

Gabriel GOODLIFFE & Riccardo BRIZZI (eds.) *France after 2012* (Berghahn Books, 2015) pp.216, £55.00, ISBN 978-178238-548-6 (hbk)

This book is not well served by its title, which might lead one to expect that the focus of the content will be on developments concerning France post-2012. In fact, the emphasis is far more on 2012 itself, the French elections that took place in that year and the political developments, problems and issues that preceded and then crystallised around them. As Gabriel Goodliffe points out in his introduction, the various chapters constituting the volume were basically drafted in March/ April 2013 and thus more recent developments might not be adequately addressed or even dealt with at all. It is tempting to think that a different title, making clear that the focus of the book is in fact on 2012 itself, as a key fulcrum point in the development of the French political landscape, would have been more apt.

As it is, there are a number of interesting analyses here clustered around several common themes, such as the fragmentation of the French party system, the increase in the anti-system vote, the effects of the economic crisis and, increasingly, the influence of Europe and European issues on French national elections.

The book is divided into three parts. The first deals with the Presidency and the changes that the institution has undergone during the lifetime of the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic. Jean-François Sirinelli discusses the growing global influences over national history and the fundamental changes which have taken place in the political and social context in which French Presidents act and the corresponding constraints this has increasingly placed upon them. He does not, however, go beyond 2012 into the Hollande presidency. Similarly, in his comparison between François Mitterrand and François Hollande, Marco Gervasoni focuses on the way in which the latter used the first Socialist President of the Fifth Republic as a reference point in his election campaign.

The second part deals with the political parties that played a key part in the 2012 elections, with chapters on the UPM, the Socialists, the Far Left, the Centre and the Front National. There is much of interest here to those interested in the details of electoral politics and political campaigning and some key trends are identified in the way in which political loyalties are now determined or undermined. There is a particular focus on the increased importance of the media and the relative weight of the old forms vis-à-vis new-style social media. However, inevitably, some of the trends highlighted in this book have been overtaken or reversed by events. This is particularly true in the case of the chapters dealing with the unsuccessful presidential candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, and his former political movement, the UPM. Reading this account now, at a time when Sarkozy is once again dominating the Right

with his new formation, the Republicans, it is difficult to isolate this analysis from subsequent political developments and could certainly give cause for reflection on the changing fortunes of politicians and the instability of French political parties on the Right.

The third and final part deals with the electoral campaign itself and the issues that were at the forefront of the debates: notably, the economy, Europe, foreign policy and immigration, each of which is dealt with in a separate chapter. Frédéric Charillon's chapter on 'Hollande and Sarkozy's foreign policy legacy' is interesting and informative but is mainly devoted to Sarkozy's record in this domain and the question of his legacy.

The book ends with a conclusion by another of the editors, Riccardo Brizzi. As its title suggests, 'Assessing the Hollande Presidency One Year into Office', this short piece aims to move the analysis past the elections into 2013 with an overview of François Hollande's achievements and difficulties to date, which attempts to explain why his popularity fell so sharply after his election victory. For no doubt unavoidable reasons, the timing here appears to have been unfortunate, as Brizzi makes much of Hollande's appeal as 'Mr Normal' with 'impeccable' personal conduct in an unfavourable comparison with the personal gaffes of his predecessor. This was, of course, written prior to 'Trierweilergate' and the subsequent media coverage of Hollande's own personal life.

This is an inevitable pitfall for those writing on recent and contemporary political events and it is not always easy to avoid giving hostages to fortune. Specifying the parameters more clearly at the outset, and certainly in the title, might have been of some help.

Nonetheless, if it is seen more as a slice across the spectrum of French political life at the time of the 2012 elections, this book will certainly appeal to those with an interest in French electoral politics for its analyses of the developments affecting the different parties, the issues with which they were confronted and the manner in which the political campaigning evolved.

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