

FRANCE, AFRICA, AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

BY C. M. ANDREW AND A. S. KANYA-FORSTNER

By 1914 France possessed the largest Empire in African history. Yet that Empire was of only trivial interest to both French people and their governments. As the diminutive colonialist movement complained: 'l'éducation coloniale des Français demeure entièrement à faire'.¹ Though few Frenchmen suspected it in August 1914, however, World War I was to mark a turning point in their relations with Africa in four ways. The War brought with it the final phase of French colonial expansion; it led to the recruitment of French Africa's first great conscript army; it launched the first concerted campaign for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire; and, at least at the moment of victory, it seemed to have begun 'l'éducation coloniale des Français'.

I

The great territorial question raised in Africa by the war was the disposal of the German Empire. British war aims in German Africa were discussed by both the cabinet and several cabinet committees. In France the cabinet seems never to have discussed African war aims at all.² The official mind of French imperialism, non-existent at the cabinet level, was weak and fragmented even at the ministerial level. The colonial ministry did not administer all French Africa. Algeria came under the ministry of the interior; the Moroccan and Tunisian protectorates were the responsibility of the *quai d'Orsay*. Until almost the end of the war, no government department developed war aims for Africa as a whole. For most of the war the foreign ministry's African war aims were limited to strengthening the French hold on Morocco; but in its order of priorities North Africa came clearly behind the Middle East and far behind the Rhine. Only for the colonial ministry was Africa a major priority. The colonial ministry, however, still remained—along with the ministry of public works—'la

¹ C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'The French "Colonial Party": Its Composition, Aims and Influence, 1885–1914', *Historical Journal*, xiv (1971), 99–128; C. M. Andrew, 'The French Colonialist Movement during the Third Republic: The Unofficial Mind of Imperialism', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, xxvi (1976). C. M. Andrew, P. Grupp, and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'Le mouvement colonial français et ses principales personnalités, 1890–1914', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, LXII (1975).

² For a more detailed analysis of France's African war aims see: C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'The French Colonial Party and French Colonial War Aims, 1914–1918', *Historical Journal*, xvii (1974), 79–106; *idem*, 'France and the Repartition of Africa, 1914–1922', forthcoming in *Dalhousie Review*.

cendrillon des ministères', at the bottom of the ministerial pecking order. By the outbreak of war the ministry, with its fiercely independent yet overlapping departments (*services*), staffed in general by *fonctionnaires* of only modest abilities, had become a byword for confusion. The report of the Chamber of Deputies' budget commission in 1917 summed up many earlier criticisms of the ministry:

Chaque service, *constituée comme une forteresse*, traite, pour les colonies qu'il administre, ses affaires à un point de vue particulier. Il advient ainsi le plus souvent . . . que trois ou quatre services s'occupent simultanément, *et en leur donnant parfois des solutions différentes*, du règlement d'une question de principe qui appellerait une direction unique.³

Not until October 1917 did the colonial ministry take steps to remedy the chaos of its post-war planning by establishing a *commission de documentation coloniale*, in order to collate 'tous les documents relatifs aux problèmes politiques coloniaux d'après-guerre'.

The unofficial mind of French imperialism was far quicker off the mark than the official mind. Unlike the government, the colonialists lost no time in debating their African war aims. Immediately after the outbreak of war, the *Comité de l'Afrique Française* turned its attention to the 'vastes réorganisations . . . africaines qui en résulteront'. During 1916 representatives of the main colonialist societies met at the *Société de Géographie* in a first attempt to agree on the 'vastes réorganisations' which were needed. The African reorganization proposed by Auguste Terrier, secretary-general of the *Comité de l'Afrique Française*, was vast indeed. The peace settlement, in Terrier's view, would provide an opportunity for acquiring territory not merely from a defeated Germany but also, by negotiation and barter, from allies and neutrals. His aim was to unify French West Africa by acquiring all foreign enclaves between Senegal and Dahomey. The report prepared for the colonial ministry in November 1917 by Albert Duchêne of the *commission de documentation*, though slightly less unrealistic in its expectations, had the same general aim. While less hopeful than Terrier that Britain could be persuaded to part with the Gold Coast, Duchêne was hopeful of acquiring the Gambia and Sierra Leone as well as Portuguese and Spanish possessions, and at least informal control of Liberia.

