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David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War France*. Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave, 2002. ix + 254 pp. Notes, index. \$68.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-333-77808-1.

Review by David L. Schalk, Vassar College.

*Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War France* is the first volume in a new series on "French Politics, Society and Culture." David Drake is Principal Lecturer in French at Middlesex University, London, and has published many articles on French topics, some in wider circulation journals such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Financial Times*. He has written an excellent general study that will be of interest not only to intellectual historians but to students of modern and contemporary France and indeed to all those francophiles (and perhaps also francophobes) fascinated by France's reputation for high intellectuality. France is after all the country where, according to most specialists, the modern intellectual was invented following the publication of Zola's "J'Accuse!" in January 1898. Anthony Burgess once paid a more than semi-serious tribute to "the French capacity for intellectualization [that] must leave any stupid instinctual Anglo-Saxon dribbling with envy." [1]

Drake's survey of the political involvement of French intellectuals since the Liberation fills a real gap. While many books, ranging from H. Stuart Hughes's classic *The Obstructed Path* to Mark Poster's extremely useful *Existential Marxism in France: From Sartre to Althusser*, deal with aspects of the political involvement of French intellectuals, no single work offering the same broad coverage exists in English. A more recent work, Michel Leymarie's *Les intellectuels et la politique en France*, published in the "Que sais-je?" series, is a wonderful, elegant but very brief overview, moving from the Dreyfus Affair to "La fin des intellectuels?" in 122 pages, but it has yet to be translated. Tony Judt's well-known and quite controversial *Past Imperfect* only deals with the years 1944-1956. [2]

In an area of scholarship strewn with ideological minefields, Drake strives for balance and tries not to be accusatory. He almost always succeeds, whether analyzing Sartre's "most violent text," his 1961 preface to Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* (p. 124), or Alain Finkielkraut's support of the Croats during the Bosnian Crisis of the early 1990s (p. 190). Drake commands a vigorous and lively writing style and is absolutely straightforward about his project; dealing with 56 years in 200 pages makes his book inevitably "an introductory overview" (p. 8). While his bibliography simply lists a few standard sources in French, the notes are most extensive and provide a useful guide to further research in a number of areas which he can only touch on briefly.

Drake concentrates on a relatively small number of famous intellectuals, all male. [3] He devotes the most attention to Jean-Paul Sartre, who for around thirty years after World War II "epitomized the committed intellectual" (p.4). Drake underscores that his book is neither intellectual nor cultural history but that his focus will be on the political dimension.

The chapters are structured chronologically, with major areas of political debate among the intellectuals examined sequentially, the first being the controversy over the postwar purges, centering especially around the trial and execution of Robert Brasillach. [4] Some general historical background is provided

periodically throughout, but it is not intrusive. It will help the non-specialist reader to grasp, for example, the contortions and arabesques of the intellectuals as they began to fight out the issues of the Cold War, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Drake observes that the post-Liberation debates "pale into insignificance" when compared with the conflicts among intellectuals as East-West tensions intensified beginning in 1947 (p. 33).

Drake is remarkably fair and accurate in presenting the political views of a real spectrum of intellectuals, ranging from Raymond Aron and André Malraux and their Gaullism, through "neutralists" like Hubert Beuve-Méry, and leftward to Sartre and his associates at *Les temps modernes*, especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who concluded in 1947 that it was "impossible to be an anti-communist and it was not possible to be a communist" (p. 59). The passionate debates over the Kravchenko libel trial of April 1949, over how to confront the painful truth of the existence of the Soviet concentration camps, over Tito's break with Stalin, over the Korean War, and over other Cold War issues are carefully and judiciously analyzed. The famous 1952 break between Camus and Sartre, initiated in a surrogate fashion by Francis Jeanson's attack on Camus's *L'homme révolté* (1951), is also given a balanced treatment. Drake pays some attention to more conservative intellectuals, for example those grouped around the review *Preuves*, launched in 1951 with CIA funding (which was not exposed until 1967).

