
H-France Review Vol. 6 (May 2006), No. 62

Pascal Cauchy, *La IVe République. Que sais-je?* Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004. 128 pp. Appendix, bibliography. €8.00 (pbk). ISBN 2-13-053651-4.

Review by Rosemary Wakeman, Fordham University Lincoln Center.

The *Que sais-je?* series published by PUF is a veritable monument to French intellectual life. Founded in 1941 by Paul Angoulvent, the title was inspired by the famous phrase in Montaigne's *Essais*. The series now includes some 3,750 plain paperback monographs, about 128 pages each, all with the same simple format, without images or embellishment. Written by distinguished specialists, they are meant to penetrate directly to the core of any given subject. And the subjects taken up over the past sixty-five years are vast: history, philosophy, religion, literature, law, psychology, sociology, economy, science written by 2,500 authors. The series is an encyclopedia of French learning. The slim paperbacks are a familiar site in any French bookstore. Some 160 million copies have been sold worldwide. They have been translated into forty-three languages.

In this volume dedicated to the Fourth Republic, historian Pascal Cauchy begins with the dictum that it is the poor parent of contemporary French history, "little-liked, born a bit by chance...out of the desire to forget defeat, foreign occupation and an authoritarian regime" [p. 3]. Cauchy deftly attempts not only to understand the events and crises of this period, but to place the Fourth Republic in the broader context of French political history. He argues that although it suffered chronic governmental instability and has long been judged ineffective, the Fourth Republic was at the epicenter of extraordinary transformations in France. It is difficult not to agree. These twelve years from the Liberation in August 1944 to the regime's demise in June 1958 were the stage for the full-flowering of the Cold War, the painful process of decolonization, the French economic miracle, the construction of Europe, and a social metamorphosis that would create a new French middle class. The Fourth Republic was able to weather these storms, however briefly, by constructing a polymorphous political center at the core of governance.

Cauchy's is a brief but solid political history. The book's narrative proceeds chronologically through the Republic's short life. Four chapters divided by legislative phases form the book's structure. Much like Jean-Pierre Rioux's classic *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958*, Cauchy identifies an initial restabilization of "liberated France" from 1944 to 1946, then an era of reconstruction from 1946 to 1951 that saw the opening salvos of the Cold War. These years were marked by the shift from the Resistance and the tripartite coalition of Communists, Socialists and the *Mouvement républicain populaire* (MRP) to the Third Force politics that dominated the Regime's early political landscape. Cauchy underplays the role of De Gaulle's theatrical resignation in January 1946 and instead concentrates on the political and administrative decisions surrounding the purges, reconstruction and the normalizing of republican authority in a powerful National Assembly. The political crisis and strikes of 1947 and the expulsion of the Communists from government set the stage for a Third Force centrist alternative determined, in the words of Guy Mollet, to "defend democracy and the Republic against Gaullist or communist 'totalitarian danger' and to assure financial stability and social justice" (p. 43). But the opposition of both left and right political extremes and the hydra-like composition of this centrist alliance created the conditions for permanent governmental instability. The Socialist party (SFIO), the MRP, Radicals and Independents all attempted to steer a moderate course through a boiling sea of domestic and foreign difficulties. An endless succession of Premiers and Cabinets, all broadly identical in composition, resulted. Around them flowered a host of cantankerous political movements and interest groups. Cauchy

lays the negative reputation of the Fourth Republic at their feet, but also argues that the stigma may be undeserved. Paradoxically, the Socialists and MRP succeeded in creating a broad centrist coalition at the governing core that carried through a coherent program of reconstruction, planning and economic modernization and also stabilized France's international position, themes that Cauchy addresses with remarkable dexterity in this slim volume.

The elections of 1951 swept away the Third Force and inaugurated the well-known "slide to the right" (p. 74) as the SFIO joined the opposition, and the Gaullists took their place alongside the Radicals and MRP to form a new centrist-right coalition. It is an event that Cauchy sees as essential to the political history of the Fourth Republic. It begins his third chapter, from 1951 to 1955, which he entitles the "Republic of Compromise." Ideology played a secondary role to pragmatism and *haute fonctionnaire* administration. Cauchy describes it as a period of difficult choices, intensifying economic and colonial crises in which political power was increasingly personalized around Antoine Pinay, Joseph Laniel, and eventually Pierre Mendès-France. The war in Indochina, the mounting Algerian crisis, and the formation of "Europe of the Six" dominated their governments. Cauchy evaluates Mendès-France in particular as symbolic of the pragmatism and "conflict resolution" (p. 85) that characterized these years, and led to his promise of sovereignty for Tunisia and rapid negotiations for settlement of Indochina in the Geneva Accords. The Fourth Republic's demise came quickly in a last, short phase from 1956 to 1958 that was dominated by the Algerian War. Cauchy gives this tragic end its just due in an extensive discussion. This brutal crisis brought to light all the contradictions and ineffectiveness of the regime. However Cauchy argues that by the late 1950s France was also reeling under the impact of economic growth, modernization, and social transformation. The tensions they wrought were as responsible for the Fourth Republic's end as the more sudden, catastrophic event of Algeria. The populist protests under the banner of *Poujadisme* were the most visible sign of underlying tensions.

Despite its contradictory politics, the Fourth Republic appears in this volume as a force of republican resurgence and of modernization. Ultimately, according to Cauchy, this short-lived era privileged the role of the "providential State" (121) and expanded the arena of political action and practice of parliamentary democracy. It was not enough however, to save the Republic from the forces that were rapidly transforming the nation. In the face of these changes, its only strategy appeared (on the surface at least) to be crisis management and compromise. Nonetheless, for Cauchy, the centrist Fourth Republic carried through innovative economic and social policies, managed colonial conflict, and led the construction of Europe. Not a bad record in so little time. True to the mission of the *Que sais-je?* series, *La IVe République* offers an efficient, first-rate introduction to its subject. It reads easily and provides just enough background and inventive analysis to wet the appetite for a crucial period of French history that is too often simply ignored.

NOTES

[1] J.-P. Rioux, *The Fourth Republic 1944-1958*, Cambridge History of Modern France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also E. Duhamel, *Histoire politique de la VIe République* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000); G. Elgey, *Histoire de la IVe République*, 4 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 1965-1992); and G. Gilbert, *Le roman vrai de la IVe République. De Bardot à De Gaulle. 1954-1958* (Paris: Denoel, 1972).

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ISSN 1553-9172