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David Hanley, *Party, Society and Government: Republican Democracy in France*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002. xii + 210 pp. Tables, bibliography and index. \$59.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-57181-966-5.

Review by Margaret H. Darrow, Dartmouth College.

In the preface to *Party, Society and Government: Republican Democracy in France*, David Hanley writes that he is "attempting to come to grips, in a relatively short space, with the complexities of the French party system" (p. xi). He argues that although a crucial element in modern democracy, we ignore parties in good times and blame them for bad times. In the French case, 1940 and 1958 are examples of the latter tendency. When political science has focused upon parties, Hanley claims the results have been mechanistic and unsatisfying. By contrast, he proposes that we consider parties as "living organisms with a capacity for reflexion and action. . . . Parties are agents" (p. 30). His study of the political party system in France from 1870 to the present means to "rehabilitate" the plural party system as an effective means for expressing political demands and producing responsive government. He concludes that except at moments of exceptional stress, France's political party system has worked quite well.

In many respects, *Party, Society and Government: Republican Democracy in France* fulfills these expectations. It is short: less than 200 pages for 130 years of French political history. And it does indeed demonstrate that the plural party system in France is deep-rooted, enduring, flexible and accommodating. Given the many opportunities that French citizens have had to junk it, they have shown remarkable loyalty to the system they created in the late nineteenth century. In the concluding chapters, Hanley argues persuasively that even the Fifth Republic, which was designed to tame parties by presidential fiat, has been absorbed to a large extent into the party system. In the end, the party system was able to cast its net over Gaullism and bring it to heel.

This had happened to other challengers in the past. From the beginning, the plural party system repeatedly expanded to include new players in the game, successfully acculturating anti-parliamentary movements. The monarchists, socialists, Gaullists, Communists, and Greens—and, he suggests, most probably the Front National in the future—have been tempted in from the cold, taught the rules of the game, and absorbed into the party system.

Hanley bases his analysis on the premise that party systems are less reflections of society's make-up than they are political markets. Parties are entrepreneurs seeking to sell their political product to voters in order to earn political office. The goal is to enter and remain in government. This casts politicians as wheeler-dealers rather than spokesmen of interest groups, a characterization particularly appropriate to the French political scene. With fifty-one political parties and movements listed for the period under review, the French political system resembles the Grand Bazaar much more than a social mirror, even, as Hanley says, a mirror "with a loud-speaker attached" (p. 7).

Citing political scientist Daniel-Louis Seiler, *Partis et familles politiques* (1980), Hanley presents parties as arising from four social cleavages—class, religion, center-periphery, urban-rural—and attempts to locate

the derivation of French parties within this scheme. However, while some cleavages—religion for example—have proven crucial, others have been much less salient. He admits that the descent of the French party system from these cleavages has been "anything but automatic"(p. 16). In fact, this scheme has little explanatory value, and Hanley rarely refers to it in his analysis.

More cogently, Hanley connects the plural party system with France's favorite electoral system, the single-member constituency with two ballots. He points out that governments have preferred this system because it returns incumbents; it also privileges deputies within parties and localities within the nation. Working against centralized, programmatic parties, it favors the loose, flexible organizations that have suited both France's political entrepreneurs and local voters. Whether this system has always best served the public interest is a question of a different order and one which Hanley quite rightly refuses to entertain.

The book moves chronologically, rather than topically, from the Third to the Fifth Republic. Most chapters begin with a summary of the society and economy of the period under review and then turn to a brisk run-through of its political alignments and shifts, crises and compromises. The level of generality in the socio-economic summary is enormous; it will make most historians uncomfortable. The political narrative, on the other hand, will bewilder anyone who does not already know a good deal about French political history. The number of parties, identified by their alphabetic acronyms, their tendency to mutate into other parties, the difficulty of accommodating them in any simple tabulation of right-center-left, plays havoc with Hanley's plot summaries. The occasional tables do nothing to clarify the situation. Fortunately, each chapter concludes with a brief analysis of the significance of the political dances previously outlined. Although these are rarely surprising, they are often insightful.

The history begins with the Third Republic in 1870. Although parties were not legal entities until 1901, Hanley argues, based on German historian Rainer Hudemann's work on the Third Republic, that parliamentary parties organized quickly, forming the "matrix of the modern party system" in France (p. 31). In the 1870s, many essential elements of France's political system emerged: a shared republican culture encompassing individual rights, popular sovereignty, patriotism, and rationalism; a terrain vaguely partitioned into left-center-right; and mechanisms by which partisan politics produced government. These latter were essentially a "pluralised polarism" (p. 54) in which "a sort of invisible barrier" (p. 55)—at this point consisting of commitment to religion and regime—prevented the formation of a center and tended to give the initiative to the extremes. In the period prior to the First World War, Hanley shows that the Radicals used this dynamic to push their agenda upon their often reluctant republican allies. They were playing a dangerous game, risking the fate of the regime in a way that belies not only their reputation as fuzzy emotionalists but also their fundamental commitment to the Republic.

