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0521808308 - The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power

Roger Price

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THE FRENCH SECOND EMPIRE AN ANATOMY OF POLITICAL POWER

This book is about a major historical figure, Napoleon III, and a political regime. It is both about great figures in history and the contexts—the political institutions and social networks—within which they were located.

First the book examines ‘the circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero’s part’ (Karl Marx); how the disorder caused by the 1848 Revolution, and the introduction of male suffrage, enabled Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte to secure election as president of the Republic and subsequently to launch a *coup d’état*. The book then considers the ways in which power was exercised by the new imperial regime, by analysing the institutions of state and the mechanisms through which these interacted with society.

The eventual growth of opposition, reflecting alternative political loyalties, led Napoleon III to contemplate the transition from an authoritarian towards a more liberal rule, a process fraught with difficulties and social and political tension. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Liberal Empire appeared to have secured the regime’s future; but at the point of success, the decision was taken to go to war against Prussia, which resulted in a catastrophic defeat and the destruction of Napoleon III’s empire.

This is the most thoroughly researched book on the Second Empire in any language, which makes a contribution to our knowledge of a vitally important period of French history following the 1848 Revolution and the intense mid-century crisis.

ROGER PRICE is Professor of History at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. His books include *The French Second Republic: A Social History* (1972), *Revolution and Reaction: 1848 and the French Second Republic* (1975), *The Modernisation of Rural France: Communication Networks and Agricultural Market Structures in Nineteenth-Century France* (1983), *A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France* (1987), *The Revolutions of 1848* (1988), and *A Concise History of France* (1993).

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*In memory of my father, Godfrey David Price (1908–1968) and of my
mother, Martha Price (1916–2000)*

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Abbreviations

AHG	Archives historiques du Ministère de la Guerre
AN	Archives nationales
APP	Archives de la Préfecture de Police
BN	Bibliothèque nationale
DM	Division militaire
(G)OC	(General) officer commanding
jp	juge de paix
MI	Minister of the Interior
MJ	Minister of Justice
NLW	National Library of Wales
PG	Procureur général
PI	Procureur impérial
PR	Procureur de la république
TP	Travaux publics