

H-France Review Vol. 4 (November 2004), No. 110

Peter Baehr and Melvin Richter, Eds. *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism*. Cambridge and New York. Cambridge University Press. 2004. 308 pp. Notes. \$65.00 U.S. (hb) ISBN 0-521-82563-1.

Review by David Higgs, University of Toronto.

This collection of essays derives from a conference held at Hunter College of the City University of New York in April 1999 with the generous sponsorship of the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C. Most of the speakers were established scholars including two professors emeriti. Historians were in a minority among teachers of political sociology, political theory, political thought, and political science. One might well enquire why the book should be reviewed for H-France since its major themes are the concepts of German political philosophers engaging with political vocabulary. However, albeit not in fact the central focus of the essays, Bonapartism is addressed by a number of the contributors, and especially by Isser Woloch in the lead article.

As in all collections there are disparities in approach and focus and the editors have grouped the essays under three headings. These are: I. Bonapartism and its Contemporaries, II. Bonapartism, Caesarism, Totalitarianism: Twentieth-Century Experiences and Reflections, III. Ancient Resonances.

The date chosen for the conference was to commemorate Napoleon Bonaparte's coup. As the title of the volume denotes, the historical experience of that individual has entered political language and conceptualization. Part one has the most to offer on the way contemporaries tried to find meaning in the activity of Bonaparte, and his relative who ruled as Napoleon III. There has always been a brisk market in Napoleonic bibliography: one thinks of Walter Scott who composed a life of Napoleon with the specific aim of cashing in on an avid market. Victor Hugo's *Napoleon le Petit* appeared in London in 1852 before the chief figure of the Second Empire had had an opportunity to reveal the full extent of his talents and failings. Marx in due course would analyse the class basis of the regime immortalized by writers and musicians. In the 1850s and 1860s commentators reached back to classical history to decide that Caesarism was an appropriate term for the activities of leading members of the Bonaparte family.

French contemporary history was sufficiently familiar to many nineteenth-century Europeans, and particularly to German speakers, that it offered examples for discussions of political terminology and nation building. In particular, intellectuals discussed dictatorship in its historical setting and also as a theory of political life. This continued throughout the twentieth century. One of the best known examples was that of Carl Schmitt in 1921, who distinguished the practices of modern Bonapartism from Caesarism. Sensitive to contemporary history, Schmitt joined the Nazis in May 1933. Alfred Cobban took issue with Schmitt's formulations as expressed in the second edition of 1928 of *Die Diktatur* in a work published on the very eve of the Second World War. Cobban's book was entitled *Dictatorship: Its History and Theory* (1939), and he discussed both Bonapartism and Schmitt, but none of the authors in the collection under review engage with his arguments. Cobban also discussed Caesarism in a chapter towards the end of his study, noting that Julius Caesar was a precursor to Augustus, who set up an empire that lasted almost 500 years. Cobban argued elsewhere that many salient characteristics of modern France were strongly defined under the Second Empire.

Twentieth-century commentators have dealt with the terminology of political forms. There is a great deal in this collection about Max Weber, less about Gramsci, and an interesting article about Hannah Arendt on totalitarianism and dictatorship. Jack Hayward has an intriguing article on the way the French Left from the start of the Fifth Republic tried to establish a parallel with Bonapartism and Gaullism in order to disparage the general. The main readership for this volume will be political scientists interested in German-language analysis of concepts of governance, with some attention to France and the classical world.

This book would be totally bewildering for undergraduates seeking to understand Bonapartism. Frédéric Bluche's discussion of the origins of the authoritarian Right in France from 1800 to 1850 is not invoked.[1] There is little here

to help the student who wants to know who was involved in what came next in France after the Second Empire. John Rothney's fine 1969 study remains the best account of the transition to the practice of Bonapartism after the end of the Second Empire.[2] Due to overlapping publication there is no reference to the points raised in Nathalie Petiteau's wide-ranging study of the relationship of a Bonapartist mythology derived from the first emperor and the work of historians.[3]

LIST OF ESSAYS

Part I: Bonapartism to Its Contemporaries

- Isser Woloch, "From Consulate to Empire: Impetus and Resistance"
- T.C.W. Blanning, "The Bonapartes and Germany"
- David E. Barclay, "Prussian Conservatives and the Problem of Bonapartism"
- Melvin Richter, "Tocqueville and French Nineteenth-Century Conceptualizations of the Two Bonapartes and Their Empires"
- Terrel Carver, "Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: Democracy, Dictatorship, and the Politics of Class Struggle"
- Sudhir Hazareesingh, "Bonapartism as the Progenitor of Democracy: The Paradoxical Case of the French Second Empire"

Part II: Bonapartism, Caesarism, Totalitarianism: Twentieth-Century Experiences And Reflections

- Peter Baehr, "Max Weber and the Avatars of Caesarism"
- Benedetto Fontana, "The Concept of Caesarism in Gramsci"
- John McCormick, "From Constitutional Technique to Caesarist Ploy: Carl Schmitt on Dictatorship, Liberalism and Emergency Powers"
- Jack Hayward, "Bonapartism and Gaullist Heroic Leadership: Comparing Crisis Appeals to Impersonated People"
- Margaret Canovan, "The Leader and the Masses: Hannah Arendt on Totalitarianism and Dictatorship"

Part III: Ancient Resonances

- Claude Nicolet, "Dictatorship in Rome"
- Arthur M. Eckstein, "From the Historical Caesar to the Spectre of Caesarism: The Imperial Administrator as Internal Threat"

NOTES

[1] Frédéric Bluche, *Le Bonapartisme: Aux origines de la droite autoritaire (1800-1850)* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1980).

[2] John Rothney, *Bonapartism after Sedan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

[3] Natalie Petiteau, *Napoléon de la Mythologie à l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

Copyright © 2004 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Review Vol. 4 (November 2004), No. 110

ISSN 1553-9172