Hanley's view of the Third Republic in the interwar years is, by contrast, serene. The Radicals, having gained most of their agenda, vacated the driver's seat, and the dynamic shifted left to the socialists. On the right, monarchism was dead, and, in Hanley's view, the extra-parliamentary right of leagues and street fighting posed no serious threat. The barrier that divided acceptable coalition partners from unacceptable ones became even more invisible as majorities were constructed along a number of axes. "There was never a chance of a straight right majority facing a united left opposition" (p. 94) even during the Popular Front; it was the Radicals who toppled Blum in 1937. In fact, rather than illustrating the rise of new polarities, Hanley argues that this period underlined the importance of small-to-medium "pivot" parties, such as the Radicals, that exercised influence and held Cabinet seats far beyond their electoral strength. In response to critics at the time and subsequently who have claimed France's party system was weak and self-serving and ultimately responsible for the debacle of 1940, Hanley points to the high voter turn-out in this period. French citizens got the government that they wanted, he concludes.

The party system was certainly not responsible for France's defeat in 1940, but how about the Fourth Republic's suicide in 1958? Hanley argues that, as in 1940, forces outside the French party system were mainly to blame: the Cold War, which turned the communist party into a pariah, and the colonial question. Yet the issues here are more within the purview of French politics than was the Nazi invasion. We must conclude that the party system, which Hanley describes as having developed so that "the stakes were now mainly holding office, not driving through dramatic new policies" (p. 113), was unable to cope. Hanley puts the best face that he can upon this failure. He points out that the Fourth Republic ceded to the Fifth, not to a military dictatorship. "By preserving democracy, the parties also preserved themselves" (p. 143), giving the party system a second chance to teach the outsiders--the Gaullists but also the communists--how to play the game correctly.

In the concluding chapters, Hanley argues that this second chance has largely paid off. Although the Fifth Republic was conceived as a framework to control and even repress the party system, in fact the system has adapted to the new rules and imposed its own logic upon them. The need to field electable presidential candidates has pushed the system toward left/right national confrontations with both Gaullism and socialism emerging as the basis of "cross-class, catch-all" parties (p. 151), something new to the French scene. Although the coalitions now tend to be managed prior to elections rather than within the legislature, the plural party system has nonetheless reasserted itself, on the right, in the UDF (Union pour la Démocratie Française, which split the Gaullist movement) and on the left in the communists and recently the Greens. As in the past, new demands tend to find expression in new parties--such as the Front National and the trotskyites--and the party system remains open to admit them, after a period of apprenticeship, as "coalitionable." The alphabet soup has thinned since the Fourth Republic; it has not congealed.

Hanley's book can be read as an apology, even a celebration of France's political party system, gloriously diverse, cynically flexible, pleasingly resilient. However, it is not clear whom the readers will be. For those unfamiliar with the history of French politics--political scientists, say, interested in party systems per se--it will be very heavy going. Turgid prose and the parenthetical reference style, with references sometimes extending for a line or more, make the process even more daunting. But the prospect is not much better for French political historians. Reading this book is an experience akin to hiking the Vermont woods: lots and lots of trudging through the trees with only an occasional and brief view of new terrain.

In a couple of areas, *Party, Society and Government* does not fulfill the claims made for it by its author. The preface and introduction, not to mention the book's title, claim that it will explain the long history of French Republican democracy by linking society and government through the party system. In fact, society functions as a sketchy backdrop most of the time; it has little effect upon, and is little effected by, the party system that Hanley describes.

Similarly, Hanley stresses that his study exposes the "non mechanistic" dimension of the party system, but sadly it does not. With few exceptions, the parties gig about like mechanical dolls, without human faces or personalities, and sometimes without even names. It is inevitable that a book of this size and scope will fail to mention many important characters. But when parties seem to operate without people (the Mouvement Républicain Populaire without Robert Schuman's solemnity, the French Communist Party without Thorez's heavy-handed dogmatism) and politicians without their personal environment (Clemenceau, the Tiger, without Caillaux, the insouciant, for example) the resulting analysis will be lifeless. The narrative deals well with some crises in the political system; the Boulanger affair is an example. But it unaccountably slides over others. Hanley dispatches February 6, 1934 in three sentences even while noting that "two governments fell as a consequence" (p. 101); he does not mention the Stavisky affair at all. This is French partisan politics without blood or passion. Passionless French politics: there is an oxymoron for you.

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