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Richard Vinen. *Bourgeois Politics in France, 1945-1951.* Cambridge, England, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995. xiv + 300 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-47451-1.

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Richard Vinen contends that his is the "first general study of politics and society in the Fourth Republic to be founded on extensive primary research" (p. i). The title is descriptive of the methodology and the content. This is bourgeois history of the bourgeoisie. Vinen depicts insiders, bourgeois politicians, and such business groups as the plastics manufacturers who have found in him a sympathetic vindicator. The book is a homage to his bourgeois sources: using the archives of Francois Mitterand's *Union democratique et socialiste de la resistance* (UDSR) and the Christian Socialist *Mouvement Republicain Populaire* (MRP), the private papers of ten politicians, the passionate apologies of political memoirs, and papers of the Paris Chamber of Commerce, Vinen exalts the "triumph of bourgeois France" (p. 2).

The result is a book that "attempts to describe the institutions of the bourgeoisie ... by dealing with the links that individual political parties had to business associations, civil servants, church organizations and the press" (p. 3). Vinen "approaches the period in terms of successful conservatism rather than thwarted reform" (p. i). Moreover, "means by which the French bourgeoisie preserved its interests were unusual. There have been many occasions in European history when property-owners have successfully reacted against threats to their interests. But most [sic] of these reactions involved violence and the suspension of democracy" (p. 2). France was saved from the "Bolshevik disease ... without destroying democracy and without large-scale violence" (p. 2). Thus Vinen claims that business groups sheltered France from a supposed "Bolshevik" menace.

Vinen's highly revisionist thesis is inconsistent. He recognizes the anti-Communism of the French Socialist Party (SFIO), but arbitrarily includes the UDSR and excludes the SFIO because the "long-term aims of the SFIO remained different from those of its allies" within the anti-Communist "Third Force" coalition (pp. 7-8). The "SFIO leaders were much more discreet about their links with capitalism than the leaders of any other party were" (p. 8). But "discretion" does not deny the SFIO's Cold War service to American interests: "Relations between leaders of the SFIO and MRP were facilitated by anti-Communism" (p. 141). Vinen repeatedly cites Leon Blum's denunciation of the Communists as "a nationalist party of foreign allegiance" (p. 141). The SFIO purged the *Parti communiste francais* (PCF) from the government and organized the "Third Force" to protect French civilization against the twin foes of French democracy: the Gaullist *Rassemblement du peuple francais* (RPF)'s supposed "Fascism" and the "Bolshevism" of the PCF.

The leader of the SFIO in the 1950s, Guy Mollet, charged that the PCF was neither right nor left, but east–that is, an agent of the Soviet government. The Socialists' strong anti-Soviet stance was hardly unique to France. The Italian Socialists were coalition partners of the Italian Christian Democrats. Blum's denunciation of the PCF was echoed by Kurt Schuhmacher of the German Social Democrats, who opposed merger with the Communists to form a Socialist Unity Party.

The title and substance of Vinen's book are essentially correct. As my old mentor, H. Stuart Hughes, said, everything that you can say about France is either cliche or it is wrong. Politics in France is a domain of bourgeois intellectuals. No one is surprised with the underlying bourgeois nature of France and her government. However, Vinen falls into the trap of exaggerating French intellectuals' rhetoric for reality. Indeed, "[t]he Vichy regime had the support of many intellectuals. It was only because these men were discredited by collaboration with Nazi Germany, and disappeared into obscurity that, after 1945, intellectuals appeared to be predominantly left wing. But this was a short-lived illusion" (Theodore Zeldin, _History of French Passions, II, 1122). Vinen bases his thesis on that illusion. His discovery of the bourgeois reality behind leftist rhetoric of the "third force" SFIO is hardly new. He emphasizes the bureaucrats' "newly found willingness to accept a more dirigiste view of the economy" (Vinen, p. 91). Yet Zeldin

showed that a series of state interventions and take-overs began long before World War II, and "[t]he nationalisations of 1944-6 were thus not revolutionary" (Zeldin, II, 1052). Zeldin noted the common theme of an idea of technocracy in Andre Tardieu, Blum, and Philippe Petain, "[a]ll of whom contributed powerfully to the formation of Gaullist France, which was in some ways a compromise between them" (Zeldin, II, 1064).

During half of the period covered by the book (1945-47), France was governed by a coalition of the Socialists, Communists, and MRP. After the immediate postwar reforms, the Communists shared responsibility for the moderate legislation; during the remainder, from 1947-51, the Socialists were a major component of the "Third Force" which sought to protect France from an allegedly insurgent Communism. Vinen pays credit to bourgeois leaders because "[t]here were no civil wars, no political murders, no private armies" (Vinen, p. 2). If so, only because the *Milice* had discredited recent collaborators of the Gestapo and Vichy government. And the Socialists preferred to ally with the bourgeois parties with whom they shared a common mistrust of the Communists; the PCF in turn allowed itself to be marginalized. Vinen's supposed Bolshevik PCF was a dubious revolutionary danger; the French Communist Party was more of a shelter for bourgeois intellectuals, than a serious revolutionary menace. In the maxim of the 1960s, the bourgeois intellectuals feigned a *gauche* posture of "revolutionary chic." Thus, Zeldin categorized the essential nature of both fascist and communist intellectuals as "hypocrisy."

Vinen's assertion that French business groups saved France from a PCF conspiracy to subvert democracy is as unproven as his assertion that there was something unique in the lack of violence in France. The bourgeoisie have seldom resorted to violence to defend their interests over the centuries. Their control of the media and their advocates in government are sufficient.

This book is hardly a general history; it greatly suffers from its uncritical recounting of the insiders' passionate justifications. We are left with Vinen's praise of the conservatives' flexibility. More flexible that the leftist parties? What could be more flexible than the PCF's serving in tripartite cabinets, or the SFIO's exclusion of the PCF from the French cabinet in 1947 to join a third force? Vinen fails to include the second volume of Zeldin's Oxford "History of France" in his bibliography. A more careful reading of Zeldin's tome would have improved Vinen's analysis.

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