The elaboration of France's African war aims was thus the work not of the cabinet nor even of the 'official mind' of the colonial ministry, but of two overlapping groups: the leaders of the colonialist movement and a handful of African enthusiasts in the colonial and foreign ministries (almost all linked, like Duchêne, with the colonialist movement). On the two occasions during World War I when the French government was forced to acquire some African war aims, it was these two groups which jointly supplied them.

³ *Journal Officiel, Documents Parlementaires (Chambre des Députés)*, 1917, no. 3476 (emphasis shown as in the original).

The first occasion arose during the winter of 1915–16 when the British attempt to provoke an Arab rising against the Turks and the allied conquest of German West Africa forced the French to negotiate with Britain provisional partitions of both the Middle East and the Cameroons. On the French side the same man, François Georges-Picot, conducted both sets of negotiations. Picot was both a diplomat and a member of a famous colonial dynasty which had played a prominent part in the *Comité de l'Afrique Française* and its Asian counterpart, the *Comité de l'Asie Française*. The French cabinet took no part in Picot's negotiations. On the Middle East Picot was told to draft his own instructions which were then signed without amendment by Briand, the prime minister. Not till Sykes and Picot had initialled their celebrated accord did Briand outline its terms to the Cabinet. And he did so then with what the President rightly described as 'une spirituelle imprécision'. During the negotiations which followed for a provisional partition of the Cameroons Picot stressed the demands not of the cabinet but of the colonialists. 'The French Colonial Party', repeated the French ambassador, 'are very excited'. In the event, the final agreement, which gave nine-tenths of the Cameroons to France, exceeded the expectations of both the colonialists and the colonial minister.

During 1918 the French government was obliged to furnish itself with a more general set of African war aims as part of French preparations for the peace conference. In February 1918 the cabinet simply passed the colonial buck to the new and inexperienced colonial minister, Henri Simon, whom it made president of a *Commission d'étude des questions coloniales posées par la guerre*. Simon in turn then passed the buck to the commission whose meetings he modestly declined to attend on the grounds that its competence in the matter of war aims greatly exceeded his own. In Simon's absence the commission was dominated by the colonialists, aided and abetted by the more energetic officials of the colonial ministry. Its war aims, once decided, became the war aims of the French government.

The ultimate ambition of the colonial war aims commission was the same as that of the *Comité de l'Afrique Française*: 'faire régner la paix française sur la totalité de l'ouest africain'. But it recognized that the American entry into the war and President Wilson's well-advertised aversion to the old diplomacy of imperialism would make impossible the vast repartition of the African continent at the peace conference for which colonialists had earlier hoped. In West Africa the peace conference simply made France and Britain mandatories of those parts of the German Empire they had already partitioned between themselves (though France's share was slightly enlarged).⁴ But the post-war negotiations which the colonialists had hoped would remove at least some of the foreign 'enclaves' in French

⁴ The smaller of Germany's two West African colonies, Togo (one-ninth the size of the Cameroons) had been provisionally partitioned on the spot by the British and French commanders after its conquest in the first month of the War. At the Peace Conference France's share was enlarged to include the port of Lomé and all the railway lines.

West Africa never materialized. Attempts to extend French control of Morocco were also unsuccessful. Protracted negotiations over Tangier during the 1920s ended not, as the colonialists and the foreign ministry had wanted, in a French Tangier, but in confirmation of its international status.

II

Before August 1914 no government of the Third Republic had given serious thought to the potential contribution of French Africa, in either men or raw materials, to a war in Europe. And yet the idea of an African army was an old one. 'Ce que l'Afrique peut produire de plus utile à la France', Napoleon III had declared, 'ce sont des soldats'. Algerian troops had been used in the Crimean War. The *tirailleurs sénégalais*, whose first battalion was founded in 1857, distinguished themselves in the Franco-Prussian War. But successive republican governments failed to build on the foundations left by the Second Empire. Even during the decade before the World War I the vigorous campaigns led by Adolphe Messimy and Charles Mangin in favour of, respectively, an Algerian army of 100,000 men and an even larger *force noire* from tropical Africa met with indifferent success.⁵ In August 1914 there were only 30,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais* and 35,000 Algerians under arms.⁶

