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Abstracts

EUGENIO DI RIENZO, *Révolution française, Second Empire, Troisième République. À propos d'Émile Ollivier*

Émile Ollivier was a French political leader who, as Minister of Justice under Napoleon III, authored a plan for achieving a governmental compromise between Bonapartist autocracy and parliamentary democracy. Ollivier was appointed Commissioner-General of the Bouches-du-Rhône Département at the outbreak of the Revolution of 1848. When Louis-Napoléon became President of the Republic (December 1848), Ollivier was dismissed from his post and from 1849 to 1857 held no public office. Elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1857, Ollivier became one of the republican minority known as «the Five», which viewed Napoleon's regime with hostility. But when the Emperor made liberal concessions in November 1860, Ollivier offered his support to him if Napoleon would establish representative government.

Ollivier soon broke with the Republicans and began working with the Duke de Mornay for a «Liberal Empire» that would incorporate elements of parliamentary government. On January 2, 1870, Napoleon appointed Ollivier Minister of Justice at the head of a government chosen from the leaders of a majority in parliament. Ollivier drew up a new constitution that was approved in a plebiscite by nearly 70 percent of the voters, and he set up numerous commissions to prepare the complete reform of such areas as labour, education, and law. He seemed to have transformed the Second Empire from despotism to constitutional monarchy without bloodshed or violence. Ollivier's work was ruined by the outbreak of the Franco-German War little more than six months after he came to power. The French military reverses soon obliged him to resign, which he did on August 9, 1870, and he never returned to politics.

*In the remaining 43 years of his life, Ollivier cultivated his wide interests and varied talents. At 65 he wrote *L'Empire libéral*, partly a history of the Second Empire, partly an apologetic account of his political activity and a defence of Napoleon III's regime. In his late pamphlets (1889-1894), Ollivier blamed the French Constitutional Laws of 1875 whose parliamentary organization was contrary to the republican principles of popular sovereignty and incompatible to the absolute freedom of executive power.*

Keywords:

Émile Ollivier

French Revolution, Second Empire, Third Republic

French Constitutional Government