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Roger Price, *People and Politics in France, 1848-1870*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. ix + 477 pp. Notes, bibliography and index. \$95.00 U.S. (hb.) ISBN 0-521-83706-5.

Review by Sudhir Hazareesingh, Balliol College, University of Oxford.

This book, which complements Roger Price's excellent study of the "anatomy of power" under the Second Empire, examines the emergence of a "mass political culture" under the Bonapartist regime. The author sets out to identify how, and in what forms, politics "reached down" into French society in the two decades which followed the 1848 Revolution, and, more ambitiously, what political activity and political values *meant*--not only to classes and social groups but also to individuals. The narrative is ordered through the experiences of different social strata: first, the "dominant" classes (landowners, nobles, *haute bourgeoisie*), which were divided between traditionalists and modernizers but were held together by a common fear of social unrest and by a "coherent repertoire of justificatory ideologies" (p. 63). Next, the middle classes: they were not monolithic in their political aspirations or practices, and Price finds evidence of middle-class identification with Bonapartism, liberalism, legitimism, and republicanism. He concludes that middle-class groups generally favoured greater political liberty, but only as long as it did not come at the expense of order. Then follow two chapters on the peasantry, the first exploring the range and diversity of rural experiences and socio-economic conditions, and the second highlighting the various forms of political mobilization of peasant populations in the 1850s and 1860s. Here Price argues strongly against the old stereotype of the "premodern" peasant, finding instead evidence of the broadening and deepening of political activity and sentiment among rural populations during the Second Empire. The book ends with two chapters on the working class, also a diverse and fragmented group, which had initially lent strong support to the Bonapartist regime in the early 1850s but which, armed with a distinct and increasingly assertive self-consciousness, began to turn to the republican opposition in the later years of the Empire.

Price's portrayal of the political culture of this period is thus richly textured. The book draws on a wide range of French archival sources and makes very good use of this material, while being constantly mindful of its limitations (there is a particularly compelling section where Price discusses the difficulties of using official archives to write about peasants--a model of lucidity). Great care is also taken to avoid excessive generalizations, to fall prey to reductionist approaches, or to follow the latest historiographical fads; as Price puts it, the historian should "not be swayed too easily by fashion" (p. 5). He navigates skilfully between the social and the political, analytically fragmenting his subject to produce an authentic account of French social diversity while at the same time seeking to connect these elements to wider political wholes. The underlying message of the book is that class (sometimes) mattered, but only as one of a number of key determinants of political identity and political behaviour, alongside locality, religion, ideology, and culture. The overall image of the politics of the Second Empire which emerges is powerful, and knocks down many of the old clichés about the regime--most importantly the proposition (still routinely repeated in French textbooks and even monographs) that the Bonapartists' electoral successes were essentially based on coercive administrative pressure and peasant stupidity.

The book's account of peasant politicization also effectively challenges that of Eugen Weber (and even Weber's later, more defensive reformulation of his classic thesis). Price fundamentally rejects the assumption that "politicization" in nineteenth-century France could only manifest itself as a form of identification with 'national' politics. Things were much more complicated, and the local sphere could often provide effective sources of political socialization, notably through elections, the celebration of political and religious anniversaries, and cultural festivities and rituals such as the *charivari*. Above all, the cumulative effect of the book makes clear that the downfall of the Second Empire was in no sense inevitable: in the summer of 1870 the regime still enjoyed considerable popular support across a broad range of social groups, and even those which were hostile to it--for example, many workers in places such as Paris, Lyon, and Saint-Etienne--were not favourable to its violent overthrow. Price argues convincingly that workers supported "moderate" republicans rather than the likes of Blanqui or the various advocates of "collectivism."

This book is thus, in overall terms, a success, and a welcome addition to the growing literature on this complex and crucial period in modern French politics. Yet, despite Price's best efforts, the relationship between the "political" and "social" dimensions of his analysis is somewhat uneasy. The problem is that the two spheres often operate in different timelines: political change can be immediate, as indeed occurred in the period 1848-1880 when there was a succession of sudden and often radical political transformations, whereas social change takes more time to kick in. To make the same point differently, it is difficult to get a real sense of the political manifestations of social change over a twenty-year period. In this sense, the book would perhaps been more effective had its chronological focus been slightly wider: examining, say, the 1830-1880 period might have allowed a better perspective on the assertiveness of the middle classes and the political decline of the nobility--and, for that matter, the complexities of industrialization and peasant politicization. In social terms, the 1850s and 1860s were moments of transition, rather than conclusive end points. This feeling of transience intrudes into the book on occasion, giving the reader the sense of reading a truncated version of a somewhat larger story.