The enormous early losses on the Western Front led to the first mass recruitment in French Africa. By the time Clemenceau became prime minister in November 1917, French Africa had provided a further 270,000 men, with the largest contingents coming from A.O.F. (90,000) and Algeria (85,000).⁷ The colonial troops most valued by the high command were the Moroccans. According to a racist army proverb, 'the Algerian is a man, the Tunisian a woman, the Moroccan a warrior'. The most decorated unit in the French army was a Moroccan regiment.⁸ But because the 'pacification' of Morocco was still incomplete, only 23,000 Moroccan troops had been sent to Europe by November 1917.⁹ Though generally satisfied also with the quality of Algerian recruits, most of the high command had grave doubts about the suitability of the *force noire* for the Western Front. Black troops, used at Gallipoli and to garrison the Empire during 1915,

⁵ C.-R. Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France, 1871-1919* (Paris, 1968), II, ch. 38. M. Michel, 'Un mythe: la "Force Noire" avant 1914', *Relations Internationales*, 1 (1974), 83-90.

⁶ M. Michel, 'Le recrutement des tirailleurs en A.O.F. pendant la première Guerre mondiale. Essai de bilan statistique', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, LX (1973), 645. Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, 1165.

⁷ 'Recrutement indigène fourni à la Métropole du début des hostilités au 15 novembre 1917', ANSOM (Archives Nationales, Section Outre-Mer), Affaires Politiques 533 (3); cited by M. Michel, 'La genèse du recrutement de 1918 en Afrique noire française', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, LVIII (1971), 437-8.

⁸ S. C. Davis, *The French War Machine* (London, 1937), ch. 7. A. Guignard, 'Les troupes noires pendant la guerre', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 June 1919, 849-79.

⁹ See note 7.

did not appear in the trenches in large numbers until 1916. Even their valour at Verdun did not overcome the doubts of the high command. Instead, those doubts were confirmed by the inability of the black battalions to withstand winter on the Western Front, and by their poor performance (due to inadequate training and leadership) in the disastrous Nivelle offensive of April 1917. Even the manpower crisis at the end of 1917 did not persuade the general staff of the need for more black troops.¹⁰ The colonial administrations themselves, disturbed by the revolts provoked by conscription in both West Africa and Algeria, were either lukewarm or actively hostile to further recruitment. After the Batna rebellion in Algeria at the end of 1916, the pace of recruitment slackened during 1917.¹¹ In A.O.F. Van Vollenhoven, the governor-general, declared that a further call-up, however small, could not fail to produce 'une révolte générale': 'La colonie est arrivée à la limite de ce qu'il lui est possible de faire: peut-être même cette limite a-t-elle été dépassée'.¹²

Ironically, the man responsible for a further mass recruitment in French Africa, Clemenceau, was, by his own reckoning, 'le moins colonialiste de tous les Français'. Though Clemenceau was an anti-colonialist, his decision owed much to the influence of the colonialists. Soon after he became prime minister in November 1917 he was persuaded by Mangin, the leading advocate of the *force noire*, that many more troops could be levied in tropical Africa.¹³ And he was persuaded by Jonnart (president of the *Comité de l'Afrique Française*) and Flandin (president of the *Réunion des Etudes Algériennes*) that, if reforms were promised, the same was possible in Algeria.¹⁴ Clemenceau's decision to follow their advice was, nonetheless, an act of desperation rather than of faith in the Empire. In order to hold out until the Americans arrived in force, France, in his view, needed more troops from every possible source, even at the cost of provoking a mass revolt in her African Empire:

Les insurrections? Je ne m'en soucie pas pour le moment. Mieux vaut courir des risques en Afrique que sur le front. Ce que nous devons éviter par-dessus tout, c'est une défaite sur le Rhin.¹⁵

In the event, the colonial call-up of 1918 proceeded without serious difficulty. At least 72,000 men were recruited in A.O.F. and A.E.F., and

¹⁰ Michel, 'La genèse du recrutement de 1918'. Marc Michel's thesis, 'L'A.O.F. et la Grande Guerre: contributions et réactions', now nearing completion, will represent a major contribution to West African history. It will include a detailed analysis of A.O.F.'s military and economic involvement in the War, as well as the African and European consequences of that involvement. On French Guinea see also the article in this issue by R. Johnson and A. Summers.

¹¹ Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, 1162-3.

¹² Van Vollenhoven to colonial ministry, 25 Sept. 1917, ANSOM, Affaires Politiques 533 (2).

¹³ Michel, 'La genèse du recrutement de 1918', 436-8.

