

FRENCH POLITICS, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

CHARLES DE GAULLE AND THE MEDIA

Leadership, TV and the Birth of the Fifth Republic



Riccardo Brizzi



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Leadership, TV and the Birth of the Fifth Republic

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Riccardo Brizzi
University of Bologna
Bologna, Italy

Translated by Jon Kear

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To Fulvio with Gratitude, on the Eve of the Beginning of a New Project

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Introduction: Politics Between Communication and Personalisation

“I am the President of the Republic. I have fallen off the train.”¹ These were the exact words that, in the night between the 23rd and the 24th of May 1920, Paul Deschanel, the then French President, said to André Rabeaud, the toll man working at level crossing number 79, who, at the time, was on his patrol along the train line at the doors of Mignerette, a small village in the Loiret Department.

The President, who had left Lyon at 9.30 p.m. for Montbrison, where he was due to inaugurate a monument the following day, felt faint, opened the door of his sleeping compartment to get some fresh air and accidentally fell off the train. Fortunately, at that moment the train was slowed down by some work on the track and the President got away with only minor scratches. No one on the train, including the President’s personal secretary, Aulneau, realised what had happened. His face bloodied, the President started to wander along the tracks until he bumped into the toll man and told him the whole story. Rabeaud was convinced the man was a drunk, but he took him to the nearest house where the Dariots lived. The couple gave shelter to the unfortunate chap, dressed his wounds as well as they could and invited him to rest on their couch. Mr. Dariot, not at all convinced he had given shelter to a gentleman,² left early the following morning to report the incident to the policemen at the nearby Corbeilles police station. He told them that he had taken in an unknown person who declared he was the President of the Republic. But as the policemen had not received any news about a missing person, they hastily

dismissed Dariot, who returned home more and more convinced that the man he had welcomed into his house was a deranged impostor. It was only on the morning of the 24th that Subprefect Louis Leseur was informed of the incident that involved the illustrious passenger and hurried to the Dariots to pick him up, solving in this way an embarrassing and slightly ridiculous situation that was destined to inspire the imagination of many French cartoonists.³

On the exact day of the 40th anniversary of this incident, which returns us to an era when the face and physical appearance of important political figures were generally unknown to the majority of their citizens, the *Revue française de science politique* happened to publish an article that was destined to trigger a long and lively debate. Significantly, this was entitled “The personalization of power in democracies”⁴:

Nowadays, democratic regimes are going through a transformation of traditional forms of the devolution of power. At their apex is a leader who actually holds power and dominates political life. This personalization of power is new to democracies [...] The natural tendency of public opinion [towards personalization] is today encouraged by the peculiar transformations contemporary democracies are going through. People and their leaders are [...] now in close and constant connection and this continuous relationship has become the new imperative of democratic regimes [...] Cinema, radio and television make possible for ordinary citizens to be in direct contact with the leaders of their country [...] Modern techniques of propaganda have created a new democratic need that puts citizens in the position to follow the concrete process of the embodiment of power. This phenomenon should be viewed as a compelling process of personalization of power that cannot be ignored either by politics or their institutions.⁵

The political commentator Albert Mabileau borrowed the expression “personalization of power” from the language of business and used it in historical and political discourse to define what, in his opinion, was a recent feature of Western democracies, particularly prominent in Anglo-Saxon countries with a majority electoral system and highly sophisticated media—precisely the two key factors that encouraged direct contact between the political leader and his public. In the US, in January 1958, following Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s successful fireside chats, the republican Eisenhower, following the advice of his press secretary Jim Hagerty, introduced regular televised press conferences direct from the

