

GORDON, DANIEL A. *Immigrants and Intellectuals. May '68 and the Rise of Anti-Racism in France*. Merlin Press, Pontypool 2012. xvi, 348 pp. £18.95. doi:10.1017/S0020859013000606

Anti-racism may be one of the least studied ideologies in the contemporary world, and this volume offers its history between 1961 and 1983. Following French fashion, the author labels this period “les années 68”. Gordon laudably attempts to bring the working class – both immigrant and French – back into the study of what Arthur Marwick, using a different periodization, might have called “the long 1960s”. In addition, the author wants to show the “cross-fertilization” between a growing number of immigrants and leftist intellectuals, who were seeking new subjects since the old ones had failed to make revolution. These intellectuals’ “focus on immigrant workers in France” became “the perfect way of reconciling *tiersmondisme* with a classic Marxist concern with the proletariat” (p. 54). Gordon explores both the immigrants’ political commitments (or lack of them) and aspects of their everyday lives.

The starting point is the judiciously examined massacre of 17–18 October 1961. During an unauthorized demonstration in Paris sponsored by the Algerian Front de Libération National (FLN), French police killed approximately 120 people. Despite this vicious example of xenophobia, France needed foreign labor during the relatively prosperous 1960s. By 1968, 605,000 Spanish, 300,000 Portuguese, 475,000 Algerians, 85,000 Moroccans, and 60,000 Tunisians lived in France. These national groups had little in common other than their position as proletarians, which many understandably wished to escape: “The emigrant is a *travailleur* in France to be a *petit-bourgeois* in Portugal” (p. 49). Although Gordon’s coverage of the immigrants’ role in the massive strike wave of 1968 provides important new information, it does not persuasively demonstrate the argument summarized by the chapter title: “French and Immigrant Workers, United”. Indeed, Gordon admits that by the end of May 1968 “inter-ethnic solidarity” (p. 78) had deteriorated, and that “solidarity between French and immigrant workers was not the norm” (p. 98) between 1968 and 1971. Like many works on 1968, the author inflates its impact by claiming that “the events of May–June 1968 made France ‘discover’ the three million immigrant workers in their midst” (p. 15).

During the immediate post-May period, New Left (*gauchiste*) groups formulated creative measures to try to unite natives and foreigners. For example, in 1970 the Maoist *groupuscule*, *Vive la révolution*, established a day-care centre in Nanterre, the second largest shanty town of France. Its humorous slogan: “French and immigrant babies [...] same bottle” (p. 103), was a playful *détournement* of the *marxisant* 1968 slogan, “French and immigrant workers [...] same battle.” The concern for immigrants led the French Left, including *gauchistes*, to acknowledge the diversity of a working class whose unity had frequently been assumed in 1968.

The early 1970s saw the birth of an autonomous movement of migrants who adopted tactics, such as hunger strikes, which were effective in appealing to public opinion and preventing expulsions from France. Immigrant militants also formed coalitions to defend their rights as workers with sympathetic Christian clerics and leftist intellectuals – such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Claude Mauriac. In Marseilles in 1973, anti-Algerian acts of violence and terrorism sparked the largest single demonstration – up to 20,000 persons, mainly north Africans – since the massacre of October 1961. In 1974, the *Mouvement des travailleurs arabes* (MTA) ran a candidate in the presidential elections. He garnered few votes, but Gordon sees his candidacy as an example of the increasing recognition of the value of multi-culturalism among progressive sectors of the French public during the mid-1970s. By the late 1970s and early 1980s the Left replaced Marxism with “the language of cultural difference, decoupled from a critique of capitalism” (p. 192).

A prolonged immigrant rent strike, lasting from 1975 to 1979, against repressive and expensive hostels stimulated demonstrations of 30,000 people in Paris. Immigrant militancy succeeded in winning a wave of regularizations of residency in 1980.

The immigrants' defenders were found not only among *gauchiste* intellectuals but also in the more conventional Parti communiste français (PCF). Throughout the book – including during the strikes of 1968 – the author convincingly defends the PCF and its affiliated trade-union confederation, the CGT, from charges – voiced by *gauchistes* – that they were racist organizations unsympathetic to immigrants. In the 1980s 25,000 immigrant workers belonged to the PCF, “more than any other party in Western Europe” (p. 181). Baby-boomers – whether French or foreign – “are actually the last generation of Communists in France” (p. 184). Once the PCF went into decline, a much more racist populism was to find a new home on the far Right.

Gordon's “années 68” ends in 1983–1984 when French workers fought immigrants and Arabs clashed with (black) Africans. Also, in 1983 the Front National achieved its first major electoral breakthrough by campaigning principally on anti-immigration themes. In December 1983 immigrants and the Left reacted by joining the “Demonstration for Equality and Against Racism” which drew 100,000 marchers, often the second generation of north African immigrants (*beurs*), into central Paris.