¹⁴ See the correspondence between Jonnart and Flandin for the period Nov. 1917 to Jan. 1918. in the Flandin MSS (uncatalogued) at the Archives Nationales.

¹⁵ Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, 1163.

more than 50,000 in Algeria.¹⁶ In all, French Africa sent 450,000 soldiers to Europe during the War.¹⁷ Mangin claimed later that their numbers could have been 'easily trebled or quadrupled' if African recruitment had been planned before the War began.¹⁸

Africa also provided 135,000 wartime workers (most from the Maghreb) for French factories.¹⁹ Even during the manpower crisis of 1918 they were received with something less than enthusiasm. In January 1918 the ministry of labour asked the colonial ministry (whose responsibilities by now included North African recruitment) to ensure that the French labour force was insufficient before seeking further workers from the Empire.²⁰ Some at least of the colonial ministry officials shared the apprehensions of the ministry of labour. A report in January 1918 by Fauchère, *inspecteur d'agriculture coloniale*, on the colonial labour force in French factories concluded: 'Il faut trois, quatre indigènes pour fournir le travail d'un Européen'. Further colonial workers would, in Fauchère's view, be badly received by the French working class. They would be accused of keeping down wages. And they would provoke sexual jealousy: 'Que l'indigène fréquente nos ouvrières et le sentiment ou plutôt l'instinct national n'en sera-t-il pas offensé?' Furthermore, besides depriving the Empire of a labour force it could ill spare during the war, the immigrant workers would cause trouble on their return:

Les conditions de la vie en France permettront à l'indigène de jouir peu à peu d'une familiarité qui n'est pas d'usage aux colonies entre blancs et jaunes ou noirs. Ayant noté nos faiblesses, lorsqu'il sera de retour dans son pays, il contribuera considérablement par ses racontars à nuire à notre prestige.²¹

France's first mass recruitment of African soldiers and workers had inevitable political consequences. From the first the *Jeunes Algériens* and *Jeunes Sénégalais* supported conscription partly as a means of winning political concessions. Most *colons* opposed African conscription, again partly for fear of its political consequences. In December 1914 Lutaud, governor-general of Algeria, exempted from the *indigénat* (the system of summary native jurisdiction), all army volunteers, their fathers, and migrant workers who spent more than a year in France.²² A series of parliamentary bills (none translated into law), tabled in a flush of patriotic enthusiasm during the first six months of 1915, declared the right of all native soldiers to citizenship: 'Ils se sont élevés à la dignité supérieure de sauveurs de

¹⁶ Michel, 'La genèse du recrutement de 1918', 443. Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, 1165.

¹⁷ The official statistics compiled by the French general staff are to be found in: P. Varet, *Du concours apporté à la France par ses colonies et pays de protectorat au cours de la guerre de 1914* (Paris, 1927), 40.

¹⁸ *Dépêche Coloniale*, 16 July 1920.

¹⁹ Varet, *Du concours*, 45.

²⁰ Ministry of labour to colonial ministry, 21 Jan. 1918, ANSOM, *Affaires Politiques*, 19.

²¹ Fauchère, 'Rapport sur l'utilisation de la main-d'oeuvre coloniale dans l'industrie métropolitaine', 12 Jan. 1918, ANSOM, *Affaires Politiques*, 19.

²² Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, 1141.

la patrie. Nous devons à nous mêmes de les élever à la dignité de citoyen'.²³ The extension of conscription to the 'Four Communes' of Senegal in 1915 was followed by formal recognition of the *originaires*' French citizenship. The West African recruiting drive of 1918 was accompanied by the appointment (despite the opposition of commercial interests and most of the local administration) of the black deputy, Blaise Diagne, as *commissaire de la République* to lead a propaganda mission promising 'un ensemble de réformes'.²⁴ The Algerian recruitment of 1918 was similarly accompanied by Jonnart's appointment as governor-general, and by the promise of a reform of the *indigénat* which eventually materialized, despite violent opposition from the *colons*, as the Jonnart law of 1919.²⁵ With the gift of hindsight both the hopes and fears aroused by the reforms in North and West Africa appear greatly exaggerated. In the four years after the Jonnart law only 256 Algerians gained French citizenship.²⁶

