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Jean-Noel Jeanneney, *Clemenceau: Dernières nouvelles du Tigre*. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2016. vii + 217 pp. Biographical chronology and index. 19.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-271-08938-0.

Review by William Keylor, Boston University.

Jean-Noel Jeanneney, a distinguished emeritus professor at Sciences-Po, has written a slim volume celebrating the legacy of a French statesman who fought ferocious battles with a long list of adversaries over the course of an illustrious career that spanned half a century. This is not an encyclopedic assessment of Georges Clemenceau's contributions to the history of the Third Republic. Rather than utilizing primary sources to narrate the full story of this fascinating character's life and times, it relies on a small number of carefully chosen studies to focus attention on a select number of themes in support of an overarching argument. The argument that Professor Jeanneney advances is, in the end, a persuasive one. He claims that the encounters of this larger-than-life character with a wide range of political, military, and social challenges in his era are directly relevant to recent and contemporary issues that France has faced in the twenty-first century.

Georges Clemenceau is probably best remembered for his two decisive interventions in the political history of his country. The first was his courageous and ultimately successful campaign as a journalist to expose the French officer corps' scandalous mistreatment of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in the 1890s. The second was his energetic and ultimately unsuccessful efforts as French prime minister at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 to guarantee his country's future security against a revival of German militarism.

While Jeanneney subjects these two topics to the careful scrutiny they deserve, he ranges much more widely in his assessment of Clemenceau's place in modern French history. He paints a very sympathetic portrait of a cosmopolitan intellectual with a wide range of interests. He reminds his readers of how well read, well traveled, and cultured was the man reviled by Keynes and other British and American critics as a narrow-minded, parochial French nationalist obsessed with protecting French interests at all costs after his tussles with Wilson and Lloyd George at the post-World War I peace conference. He began his career as a physician who treated the poor in what was then the Parisian suburb of Montmartre during the Franco-Prussian War. Fluent in German and English, he spent seven years in the United States after the Civil War, teaching and writing news articles and eventually bringing home an American bride. He developed a wide circle of friends in Great Britain and translated John Stuart Mill's analysis of Auguste Comte's doctrine of positivism.

Clemenceau appears in this book as a resolute defender of the rights of the common people as they coped with the negative consequences of industrialism and the laissez-faire political theory that opposed all efforts to mitigate them. He hailed the astringent social criticism in the plays of Ibsen. His campaign against the use of lead paint in housing construction provides additional proof that Clemenceau was a man ahead of his time, foreshadowing "contemporary ecological battles" (p. 117). Both in and out of office, he waged these campaigns for social justice and the public interest in the name of a humanism that Jeanneney claims was at the very core of personality.

In his effort to portray his subject as the quintessence of modern humanism, Jeanneney devotes many pages to Clemenceau's exaltation of the cultural heritage of ancient Greece. In a long succession of articles and commentaries during his career as a journalist, Clemenceau deplored the triumph of Christianity over the classical tradition of liberty in Western civilization and celebrated the intellectual campaign of the Enlightenment philosophes against obscurantism and in support of rationality. The battles waged in the early decades of the Third Republic to eradicate the political role of the Catholic Church always found Clemenceau at the center of the campaign for *laïcité*, as both journalist and statesman. During the Ludendorff offensive in the spring and early summer of 1918, when a German military victory seemed a horrifying possibility, the archbishops of Bordeaux and Reims failed to persuade the wartime prime minister to authorize public prayers as a means of bolstering public morale at a time of great danger. After the armistice, the archbishop of Paris organized a *Te Deum* at Notre Dame and invited the leading members of the government to attend, only to be turned down by Clemenceau as an unacceptable violation of the separation of church and state. Jeanneney connects this tenacious commitment to *laïcité* to the current dispute in France over Muslim women's dress habits.

Jeanneney reminds us that the young Clemenceau was a staunch opponent of French imperialism in the 1880s. His verbal skirmishes on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies with Prime Minister Jules Ferry over the French occupation of Indochina foreshadowed the critique of imperial expansion that would be mounted by the Socialist left in the twentieth century. Ferry justified his pursuit of colonies on two grounds. One was economic: the need for foreign outlets for French investment, an argument that Clemenceau refuted in anticipation of subsequent economic studies disproving the claim. The second was the moral argument of *la mission civilisatrice*, the French counterpart to the British "White Man's Burden." "The superior races have a right and a duty to civilize inferior races," Ferry announced in the Chamber. Clemenceau's heated response was brutal in its frankness: "Do not try to clothe violence with the hypocritical name of civilization. Let us not speak of right, of duty, he implored. "To speak of civilization in this context is to link hypocrisy to violence" (p. 30). Notably, Jeanneney does not address the paradox of the old anti-imperialist of the 1880s acquiescing to the demands of the colonial lobby in 1919 for the occupation of Syria and Lebanon as mandates under the League of Nations.

