudoin. It also charged 23 political groups, banks, firms, and industries with supposed ties to the syndicate, financial or otherwise.<sup>23</sup> A handful of these organizations that deserve attention included: The *Banque d'Indochine*, which Paul Baudoin directed, the State Bank of Morocco, France's Transatlantic Bank, Renault Automobiles, which Lehideux still commanded, and a handful of previously-unmentioned petroleum companies (*e.g.*, Pechelbroun and Nobel). Besides the men or organizations attached to this catalog, however, the report offered no additional information regarding the nature or origins of their respective associations. By contrast, the shorter register presented in the translated Gaullist assessment (presented as Appendix B in the report) delved into the personal backgrounds of those suspected of such

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<sup>22</sup>The claims that Kerekes' overview provided offered no new information on the conspiracy *per se*, save for the fact that the publicized myth (in the form of the Chavin Report) reached General Giraud's office in Algiers where it was distributed once again throughout the colonies. To this, his overview read: "According to a reliable source [the 'original report'] was prepared in 1941, circulated in Vichy where it created considerable stir, and was seen by Marshal Pétain. It came to North Africa through Spain by mail, was intercepted, and found its way to a member of General Giraud's personal staff. It received wide dissemination in governmental circles in Algiers. Several slightly different versions appear to exist." (Ibid.)

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 4.

affiliations. This final roll implicated 43 new figures. Although space does allow for a full citation of all of those included, each featured either an intriguing backstory, a familiar connection to the legend's original iterations, or an overtly flippant accusation, as it labeled some as simply "Synarchists."<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, the various allegations made in Kerekes' report do not alone point to these people's associations with the mythical technocratic cabal described throughout much of this dissertation. Yet this list of names only represents one shift in the legend of 1944. The remainder of the translated article provided additional insight into its bizarre evolutionary trajectory involving de Gaulle and the members of his Provisional Government.

Although belief in the statist objectives and the clandestine nature of the Synarchist organization remained in both the French and American Intelligence Communities, Kerekes' second appendix, provided to him via invested Gaullists, illustrated how the myth continued to transform in 1944. With numerous and often conflicting studies conducted on the affair over the previous three years, it was perhaps inevitable that the accounts would nearly become unrecognizable over time. Indeed, in the excerpt, entitled "Confidential Note on the Synarchist Organization," the translated article confused the rumored stories of the *M.S.E.* with those of the actual interwar *Cagoulard* organization. It, in fact, consistently referred to the Synarchist movement as the *C.S.A.R.*<sup>25</sup> In not only singling out "large French industry" and "great

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<sup>24</sup>To those with interesting personal histories, Kerekes' report offered Mr. Rene Missigli as a notable case: "Commissioner of Foreign Affairs [under de Gaulle], whose intimacy with a notorious British spy, the Countess de Montgomery [...] is well known;" to backstories that corresponded with the legend's original iterations, the now-familiar figure of Colonel Passy appeared once more: "Passy- Whose real name is de Wearin, nephew of the individual who was General Secretary of the Cagoule. He is a monarchist politechnician [*sic*];" and to clearly groundless allegations, the following three figures spoke well to the Gaullists' witch hunt for conspirators: "Mme. Veuve Barill, Synarchist. General Layer, Synarchist. [...] Surgeon Captain Gugenheim, Synarchist." (Ibid., 4-5)

<sup>25</sup>Early accounts of the conspiracy rumors often yielded such confusions, as the abbreviation *C.S.R.* (Synarchist Revolutionary Convention) often appeared in similar publications. Even the author of the March 1944 O.S.S.



landowners” as known adherents, the report also argued that many members of both the army and navy “joined the movement” during the war. The unnamed French author then pointed to the dangerous prospect of a reemerging Synarchist movement subverting de Gaulle’s Provisional Government:

The work of the organization was carried out intelligently and mysteriously. Taken one by one, the members of this group appear to devote themselves exclusively to their own business. But they help each other to important posts and they are at the point where they soon will control all important positions of the [C.F.L.N].

It appears that General de Gaulle realized the danger that such concentration of power means to Republican institutions. At present he is eliminating the main exponents of this policy. However, it seems that there are so many of them and that they are so clever that the President must treat with them.<sup>26</sup>

The author offered no specifics as to how de Gaulle planned to indulge these conspirators.

Kerekes’ cited report demonstrated how the stories of Synarchy, snarled many times over and traversed through time and space, degraded to a confused hodgepodge of rumors featuring only fragments of the original narrative. Though still presenting the movement as reactionary and covert and as still theoretically possessing ties to the pre-war *Cagouards*, high French finance, and industry, this was where the French report’s connections to the earlier accounts ended. The rumors that de Gaulle’s supporters had some involvement with the movement vigorously persisted, yet Kerekes never overtly contested or refuted them.

Though the de Gaulle subplot offered ample opportunities for conspiracy theorists to expand the Synarchy canards in 1944, it also demonstrated that the plastic myth endured within

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“Synarchie” report indicated that “Another similar society was the C.S.R. (Convention Synarchic Révolutionnaire). One extensive report indicates that the M.S.E., of which a reported Cagoulard named Jean Coutrot was the guiding spirit, employed secret society forms of affiliation.” O.S.S. “Synarchie,” March 23, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 3.

the American intelligence community. Though one American report from 1944 openly challenged the prevailing Synarchist legend, most continued to treat it as an imminent threat of fascist political saboteurs.

## 1944

A romanticized vision of Donovan's O.S.S. in the months preceding the D-Day invasions of northern France may depict the operatives of the spy organization working as a well-oiled machine operating behind the enemy lines and conducting piercing studies of expansive quality and scope. Certainly, postwar histories of the organization assert that 1944 signaled the first year when the U.S. government fully lifted the bureaucratic roadblocks and hindrances constricting its activities. The official *War Report of the O.S.S.*, for instance, tersely argued that "by 1944, [Donovan's organization] was in a position, both in the field and in Washington, to render varied and effective services."<sup>27</sup> While undeniably true to some degree, when it came to O.S.S.'s and other American intelligence agencies' treatment of the Synarchy affair, 1944 reflected the still-nascent state of America's espionage prowess. Still believing that the group threatened America's foreign objectives abroad, these agents continued to exuberantly pursue the fantastic Synarchy stories.

As was previously mentioned, the U.S. government produced fewer intelligence studies of the Synarchy affair in 1944 than it had in 1941. In fact, this subsection only considers four

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<sup>27</sup> Roosevelt, *War Report*, 113.

Smith's monograph also emphasizes the bureaucratic strength of O.S.S. during 1944, by indicating that the agency's purview was finally defined within the scope of U.S. military operations. This allowed it to offer noteworthy assistance during the Allied offensive in western Europe. Smith writes, "The 1944 phase of rapid military advance found O.S.S. in a comparatively strong position. Its relations with other agencies were generally harmonious and its budget and manpower position intact." (Smith, *The Shadow Warriors*, 265)

such documents that illuminate the Americans' understanding of it in this crucial year.<sup>28</sup>

Donovan's O.S.S. produced three of them, while Gabriel Kerekes authored the fourth. What these examinations exhibited, however, was an increased depth and breadth of the reports conducted, as most offered robust (though generally inaccurate) accounts of the affair. Moreover, the Americans' broad objective of eliminating Franco-German collaborationism, which understandably dissipated within the de Gaulle side story, appeared once again as a topic of interest in these related reports.