III

Just as World War I emphasized the military potential of French Africa, so, though in a lesser degree, it also drew attention to its economic potential. Before 1914 remarkably little use had been made of the Empire's resources. Whereas India was Britain's largest export market and the mainstay of her balance of payments, the French Empire actually contributed proportionately less to the French economy before World War I than before the French Revolution. In 1787 30 per cent of French foreign trade was with the French West Indies. During the years 1909–13 the whole of France's Empire, despite its enormous size, accounted for only 10 per cent of her foreign trade. Joseph Chailley-Bert, secretary-general of the *Union Coloniale*, the main business wing of the colonialist movement, described colonial production at the outbreak of war as 'véritablement misérable pour un Empire colonial si vaste et pour un métropole si riche'.²⁷ In 1914 only 9 per cent of France's foreign investment was in the Empire, as compared with 25 per cent in Russia alone. As du Vivier de Streel, wartime

²³ *Journal Officiel, Documents Parlementaires, (Chambre des Députés)*, 1915, no. 935. Cf. Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, 1191.

²⁴ G. Wesley Johnson Jr., *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900–1920* (Stanford, 1971), ch. 10. M. Michel, 'Citoyenneté et service militaire dans les quatre Communes du Sénégal au cours de la Première Guerre mondiale', in *Perspectives nouvelles sur le passé de l'Afrique noire et de Madagascar. Mélanges offerts à Hubert Deschamps* (Paris, 1976); idem., 'La genèse du recrutement de 1918'.

²⁵ Jonnart had persuaded Clemenceau that a new recruitment would necessitate 'la mise en pratique d'une politique indigène d'une grande bienveillance'; Jonnart to Clemenceau (copy), 27 Dec. 1917, Archives Nationales, Flandin MSS (uncatalogued). For details of the reforms, see Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, ch. 43, and V. Confer, *France and Algeria: The Problem of Civil and Political Reform, 1870–1920* (Syracuse, 1966), ch. 7.

²⁶ Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans*, II, 1223.

²⁷ C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'French Business and the French Colonialists', *Historical Journal*, XIX (1976), 982–6. C. Régismanset and E. du Vivier de Streel (eds.), *Conférence Coloniale instituée par M. Maginot, ministre des colonies* (Paris, 1917), 169.

leader of the colonialist campaign for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire, complained:

Nos capitalistes ont toujours été très méfiants à l'égard des entreprises coloniales, en raison de leur ignorance d'une part, et par suite aussi des conseils peu encourageants qui leur ont été donnés par les établissements financiers dont ils suivaient les inspirations, et qui préféraient les entraîner vers des placements étrangers de plus grande envergure.²⁸

The greater part of France's colonial trade was conducted with her oldest colonies. Algeria was her main colonial trading partner. By contrast, the huge tropical Empire acquired during the late nineteenth-century scramble for Africa remained remarkably neglected. The French Congo attracted only a small fraction of the investment which had poured into the Congo of Leopold II.²⁹ Even in West Africa, despite the long history of French commerce with Senegal (which continued to account for well over half the foreign trade of A.O.F.), French businessmen were notoriously less enterprising than their British and German rivals. Production of cocoa, coffee, and tropical fruits had scarcely begun in A.O.F. In 1913 cocoa production in the Gold Coast already amounted to 51,000 metric tons; in the neighbouring Ivory Coast it was only 47 tons. After the outbreak of war British merchants were far quicker to take over the German share of African commerce even in French Africa. Owing to the superiority of the British merchant navy, by 1916 Britain had actually replaced France as the main supplier of A.O.F.³⁰

Before the outbreak of war the French government had not even considered the possibility of an economic contribution by the Empire to the war effort. In keeping with its incompetent organization the colonial ministry as yet possessed no department concerned with the economic development of the Empire. After the outbreak of war conscription, the occupation of the northern departments, and the shortage of fertilizers and machinery quickly ended France's agricultural self-sufficiency. But the government was slow to seek help from the colonies. An unwieldy 56 man *Commission consultative coloniale* set up in September 1914 to consider trade with the Empire ground to a halt within a year. In November 1915 the colonial ministry at last established a *Service d'utilisation des produits coloniaux pour la défense nationale*, to coordinate the supply of colonial products. In December 1916 colonial governors were asked to encourage production of all foodstuffs which could be shipped to France.³¹

²⁸ E. Du Vivier de Streel, 'Une grave question de l'après-guerre', *Revue de Paris*, 1 Feb. 1916, 3.

