

of oral history and of the care that needs to be taken with the reminiscences of decades gone by. The second comment I am surprised to have to make. On p. 7 of his book Dr Morgan is discussing briefly the contributions made by Trotskyists to British communist history, and in the middle of his main paragraph he writes that one of the authors he is considering, namely Brian Pearce “deliberately misleads the reader into thinking [. . .]” etc. Now putting aside the fact that this is a libellous statement, no one is entitled to make accusations of this kind in scholarly discussion, and it must be regarded as regrettable and unfortunate. It must also be said that it is quite out of keeping with the civilised tone that pervades Dr Morgan’s volume in general, and certainly not in line with the standards we have come to expect from Manchester University Press. The excellence of the volume remains.

*John Saville*

PUDAL, BERNARD. *Prendre parti. Pour une sociologie historique du PCF*. Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris 1989. 329 pp. F.fr. 190.00.

The decline in the fortunes of the French Communist Party has done little to reduce the temperature in the sauna occupied by those who debate the affairs of that party. Rather more surprising is the fact that analytical studies of the PCF, by both sociologists and political scientists, should be getting richer as the party itself continues on its trend towards marginality in French political life. It was something of a landmark when the journal *Communisme* made its appearance in the early 1980s. Situating the PCF and its history in a comparative perspective, that journal has brought a good deal to a discussion that can never be fully detached, but can at least be scientifically rigorous and broadly-based.

Pudal’s book is written in the same spirit, as far as scientific rigour is concerned. There is no doubt that it will join the corpus of major authoritative works on French communism. The author focuses on the development, during the party’s formative years between the wars, of the “organic intellectual”, the self-taught worker-leaders of the Thorez type, whose attachment to the Stalinist structures and thinking that gave the party its initial force and identity – and provided them with a role, and with jobs – has made it hard for the PCF to adapt to a changing world. The book’s great strength is its attention to biographical detail, assembled from both published records and from interviews, and it is for this sociological contribution that it will be valued.

Pudal’s answer to the problem of objectivity reflects the present state of studies of French communism. He supports the argument that objectivity is an aim to strive for whilst realizing that one’s own words can only be a part of the discussion, but he is at pains to nail the ideological influence of those *entrepreneurs de déclin* who have contributed to the crisis of French communism through the way in which their analysis is presented and through their selection of evidence. But is Pudal not caught in a bind here? Nothing succeeds like success and nothing fails like failure. Analyses and descriptions of the PCF’s sharp decline necessarily tend to confirm that decline –

as indeed does Pudal's own material and the argument that he bases on it. This is no great failing. The material itself is excellent, the argument is a useful contribution to the debate, and the search for objectivity is sincere and does to a good extent pay off.

But the book has two disappointing features, one of which can reasonably be considered a fault. First, on the one hand the biographical detail on the 1930s is first-rate and fully supports Pudal's conclusions on that period; moreover, if carried into the more recent period (to take in for example, the Fiszbin affair) it helps to document current difficulties at leadership level. But in the final chapter Pudal presents tables and figures showing that a new generation entered the party in force in the 1970s. The Fiszbins of the party were caught between the hammer of this new entry and the anvil of the Stalinist leadership and its patronage network. This was a crucial development, but in that case we need to know as much about the biography of the leaders of this new wave of members as about that of the old guard. This might be held to go beyond Pudal's brief; but by (correctly) attributing so much attention to these new forces in his final chapter, he gives an unfortunate hostage to fortune. The result is that the book is much more a contribution to the PCF's history than to its current problems, which is disappointing in so far as Pudal clearly intends his material to serve both purposes.

More important, Pudal's conclusions and his strictures about the analytical treatment meted out to the PCF, are both weakened by a total absence of any comparative element in his own analysis. It is not only in France that communism had been declining. True, in a strict etymological sense, its decline has been catastrophic there. But it has been even more dramatic in some of the smaller parties (such as that of the Netherlands) for reasons that Pudal is aware of in the French case, but passes over in his preoccupation with the local scene. Each case of communist decline in Europe (or, for that matter, of survival) has its particular sociological features, and Pudal is quite entitled to draw parallels between the *instituteur*, the *curé* and the communist organic intellectual as French social phenomena. But for more securely based conclusions on the evolution of Stalinism – which, in one of his modes, Pudal clearly wishes to address – a wider framework is needed. Pudal's quest for objectivity takes him one step towards the door, but he remains inside the sauna.

*Michael Waller*