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**Robert Stuart**, *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism, and National Socialism during the French Fin de Siècle*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. x + 305 pp. Appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-7914-6670-1.

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Does a *fin-de-siècle* socialist have more in common with a socialist today than with a *fin-de-siècle* conservative? Is Jean Jaurès or Jules Guesde more like Ségolène Royal or Maurice Barrès? This kind of question is central to our understanding of the past, especially of the end of the nineteenth century when so many of the categories we use in studying it were created, transmuted, or fine-tuned. Establishing ideological continuity across time--in this case linking socialists across generations in a great chain of being--has the advantages of clarity and coherence. Yet the synchronic juxtaposition is more rewarding to the historian because it forces us to bring out the particularity of context.

For the most part, the emphasis is on continuity in Robert Stuart's expert study of French Marxism's encounter with questions of nationhood, ethnicity, and race during the *fin-de-siècle*. This emphasis stems from two core ideas that animate the text: that, to the author, French Marxists "are, at a century's distance, 'my people'" (p. ix), and that they "should be kept clearly distinct" (p. 182) from the *fin-de-siècle* Right. Stuart's fellow feeling enables him to offer intimate insight into *fin-de-siècle* French Marxism, and he demonstrates how ideologically dissimilar from their contemporaries its adherents truly were. In doing so he rescues their views on the national question from relative inattention, considerable misunderstanding, and some notable malignity by scholars of Marxism and historians of late nineteenth-century France. Yet more critical attention to the commonalities between French Marxists and their opponents, while it might have compromised the admirable clarity of his account, would have offered a more complex image of the particular context of the French *fin de siècle*. As in his *Marxism at Work*,<sup>[1]</sup> to which this book in many ways is a topical sequel, Stuart's focus is not on socialism broadly or French Marxism generally but on the Parti Ouvrier Français under the leadership of Jules Guesde and a coterie of others, including Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth. It is in an exceptionally informed account, drawing mainly on *L'Égalité* and *Le Socialiste*--the party's weeklies edited by Guesde--and other newspapers and pamphlets to which POF leaders contributed. As such, Stuart speaks with authority on what the Guesdists said (and failed to say) about national identity and much else. Stuart's intimate knowledge of Guesdism is the central strength of the text and its many positive qualities flow from it.

Stuart's main conceit is to present what he calls the different "personae" of French Marxism in the period. In chapter one, he brings forward a "Guesdism at its most cosmopolitan" (p. 27), rooted in Enlightenment universalism and exhibiting principled inclusion in a climate increasingly hostile to difference. As he demonstrates in chapters two and three, while the POF toyed with a kind of socialist nationalism that tapped into the link between the French Revolution and universal human rights, their cosmopolitanism blinded them to the appeal of nationalism on workers, and Stuart shows them generally confounded by the false consciousness of nationalism. Chapter four explores "proletarian patriotism," which sought to establish the working class as the universal nation (instead of France as the homeland of universalism). In chapter five, Stuart deals with the Guesdists' encounter with race, showing that while the POF leadership occasionally slipped into racialized language, they were the most incisive enemies of racists the period saw. As with nationalism, he shows them baffled and irritated by

the ubiquity of such a bourgeois distraction. Chapter six--where Stuart really hits his stride--explores the multiple and confused ways that the Guesdists confronted the new extreme Right, the forerunners of fascism, that emerged in the fin de siècle. He ends with a superb conclusion and an appendix that contains some of the most judicious and clearest definitions of the notoriously confusing terms of the period available anywhere. Stuart's device of presenting a conflicted group of militants, where "the schizophrenic disjuncture between their cosmopolitan and socialist-nationalist personae" (p. 77) generated an array of positions on national identity, allows him to offer a text awash in insight about French Marxism, encapsulated in pithy formulations that elegantly encompass the complexity of the period.

But Stuart's determination to keep the Parti Ouvrier distinct from its opponents and his own sympathy with their goals sometimes works to divorce them from their context. He rarely doubts that the real POF is the cosmopolitan version that opens the book. When they depart from that core identity, it is a "lapse" (pp. 81, 98), or the POF engage in "personification" (p. 90), they were merely "posturing as patriots" (p. 88), wore a "guise" (p. 88), or they momentarily "succumbed" (pp. 72, 98) or "surrendered" (p. 73) to an "aberrant" (p. 98) position. The "personae," it turns out, are really the ill-fitting masks that these cosmopolitan Guesdists don when "cowering before the tsunami of nationalist passion" (p. 73). Stuart is visibly saddened when Guesdists were too weak not to get caught up in their context and thus departed from their cosmopolitan socialist identity. As such, Stuart often treats the POF militants not as a product of their milieu but at odds with it. Such treatment is dubious in a work of history.

Adding to this impression are Stuart's judgments about the judiciousness of Guesdist tactics. Most of the time, their analyses "abounded with insight" (p. 45), they were "prescient" and "trenchant" (p. 47), and "should command our respect" (p. 27). When they were "wrong" (p. 95), it seems to pain him and he does not show compunction in defending or correcting them. If they made an "error," it was because they were "overly optimistic" (p. 42) and Stuart will wistfully suggest a different approach that might have worked better. Maybe so, but it is unclear why or how Stuart's suggesting alternative tactics is relevant to a work of history other than cementing the impression that real socialism is cosmopolitan socialism and that it coincides with Stuart's socialism.