²⁹ C. Coquéry-Vidrovitch, *Le Congo au temps des compagnies concessionnaires, 1890-1930* (Paris, 1972), 15.

³⁰ See chapters 7 and 8 of the forthcoming thesis by Marc Michel referred to above (note 10).

³¹ Varet, *Du concours*, 9-13. D. Heisser, 'The Impact of the Great War on French Imperialism, 1914-1924', unpublished dissertation (University of North Carolina, 1972), 14 ff., 121 ff.

No more, in the view of the *Service d'utilisation des produits coloniaux*, could be done.³²

Many colonialists disagreed. By 1917, with a wheat harvest less than half the pre-war level and domestic sugar production even harder hit, France was faced with a crisis of food supply. That crisis gave added weight to the colonialist campaign for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire. In April du Vivier de Streel wrote to the colonial ministry:

J'estime qu'en obtenant le concours de tous nos colons pour créer les exploitations nécessaires et si les Administrations locales interviennent pour exiger des populations indigènes l'activité laborieuse qu'elles ne donnent pas toujours spontanément, on peut arriver en un an à intensifier dans des proportions extraordinaires notre production coloniale.³³

Maginot, the new and inexperienced colonial minister, was seduced by the colonialist campaign. In June 1917 he summoned a *Conférence Coloniale* attended by 250 delegates representing the colonialist movement, the colonial administration, and business interests, with du Vivier de Streel and an official of the colonial ministry as joint secretaries-general. Their task, Maginot told them, was to find means not merely to overcome the present crisis of food supply but also to draw from the Empire vast quantities of raw materials to ensure post-war France 'une puissante renaissance économique': 'Pour tirer de notre admirable empire colonial le parti que nous devrions normalement en tirer, il nous reste à faire dix fois, vingt fois plus que nous avons fait jusqu'à présent'.³⁴ After two months' discussions, Maginot set up a *commission executive* in August 1917 to act as liaison between the colonial administration and the colonial movement and work for 'la réalisation des vœux émis par la Conférence coloniale'. In May 1918 the *Union Coloniale* organized a *Congrès d'Agriculture Coloniale* with much the same kind of membership as the conference of the previous year. This conference, too, gave birth to an action committee of colonialists and colonial officials to implement its resolutions.³⁵

As Lyautey observed in January 1918, the campaign for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire was by now in conflict with the attempt to recruit more troops:

La France demande au Maroc de lui fournir des soldats, des ouvriers et des céréales. Il y a antagonisme entre ces diverses demandes dont les deux premières absorbent presque toutes nos possibilités et ne laissent à la main-d'oeuvre agricole que le déchet.³⁶

³² Rheinhart, 'Note pour M. le chef du service du secrétariat et du contresigne', 15 May 1917, ANSOM, Affaires Politiques 2613 (2).

³³ Du Vivier de Streel to Maginot, 15 Apr. 1917, ANSOM, Affaires Politiques 2613 (2).

³⁴ Régismanset and du Vivier de Streel (eds.), *Conférence Coloniale*, 1-7.

³⁵ Heisser, 'French Imperialism', 130-2, 180-7.

³⁶ Lyautey, 'Rapport mensuel', Jan. 1918, ANSOM, Affaires Politiques 899 bis (1). A similar point was made during 1917 in the monthly reports from Algeria and—in with particular force—in dispatches from A.O.F.

There was thus a conflict of priorities within the colonialist movement between those for whom the most urgent necessity was more soldiers and those whose main aim was the *mise en valeur*. For the *Union Coloniale* and the business wing of the colonialist movement, as for most of the colonial administration, the overriding need to intensify colonial production made it vital to preserve what remained of the colonial labour force. As one of the reports to the *Congrès d'Agriculture Coloniale* concluded: 'on aboutit à un dilemme simple et précis, ou bien renoncer à mettre en valeur nos colonies, ou bien conserver intégralement la faible main-d'oeuvre dont elles disposent'.³⁷

The wartime achievements of the campaign for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire were, however, slight. By 1918 the French merchant navy had lost almost half its pre-war tonnage. Even where colonies were able to increase wartime production, the ships were not available to bring it to Europe. In A.O.F. the administration was left with the problem of disposing at the end of the War of substantial stocks of foodstuffs it had been unable to ship to France.³⁸ Even in Morocco, André Fribourg, secretary of the *groupe colonial* in the post-war Chamber of Deputies, complained of 'des milliers de sacs de blé pourrissant sur les terres pleines de Safi tandis qu'on manquait de pain en France, à trois jours de mer de là'.³⁹ In the short term World War I produced no major shift in the pattern of French trade with her African Empire. Indeed, partly because of the continuing shipping problem, the Empire was marginally less important as a supplier of major foodstuffs in 1920 than in 1913.⁴⁰ The real importance of the wartime campaign for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire was not its contribution to the war effort but the stimulus it provided for post-war investment.

