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Gabriel Goodliffe, *The Resurgence of the Radical Right in France: From Boulangisme to the Front National.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. xi + 361 pp. Tables, figures, notes, and index. $99.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 978-1-107-00670-6.

Review by Sean Kennedy, University of New Brunswick.

The Front National has staged a comeback. In 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy's appropriation of some FN-style rhetoric and tough law-and-order policies siphoned away a significant amount of Jean-Marie Le Pen's support. While the FN leader had advanced to the second round of the 2002 presidential election with 16.9 percent of the popular vote, five years later he was held to 10.4 percent. But only a little over a year after assuming leadership of the movement, his daughter Marine Le Pen had boosted its support to a record 17.9 percent of those voting in the first round of the 2012 presidential election, some 6.4 million people. [1]

This result has naturally provoked renewed attention to a movement whose incendiary rhetoric and virulent anti-immigrant stance has long attracted scholarly interest. Gabriel Goodliffe's study is an ambitious work of political science that situates the FN's appeal in a broader historical context, going back to the inception of the Third Republic. The key, Goodliffe argues, lies in France's uneven path to modernization, which fostered a large class of *petits indépendants*--artisans, shopkeepers and other urban small producers--that was originally regarded as a crucial foundation of the new regime, but subsequently felt threatened by socioeconomic modernization. These people provided a social base for various surges in radical right activism during the Belle Époque, between the world wars, and during *les trentes glorieuses.* They also figured in the advent of the FN, although since the 1980s de-industrialization has resulted in the working class becoming an increasingly significant core of the *lepeniste* vote.

The thesis that disaffected members of the lower middle classes are often receptive to the far right is, of course, a venerable one. Goodliffe is well aware of this and situates his findings in relation to earlier studies, but also argues that his work incorporates a fresh, class-cultural perspective. In addition to tracing the economic upheavals and political vagaries that afflicted *petits indépendants*, he also stresses the importance of cultural and psychological factors, though some analytical categories such as gender are not addressed. Goodliffe's portrait of small producers stresses how their identities and self-worth have been eroded by ceaseless modernization. As well, various political and economic upheavals imbued a collective memory of crisis that reinforced a proclivity for authoritarian, exclusionary solutions.

Thus, notwithstanding the vast changes that France has experienced since 1870, in many ways Goodliffe is making an argument for continuity. He acknowledges the lack of consensus over how to define the French far right, and notes that it hosted different traditions. In particular he contrasts Maurice Barrès's national populism with Charles Maurras's counter-revolutionary elitism. However, he ultimately stresses how various far-right movements over time shared a similar world view. His key concept in this regard is misoneism--fear of and hostility towards the modern world--but he articulates its ramifications in some detail, noting how over the decades various far-right activists shared a hatred of socialism and deep contempt for political and economic liberalism. Invariably they advocated authoritarian leadership, national "purification" through exclusionary measures (p. 47), and "welfare chauvinism," in which ameliorative measures would be reserved for authentic members of the national community (p. 48).

Misoneism was also at the heart of the *petits indépendants*' outlook, Goodliffe argues. In the early years of the Third Republic they were seen as crucial to the success of the new democratic order. To that end they initially enjoyed preferential tax rates in comparison to larger-scale businesses, as well as economic security afforded by trade tariffs, access to credit, and anti-concentration measures. Before long, though, the system became dysfunctional. Modernization nurtured economic concentration on the one hand and growing working-class militancy on the other, which in turn encouraged expensive social reforms that large companies could afford but small employers could not. All of this served to promote a siege mentality among *petits indépendants*, and in the process the values that were supposed to buttress a democracy of small producers--independence, frugality, risk aversion, and a belief in the traditional family--took on a defensive, angry tone upon which far-right populists could capitalize.

The correlation between economic decline and growing militancy was not always straightforward. For one, Goodliffe notes that between 1870 and 1950 there were points at which economic concentration slowed or even temporarily reversed, boosting the ranks of small producers. Moreover, if the decline of the *petits indépendants* was uneven and partial, their attitudes were also conditioned by particular events. "A lot of history needed to unfold and many political developments to occur before [their consistent support for the radical right] could come to pass" (p. 114).

Chapters four through eight examine this history in some detail. Goodliffe believes that a growing estrangement between small producers and the democratic Republic was discernible by the turn of the twentieth century. Mainstream conservatives had aligned with big businesses, which in turn were challenged by the emerging socialist and trade union movements; artisans and shopkeepers felt that they were being squeezed out. Even the Radical Party, supposedly the leading protector of the lower middle classes, was increasingly receptive to large-scale business interests. The real turning point came after the First World War, however. The expansion of state intervention in 1914-1918 was never entirely undone, while the inflation and devaluation of the early 1920s, and the burst of growth and concentration that followed, further eroded the status of the *petits indépendants*.

