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Frédéric Monier, *La politique des plaintes. Clientélisme et demandes sociales dans le Vaucluse d'Édouard Daladier (1890-1940)*, Paris, La boutique de l'histoire, 2007. 413 pp., notes and index. 29€ (pbk). ISBN 978-2-910828-40-0.

Review by Paul Smith, University of Nottingham.

Somewhere in the course of his impressive study of the evolution of republican political culture in the Vaucluse between the end of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of the Second World War, Frédéric Monier estimates that Édouard Daladier received, on average, one letter a day asking for some service or favour. Fellow victims of student email culture reading this review might well suppress a guffaw: Daladier was getting off lightly, though as Monier points out, one letter received generated at least three if not four further pieces of correspondence.

Édouard Daladier presents, of course, an excellent focal point for a study of political culture in the later Third Republic. Son of a baker from Carpentras, intelligence and hard work took him to the Lycée Ampère in Lyon, where he was a pupil of the 'other Édouard', Herriot. Daladier passed the *agrégation* in history and became a *professeur*, then, in 1912, was elected mayor of Carpentras. He served at the front during the First World War and was one of the intake of new deputies elected in 1919 that gave the Chamber its nickname of *Chambre bleu-horizon*, although that title more usually associated with the overwhelming right-wing majority elected in that year. A minister for the first time under Herriot in 1924 and again several times between then and 1932, Daladier was himself *président du Conseil* in 1933 and at the crucial moments of February 1934 and again between 1938 and 1940. He was also chairman of the Radical Party from 1927 to 1930 and again from 1936 to 1938. Monier's work is, then, partly the study of a rising political star from his beginnings as a simple mayor to the Chamber, to party leadership, to the *maroquin* and (from 1938) Matignon.

Monier focuses on the reception and treatment of *plaintes*. To translate *plainte* as "complaint" is not quite adequate here and that is not how Monier uses the term. Of course, some of the letters to Daladier or to other *élus* asking to intercede with the deputy/minister/premier are complaints. Most are also requests for assistance in a delicate or unfortunate matter. A number involve preferential treatment during military service. But they are all, of course, pleas for special treatment, where "the system" has failed, for example in the case of the pension not attributed to a war-widow, or where a son or a daughter's talents are particularly deserving of recognition and assistance for their schooling, perhaps. The nub of Monier's argument is tucked away on page 114, when, he describes the purposes of both the complainants and the mayors called upon to lend assistance as being far from democratic but "profondément républicaines. Plaintes et recommandations sont des témoins paradoxaux de l'enracinement, dans la société française, d'une culture républicaine de la promotion sociale et du service de l'État. »

As Daladier's star rises, so the distance between him and the complainant grows too. As a mayor, the relationship is direct, but once elected to the Chamber, the relationship can be direct or mediated through local *élus*: sometimes mayors but, more often, the members of the departmental *conseil général* and, once Daladier becomes a minister, other members of parliament for the Vaucluse, deputies and senators alike, also serve as conduits. (It is also worth noting, in passing, the influence that could be exerted by former ministers. After all, with the rapid turnover of cabinets under the regime, any former minister was also a potential future minister.)

The work is divided into three parts. Monier begins with the development of political patronage in the period 1890 to 1928. By starting there, he covers the shift of Radicalism from France's cities, to the countryside, a shift perhaps best incarnated by Émile Combes. The rise, establishment and decline of Combism as a system of patronage provides the backdrop for Monier to explore the nature of political relations in the Vaucluse and how Daladier was introduced into and became a key player in that system. The second section examines the decline of Radical committees as the 'transmission' belt of local patronage, between 1924 and 1939. Then, in the third section, Monier shifts gear, so to speak, by focussing on Daladier's responses to *les plaintes*, especially as the head of government in that peculiar passage of French politics between 1938 and 1940.

As we might expect, the nature of the *plaintes* evolves with the course of time. In the 1920s, there is a strong tilt towards the needs of war veterans and their families, playing on Daladier's own experience and his "natural" sympathy for his comrades in arms. By the turn of the decade, however, the focus is much more clearly on the impact of the economic crisis. Here the author notes a number of letters from the disenfranchised: foreign labourers and women. Monier suggests in the case of the latter this might somehow be a reflection of the greater political involvement of women, faced with a flagging feminist (i.e. suffragist) movement, but he does not push the point. But what is important to note, from across the board, is that there are few explicit references to political partisanship. Very few individual correspondents write to Daladier expecting favours as loyal Radicals. They are simply *électeurs* (or not in the case of women and foreigners) seeking the intercession of their deputy, or, in other contexts, of a minister. There are, of course, examples of local Radical or *radicalisant* committees trying to exercise gentle pressure, but these are less frequent than one might expect and by the 1930s almost non-existent.

Monier picks his way through the wealth of material available (principally post-1924) with great skill and thoroughness. No stone goes unturned and the complexity of local political relationships in the Vaucluse between the two world wars is painstakingly laid bare. This is not, however, always an easy read. Colleagues who know Monier's very good, short introduction to France in the 1920s will find here none of the concise, compact analysis that marks that work as essentially reading for all undergraduate students.[1] This is deep drilling. Monier knows his material backwards, and by the end of this study so do we. Indeed, some of the protagonists are such regular contributors to the postbags of various local *élus* or of Daladier himself, that we feel we know them pretty well. This is not a book for undergraduates and Monier does not pretend that it is. Nor is it the last word on the intersection of local and national politics in the Vaucluse, though it has a great deal to say on that account. It is, however, a meticulous analysis of the relationship between an *élu* and his *administrés* at a whole range of levels, within one department. Monier also looks beyond the confines of the old Comtat Venaissin, to draw comparisons, for example, with the Basses-Pyrénées of Louis Barthou and the Meurthe-et-Moselle of Louis Marin, as well as writing on contemporary clientelism and political culture in Spain and Italy. His notes and bibliography provide the reader, moreover, with an excellent feel for the state of writing in the field now. This book is a must for any scholar building a personal or university library of French political culture, and not just of the late Third Republic.

NOTE

[1] Frédéric Monier, *Les années 20*, (Paris, Les livres de poche 1999).

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