IV

In the aftermath of victory it was possible to believe that the War had transformed popular attitudes to Empire, and above all to French Africa. As Chailley-Bert told the *Conférence Coloniale* in 1917: 'Cette guerre a enseigné à la France qu'elle a des colonies. Elle l'ignorait complètement.'⁴¹ The lesson had been begun by the colonial troops who had helped to bring victory on the Western Front. Bitter German complaints against the post-war occupation of the Rhineland by black soldiers made these soldiers more popular still. But an even more important reason for the Empire's newfound popularity was its potential contribution to post-war recovery.

³⁷ Fauchère, 'Rapport sur l'utilisation de la main-d'oeuvre coloniale dans l'industrie métropolitaine', 12 Jan. 1918, ANSOM, Affaires Politiques 19.

³⁸ See chapters 13 and 18 of the forthcoming thesis by Marc Michel.

³⁹ *Dépêche Coloniale*, 25 Feb. 1920.

⁴⁰ C. Fidel, 'La part des colonies dans nos importations de matières premières', *Bulletin de Renseignements Coloniaux*, no. 474, Jan. 1923.

⁴¹ Régismanset and du Vivier de Streele (eds.), *Conférence Coloniale*, 159.

Once victory had ended wartime demands on the Empire's manpower, the whole colonialist movement was able to unite in a campaign for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire. The colonies, so the colonialists claimed, would free France from dependence on foreign imports and provide an inexhaustible reservoir of raw materials to supply her industries. Those arguments persuaded one third of the deputies elected in 1919 to join the parliamentary *groupe colonial* which thus became the largest group in the Chamber of Deputies. When Albert Sarraut, the leader of the *groupe colonial*, became minister of colonies in January 1920 (a post he was to retain in successive cabinets until the 1924 elections), the colonialist programme seemed about to become government policy. In April 1921, after long preparation, the 'Sarraut plan' for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire was finally tabled as a parliamentary bill. The plan suffered, however, from one simple and insuperable defect. Its cost was (probably optimistically) estimated by Sarraut at four billion francs, and the bill came before parliament at a time of financial crisis.⁴²

Many of the deputies who had joined the *groupe colonial* had only the vaguest idea of the colonial resources they were so anxious to exploit. For most deputies, as for most Frenchmen, enthusiasm for the *mise en valeur* of an Empire of which they knew little was, like reparations, a way of taking refuge from the appalling economic realities of post-war France. And when the limitless resources of the Empire proved even harder to obtain than reparations, the Empire quickly lost its newfound popularity. As soon as the rhetoric of the *mise en valeur* was translated into a programme costing billions of francs, the enthusiasm of taxpayers and their parliamentary representatives disappeared. The Sarraut plan, introduced amid fanfares in April 1921, was then sidetracked by a parliamentary committee which did not report until the end of 1923. The report had still not been debated when parliament was dissolved in May 1924.⁴³ The first comprehensive study of the Empire's contribution to the war effort, published in 1927, gloomily concluded that the imperial enthusiasm generated by the war had almost disappeared: 'Le "Français moyen" s' imagine volontiers que les colonies servent uniquement à faire vivre des fonctionnaires et "coûtent cher" au budget de la métropole.'⁴⁴

The apparent return to pre-war apathy, however, concealed at least three significant changes in attitude. The most easily discernible, despite the demise of the Sarraut plan, was among French investors. The loss of half France's foreign investment during the war (including, notably, all her Russian loans), the rapid decline of the franc in foreign exchanges, the various post-war restrictions on investment outside French territory, all combined to make colonial investment more attractive than in 1914. At the end of 1920 the colonial ministry reported:

⁴² C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'The *Groupe Colonial* in the French Chamber of Deputies, 1892-1932', *Historical Journal*, xvii (1974), 842-5.