Of course, Georges Clemenceau is best remembered in his own country as a master of political maneuvering in the French parliament, whose skill in overturning governments earned him the familiar sobriquet "The Tiger." He was a fanatical defender of the republican tradition in France, in particular the supremacy of parliament as the most reliable vehicle for the expression of popular opinion. Jeanneney does not sidestep the one egregious contradiction to this reputation as the champion of legislative supremacy, namely, his early support for General Georges Boulanger's bid for dictatorial power in the late 1880s. Jeanneney concedes that the Tiger had been sorely tempted by the appeal of this "man on horseback" because of his impeccable republican credentials amid an officer corps riddled with monarchists, Bonapartists, and other enemies of the Republic. After the general began to behave more like a demagogue than a democrat, Clemenceau saw the error of his ways. He withdrew his support from the general in 1888, when Boulanger, recently elected in several constituencies, introduced legislation sharply curtailing the power of parliament. After that embarrassing blemish on his Republican credentials, Clemenceau returned to his vigorous defense of parliamentary supremacy and stubborn opposition to strong executive authority. His earlier reply to the question about whom he would support in the parliamentary election of the figurehead president-- "I shall vote for the stupidest"--set the tone for Republican opposition to an independent, powerful executive authority that lasted for the remainder of the Third Republic.

Jeanneney gives short shrift to the series of incidents in 1906 when, as interior minister and later as prime minister, Clemenceau dispatched troops to the Pas-de-Calais to crush a strike by coal miners and then against agricultural workers in the Midi. These policies, which earned him the enmity of Jean Jaurès and other leaders of the Socialist left, are not reason enough for Jeanneney to qualify his defense

of the Tiger as a friend of the French working class. Instead, in the author's eyes, they demonstrate Clemenceau's solemn insistence that progressive social reform be promoted peacefully, rather than with revolutionary violence. This commitment to gradualism pitted him against the champions of radical revolution among French Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists before the war. It turned him into a passionate opponent to Bolshevism after the 1917 revolution in Russia. Jeanneney is most effective when defending Clemenceau against the charges that his diplomacy in 1919 foredoomed the Versailles settlement.

From the right, Marshal Ferdinand Foch denounced the prime minister in his memoirs for losing at the conference table what the Allied armies had won on the battlefield. In reality, Foch's insistent demand that the Rhineland be detached from defeated Germany and reconstituted as a French client state was a non-starter from the very beginning because of the staunch opposition of Wilson and Lloyd George. Recognizing this insurmountable obstacle, Clemenceau wrested from his two reluctant interlocutors two key insurance policies which, Jeanneney insists, would have protected France from the danger of a German military revival had they been implemented by subsequent governments in the 1920s and 1930s. The first such insurance policy was the temporary inter-Allied occupation of the Rhineland for fifteen years, reinforced by the authorization of France to prolong the occupation or reinstate it after its expiration in response to German violations of the treaty. The second insurance policy came in the form of bilateral pledges by the United States and France to intervene militarily in France's defence in the event of unprovoked German aggression. Jeanneney is at pains to emphasize that the unraveling of those provisions and commitments in subsequent years cannot be blamed on the Tiger. Instead, Clemenceau deserves credit for playing shrewdly and skillfully the poor hand he had been dealt at Versailles, only to see the safeguards he had carefully erected fall by the wayside after he left office.

Having defended his subject against the complaints from Foch and his epigoni that he failed to protect France from a future German military revival, Jeanneney refutes the opposite complaint of vindictiveness against Germany leveled against Clemenceau by John Maynard Keynes, Ray Stannard Baker, and other disillusioned Anglo-American participants in the peace conference. He denies that Clemenceau approved of the surreptitious campaign waged by General Charles Mangin in the summer of 1919 in support of Rhenish separatism. The French prime minister opposed such a policy, not because it was a patent violation of the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination, but because it was doomed to fail. For this Foch never forgave him. But he got no credit from his American and British counterparts for his stand against the hardliners in the French military.

In the end, the portrait of Georges Clemenceau that Jeanneney sketches for the reader of this book is that of a quintessential realist and a staunch proponent of moderation in all things. His sympathies ran to the working classes of France, but he was unwilling to tolerate violence and disorder to bring about a radical restructuring of French society. He was an ardent defender of Republican values of toleration, humanism, representative government, and, above all, the stalwart demand that religion be strictly confined to the private sphere. In these and other ways, Clemenceau served as the living embodiment of the distinctive type of republicanism that the world associates with France.

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