The conceptual and institutional analysis is rich. And yet more could have made of the fascinating material Price has unearthed in the archives. It is striking, for example, that the discussion of the content of French political discourse during this period makes little reference to the "nation"--a central theme for all political groups, albeit one which was deployed with different intonations; it would have been interesting to hear what echoes it produced among the different social groups surveyed in the book. There is also relatively little about the social consequences of the growth of municipal democracy in France after 1848. Price acknowledges the importance of the debates about "decentralization", and there are occasional references to municipal politics throughout the book. But communal politics are not portrayed as a central element in the development of mass democracy under the Second Empire. This vitiates some of Price's conclusions: for example, when he claims that republicans only represented a small fraction of the political elite, he cites the figure of five percent of the elected members of the *Conseils Généraux* as evidence. It is quite true that republicans were very poorly represented on these councils, which reflected the preponderance of rural voters in France at the time. But if municipal councillors had been included in the tally, the proportion of republicans would have been much higher--especially in the municipal elections in 1860, 1865, and 1870, when they were elected in droves in urban, semi-urban, and rural communes.

Some of the specific conclusions reached by Price--measured and careful though they always are--are also open to debate. It is unclear how those at the bottom of the social ladder perceived those above them: at one point, the book claims that their attitudes were changing, and that populations increasingly saw themselves as "equals" (p. 51); and the chapter on peasant politicization further stresses the rational bases of rural political support for the Empire. But Price elsewhere also suggests that peasants and workers had no alternative but to accept the rules laid down by the powerful, and that "dependency" and "deference" remained widespread in French society (pp. 65-66). It is not obvious that both of these claims can be true at the same time.

Finally, and this is merely a political historian's quibble with the conceptual categories of social history, I was not entirely convinced of the explanatory value of the concept of the "dominant classes." In ideological terms, this was, after all, a period when the political representatives of these elites, both legitimist and conservative liberal, railed and wailed against the emergence of "democracy" and majoritarian tyranny--hardly a sign of their intellectual confidence, even less hegemony. If, as Marx put it, the principles and values of the dominant classes are the ruling ideas of their time, this was certainly not the case in France between 1848 and 1870. Furthermore, these 'dominant' classes were not quite as cohesive as Price states. True, the restoration of the Empire was welcomed by the notables, and they thereafter remained (negatively) united in fear of social revolution. But there was much less cohesion among dominant social groups over religion: the social and moral values of a traditionalist were very different from those of a liberal Bonapartist.

Behind this argument lies a more fundamental difference in appreciation over the nature of Bonapartism. There is no right or wrong here: the evidence is conflicting. Price, for once abandoning the caution which he deploys so consistently throughout the book, regards Bonapartism as "firmly oriented towards the Right" (p. 69). For my money, this is slightly too rigid. A more subtle formulation, which captures both the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary dimensions of the Bonapartist phenomenon, would have been more useful. Despite its restoration of the monarchical form, the Empire was, after all, a regime based on universal male suffrage, and often used anti-noble rhetoric against its conservative political opponents in national and local elections. Here, for example, is how a local Bonapartist functionary described the Marquis d'Andelarre, an anti-imperial liberal candidate in the 1863

elections: the Marquis, he stated, was not only an enemy of the Empire but also “a protector of the party of the nobility and the clergy, that is the party that would like to see the return of the times when our ancestors were summoned in turn to beat the water and silence the frogs, in order that Monsieur and Madame la Marquise could sleep peacefully.”[1] This sort of language--which could have been used by a republican--resonated powerfully with the regime’s rural voters, and demonstrated that in their minds at least, the Bonapartists were in some meaningful sense a part of the “1789 tradition.”

NOTES

[1] Quoted in Jules Ferry, *La lutte electorale en 1863* (Paris: Dentu, 1863), 148-49.

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