O.S.S.'s first study of the year, officially designated as R&A 1015 (March 30), undoubtedly served as the zenith of these efforts. The report featured nearly 56 pages of commentary on the topics of both Vichy collaborationism and the associated Synarchic conspiracy.<sup>29</sup> Although it ultimately attempted to debunk some of the previous theories of the Vichy scandal, its unnamed author successfully chronicled the Americans' initial concerns regarding the subject.

Previous intelligence studies of the "*Banque Worms* group" tended to vacillate between treating the Synarchy as a topic worthy of scrutiny and not. Donovan's December 1941

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<sup>28</sup>There is a fifth entry as well, yet due to a lack of accompanying commentary by the respective intelligence agents, I have decided to omit its evaluation from this project's main text. Specifically, two pocket-sized copies of the Chavin Report are currently located in the State Department's Foreign Service Posts' records. For these facsimiles, please consult the following archival record: Wallace Deuel, Title Unknown, to I.E. Lindgren, Title Unknown, Location Unknown, April 25, 1944, "Report on North Africa;" Records of the Department of State, Record Group 84, Entry 2490, Box 2, 350: 56-18-6, National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

<sup>29</sup>There is conflicting evidence as to the exact date of the report's production and dissemination. Though the report's heading explicitly cited the specific date of March 30, 1944, other aspects within and without the assessment indicates that it was perhaps completed earlier than this. Not only did an earlier O.S.S. evaluation from March (which receives attention below) cite it, its contents only consider the period of March 1942-August 1943. As another O.S.S. report from March 23 cited it document as a reference, a reasonable assumption is that it document was the second draft of an assessment produced earlier in the war. Regardless, as it is difficult to definitively prove when the O.S.S. produced it, though in staying true to its official documentation, its appearance here tentatively appears appropriate.

assessment presented to Roosevelt's office of course did, while the revised March 1942 edition evaded it. R&A's third and final comprehensive O.S.S. report on the collaborationist clique, entitled "Activities of the *Worms et Cie.*," once again broached the topic. Yet this time, it did so in a much different fashion than the 1941 example. In almost every respect, it provided a sharpened assessment of the group, as its evaluations of the individuals, organizations, and firms involved in the respective circles appear inclusive. And unlike its predecessor, it also treated the topic of Synarchism with a noted degree of skepticism.

Considering the overall findings of the O.S.S. report, arguably the agency's most accurate assessment of Vichy's economic collaborationism produced during the war, its evaluation of the Synarchist movement also pointed to, to some degree, its astuteness. The beginning of the report's subsection entitled "The Banque Worms and Synarchy" cited prior theories regarding the conspirators and their presumed political philosophy before delving into its updated intelligence on the topic. Upon close scrutiny, the March 1944 survey clearly drew heavily from C.O.I.'s early-1942 "Synarchie" report and O.S.S.'s 1943 "*Les Synarchistes.*" Like both reports, the unknown author similarly referenced the theorized subversion of the Churchill government, their supposed closed-door agreements to avoid Europe's business capitals during aerial bombing raids, and their suspected intercontinental statist objectives, to name but a few aspects. Further, in offering a comparison of their specific political doctrine, the agent indicated that "there is an obvious similarity between this doctrine and that of 'technocracy' in the United States." Thus, the agent presented all three previous principal American concerns regarding the conspiracy. The report's introductory points offered little more than a summary analysis of previous intelligence assessments, however. By contrast, the subsection's closing statements

provides novel insight into O.S.S.'s updated theories concerning Synarchy's actual origins and objectives.

When considering the prospect that the Synarchists failed to achieve their various objectives, R&A 1015 provided similar conclusions as its pre-1944 intelligence forerunners had. After supplying the menacing description of the cabal, the document then proffered a short but favorable inference regarding the *M.S.E.*'s nonexistence. To this, the agent wrote: "It is not believed that the synarchie ever got very far as a practical political movement, but only that it served as a rallying-point for the Worms group's ideas and perhaps supplied some cohesion for men of like opinions."<sup>30</sup> Supporting the armchair ideologue theory (a position later adopted by historian William Shirer, for instance), the O.S.S. report hypothesized that Synarchy merely acted as an offshoot of the interbellum *dirigisme* organizations advancing similar technocratic agendas. Although this quasi-revisionist interpretation was largely consistent with the short untitled December 1942 French-language document or the O.N.I. survey outlined above, neither report appeared in the document's robust footnotes. Likewise, the account also largely shied away from prior beliefs of a definitive French/Mexican Synarchist combine, an immense departure from previous accounts on the topic.

Unlike most studies conducted on Abascal's and Bueno's *Sinarquistas* between 1942-1943, some of which fervently propounded commonalities or connections between the two variants of Synarchism, the R&A evaluation adopted a more grounded approach. Its astute deductions on the subject posited that "It is not impossible that the French movement had some

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<sup>30</sup>Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, Washington D.C., March 30, 1944, "Activities of Banque H. Worms et Cie. and its Associates, March 1942-August 1943" (National Archives Microfiche Publication, M1221, Report 1015), Records of Department of State, Record Group 59, p. 14; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

connections with the Mexican movement of somewhat similar aims, the National Sinarquista Union. This is reported to have been organized by German agents. No evidence, however, of any relationship closer than resemblance of names and opinions is at hand.”<sup>31</sup> While still not dismissing it entirely, 1015 came closest to fully debunking the prospect of a Synarchist international. In the final assessment of the document, then, O.S.S.’s “*Worms et Cie.*” exposé offered iconoclastic treatments of topics possessing considerable national security and foreign relations ramifications and undoubtedly came closer than any other intelligence report to completely demystifying the legend as hokum. Other assessments from the year did not offer such inimitable conclusions.

Swinging the pendulum back to intelligence theories supporting a viable *M.S.E.* conspiracy, the previously-cited O.S.S. Algiers assessment from March 23, 1944 ostensibly dismissed the findings of the revisionist report preceding it. In fact, a footnote in the document explicitly stated that “material [had] been drawn” from R&A report 1015 in the crafting of its evaluation.<sup>32</sup> In treating the myth in a way very similar to its initial iterations, the report revived many of Synarchy’s orthodox narratives which again emphasized the technocratic, collaborationist, and Fifth Columnist aspects of the cabal.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>32</sup>O.S.S., “Synarchie,” March 23, 1944, 3.