Still, this POF feels slightly unreal and disembodied. This is not the book to learn about the formation of the Parti Ouvrier (or, more centrally, about the adding of "Français" to the party's name in the late 1890s) or to get biographical information about its leadership. In fact, only those whom non-specialists are likely to recognize immediately, such as Guesde and Lafargue, are even introduced at all. Although Stuart frequently refers to the belle époque, he remains (aside from engaging present-day Marxist debate) almost entirely in the 1880s and 1890s without explaining why. As a result, the book never touches on what would appear to be the very interesting question of Guesde's turn toward patriotism and even nationalism after the Great War. Drawing out the context and identifying the leadership and membership of the POF would have helped broaden the audience that the text deserves.

Best exemplifying the text's own insight and blindness is the discussion of the POF and antisemitism,<sup>[2]</sup> the longest section in the longest chapter of the book. Stuart is convincing in concluding that the Guesdists' failure to support Dreyfus did not mean that they were anti-Dreyfusards or antisemites. He shows how as cosmopolitans they were opposed to any form of particularism, be it regionalism, nationalism, Eurocentrism, or "philo-Semitism." "Trivial deviations" from their "antiracist imperative," he argues, ought not to "obscure the Guesdists' hatred of their anti-Semitic enemies" (p. 126). His emphatic distinction between Guesdists and the extreme Right is convincing and a very important contribution.

Yet he is at a loss to explain satisfactorily the use of what is very obviously antisemitic language by these tolerant humanists. Faced with it, Stuart seems just as at a loss as the Guesdists, his "people," and he grasps for straws. Somehow, using the word "Jews" for financial speculators is not antisemitic to him

because it “almost always referred, not to ethnic Jews, but to financial speculators, of whatever race or religion” (p. 116). He mentions that some Jews themselves talked this way (p. 118), although it is unclear why this makes it less racist. He points out that what POF leaders were most worried about was industrial, not financial, capitalism anyway (p. 119), but at the same time that since Jews advanced capitalism and advancing capitalism meant the imminence of socialism, this meant that Guesdists were really supporters of Jews—actually “they *delighted* in capitalism’s universalization of ‘juiverie’” (p. 120)!

While the insensitivity is uncharacteristic of the book, this blindness is symptomatic in the sense that it is a product of Stuart’s insistence that the POF be “kept clearly distinct” from their ideological opponents. Here the poststructuralism that Stuart periodically mocks as too caught up in identity politics would have helped him. First, it would have made it easier for him to recognize the problems with universalist humanism and its devaluation of particularity. Second, it would have enabled him to make the crucial distinction between antisemites and antisemitism. It is clear that most French Marxists did not hate Jews, but without recourse to this distinction Stuart is unable to explain away their antisemitic statements, let alone to explain them. Third, as Venita Datta has shown so persuasively, if one moves beyond politics and ideology narrowly defined, it becomes apparent that opposing groups have plenty in common, since, for example, as Datta shows, “writers of the avant-garde shared with their opponents a common discourse of honor and masculinity.”[3] The poststructuralist emphasis on discourse—gendered discourse in particular—bound to a specific milieu would have been useful to explore ways in which French Marxists and anti-Marxists inhabited the same context.

In speeches several months ago, the two main presidential candidates in France outlined the themes of their campaigns. Whereas Guesdists at a century’s distance, as Stuart puts it, “flaunted the red flag rather than the tricolore” (p. 18), when Ségolène Royal announced her candidacy for the Parti Socialiste, she chose “the nation,” and the first word she pronounced in outlining this theme was “le drapeau.” Nicolas Sarkozy for his part promised a veritable revolution: a vision of “un nouvel Etat, d’une nouvelle nation, d’une nouvelle République.” The “rupture” he described was to “ne plus tolérer des injustices qui font honte à notre République.” (As for his opponents, he argued that, “Les socialistes de jadis étaient d’abord républicains, les socialistes d’aujourd’hui sont d’abord socialistes.”)[4] These statements are reminders, to the historian at least, that particular contexts always trump and shape ideology. In fact, ideology to Marx himself was the denial of context, “the negation of the particularity of place,” as Michel de Certeau once put it, “being the very principle of ideology.”[5] When Robert Stuart extends this analytical imperative to the POF and not just to its ideological opponents, *Marxism and National Identity* is a deeply informed, nuanced, clear-headed, and excellent contribution to our understanding of the role of the Parti Ouvrier in the turbulent debates about national identity during the fin de siècle.

## NOTES

[1] *Marxism at Work: Ideology, Class and French Socialism during the Third Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[2] Following established practice in the field of the study of antisemitism, I do not hyphenate the terms antisemite, antisemitic, and antisemitism, as this seems to concede the point that there is a distinct racial group called “Semites.”

[3] Venita Datta, *Birth of a National Icon: The Literary Avant-Garde and the Origins of the Intellectual in France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), especially chapter five. The quote is from p. 118.

[4] *Le Monde*, 13 October 2006.

[5] Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975), p. 79.

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