
H-France Review Vol. 2 (May, 2002), No. 39

Edward G. DeClair, *Politics on the Fringe: The People, Policies, and Organization of the French National Front*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. xiv + 261 pp. Appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 US (cl). ISBN 0-8223-2237-4. \$17.95 US (pb). ISBN 0-8223- 2139-4.

Review by Samuel H. Goodfellow, Westminster College.

After reading this book, one can begin to appreciate why the leaders of the European Union are so terrified of Joerg Haider in Austria and the European far right. DeClair identifies Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National as the only consistently dynamic political party in France over the past ten years. In a Europe riddled with corruption, from Helmut Kohl's misuse of campaign funds to the pathetic exile of former Italian prime minister Bettino Craxi, the Social Democratic and Christian Democratic movements seem, well, old. By default, the new far right parties across Europe are rushing to fill the eroding vacuum with their brio of anti-immigration, anti-European Union, and traditional far right enthusiasms. *Politics on the Fringe* is a well-researched overview of the development of the Front National from the chaotic milieu of the marginalized and fractious far right in 1972 into a "solidly anchored, mass-based political party" (p. 212). Based on interviews with twenty-nine party leaders from the National Assembly and the Front's political bureau, DeClair effectively blends their views with political manifestos, secondary sources, and contemporary analysis in order to get inside the party.

By the early 1970s the French far right appeared to be moribund in the face of the ascendant left. The Front National evolved out of the disparate and often bitterly antagonistic factions of royalists, neo-fascists, embittered Algerian activists, Poujadists, and right-wing Catholics. Jean-Marie Le Pen's career epitomizes the Front's tangled roots. A veteran of Algeria, Le Pen was elected in 1956 to the national Assembly under the Poujadist banner. In 1965, he ran the presidential campaign of Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, defense lawyer of Algerie Française paramilitary leaders and the founder of the extreme right Rassemblement National. Each of these events--the abortive coup in Algeria, Poujadism, and Tixier-Vignancour's campaign-- were ephemeral, but they express a durability of French far right sensibilities stretching from the late nineteenth century to the present.

In October 1972, the various factions of the otherwise fractured far right came together as the Front National in order to compete in elections. Jean-Marie Le Pen received the nod as the leader because of his extensive background and experience. This choice proved lasting and effective for the Front, which has consistently cited leadership as one of the party's chief assets. Le Pen has, until his recent assault on Madame Peulvast and the division of the party, thoroughly dominated the Front, dictating its platform and its organizational structure. DeClair stresses that the formation of the Front marked a decisive first step towards the creation of what would become, against all expectation, the third largest party in France.

Founding a party, of course, is not the same thing as lasting success. Indeed, in 1981 Simone Veil, among others, declared the death of the French Right. A scant three years later, however, the prospects looked completely different after the Front garnered 12.34% of the vote in the European Parliament election. In the 1986 legislative elections, the Front continued its momentum with 9.7% of the vote and 35 seats in the National Assembly--courtesy of the newly instituted proportional system instead of the

old two round system. Capping off the robust rise in the 1980s was Le Pen's 14.4% in the 1988 presidential election. Into the 1990s the Front maintained a consistent and, as DeClair emphasizes, loyal voting constituency, but it could never surmount the 15% barrier.

If the 1980s saw the Front's breakthrough, the 1990s were about the party's endurance, which DeClair argues is critical for a party to be ranked as a permanent fixture. Despite the major obstacle of the reimposition in 1986 of the two round voting system, the Front has remained effective by plugging its role as an outsider (*mains propres et tête haute*), its new-found anti-European Union stance (*Non Maastricht*), and its concern for jobs (*droit au travail*). In the last elections, the Front still held a critical position as the third largest party in determining the composition of the National Assembly.

One of the key points that DeClair makes about the Front National, and perhaps by implication the far right in Europe, is that the leadership cadre is divided into factions, the founders, the notables, and the new recruits, which have different orientations and which, accordingly, appeal to different constituencies. The founders, best represented by Le Pen himself, grew up in the post-World War II extreme right milieu and were influenced by the Algerian crisis. This group has far greater continuities with the pre-war French fascist sensibility than the others. The second group, the notables, tends to be better educated and less ideologically motivated, and, for the most part, joined the party after the initial successes of the 1980s. The founders brought them in to provide legitimacy in local elections, in return for which the notables expected to revive moribund political careers. Most radical of all are the new recruits who are on average twenty years younger than the other factions. Attracted to the party for purely ideological reasons, the new recruits seek action and immediate political gratification. These factions effectively link the founding generation with the younger generation, thereby insuring some continuity, and they broadened the ideological appeal of the Front through the inclusion of the notables.

Who then has supported the Front National? Most striking is the balance across class and age, although with slightly more men than women, with particular success among shopkeepers, craftsmen, and workers. The Front has become a true mass party insofar as it draws from all constituencies. This, in DeClair's view, signifies the unique evolution of the Front and the far right in general, although he probably underestimates the diversity of the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français in the 1930s. From a regional perspective, however, the Front looks less like a mass party, as one with strongholds in the eastern half of metropolitan France and little support in the west. Part of the reason for the Front's broad support stems from the party's participation in the democratic arena, which, along with the influx of notables, has had a moderating influence on the party by making it more accountable.

The strength of this book lies in its dispassionate analysis of a controversial movement. Moving past frenzied conspiracy theories and desperate attempts to explain away the Front's support as just a protest vote, DeClair forces the reader to imagine the Front as a major political party rather than as a marginal and ephemeral movement. Unfortunately, the book was finished just before Le Pen received a sentence for assault and the faction supporting Bruno Megret, including one of Le Pen's daughters, left the party. At that moment, the Front looked fully capable of reverting to the chaos of the 1960s. Looks, however, can be deceptive and this is hardly the first time that Le Pen has looked like a buffoon (the time when his former wife posed for Playboy springs to mind) or that the party has wavered in its focus, only to stage a spectacular rebound. If Le Pen has come up smelling like roses again in the 2002 presidential elections, it is in large part because of his personal charisma, the experience of his organization, and his ability to seduce a new generation of activists—all points raised by DeClair. Le Pen is the only candidate who fills the emotional need for a reassertion of French identity in the face of the European Union. He will probably not get a post-presidential election bounce as Hitler did in 1932, but the Front National has waited patiently for exactly this scenario where Le Pen reaches the second round of the presidential elections. DeClair's analysis seems even more relevant now than in 1999 when his book came out.

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