<sup>33</sup>An excerpt from the first two pages of the evaluation hearkened back to nearly three-year-old accounts of the movement: “The doctrine of Synarchie, although of 19<sup>th</sup> century origin, first developed as a political movement among certain polytechniciens in the early twenties. Its leaders fostered several societies such as the M.S.E. (Mouvement Synarchique d’Empire), and groups of technical and economic specialists organized from among banking and industrial circles, Inspecteurs de Finances, Conseillers d’Etat, and graduates of the specialized higher schools, most notably the Ecole Polytechnique. The doctrine (reduced to its minimum) called for the taking over of political and economic power by specialists backed by the principal banking and industrial interests. Europe was to be knitted together into a single integrated economy, parliamentary regimes were to be displaced where they proved intractable, economic combinations were to fix prices and wages, and the worker was to be placed in a juridical and social framework that would prevent any extreme action from the Left. To achieve these ends,

Far from innovative in its declaration that a Synarchist revolution still threatened a global liberal order, the O.S.S. assessment embraced the prospect that members of the *M.S.E.* not only had a hand in the French Republic's death, but accomplished it via the use of underhanded Fifth Column tactics. Pointing to all three chief American concerns regarding the cabal, the O.S.S. assessment noted that "with the fall of France, men sympathetic to Synarchie rapidly installed themselves in the Vichy regime. [...] [The] Synarchistes had wide German connections established prior to 1939 and were on hand and ready to serve at a time when the new Vichy Government desperately needed men competent to handle the economics of collaboration."<sup>34</sup> Though now cited in the past tense, many of the original Synarchy rumors held true in this report and appeared in much the same fashion as they had before. But the O.S.S. author added an updated addendum isolating the defining characteristics of those subscribing to the movement's Statist ideology.

Once again, the meaning behind the term "Synarchist" shifted once more in this O.S.S. analysis. Aside from accusing the small band of France's elites of dabbling with antiquated nineteenth-century political philosophies (with the "Groupe *Worms*" emphasized but not singled out), the end of the report's introductory statements argued that the movement's adherents now included many of those throughout the nation's capitalist and industrialist classes. Still unable to definitely acquire a singular meaning, the agent challenged prior conceptions of what exactly constituted an adherent to the technocratic program. "The name Synarchiste" it stated, "has come to be applied to all who share these views, men not necessarily bound together by any explicit

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connections should be established with corresponding interests in other countries (most notable in German Europe), and 'Synarchists' should be put in controlling positions at home." (Ibid., 1-2)

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 2.

relationship but rather by common interests and political sentiments, and a variety of economic and social connections.”<sup>35</sup> Familiar names typically associated with Vichy’s initial collaborationist/Synarchist coterie are present (*e.g.*, Pucheu, Lehideux, Belin, Berthelot, and Lafond) appear in the report’s appendix. In addition to these figures, however, the report added others to this ‘list of the best known members of the M.S.E.,’ including those from lesser administrative positions from Vichy’s Organizational Committees. Men such as Louis Pineau (motor fuels) Robert Gibrat (electricity), and Henri Coqueugnot (iron and steel production), for instance, appeared on it.<sup>36</sup> The moniker, once exclusive to the ministers in Darlan’s long-defunct cabinet, was now tailored to fit the broader population of French economic collaborationists more generally. Through this report’s attempted identification of new conspirators, it maintained that the organization continued to endanger American foreign relations’ objectives abroad. In some regards, O.S.S.’s final evaluation on the topic took a similar tack.

More than a month after O.S.S.’s “Synarchie” evaluation, the agency released a second installment of its cutting-edge intelligence on the subject. The April 27 document from the agency’s Algiers outpost in fact served as a direct supplement to its March counterpart’s findings. Much of the report’s contents focused on the *C.F.L.N.*’s stratagems in North Africa for combating persistent economic collaborationism in its many forms. But aside from this topic, which appears slightly outside the scope of this project, the agent also included insight into the Synarchy conspiracy in his survey.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 10.



In remaining consistent with the expanding population of potential Synarchists that materialized in the 1944 intelligence compendium, the April assessment summarized the previous report's conclusions regarding the movement's possible supporters. As opposed to most accounts that placed a particular onus on the so-called *Worms* clique for the promotion of technocratic ideals, however, this document argued to the contrary. Specifically, at the end of the assessment's introductory statements, the author averred that "a considerable amount of myth has undoubtedly been added to the history of the Groupe Worms" with relation to the Synarchy affair. Highlighting more grounded facts concerning the actual roles the respective Vichy ministers played under Darlan, however, the report also noted that "[by] their previous ties with German industry, by technical competence, and by inclination, these men came to play a role in the Pétain administration."<sup>37</sup> Citing realities which modern scholarship has since proven true, the evaluation went on to indicate that though the "men [were] linked by various economic and socialties [*sic.*], they [were] not as a whole bound together by any specific relationships, and certainly not by any master plot."<sup>38</sup> Although absolving the *Worms* group members from explicit ties to a secret technocratic society, this O.S.S. account did not completely abandon the theory that such a philosophy actually existed.

Instead of fully demystifying the Synarchist legend, O.S.S.'s April report further expanded upon the already-diverse theories of the movement's membership. No longer singling out industrialists, financiers, technocrats, statisticians, or high-profile ministers, the current

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>38</sup>Author Unknown, Office of Strategic Services, Algiers Outpost, Algeria, "The Banque Worms and 'Blocus,'" April 27, 1944, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry 16, Box 832, Folder 69176, 190: 3-28-3, p. 1. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

intelligence indicated that nearly anyone could endorse the still-nebulous Synarchist agenda.

Taking stock of the prevailing sentiments in Algeria regarding the subject, the agent wrote:

The name 'synarchiste' is currently—and loosely—applied in Algiers not just to collaborationists but even to patriotic elements who are believed to share certain interest and ends, notably the furtherance of industrial and financial combination at home and abroad, and the establishment of a political regime that would so adjust prices, wages, and the whole legal and social order as to assure the dominance of their economic interests and ideas.<sup>39</sup>

Though downplaying a direct threat of an imminent Synarchist revolution from the perspective of the former Vichy ministers, the O.S.S. analysis argued that the movement represented an emerging underground movement. Instead of being recognized as a group with a centralized power base, Synarchists now constituted a vague menace of intangible ideology alone, capable of inspiring both traitors and nationalists alike. Indeed, the agent went on to indicate that the Synarchists' intrigues alarmed the anti-collaborationist French officials to the point where they "[planned] to take the question for final decision [regarding future actions against them] to General de Gaulle himself."<sup>40</sup> Continued fears over collaborationism, technocratic Statism, and Fifth Columnism once again appeared in this final O.S.S. evaluation as local hearsay and conjecture spurred on their studies of it. So, although this O.S.S. evaluation took significant steps to demystify aspects of the conspiracy, it also demonstrated that the American intelligence community again failed to fully discredit the subject of Synarchism as hokum. The final intelligence examination from 1944 also illustrates this.

Even after de Gaulle's triumphant establishment of his Provisional Government, Synarchy still inhabited the imaginations of some of those in the American government. Gabriel

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 10.