White House.⁶ In the 1960s, when the above-quoted article appeared, the presidential campaign in the US, and in particular the innovative strategy devised by the “brain trust” of the Democratic candidate John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was about to change the American political scene forever; thanks to the new media, politics became characterised by an increasing tendency towards spectacle.⁷ In Great Britain, Harold Macmillan too demonstrated a particular talent for communicating with the public through the new mass media. In the autumn of 1959, with the help of the advertising agency Colman, Prentis and Varley, which invented the famous slogan “Life’s better with the Conservatives. Don’t let Labour ruin it”,⁸ he successfully personalised an electoral campaign that eventually resulted in his re-election. It earned him the nickname “Supermac”, popularised by the cartoonist Vicky of the London *Evening Standard*.⁹ Similar developments can be noted in other great Western democracies. In Germany, Adenauer organised a *Kanzlerdemokratie* focused on him—during which the slogan “let him work!” was coined. But it was in President de Gaulle’s France that, after years of depersonalisation of power,¹⁰ these changes were introduced more vigorously than in any other European countries. The return to power of General De Gaulle brought “a brutal transformation, a complete change of the political scene that marked the introduction of the concept of leadership in France”.¹¹

Due to the dominance of Durkheim’s sociological model, Max Weber’s theories of power were introduced comparatively later in France than in other European countries. Despite this, Weber’s ideas were destined to play a decisive role in French political life. They first made their appearance in Mabileau’s above-quoted article, which was strongly influenced by Weber’s concept of the ideal type of charismatic leadership. This concept was part of Weber’s wider elaboration of the three pure types of power through which he explained “historical watersheds”. Mabileau may have been the first, but he was not alone, in connecting Weber’s ideal type of charismatic leadership with the figure of General de Gaulle. Indeed, this connection was made in historiographical studies and political science as early as the publication of Wolfgang Mommsen’s work on Max Weber and German politics.¹² Though these associations of de Gaulle with Weber’s model of charismatic leadership have not been unanimously accepted and other interpretations have associated the figure of the General with more traditional models of political leadership,¹³ connections between Weber’s typology and the experience of Gaullism after 1958 can be articulated

through three main lines of argument. Firstly, Gaullism interrupted in a radical way the continuity of the system. The approval of the new Charter effectively marked the end not only of the Fourth Republic but also of an entire institutional political tradition that since MacMahon's failed "coup" in 1877 (in actual fact an attempt to provide a "presidential interpretation" of the 1875 constitutional laws) was founded on the centrality of Parliament and, consequently, on the depersonalisation of power.¹⁴ In line with Weber's thought, this personalisation of power was caused by the exceptionality of the context, namely, the impossibility of political power to face up to the repeated crises of the process of decolonisation and, in particular, the Algerian rebellion. The specific historical conditions of this phenomenon are integrally related to the role played by the leader who represents both the product of the crisis and the necessary means to resolve it.

Secondly, charismatic leadership, according to Weber, is a limited and exceptional event whose aim is to manage a transition towards the creation of a new political system. For Weber, charismatic leadership generates a precarious and unstable political power that can work only in the short period. The length of the Gaullist presidency—just over ten years—is in this respect an exception. In the spring of 1958, when the political leadership called the General back to power, it was unanimously agreed that in order to face an exceptional situation an equally exceptional personality was needed. Once this contingency was over, the plan was to return to the old traditional depersonalised parliamentary system, as had been the case at the end of the Second World War, with Mendès France and Clemenceau.¹⁵ It is no coincidence that the process of delegitimation of de Gaulle did not occur when he returned to power, but, later on, in the autumn of 1962. At the end of the Algerian crisis the General proposed to extend the right to vote for the President of the Republic to all citizens, in this way making clear that he intended to constitute a new type of presidential system, normalising the exceptional state of emergency and extraordinary measures.¹⁶ As Raymond Aron noted in the periodical *Preuves*, de Gaulle's Fifth Republic remained continually characterised by risk and precariousness:

The President of the French Fifth Republic defines himself as an impartial judge, above political parties, as the embodiment of the nation. This may be true for General de Gaulle, but it would not be true for a President elected by a broad constituency. The Fifth Republic of General de Gaulle is therefore, by its very nature, a precarious system.¹⁷

