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Gino G. Raymond, *The French Communist Party During the Fifth Republic: A Crisis of Leadership and Ideology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. x + 233 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$80.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-4039-9612-1.

Review by W. Brian Newsome, Alfred University.

Gino G. Raymond, Reader in French at the University of Bristol, England, traces the evolution of the Parti communiste français (PCF) from its origins to the present. His central objective is to place the history of the party in a wide social context, especially during the Fifth Republic. Raymond claims thereby to diverge from “the now familiar evocations of the PCF’s recent history as a catalogue of missed opportunities and self-inflicted wounds” (p. 2). Trained as both a historian and a political scientist, Raymond blends the two disciplines to establish an interpretive framework that is useful for understanding the decline of the PCF’s fortunes in recent years.

Raymond begins with a standard history of the PCF during the Third and Fourth Republics. He moves quickly, however, to describe the party in a novel way, as an ethno-class: “a people marked by those traits conferred by their economic situation (‘class’) and those traits which express their membership of a community habitus (‘ethno’)” (p. 26). This particular combination, argues Raymond, gave the PCF its unity. That cohesion and the PCF’s stance and an “anti-system party”—that is, a party opposed to the constitutional regime—helped it appeal to voters under the Third and Fourth Republics, regimes in which the “general political climate [was] notable for its inability to favor consensus” (p. 37). In the 1940s and 1950s, the PCF could count on support from 25 percent of the electorate. The party’s great mistake, according to Raymond, was its failure to adapt to the Fifth Republic, whose presidential system established the consensus and stability that had been missing. In his new climate, the PCF’s cohesion and its anti-system position lost their unique appeal.

Party leaders tried to compensate by forging alliances with other parties, particularly the Socialists. PCF general secretaries Waldeck Rochet and Georges Marchais wanted to place their party, which they believed to be the only true party of scientific socialism, at the head of a left-wing alliance that would radicalize the Socialists. The PCF did make electoral gains several times, in 1965 and 1981 for example. However, the party’s strategy ultimately failed. The Socialists never accepted the Communists’ claim to the leading role, in part because the Socialists established a broader electoral base than the Communists. The Socialists successfully appealed to white collar workers, women, and youth, while the Communists’ resistance to “bourgeois ideals” limited the party’s base to aging male factory workers, whose jobs began disappearing in the 1970s.

In François Mitterrand, the Socialists also found a viable presidential candidate. The Communists never did, for two key reasons, according to Raymond. First, because the party rejected presidentialism, PCF leaders had to explain why the party even chose to run presidential candidates. In 1988, for example, Marchais announced that a Communist would run for the presidency because only a Communist president could end the slide toward presidential authoritarianism. This line of reasoning fell flat with voters. Second, party secretaries often interfered in the campaigns of Communist candidates, creating some confusion about just who was running. In 1988, again, Georges Marchais appeared at nearly a third of the campaign meetings of André Lajoinie, the party’s candidate. Communist *rénovateurs* also broke with the party to run their own candidate, Pierre Juquin. Lajoinie won only 6.7 percent of the vote, less than half the votes cast for Marchais himself when he ran for the presidency in 1981. 1988 was

no anomaly, though. The PCF's share of the vote--both presidential and legislative--had consistently declined since the 1960s. As Raymond convincingly argues, the PCF failed to rise to the challenges of a presidential system.

The rise of the *rénovateurs* also affected the power of Marchais' leadership discourse. According to Raymond, "the growing disinclination to accept the ideology of disinterested representation sustaining the symbolic power of Marchais' discourse rendered his utterances less performative, and therefore less effective and led them to be viewed increasingly as those of an *apparatchik* seeking to sustain his personal power" (author's italics, pp. 121-22). The cohesion that had once made the PCF such a powerful force began to melt away.