Kerekes' third J.I.C.A.N.A. report sheds additional light on this belief of the movement in late November 1944. As opposed to his two previous assessments, both of which attempted to implicate a number of new figures in the underground scheme, Kerekes' final survey sought to trace the origins and financial support system of the Synarchist revolution. New propaganda advancing its fantastic origins provided his assessment's source base. In an article he recently acquired, entitled "Treason by the Cagouards," taken from the November 15 copy of the French newspaper "*Dernieres Nouvelles*," Kerekes relayed a novel but highly troubling revelation:

Paris: Evidence was discovered in the Fascist documents seized by the Allies in Rome indicating contacts by the agents of the C.S.A.R. with influential members of the Association of Alumni of the Ecole Polytechnique, with Inspecteurs de Finance, with industrialists and bankers.

These documents throw new light upon the history of the Synarchist movement which played an important role in France and North Africa between 1940 and 1944. They prove that the Fascist Government subsidized the Treasury of the Cagouards by regular contributions.<sup>41</sup>

The topic of Mussolini's financing of the *Cagouards* is certainly a relevant one from within the context of the C.S.A.R.'s history (whether or not this actually occurred, however, is another matter entirely). Yet for purposes of this project, its association with French Synarchism is of little consequence. Again referencing the scandal in the past tense, Kerekes continued to conflate the connections between the actual interwar terror organization and the mythical Synarchy. His references made to high French finance and industry, the Polytechnical and Finance Inspector communities, and the theoretical patronage from Fascist Italy indicates that Kerekes still advanced the sensationalist tales of the Synarchy movement. Notably absent from this report, again, was any specific reference made to the "*Worms* group." In turn, his report furthered the

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<sup>41</sup>Gabriel Kerekes, J.I.C.A.N.A. Officer, Algiers, Algeria, November 22, 1944, "Synarchism III," Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 1188, File 105189, 190:3-35-5, p. 1; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

myth within the American intelligence community, and bolstered previous suppositions that the technocratic and esoteric Synarchy shared defined ties to Europe's reactionary base.

Even as other intelligence agents (from O.S.S., for instance) dismissed at least aspects of the legend in 1944, how did Kerekes' final assessment of the year treat the current threat of subversive Synarchist activities? To this, the J.I.C.A. officer transparently commented in his concluding section that "the interest of this office in Synarchism and its affiliated movements continues."<sup>42</sup> This was where the wartime intelligence narrative ironically ended, however. The archival research for this project failed to confirm whether J.I.C.A.N.A., Donovan's O.S.S., or any other American agency pursued the topic through 1945. Regardless, loose ends tangentially related to the Americans' experience with Synarchy offers a fitting conclusion for this World War II affair.

Regardless of how the American intelligence community viewed the Synarchy scandal at the end of the war, many agencies and departments kept close watch on the men and organizations closely related to the conspiracy. If they survived the final Allied push toward Berlin, all of the men in Darlan's former ministry tied to the Synarchist conspiracy faced postwar French justice. The Americans demonstrated significant interest in de Gaulle's March 1944 trial and execution of Pierre Pucheu during the general's short-lived "Purge Committee," which was intended to punish arch-collaborationists and fully distance the *C.F.L.N.* from Pétain's regime.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>As historian Peter Novick attests, "the Committee was [formally] committed- for the first time- to the punishment of Pétain, his Ministers, and his responsible subordinates. [...] The resolution was intended to squelch- finally and unambiguously- the rumors that secret contacts or agreements existed between the *C.F.L.N.* and Vichy, and that when France was liberated the Committee would come to terms with Pétain." Further, they were meant to "distinguish between men who merely obeyed orders without having the authority necessary to dispute them, and those who, 'going beyond their strictly professional obligations, knowingly associated themselves with an

For those not condemned to death for their roles in Vichy, the U.S. government also chronicled their fates.<sup>44</sup> For instance, a Treasury Department Foreign Funds Control memorandum sent to Cordell Hull indicated that Yves Bouthillier, former Inspector of Finance, was “discharged without pension.” Paul Baudoin and Jacques Barnaud similarly were “erased from all records of the Inspection General of France.”<sup>45</sup> These judicial studies did not reference the Synarchy nor any of its related tales of conspiracy. But perhaps against all odds, Synarchy still endured after the war. Instead of falling away after France’s Dark Years, the subversive technocratic threat followed the American intelligence community well into the *postbellum* era.

### To Be Continued

Following the death of Hitler’s thousand-year Reich in May 1945, many presumed that the Allies had finally and fully extinguished the scourge of fascism in Europe. Most in the American intelligence community thought differently. Besides hunting for fugitive Nazis and other war criminals, concerns over the revitalization of continental Statism remained. By 1946, Charles de Gaulle’s stipulated resignation from the government (January 20), coupled with a

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antinational policy.” Novick goes on to indicate that beyond Pucheu, Marcel Peyrouton (Former Minister of the Interior and Governor General of Algeria), and “dozens of others were proscribed” during these initial trials. Peter Novick, *The Resistance Versus Vichy: The Purge of Collaborators in Liberated France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 50-1.

<sup>44</sup>In his monograph, Paul Farmer provides the following postwar court’s decisions regarding some of the men directly associated with the affair: “[Paul] Baudoin was given only imprisonment for five years [...]. In June [1947], Benoist-Mechin was sentenced to death, but the sentence was at once commuted to imprisonment for life. [...] In July three years’ imprisonment was meted out to [Yves] Bouthillier [...]” Jean Berthelot, served a full two-year sentence, while former Minister of Labor, René Belin, was pardoned. The courts sentenced Paul Marion, the principal fascist ideologue of the ministry, to 10 years for his role as Vichy’s Propaganda Minister. Farmer, *Vichy Political Dilemma*, 332.  
*Historical Dictionary of World War II France*, s.v. “Berthelot, Jean,” “Belin, René,” and “Marion, Paul.”

<sup>45</sup>M.L. Hoffman, Assistant Director, Foreign Funds Control, to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, Paris, France, December 15, 1944; Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Entry 67A1804, Box 5-Folder “Blocus” (Office of Economic Warfare), 450: 80-34-3, p.1, National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

power vacuum that immediately emerged in the nascent Fourth Republic and uncertain economic times, left France ripe for such ideologies and movements to once again flourish. As Fourth Republic historian Jean-Pierre Rioux writes, de Gaulle's departure "brought a profound change to the political landscape. [...] the political and parliamentary practices which now became current, both in government and in the elaboration of the Constitution [under an untenable tripartite system], already had disturbing implications for the character and efficiency of the régime in gestation."<sup>46</sup> One American intelligence agency assessing these threats was the Strategic Services Unit, directed by the Assistant Secretary of the War Department, John Magruder.<sup>47</sup>

After the Japanese surrender, and due to bureaucratic pressures from other American intelligence offices, President Truman, new to office following FDR's death in April, wasted little time in disbanding Donovan's organization, which he officially accomplished on September 20, 1945. His subsequent creation of the S.S.U. (under the direct auspices of the War Department) served as a temporary bridge to continue O.S.S.'s chief intelligence functions in Europe.<sup>48</sup> As historian David Alvarez asserts, Truman hoped that post-1945 centralized foreign

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<sup>46</sup>Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958*, trans. by Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 97.