Thirdly, a key feature of charismatic power according to Weber, closely connected to the previous one, is the imperative for the leader to overcome the challenges he faces. If the charismatic leader fails, his charisma is inevitably damaged along with his personal standing, but if he succeeds, his followers will offer him their support. De Gaulle put himself on the line in every election, stressing in this way the exceptionality of his role and the special bond that connected him to the nation. This was not just a way to highlight the peculiar nature of his power. His championing of the referendum, “the most direct, and frankest democratic practice in politics”,¹⁸ provided proof of the fact that de Gaulle was plainly prepared to accept the risks inherent in the precarious nature of his leadership and to bear the brunt of the consequences in April 1969, even when no constitutional law required him to resign. However fitting these connections are between de Gaulle and Weber’s ideal type of charismatic leadership, this should not lead us to consider the latter as an explanatory mode, but rather one that needs to be explained.

This study focuses on a single—but crucial—feature of de Gaulle’s leadership when he returned to power in 1958: his use of mass communication media, and in particular television. Several scholars have considered his use of mass media as the foundation in de Gaulle’s construction of his leadership, but however crucial this relationship is and however effective de Gaulle’s use of mass media was, Gaullist leadership cannot be explained solely by his skilful use of this means of mass communication.¹⁹ After all, when “the most illustrious of the French people” was called back to power, he returned from a long period in which he was banned from using the mass media. Eleven years earlier Prime Minister Ramadier had in fact forbidden him to give political speeches on French radio and television because, in his eyes, the General was guilty of attempting to start a political party—the *Rassemblement du peuple français* (RPF)—that positioned itself “against the system”. Nevertheless, de Gaulle’s use of mass media was one of the defining features of his leadership for, once he returned to power, radio and above all television represented for him the primary way to connect with his people and form the special bond with the nation that is a requisite condition for all charismatic leaders. As André Passeron—an authoritative political correspondent for the daily paper *Le Monde*—wrote:

For “the man of the verb” words have turned into a new weapon to exercise power. For General de Gaulle who wants above all things to be able to rule in direct contact with his people, without screens or intermediaries, television and public speeches are essential for creating a channel of communication.²⁰

The connection between communication, leadership and the redefinition of legitimacy is not new in political history. Already by the end of the 1860s, the British essayist Walter Begehot reporting on the rise of William Gladstone—the great liberal politician who was destined to embody the archetypal successful demagogue to such an extent that even Bismarck became obsessed with him²¹—noted that the essence of Gladstone’s leadership was “his power to explain” politics outside the Parliament to the wider public of non-experts: “We could not imagine Gladstone’s financial policy could be realized. They are happy with what has been done, now that he has explained it all to them, but they needed somebody who explained it to them. If he will do this all the time, he could be our prime minister for several years.”²²

The theoretical framework of this study is the development of the idea of “government by discussion” in a political regime—democracy—that by giving increasing importance to political discourse produces a progressive transformation of forms of representation.

The experience of Gaullism is positioned at a crucial stage in this evolution, which many believe has its origins in the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt.²³ Beside drawing attention to the relationship between representative ideals and the role of parliamentary institutions, Schmitt also explained the central importance of the Assembly as the natural consequence of a deep, prior belief both in the virtues of the principle of government by truth (*veritas non auctoritas facit legem*) and in debate as the most congruous way to attain truth.²⁴ From these premises came his conviction that the key political requirement should be a particular site where discussion takes place—that in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century government is represented by the Houses of Parliament.²⁵