Challenges from within also provided evidence that the party had fallen out of step both with the members it claimed to serve and with the society it wanted to change. One of the original strengths of the party had been its counter-cultural mission. The party had offered a refuge for those disenchanted with capitalist society. As time wore on, however, the culture of the PCF had become regimented to the point that it clashed with the new counterculture of '68. The PCF was outflanked on the left by Trotskyists, Maoists, anarchists, and libertarians. Raymond maintains that Communist ideology lost its mobilizing power and that, because the party was so rooted in a totalizing socio-economic theory, it was particularly damaged by the phenomenon of *dépolitisation*, or disengagement from mainstream politics, which has come to characterize French society in recent years.

In 1994, Robert Hue replaced Georges Marchais as party secretary. He endorsed the expression of pluralism within the party and the involvement of citizens in politics and society. In 2002, however, Hue received only 3.37 percent of the vote in the presidential election and the party only 4.82 percent of the vote in the legislative elections. Raymond argues that Hue's message had resulted in slight gains among professional and managerial classes, but that it had failed to satisfy the party's traditional working-class base, a portion of which had switched to the xenophobes of the far right. The PCF found itself locked in a seemingly insoluble dilemma. With its traditional base declining, the party had to change. But change threatened to alienate too many loyalists while failing to bring in enough new voters. Hue's successor, Marie-Georges Buffet, did not try to restore the unitary discourse of the party. The PCF has begun to look much like other French political parties, with different factions and leaders operating under a broad umbrella. Does the PCF have a future? In Raymond's opinion, the PCF will continue to function as a party of protest, an option for those who are dissatisfied and who want to send a message to the political elite.

Raymond bases his study on a wide array of primary and secondary sources. He makes particularly good use of press and journal articles for the recent history of the PCF. Raymond's reasoning is generally solid, but his work does have several weaknesses. First, Raymond sometimes contradicts himself. The single best example is his argument about the lack of consensus in the Third and Fourth Republics, which he makes on p. 37. On the same page, however, Raymond notes that the shifting parliamentary alliances of the Third and Fourth Republics included many of the same parties and many of the same politicians who were trying to exclude both the far left and the far right from the government. Much later he also states that the Third and Fourth Republics operated "within a broad centrist consensus" (p. 170). Which was it? What Raymond seems to be trying to say is that the French republican system favored consensus. The problem was that the consensus was not apparent to most voters, who saw only the rise and fall of cabinets, which they perceived as evidence of instability. This distinction between appearance and reality is perhaps a fine one, but it is an important one that would clarify Raymond's argument.

Raymond also exaggerates the stability of the Fifth Republic. As Anne Sa'adah has argued, de Gaulle failed to establish a durable bipolar political system.[1] During his presidency, de Gaulle used the power of his person to eclipse the divisions of the right, but he did not create a party that could remain

united without him and thus overcome those divisions. After de Gaulle resigned in 1969, the powerful but bifurcated executive of the Fifth Republic resulted in rivalry among leaders of the right: for example, the conflicts between Presidents Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, on the one hand, and their respective Prime Ministers, Jacques Chaban-Delmas and Jacques Chirac, on the other. As indicated above, the Communists and Socialists established periodic alliances, but they too collapsed. By 2002, the parties of the left were so divided that Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin did not receive enough votes to enter the second round of the elections. Once again, Raymond needs to distinguish between appearance and reality. The Fifth Republic seemed stable and that appearance did hurt the PCF, the cohesive anti-system party. Beneath the apparent stability, however, lay powerful centripetal forces.

Despite these problems, Raymond succeeds in placing the history of the party in a broad social context, even as he notes the "missed opportunities and self-inflicted wounds" to which other scholars have pointed. Raymond's book thus complements the works of Jacques Fauvet, François Fejtö, Philippe Robrieux, Maxwell Adereth, Irwin Wall, Marc Lazar, and others. Scholars will find this book useful as a resource. Instructors of history and political science should also consider Raymond's book for use in the classroom, as he provides a sophisticated analysis of one of France's most complex political parties.

NOTES

[1] Anne Sa'adah, *Contemporary France: A Democratic Education* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003).

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