<sup>47</sup>In her 2010 dissertation on the C.I.A.'s purview of intelligence interests, historian Hillary Gleason argued that as late as 1947, reports on right-wing European fanaticism outweighed comparable attention given to Soviet activities in eastern Europe. To this, she writes: "Many policymakers feared that political extremism could once again flourish in an economically devastated and war-torn Europe. [...] A [September 1947] report from the newly-formed Central Intelligence Agency agreed with State's urgency, warning that 'the greatest present danger to U.S. security lies, not in the military strength of the U.S.S.R. and the possibility of Soviet armed aggression, but in the possibility of the economic collapse of Western Europe. Western Europe is confronted (in the absence of outside aid) with a prolonged period of low standards of living, widespread dissatisfaction, social unrest, and political instability.'"

Hillary Gleason, "The C.I.A. to 1950" (PhD Dissertation, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2010), 114-5.

<sup>48</sup>Historian David Alvarez identifies the "three principal organizational and functional components" of the former O.S.S. as "clandestine intelligence collection, counterintelligence, and research and analysis." "[The] first two of these components," he continues, were sent "to the War Department and the third to the State Department."

intelligence would later become the domain of the State Department rather than that of a specially-trained War Department outfit akin to the O.S.S.<sup>49</sup> In the interim, however, the President appeared hesitant to make any significant decisions regarding the future role of any such program.<sup>50</sup> But from late-1945-mid-1946, the S.S.U. survived (albeit with a vastly diminished staff and budget as compared to its O.S.S. predecessor), and continued to provide regular intelligence on a wide range of European topics; French Synarchism was one of them.<sup>51</sup>

Consistent with the themes during the wartime period, the singular S.S.U. report broaching the topic of Synarchism from May 1946 told of a forthcoming French military *coup* which threatened the fragile post-de Gaulle political foundation. Further, financial support for this reactionary endeavor purportedly came directly from a band of influential French plutocrats operating behind the political scenes. The terse but telling document from an unknown S.S.U. agent indicated the following:

It is reported that General Pierre Billotte is the choice of the P.R.L. (Parti Republicain de la Liberte) as their man of the future, and plans are being formulated for a military coup

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David Alvarez, "American Clandestine Intelligence in Early Postwar Europe," in *Journal of Intelligence History* 4.1 (2004): 8.

<sup>49</sup>To this, the historian declares that "the president, whose attitudes concerning the benefits of a secret intelligence agency were at best ambivalent, may not have expected the orphans [of the O.S.S.] to long survive the death of their parent organization. [...] Although the president, on the same day that he signed the executive order, directed the Secretary of State to create an interdepartmental group to develop plans for a postwar foreign intelligence program, the place of the O.S.S. orphans in any future program remained uncertain." (Ibid.)

<sup>50</sup>Truman's position regarding the creation of a peacetime foreign central intelligence agency was opaque at best in late 1945. As intelligence historian David Rudgers indicates, "by his own admission, Truman had no clear ideas of his own at this time [regarding these matters], except, as he later put it, 'one thing was certain—this country wanted no Gestapo under any guise for any reason.'" Rudgers, *Creating the Secret State*, 40.

<sup>51</sup>The reduction of S.S.U.'s activities and responsibilities is reflected in the totality of records housed at the National Archives today. As opposed to RG 226 (C.O.I./O.S.S.), for instance, which offers an astounding collection of both textual and microfilm holdings, Record Group M1656 (Records of the S.S.U.), by contrast, is a paltry series of six microfilm rolls.

d'état to be accomplished under his direction when the opportune moment arrives. Party leaders do not foresee this before the end of two or three years. If this coup were successful Billotte would head the Government.

Billotte was instrumental in organizing the P.R.L. and finances it with funds placed at his disposal by members of the Synarchie. He also amalgamated into the P.R.L. the old Parti Social Francaise of Colonel de la Rocque. The P.R.L. plans to organize its future coming to power through Billotte's backing by the Synarchie and his extensive connections and influence in military circles.<sup>52</sup>

Familiar references made to powerful French financial circles, the real prospect of right-wing political upheaval, and even the interwar fascist figure of Colonel de la Rocque (leader of the now-defunct *Croix de Feu*) continued to persist within the lore of Synarchy well after the demise of Vichy. Furthermore, and perhaps most intriguing from within the context of this chapter's findings, is that General Billotte emerged as a noted Synarchist risk once again. The March 23, 1944 O.S.S. report referenced above first noted his supposed Synarchist sympathies when he was *Colonel* Billotte, a dubious de Gaulle associate. Although framed in a vastly different context in 1946, S.S.U.'s assessment of Billotte and his reactionary P.R.L. demonstrates that as it pertained to the Synarchist legend, the more things changed, the more they seemed to stay the same. Yet one final question still demands consideration: since the interim S.S.U. failed to uncover the truth behind the Synarchist legend, did any American intelligence agency ever fully demystify it?

Of course Truman did not eliminate America's foreign clandestine intelligence program after his dismantling of the O.S.S. The formation of the C.I.A. just two years later (September 18, 1947) and the agency's expanded activities into new arenas throughout Europe and beyond indeed speaks to this. But in closing this dissertation's evaluation on the American intelligence community's studies of French Synarchism, it is perhaps prudent to end with some scrutiny of the agency's findings on the topic. Unfortunately, after scouring the National Archives'

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<sup>52</sup>Author Unknown, "Subject: Pierre Billotte and the PRL," May 29, 1946, Paris, France, Records of the Strategic Services Unit, RG 226, Entry M1656, Roll 2, Slide 874. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.



declassified C.I.A. records via their digitized C.R.E.S.T. database, no additional intelligence documents studying the affair emerged. Yet as the accessioning process provides further Cold War records for researchers in the following years, this topic undoubtedly beckons for future additions, amendments, and revisions. Even as C.I.A. document counterparts almost certainly followed the Americans' wartime examinations of Synarchy, for now, this is where this examination must end.

### Conclusion

Despite small strides made in 1942-1943 toward debunking it, the American intelligence community generally moved further away from fully discrediting the Synarchy legend between 1944-1946. Still consumed with the prospect that a sinister Statist, Fifth Columnist, and collaborationist (though now largely used in the past tense) cabal fought on, the Americans ardently continued their investigations into it. In some respects, the legend's strength only intensified with the ascendance of the *C.F.L.N.* and the correlated death of Vichy. In this final chapter of the Synarchy spectacle, then, the implications of such a peculiar course of events demands consideration as to why.