During the twentieth century, when mass parties entered the political arena, this idea underwent its first important transformation, which went hand in hand with changes to the structure of representation brought about by mass party organisations. The progressive expansion of the electorate led to the destruction of the personal relation between who was elected and the voters that characterised classical forms of parliamentarism; at the same time mass political parties became the means to orient and frame the votes of wide segments of the electorate through forms of organisation and networks of supporters. Party democracy is thus characterised by a dual phenomenon: On the one hand, one of the key rules of classic parliamentarianism is challenged—elections are not about choosing a trusted person any longer, but a matter of choosing a party (a phenomenon

that encourages electoral stability). On the other hand, there is a splitting of the *loci* in which the political debate takes place—political debate thus involves not only the Parliament where final decisions are the result of structured and predetermined discussions, but also within the political party with its organising and managing bodies that acquire the function of deliberative assemblies. This is particularly the case for those parties inspired by communism and characterised by democratic centralism.²⁶

From the 1960s, a further change occurred, one made possible by the media revolution and the sudden emergence of new mass communication media in politics, most particularly television. This becomes the main means to realise the kind of “personalization of power” mentioned earlier.²⁷ In this context, while political parties maintain their central role because they can mobilise the organising structure crucial for implementing networks of relations and fundraising, they progressively become instruments at the service of a leader, because radio—and above all television—provides the electorate with a direct perception of the candidate. The immediacy of this relationship shows that the phenomenon of personalisation in politics, far from being confined to the collective imaginary, has contributed to fundamentally change the idea of political representation.²⁸ The candidate could once again present himself to the electorate without resorting to the mediation of party activists. In this respect, television revives the eighteenth-century personal mode of representation that was later substituted by mass political parties. As noted by Bernard Manin, discussions about the destiny of the *polis* do not occur solely in a specific place (as it is the case with parliamentarism), or in parties’ consultation committees and focus groups (as in party democracy). Rather, these discussions occur in the public arena. This new form of “government by discussion” is characterised by the importance of the citizen, i.e., the new protagonist of the public decision-making process, and of television, i.e., the locus of the debate.²⁹

“Presidential power is the power to persuade”, wrote Richard Neustadt in 1961 in a study of the American experience that was destined to leave an indelible imprint in American political studies.³⁰ The author pointed out that the emergence of mass media contributed not only to define a new turn in the “presidential rhetoric”,³¹ but also to redraw the conditions of political leadership.³² This did not only happen overseas where media development had reached a mature stage and the party system was less structured, but it also found extraordinary fertile ground for development in the French Fifth Republic. Thanks to the disrepute that had weakened

the Fourth Republic parliamentary system, de Gaulle pioneered a new way of acting and communicating. Its novelty was not so much the fact that it did not involve political parties, as that it took place outside of Parliament.

The centrality of the relationship between leadership legitimation and expansion of the media was promptly noted by the main political commentators of the time, who agreed that radio and television were playing a key role in the construction of Gaullist leadership and its corollaries or by-products, in other words, in the personalisation of political life, which had for a long time been considered irreconcilable with republican institutions.³³

Though it attracted attention at the time, this is an issue that has remained marginal in works on the history of de Gaulle and Gaullism, so much so that there is not a single study that focuses attention on Gaullist rhetoric.³⁴ Similarly, in respect of communication studies, works on the historiography of the media—that since the 1980s have led to a renewal of political history in France³⁵—have focused mainly on radio and television in the Gaullist period,³⁶ with only scant references to the relationship between the development of new media and leadership's legitimation.³⁷

The historian who sets his mind to explore this issue finds a mine of information; audiovisual documentation can be easily accessed at the Inathèque de France—a unique institution in Europe. During the period between 1959 and 1969, key material became available at the archive of the presidency of the Republic and at the Michel Debré archive.³⁸ All these institutions have been central for this book.