Although the author asserts that “this book tells for the first time in any language the whole story of the immigrant/Left crossover” (p. 15), gaps remain. Gordon identifies strongly with his subjects and thus offers little criticism of the ideology of “anti-racism” other than acknowledging that traditional Marxists accused it of dividing the working class. Neither “racism” nor “anti-racism” is defined, and the latter sometimes becomes – in a manner similar to “fascism” – merely a catchword used to dismiss those who disagree (and to award oneself a certain moral superiority). Of course, both racism and xenophobia are deplorable, but the author fails to distinguish between them. Nor is he interested in exploring how some “anti-racists” of Arab or African origin in the *banlieues* and elsewhere became anti-Semites. Their anti-Semitism originated, not only because of anti-Zionism derived from the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, but also from resentment of the more upwardly mobile Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews. The latter were also immigrants, many of whom had been ethnically cleansed by the Muslim majorities of the newly independent north African states. Nor does Gordon investigate a similar resentment against Asian immigrants – including at least 500,000 Chinese and 110,000 Indochinese “boat people” – many of whom have also achieved relative success in French society. The complex situation of approximately 270,000 *harkis* – Muslim immigrants who fought for France and were compelled to leave Algeria or face brutal execution by the FLN and its affiliates – is also ignored.

In his quest to document French racism, the author uncritically reproduces statements from dissident Caribbean organizations which accused their official representatives of running “a new slave trade”, and from the presidential candidate of 1974, the Tunisian MTA activist Djellali Kamal, who labeled western Europe “the Common Market of slavery” (p. 168). This discourse of competitive victimization trivialized the experience of their ancestors, who – unlike the immigrants of the late twentieth century – were forcibly transported across the Atlantic or the Sahara under the most dreadful conditions. Gordon's treatment is excessively Franco- or Eurocentric and neglects any examination of the repressive and corrupt states of north Africa whose failed policies played a role in encouraging large numbers of immigrants to depart. Unlike many Italian immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, north Africans refused to return permanently to their native lands despite the monetary incentives offered by the French government.

The debate between “multi-culturalists” and “assimilationists” is not examined in depth. Gordon never tackles the question of whether anti-racism is itself based upon essentialist racial or ethnic identities and thus reinforces the evil which it is designed to combat. The attraction of France for millions of immigrants from all continents, not only

during the long 1960s but also throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, remains unexplored. Instead, the text emphasizes immigrant victimization and collective struggles. Since Gordon believes that the new migrants differed “only in degree” (p. 10) from their nineteenth-century French provincial predecessors, there is no attempt to investigate the role of Islam, now the second religion of France, among the immigrants and their descendants. The author does not address directly the challenges to French Republican *laïcisme* and gender equality raised by large-scale Muslim immigration. Instead, he unpersuasively suggests that the Arab Spring of 2011, which has led to the spread of Islamism, was the culmination of the French May.

Although the volume is generally well-written, a few errors dot the text: Valence (Drôme) is not in Provence (p. 129). In May 1968 the movement of military tanks in the *banlieue* was not merely a “rumour” (p. 69) but an authentic government attempt to intimidate strikers. The turn of the Socialist government in 1983 to “economic orthodoxy [which was] previously unimaginable for a government of the Left” (p. 215) had a clear precedent in the “pause” of 1937 during the Popular Front government of Socialist, Léon Blum.

Even with its limitations, Gordon has produced a stimulating work.

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Should Latin America be considered just another region where the east–west opposition resulting from the Cold War had to be extended and reproduced? Is there no other way to capture both the national and international political dynamics of this region other than in terms of uncritical adherence or unquestioned alignment to either of the hegemonic systems opposing each other from 1947, namely the USSR and the USA? Or might it prove possible to track down, during this tense period, alternative projects striving for a collective solution and attempting to temper the ideological disputes while involving additional issues specific to the Latin American reality?

To answer such and other questions relating to the political dynamics and processes initiated by the various left-wing forces in Latin America, key elements are provided by the findings of Fernando Pedrosa following five years of research aimed at exhaustively and rigorously analysing the influence of social democracy between 1978 and 1990. His theoretical-empirical results in the field of research that links history and political science are the best documented of recent decades, and, in this particular case, they also combine analytical categories specific to the sphere of Latin American studies with others specific to contemporary political processes – both are Pedrosa’s specialist areas of expertise.

The author’s assiduous work in exploring whether, in the context of the Cold War, a moderate proposal transcending the bipolar logics could emerge allows one to envision politics and the actions of political players in terms of historical time, in terms, for example, of processes. To achieve this, a methodology was required that combined a historical reconstruction of the international, regional, and national contexts in which the different social democratic organizations or groups and their representatives were