By the end of 1944, most of Vichy's former leaders were either in prison, dead, or marginalized, and de Gaulle returned triumphant to a resurrected nation. But if nothing else, Synarchy consistently appeared as an adept Fifth Column, capable of taking advantage of such change through its pernicious infiltration tactics. Since it already occurred once in Vichy, many in the American intelligence community believed that similar maneuvers could equally be deployed against the Gaullists or some other untenable postwar political faction. Lilian Mowrer's

Synarchist pamphlet from the same year posited such a claim, though in more concrete terms.<sup>53</sup>

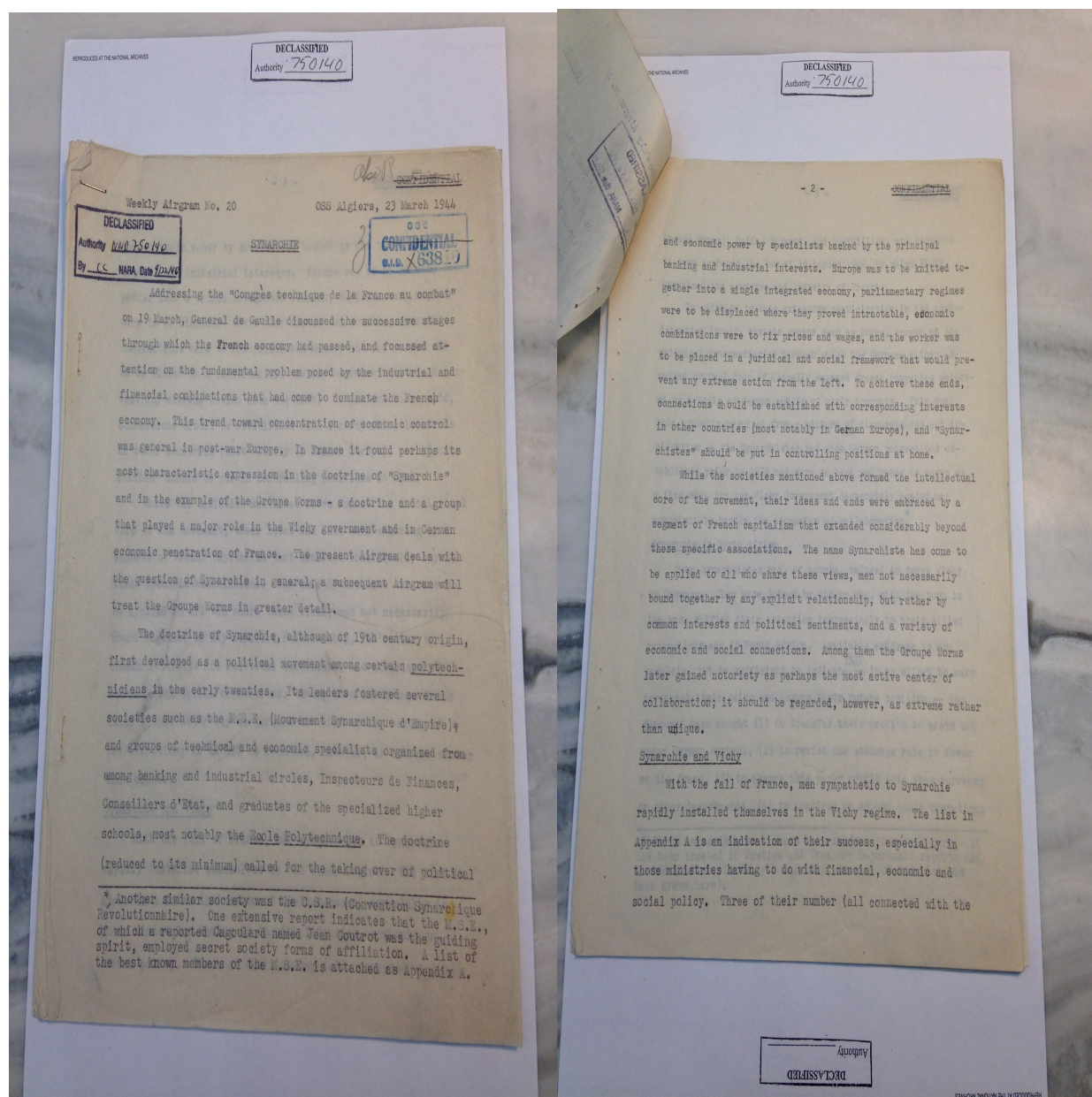
Yet what does this pessimistic outlook say about the third and final Synarchist epoch considered in this dissertation?

Notwithstanding its many malignant qualities, Vichy, even during its waning months and even under the iron thumb of its German occupiers, was an identifiable and discernable political force that offered at least the façade of stability. Synarchy, by contrast, embodied unpredictability. It endangered an already-uncertain future for the French metropole and her colonies. Thus, as de Gaulle and other political splinter groups served as relatively unknown factors for the suspicious Americans, it certainly was not unreasonable for FDR's agents to place some of their acolytes under the Synarchist microscope. Though now freed from the clutches of authoritarianism under the name of "Vichy," recurring though indefinable threats to France from the *M.S.E.*'s tyrannical revolution remained. For this reason, the American intelligence community greeted the dawn of the nation's political resurgence not with exultation, but with hesitation. As Vichy's kaleidoscope of horrors continued to revolve, their interest in the topic shifted accordingly.

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<sup>53</sup>If recalled, Mowrer argued that "if the Nazis and fascists are to be allowed to save themselves as Synarchists, are to be granted shelter in the Americas and from there are permitted to burrow their way underground once more back into European society, then indeed the next war is just around the corner." Lilian Mowrer, "Concerning France," 28.

## Chapter Five Appendix



Figures One and Two: O.S.S. "Synarchie" Assessment: This Algiers report demonstrates that even during the waning months of the Vichy regime, Synarchy still appeared as a viable threat to American objectives abroad. The expanded scope of individuals sympathetic to the movement (noted on page two) also exhibits the exceptionally malleable nature of the legend.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Author Unknown, Office of Strategic Service, Research and Analysis Branch, Algiers Outpost, March 23, 1944, "Synarchie," Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, Entry UD 16, Box 772, File 63810, 190:3-27-2, pp. 1-2; National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.