The survey continues through the 1950s, examining the profound impact on the French intelligentsia of Nikita Krushchev's secret speech at the February 1956 Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, followed by the Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising in November of the same year.

When Drake moves on to the French intellectuals and decolonization he includes a most helpful section on their response to France's war in Indochina, 1946-1954, before turning to the much better known and more extensively studied "*bataille de l'écrit*" during the Algerian War, 1954-1962.[5] He divides the Algerian crisis into two sections, breaking at 1958, noting the "relative moderation" (p. 108) of the demands of the antiwar intellectuals in the early years of the conflict. He allows the pro-*Algérie française* intellectuals to speak and offers a very good summary of Raymond Aron's position, who argued for French withdrawal from Algeria for pragmatic, largely demographic reasons.

Drake leads his readers through May 1968, on to the brief, most curious episode of the appeal of Maoism to a number of French intellectuals, and then to the endlessly worried-over question of the end of the intellectual, at least the politically *engagé* variant thereof. He touches briefly, perhaps too briefly, on the Women's Liberation Movement and devotes somewhat more attention to the dramatic impact on French intellectual practice and belief of the 1974 publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.

The sixth chapter, "From the 'Silence of the Intellectuals' to the End of the Millennium," does an exceptionally good job with the immediate contemporary period.[6] Drake is not only immensely learned but manages to be up to date on a diversity of issues, ranging from the 4,000 signatories supporting the Polish movement "Solidarity," through the complex debates over the "headscarf" affair, to the controversy over the pageant of the 1989 Bicentennial, and on to the question of whether for a few short years, beginning with the massive demonstrations of December 1995, the late Pierre Bourdieu could claim to be "the new Sartre" (p. 201). Drake has an unusual gift of being able to step back and look across the Channel with equanimity, without even a touch of superciliousness, and present to the reader a true cacophony of highly literate and highly combative voices in such a way that a foreigner can hear them, can grasp the motivations behind and the rationales for more than a half-century of French intellectuals' descending from the ivory tower into the harsh, often confused world of socio-political actuality.

Drake acknowledges the relative lack of success of the French intellectuals in effecting the changes they

fought for, their marginal impact on public opinion. He still defends, persuasively in this reviewer's opinion, the relevance of French intellectual engagement. He notes the absence of an equivalent "visible social function" in the United States and the United Kingdom, where intellectuals are marginalized, occupying a very different social position. In a book that went to press before September 11, 2001, Drake argues powerfully and presciently that both in the United States and the United Kingdom there is "a crying need for people with a socially and culturally recognized legitimacy, as with intellectuals in France, to have ready access to the media in order to express their thoughts, analyses, and views about current events, even when--some would say especially when--these break with a prevailing consensus" (p. 206).

## NOTES

[1] Anthony Burgess, "Le Mal Français: Is there a Reason for Being Cartesian?" *New York Times Magazine* (May 29, 1977), p. 46.

[2] H. Stuart Hughes, *The Obstructed Path* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Michel Leymarie, *Les intellectuels et la politique en France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001); Tony Judt, *Past imperfect: French intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1992); French trans. *Passé imparfait: Les intellectuels en France, 1944-1956* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1992).

[3] One could question his choices and wish that he had devoted more attention to Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva, for example, but women are absent from the intellectual field "as defined for the purposes of this book" (p. 6). See Claire Duchén, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); and Toril Moi, ed., *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1987),

[4] For an exemplary study of a single politically engaged intellectual, see Alice Kaplan's brilliant *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[5] A term first used by Michel Crouzet in an influential retrospective article published in *La Nef*, no. 12-13 (October 1962-January 1963).

[6] The phrase "silence of the intellectuals" refers to the relative inactivity of the intellectuals in the early 1980s, particularly their refusal to actively support the Socialists after their 1981 electoral victory.

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