The crises of the 1930s revealed the true depth of the latter's alienation. Governments struggled to develop coherent policies. When they shifted (though never entirely consistently) towards a policy of deflation in 1934-36, small producers felt the pinch. The election of the Popular Front in 1936 proved to be an even more traumatic experience for them. They feared the consequences of its reflationary and redistributive policies, and many were frightened by the labor militancy that accompanied its victory. With big business initially pursuing a more conciliatory policy--the Confédération Générale de la Production (later du Patronat) Français, the leading employers' association, made key concessions to labor in signing the Matignon Accords--and believing that they had also been betrayed by moderate conservatives and the Radicals, many *petits indépendants* abandoned mainstream politics for the streets. They swelled the ranks of groups ranging from the Fédération des contribuables to the Croix de Feu and later the Parti Populaire Français. Even more mainstream political formations, including the Radicals, soon reflected and reinforced these "illiberal proclivities" (p. 195).

After the defeat of 1940 and the advent of Marshal Philippe Pétain's National Revolution, many *petits indépendants* expected the Vichy regime to be on their side. Pétain and some of his traditionalist ministers said the right things, but technocratic elements quickly set the agenda and promoted modernization. The leaders of the postwar Fourth Republic also raised and then dashed hopes, establishing some protections for small producers but also pursuing rapid growth and concentration. Despite the latter regime's endemic ministerial instability, this goal was being realized by the 1950s. Artisans, shopkeepers and others fought a rearguard action through groups such as the Confédération Générale des petites et moyennes entreprises (CGPME) as well as Pierre Poujade's considerably more strident Union de défense des commerçants et artisans (UDCA) which, perhaps surprisingly, is discussed only briefly.

If anything the pressure on small businesses intensified during the 1960s, as de Gaulle's regime encouraged intensified expansion. Yet Goodliffe shows that militant opposition could have an impact, at least for a time. While less well-known than the Poujadists, beginning in 1969 the Comité d'information et de defense--Union nationale des travailleurs indépendants (CID-UNATI) engaged in tax strikes, sit-ins and even the kidnapping of tax inspectors; by 1972 it had 200,000 members. Seeking social peace, politicians enacted the Royer Law of December 1973, which introduced tax changes and anti-concentration measures that offered some relief for the *petits indépendants.*

But within a few years broader economic and political shifts moved the goalposts yet again. As the postwar boom faded and after an abortive effort at "Keynesianism in one country" in 1981-1983 (p. 263), French governments of right and left promoted liberalization and small producers again turned to a vociferous opposition movement, this time the Front National. Their support helped it to achieve national recognition during the 1980s. Yet, by the following decade, another social class under siege--industrial workers--was displacing them at the core of the FN's support base, a process that Goodliffe traces in his epilogue. Among the key dynamics behind this shift were growing divisions within the working class, notably between a better-paid and more secure labor aristocracy and an expanding sector of unskilled, often younger workers with far less stable employment prospects who proved more amenable to the FN's message.

In making his case, Goodliffe draws upon a wide variety of scholarly literature, ranging from classical works of political theory through historical studies to recent political and sociological analyses. The book may have benefited from engaging with some additional recent historiography, however. For example, Goodliffe's emphasis upon the relative backwardness of the French economy and the conservative outlook of many small producers echoes, at least in some respects, the influential "stalemate society" thesis, as articulated by Stanley Hoffmann and others.[2] Several years ago this thesis was subjected to careful examination by Kevin Passmore, who makes a strong case for regarding the stalemate society thesis as being rooted in interwar criticisms of the Third Republic, and being based upon problematic assumptions about what the trajectory of modernization in France should look like. Goodliffe draws upon Passmore's earlier work on the interwar right, but not his more recent intervention.[3]

The final chapter, which is comparative in nature, also raises questions. In it, France is presented as an intermediate case between British gradualism, where both the elites and lower middle classes were slowly habituated to a liberal order, and states such as Italy and Germany, where illiberal elites retained power and uneven socioeconomic change nurtured authoritarianism. However, the comparison is not really developed for the post-1945 era, and the author's later assertion that "France differs markedly from Germany and Italy, whose traumatic experience of Nazism and fascism respectively vaccinated their societies against the recrudescence of substantial parties of the radical Right" (p. 327) seems overstated.

Nevertheless, Goodliffe's point about the singular durability and relative popularity of the FN, and more generally the French far right, is telling. More generally, *The Resurgence of the Radical Right* synthesizes key findings about the evolution of France's political economy, dealing with issues such as taxation, credit, and industrial organization in a clear and accessible manner. It conveys the shifting priorities and policies of various governments, as well as information about a wide variety of organizations that promoted *petit indépendant* interests. While they may dispute some of its conclusions, scholars of modern French political history will find much to ponder in this wide-ranging analysis.

NOTES

[1] See James Shields, “Marine Le Pen and the ‘New’ FN: A Change of Style or Substance?” *Parliamentary Affairs* 66/1(2013): 179-180.

[2] Stanley Hoffmann, “Paradoxes of the French Politicial Community,” in Stanley Hoffmann et al, eds., *In Search of France* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 1-117.

[3] Kevin Passmore, “The Construction of Crisis in Interwar France,” in Brian Jenkins, ed., *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), pp. 151-199; Passmore’s interpretation is now fully developed in *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

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