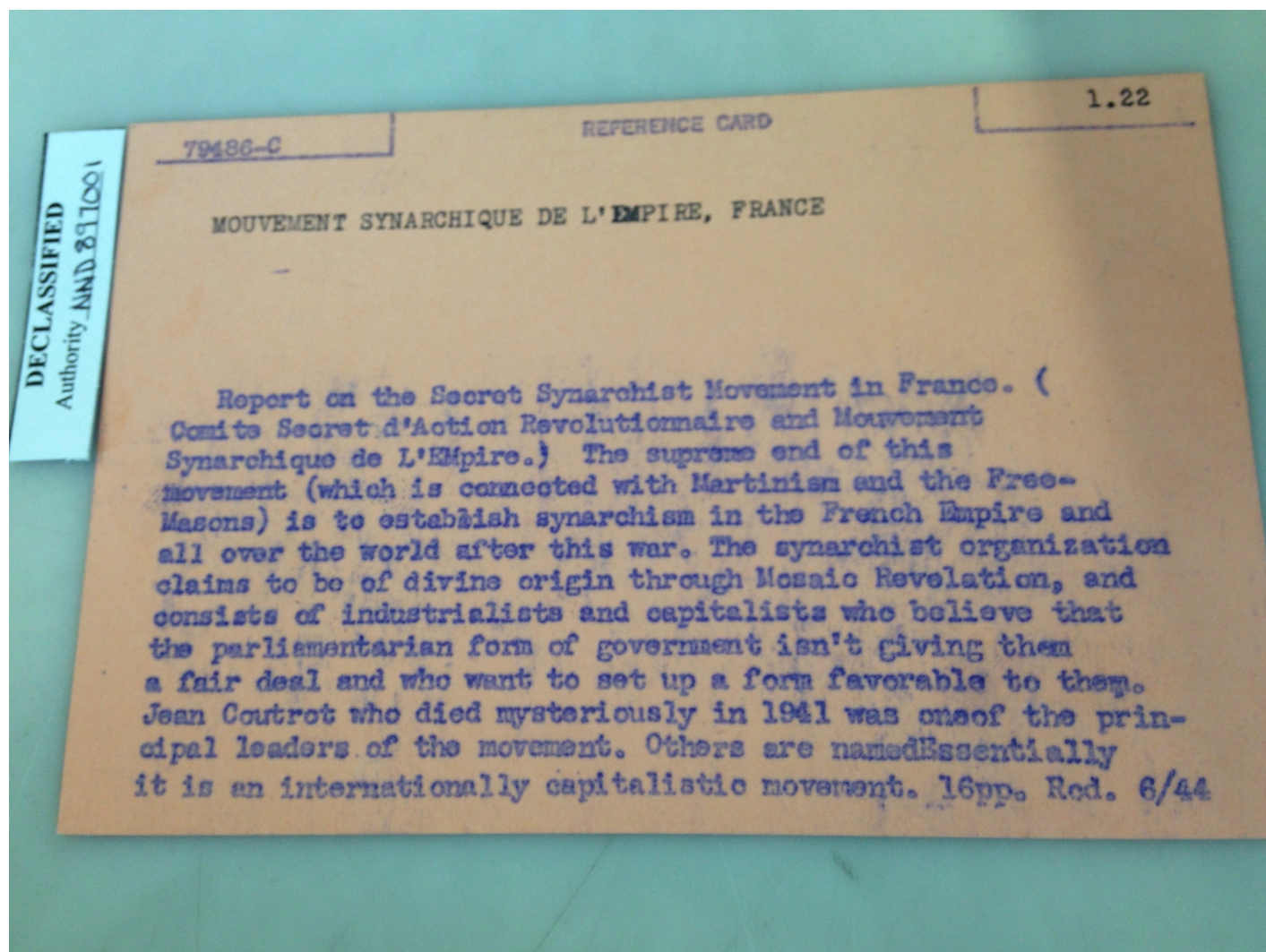


Figure Three: Archival Finding Aid Index Card: This finding aid demonstrates the 1944 revival of the Synarchist legend from within the American intelligence community. With references made to the shadowy death of Jean Coutrot, fantastic occult elements, and the movement's vast technocratic ambitions, it appeared as a return to form for the myth. Undoubtedly, these claims were consistent with those found in the 1941 Chavin Report (the "original study"), a copy of which accompanied this particular J.I.C.A.N.A. survey.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup>"Mouvement Synarchie De L'Empire, France" (Gabriel Kerekes' J.I.C.A.N.A. Survey), O.S.S. Reference Index Card, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Alphabetical Research and Analysis Records, RG 226, Entry 14, Box 31, File # 79486-C, 190:3-6-2. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

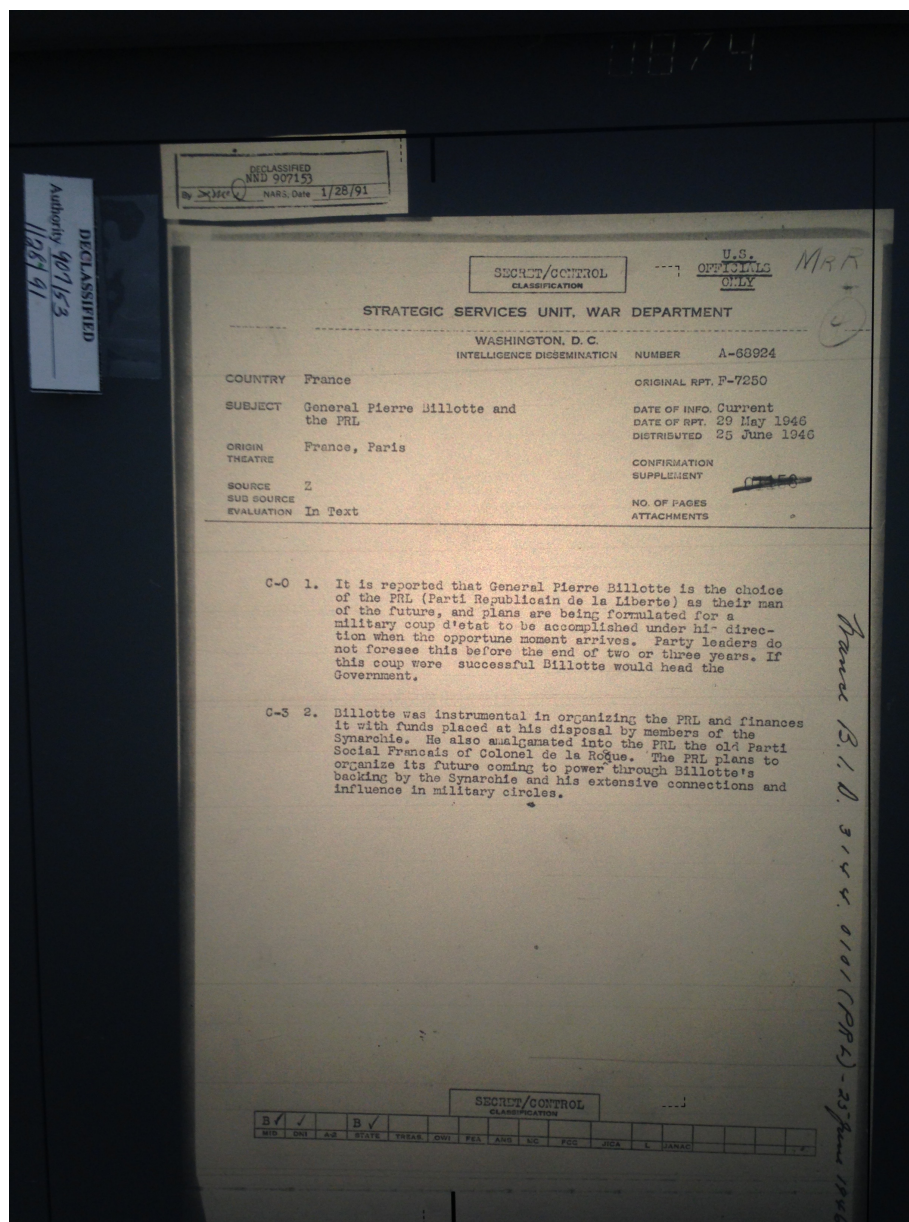


Figure Four: Strategic Services Unit (S.S.U.) Report (May-June 1946): The final report considered in this dissertation highlights America's postwar apprehensions concerning the Synarchists' political infiltration capabilities. As it related to Pierre Billotte's *P.R.L.* here, the illusory menace once again manifested itself not in direct political action, but rather in the surreptitious financial support of a reactionary movement.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Author Unknown, "Subject: Pierre Billotte and the P.R.L.," May 29, 1946, Paris, France, Records of the Strategic Services Unit, RG 226, Entry M1656, Roll 2, Slide 874. National Archives Building II, College Park, MD.

