COMMUNISM IN RURAL FRANCE

French Agricultural Workers and the Popular Front

JOHN BULAITIS

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

CONTENTS

Tables ix
Maps & Illustrations xi
Acknowledgements xiii

Introduction 1

1. **The Legacy of pre-1914 French Socialism** 13
The Emergence of the 'Peasant Question' 13
Socialist Agrarianism 15
The French Agricultural Worker in the Early Twentieth Century 17
Socialists and the Agricultural Strike Movement 21

2. **Communist Agrarianism, 1921–28** 27
The Comintern and the Agricultural Proletariat 28
The Marseille Thesis: 'Nothing Has Changed' 32
Post-War Agricultural Workers' Unionism 35
The 'Absurdity' of the Class Struggle in the Countryside 39

3. **'Class against Class' in the Countryside, 1928–34** 45
The Agricultural Proletariat at the Centre of Agrarian Strategy 46
The FUA during 'Class against Class' 51
Winter 1932–33: a New Orientation 56

4. **Communists and the Agricultural Labour Force, 1933–35** 61
'A Rural Proletariat Comparable to the Industrial Proletariat' 62
Building the FUA in the Calais Region 67
'Vive Marcel Cachin!', 'Vive Monsieur Béhin!' 69
Agricultural Workers' Unionism and the Immigrant Worker 73
The Peasant Popular Front 78

5. **Rebellion in the Fields, 1936–37** 89
'We will no longer be Common Bastards' 91
The Communists and the Calais Strike Movement 94

Who Led the Farm Strikes? 100
An Agricultural Matignon? 105
The 20 July 'General Strike' 109
The Battle of Arras 112
The FNTA in face of a Counter-Offensive 120
1937: Radicalisation and Defeat 125

6. **Characteristics of the Farm Strikes** 135
The Farm Strikes as Community Struggles 135
Farm Occupations 144
Immigrant Workers: the 'Spearhead of the Movement'? 148

7. **The Farm Strikes and the Problem of 'Peasant Unity'** 157
Waldeck Rochet and the Strike Movement 158
The Strikes and the Small and Middling Farmers 159
Uniting Workers and Farmers in the Auvergne 163
A 'Fascist Provocation' in the Calvados 168
Two Ideas on 'Peasant Unity' 170

Conclusion 175

Notes and References 181
Sources 219
Bibliography 233
Index 243