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Neo-Socialism, Fascism, and Political Conversion in Interwar France
Mathieu Hikaru Desan
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Order, Authority, Nation

Order, Authority, Nation develops a sociological account of political conversion from left to right through an examination of the historical case of Marcel Déat and the French neo-socialists. Déat and the neo-socialists began their careers in the 1920s as democratic socialists but became fascists and Nazi collaborators by the end of World War II. While existing accounts of this transformation emphasize the ideological continuity underlying neo-socialism and fascism, this book centers the fundamentally discontinuous and relational character of political conversion in its analysis. Highlighting the active part played by Déat and the neo-socialists in their own reinvention at different moments of their trajectory, it argues that political conversion is a phenomenon defined not just by a change in belief but also, at its core, by how political actors respond to changing political circumstances. This sociological account of a phenomenon often treated polemically offers a unique contribution to the sociology and history of socialism and fascism.

Mathieu Hikaru Desan is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Colorado Boulder. His research interests include social theory political sociology and cultural sociology. His work has appeared in *Sociological Theory*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, and *Critical Sociology*, among other outlets.

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Order, Authority, Nation

Neo-Socialism, Fascism, and Political Conversion in Interwar France

MATHIEU HIKARU DESAN

University of Colorado Boulder



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For Charlie and Lydia

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Acknowledgments

This book has been fifteen years in the making. It started as a dissertation project for a PhD in Sociology at the University of Michigan but work on it extended well beyond my time in Ann Arbor. Little could I anticipate just how eventful the last ten years would be, with work on this book continuing, on and off, through a new job, a cross-country move, the birth of my daughter, a global pandemic, and a political conjuncture that has thrown into doubt much of what we have come to take for granted. People keep telling me that the subject of my book – socialism, fascism, and political conversion – is timelier than ever. Perhaps, but what I can say for sure is that my book would have been finished in a timelier manner were it not.

Work on this book has spanned multiple phases of my life and career, and as such it has something of a layered quality to it, reflecting the support of a wide variety of colleagues and friends and incorporating different stages of my thinking on political conversion. My hope is that this has nevertheless resulted in a compelling historical and theoretical account, but it is hard to fully shake the writer's ambivalence about the finality entailed in committing something to print. It is the scholar's vocation, after all, to keep reading, to keep thinking, and, most importantly, to keep writing. It is in this spirit – as an invitation to further revision – that I offer this modest contribution to the history and theory of political conversion.

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