## Conclusion

Vichy's Synarchy affair offered a vibrant source of apprehension for the American intelligence community during and after the Second World War. At its heart, the conspiracy endangered a variety of American diplomatic and military objectives and represented an incorporeal force menacing an uncertain future for France and the broader global community. Some amalgam of the Americans' concerns over Franco-German collaborationism, prolific European Statism, and pernicious Fifth Column movements consistently drove their investigations of the sinister cabal. From 1941-1946, Synarchy's thematic breadth, above all, demonstrated the conspiracy's deeply flexible nature, as it transitioned (sometimes seamlessly) from Vichy to de Gaulle to postwar French political uncertainties. Though this project chronicled one novel aspect of this most intriguing historical narrative, many others still await academic treatment.

Had Vichy's Synarchist movement actually existed, undoubtedly a more robust scholarly canon would have emerged regarding its activities after 1945. Yet no such sizable compendium arose. Because the specterous French Fifth Columnist tales proved little more than a legend of technocratic bogeymen, academics have largely consigned it to the dustbin of history. This is a myopic indiscretion. Instead of measuring the affair by whether or not the cabal actually constituted a viable threat to the future of the democratic Free World, it, instead, could easily coincide with numerous other fields and studies. Thus, perhaps it is time now for historians, as well as those from other disciplines, to revisit the academic significance of Vichy's shadowy Synarchy affair.

As the records of the wartime period become increasingly accessible to researchers, they add new avenues of inquiry regarding Synarchy which demand further illumination. The British intelligence agencies' assessments of the affair appears as the first natural addendum to this project. Within the present historiographical record, no works (academic or otherwise) analyze this topic. In scrutinizing the records from M.I.6 or the wartime Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.), it is highly probable that the Churchill government also dedicated resources to studying the topic. Further, due to the fact that the established British intelligence services proved more effective in their clandestine activities during the war as opposed to their nascent American counterparts, these organizations' conclusions regarding the cabal may have differed wildly from those presented in this dissertation's cited reports.<sup>1</sup> Other potential projects in this vein include the Italians', Soviets', and Nazis' studies of Synarchism, the last of which Kuisel only briefly noted in his article.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to the American experience with the affair, two chief opportunities of study emerge. The first of these concerns the popular coverage of it, including any possible (even if only limited or localized) effects it had on American culture and thinking during the war. Lilian

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<sup>1</sup>Though the Americans emulated the British model of foreign intelligence practices during the war (both Smith and Mauch attest to this, for example), more contemporary scholarship goes even further, by arguing that the O.S.S. was, in some ways, only made possible due to the experienced British services that influenced it. For instance, British intelligence scholar, Aaron Linderman, avers that the S.O.E. (July 1940-February 1946), under the direction of Sir Colin Mc V. Gubbins, had the greatest influence on Donovan and his associates during the formation of the C.O.I./O.S.S. In his 2012 dissertation, "Reclaiming the Ungentlemanly Arts," Linderman claims that "even before the entry of the United States into the Second World War, O.S.S. turned to Britain for training in intelligence and sabotage. S.O.E. played a substantial role in this process [...]. Although the Americans drew upon their own sources of inspiration as well, S.O.E. and Gubbin's doctrines were significant, arguably central, to American thinking." Aaron Ray Linderman, "Reclaiming the Ungentlemanly Arts: The Global Origins of S.O.E. and O.S.S." (Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2012), iii-iv.

<sup>2</sup>The historian indicates that after placing the technocrats under surveillance for some time, "Dr. Elmer Michel, who at the time was chief of the economic section of the German military administration in France, came to believe that the rumors of a political conspiracy were erroneous [...]." (Kuisel, "Legend," 394)



Mowrer's 1944 pamphlet, "Concerning France," and the November 1941 *Fortune Magazine* article indicates that the topic received at least some interest in the U.S. outside of political circles. Still, research for this project pointed to the fact that awareness of the affair was principally limited to American intelligence departments and agencies during and after the war. This thus leads to the second and final recommendation.

As mentioned in the introductory statements of this project, due to the sizable labyrinth of documents and finding aids at the National Archives requiring diligent sifting, the source base implemented in this dissertation was limited to a short list of record groups. This, of course, primarily related to those records from the C.O.I./O.S.S. and the State Department, with only small supporting roles played by those from other offices, such as Henry Morgenthau's Treasury Department. Various other record groups may offer additional insight that those presented in this dissertation simply do not. Two of these include the records of the Military Intelligence Division (M.I.D.) (RG 165) and Hoover's F.B.I. (RG 65). And as is noted at the end of Chapter Five, the question of when Synarchy's legend was exposed by the American intelligence services will, for now at least, remain a mystery. Yet as the accessioning process of Cold War intelligence records continues at the National Archives, further pieces of the puzzle will certainly begin to fall into place. The "smoking gun" document categorically demystifying the affair should serve as one of the most coveted of these. A document fitting this description presumably exists in those still classified, presumably from the C.I.A. Such a record not only acts as the necessary *denouement* for this project, as it would provide the appropriate conclusion to the American intelligence narrative, it also represents a Holy Grail of sorts for the Kuiselist/Dardist historians, all of whom contend that propagandist hoaxes crafted the Synarchy affair. Additional records on the topic



may also indicate whether American spies physically hunted French Synarchists, instead of merely observing them behind the safety of a desk.

Vichy's Synarchy was an illusion. Whether due to their cautiousness, zeal, or oversight, this dissertation has demonstrated that this reality evaded most of FDR's and William Donovan's erudite intelligence agents. Yet at the heart of their misguided investigations were the three principal themes essential to safeguarding American national security and defeating the Axis, making their pursuit of Synarchy, if nothing else, a virtuous one.

Though the U.S. government's intelligence analyses of Synarchy generally ended in failure, the historian's is just beginning. For scholars who resume the study of Vichy's phantasmagoria from the perspective of the American intelligence community, remember: Their proof of the legend's demystification is most certainly out there, in black and white, just waiting to be discovered.

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