⁴³ *Ibid.* See also: Heisser, 'French Imperialism', ch. 6.

⁴⁴ Varet, *Du concours*, 5.

un afflux récent de capitaux nouveaux porté vers les colonies et la création presque quotidienne d'un grand nombre d'entreprises ou de sociétés qui se proposent l'exploitation, la mise en valeur et l'apport sur le marché français des ressources coloniales.⁴⁵

The Empire's share of French foreign investment grew from 9 per cent in 1914 to 45 per cent in 1940, with the main movement of private capital coming in the 1920s. Of France's colonial investment in 1940, about 60 per cent was in North Africa and 14 per cent in tropical Africa. Trade with the Empire grew more slowly. But with the Depression its relative importance increased dramatically and Algeria, with only seven million inhabitants (most of them impoverished), became France's main trading partner.⁴⁶

Secondly, colonialist propaganda achieved a degree of success, if not among French adults, then at least among French schoolchildren. By ministerial regulations of 1923 and 1925 the history and geography of the Empire became for the first time a compulsory part of the school curriculum. School textbooks began to portray France as 'l'héritière de Rome', reviving the Empire of the Romans on both shores of the Mediterranean, though now with an African hinterland stretching southwards to the Congo.⁴⁷ Many later supporters of 'Algérie française' first learned the myth that 'the Mediterranean runs through France as the Seine runs through Paris' in the schoolroom. The *Ligue Maritime et Coloniale*, most of whose members came from the schools, grew from modest beginnings to claim a membership of half a million in 1925 and 700,000 for most of the 1930s.⁴⁸

Finally, World War I left behind it an imperial myth which the approach of World War II was to revive. Faced in 1939 with the enormous demographic and economic superiority of Greater Germany, the colonialists argued once again that the resources of the Empire would make good the weakness of the metropolis. And once again, though dormant for most of the years between the wars, the imperial myth struck a popular chord. The wartime governments of Daladier and Reynaud eagerly seized on the colonialist slogan, 'La France de 110 millions d'habitants fait face à l'Allemagne'. Georges Mandel, once an anti-colonialist, now minister of colonies, boasted that 'notre Empire pourra lever 2 millions de soldats et 500,000 travailleurs'.⁴⁹ Imperial France would conquer continental Germany. That myth was brutally destroyed in the six-week blitzkrieg of 1940.

⁴⁵ Untitled memo [late 1920], ANSOM, Affaires Politiques 2613 (1).

⁴⁶ J. Marseille, 'L'investissement français dans l'Empire colonial: l'enquête du gouvernement de Vichy (1943)', *Revue Historique*, CCLII (1974), 409-32. Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, 'French Business', 986-7.

⁴⁷ M. Semidei, 'De l'Empire à la décolonisation à travers les manuels scolaires français', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, XVI (1966), 56-86.

⁴⁸ Membership figures were published intermittently in the *Ligue's* official bulletin, *Mer et Colonies*.

⁴⁹ *France Outre-Mer*, 29 Sept. 1939.

SUMMARY

World War I marked the final phase of French colonial expansion. France's African war aims were determined not by the cabinet but by the leaders of the colonialist movement and by a handful of African enthusiasts in the colonial and foreign ministries. Most of these men harboured the unrealistic aim of acquiring not merely German territory but also other foreign 'enclaves' in A.O.F. At the peace conference, however, France's African gains were limited to mandates over the greater part of German West Africa.

Before August 1914 no government had given serious thought to the potential contribution of French Africa, either in men or raw materials, to a war in Europe. The enormous losses on the Western Front led to the recruitment of French Africa's first great conscript army. By the end of the War French Africa had sent 450,000 soldiers and 135,000 factory workers to Europe. The crisis of French food supply also led in 1917-18 to the first concerted campaign, mounted jointly by the colonialists and the colonial ministry, for the *mise en valeur* of the Empire. But France's shipping losses made it impossible to increase her African imports.

In the aftermath of victory French Africa appeared genuinely popular in France for the first time. The main reason for that popularity was the naïve belief that the resources of the Empire would free France from dependence on foreign suppliers and speed her post-war recovery. When the resources of the Empire proved even slower to arrive than reparations, the Empire quickly lost its newfound popularity. The War nonetheless left behind it the myth of the Empire as a limitless reservoir of men and raw materials: a myth which, though dormant for most of the inter-war years, was to be revived by the coming of World War II.