This study focuses attention on television and its role in the legitimation of Gaullist leadership in the political and institutional context of the new French Republic. It begins by drawing connections between communicative practices and the technological conditions of political actors in the institutional context in which these develop. The Gaullist decade is characterised by an unprecedented transformation of the media, specifically by the development and increasing popularity of television communication—though this was slightly delayed in comparison to other Western countries. At the end of the 1950s less than 10% of French families had a television; there was only one black and white channel and programs were broadcasted between 12 a.m. and 11.30 p.m. The signal extended only to eight main urban areas (Paris, Strasburg, Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Bourges and Reims). In the space of a few years, television spread in an unprecedented way. According to data collected by the National Institute of Statistics and Economics (Insee), between 1958 and 1968 the number of television sets sold increased ninefold. Television

became in this period the most popular consumer durable; at the same time, by comparison, the number of radio sets sold increased only seven times, the number of washing machines four times and the number of fridges six times.³⁹ From a mere consumerist object, television became a powerful instrument for cultural indoctrination. It was quickly transformed into a primary political tool that played a decisive role in the cultural redefinition of the figure of the President that began with de Gaulle in 1958.

This is hardly surprising given that the General had always been very conscious of the power of the media. In the 1920s he turned to the press to express his unorthodox military theories, albeit with little success.⁴⁰ But on 18 June 1940, thanks to radio and the intercession of Winston Churchill, he managed to carve out for himself a place in history with his famous appeal to the Resistance that was broadcast from Studio 4B at the BBC. During the war period de Gaulle spoke on the radio 66 times, managing in this way to remain in constant touch with the French people until Liberation and winning him the droll sobriquet of “Général-micro” coined by German propaganda. When he returned to power, in the spring of 1958, he decided that the power of his voice should be supplemented with the power of his image and started to form an intense and fruitful relationship with television. The perception that the press was unanimously hostile to the President led the government to form a suffocating monopoly over television. The relationship of the General with the newspapers and television was summed up by one of de Gaulle’s favourite statements: “The Press is against me, the television is mine.” However, the strict control over television by the Gaullist regime was by no means new, but had a precedent in the Fourth Republic. What was new, however, was the way in which the media was used during the Gaullist period. Even in those times when television was not yet so popular, General de Gaulle’s vision of the important role it was to play in politics was not just far-sighted but also purposefully clear:

It is with the common people and not just with their leaders that I want to form a connection both with my eyes and with my ears. What I need is that French people see and hear me and that I see and hear them in turn. Through television and public meetings this will be possible. During the war I took great advantage of the radio. What I could say and the way I could spread information through this medium played undoubtedly an important role in reinforcing National unity against the enemy [...] And now the combination

of the microphone and the screen has become available to me right at the moment in which technology begins its progress. It is a unique medium that allows me to be present everywhere [...] Through images and sounds I will be able to be close to the whole Nation.⁴¹

All this marked a significant departure from common practices during the Third and Fourth Republic. As with any kind of political culture, French republicanism had its own forms of expression and channels of communication that were founded exclusively on the central role of the Parliament, from its low levels where electoral campaigns unravelled to its noblest one at Palais-Bourbon. The decade between the end of the fifties and the end of the sixties represents in this respect a crucial transitional moment; the dissemination of the medium of television caused a rupture not only of the hierarchical forms of republican political communication—parliamentary eloquence gave way to audiovisual eloquence—but also of the idea of political legitimacy. The traditional delegational legitimacy that regulated politics, giving authority to those who were elected and imposing obedience on the electorate, and whose centre was the representative Assembly, came in these years to coexist alongside another quite distinctive form of legitimacy whose origins resided neither in the electoral event, nor in the centrality of Parliament. This legitimacy is informal and yet powerful; it originates from the media, television in particular, and forces political leaders to continuously communicate, if they want to benefit from traditional legitimacy.⁴²

In addition to the representative legitimacy he gained through his election, the General also benefited from the strong historical legitimacy he had acquired as a result of his service to the nation during the Second World War. Nevertheless, he was acutely conscious of the important role played by new media. The convergence between the new system of government and television was absolute. The small screen immediately appealed to the General as the most suitable means through which the Head of State—a typical Weberian leader because of his charisma—could forge a consensus of the masses without the mediation of either political parties or the Parliament.⁴³ The speech given by the General when he announced his nomination to the presidential election in 1965 is, in this respect, emblematic. He commented on the decisive role that during his first term communication strategies played in providing legitimacy to his leadership, and in constructing the central role of the figure of the President in this new institutional setting:

It is first of all with his people that he represents and guides that a leader should be in direct contact. It is in this way that the Nation can personally know the man who leads it [...]. I believe that these contacts have never been so frequent as in the last seven years: thirty addresses to the whole Nation on the radio and television; twelve press conferences broadcasted without cuts; thirty-six speeches given during solemn public ceremonies; a series of visits in the ninety-four regions of the metropolitan area and overseas, not to mention two hundred official events in Paris, during which the Head of State has seen with his own eyes at least 1,500,000 French people, has consulted all the Members of Parliament, all constitutive bodies, all general advisors and all the Majors of France, has visited about 2,500 main constituencies, has responded to the invitation of almost four hundred town councils and of 100,000 notables, has given public speeches in more than six hundred places, has conferred with countless people and shaken countless hands. In conclusion, the President of the Republic, designated by the national majority, keeps together and protects the edifice of our institutions.⁴⁴

Though in 1958, when de Gaulle returned to power, television was not yet a popular media (television sets in the whole of France numbered less than one million) and the General's first appearances on it were so unsuccessful that he had to resort to the help of specialist advisers in communication, television quickly began to be associated with the political style of a leader eager to form a direct relationship with public opinion devoid of intermediaries. The appearance of the President of the Republic on television screens became a familiar event: without counting the news bulletins that often focused on him, the Head of State addressed the French people in televised speeches and press conferences a total of 76 times. In those crucial moments when the stability of the nation and the new institutional order was at risk, the Head of State addressed the French people through television so often that his appearances—particularly frequent in the most delicate and decisive period of the Algerian crisis—can be seen as a precise barometer of the state of politics in France.

Of de Gaulle's communicative practices there are alternate interpretations: some see them as evidence of democracy, others as an example of his Bonapartist aspirations. Whatever the interpretation, they are of fundamental importance not only in understanding Gaullist institutions and their relations with intermediate political bodies, but in analysing the evolution of the nature of political legitimacy brought about by the irruption of mass media. In this light, the presidency of de Gaulle from 1959 to 1969 can be studied as the story of the first "televised President" in contemporary Europe.

NOTES

1. This event was covered in the local news and reported in F. Goguel, "Quelques remarques sur le problème des institutions politiques de la France", in *Revue française de science politique*, 1, 1964, p. 7.
2. It has been reported that Mrs. Dariot felt differently; after the guest settled down, she said: "I am sure he is someone important because his feet are clean!" *Le Président de la République victime d'un accident*, *Le Figaro*, 25 May 1920, p. 1.
3. The satirical weekly *Le Canard enchaîné* had a vignette on its cover that was clearly inspired by this event. It showed a husband coming back home from work who surprises his wife and her lover half dressed; the lover clumsily tries to hide under the bed. The husband angrily shouts: "Who is he?" His wife evidently making up an excuse to hide her betrayal replies: "I have no idea, my love, maybe he is the President of the Republic." *Le Canard enchaîné*, 2 June 1920, p. 1.
4. This study provided the inspiration for a conference that was attended by the most renowned political scholars of the time. It was organised in Dijon by the Association française de science politique. The proceedings are published in L. Hamon et al. (eds), *La personnalisation du pouvoir. Entretiens de Dijon du 10 et 11 mars 1962*, Paris, Puf, 1964.
5. A. Mabileau, "La personnalisation du pouvoir dans les gouvernements démocratiques", in *Revue française de science politique*, 2, 1960, pp. 39–65.
6. C. Allen, *Eisenhower and the Mass media: Peace, Prosperity & Prime Time TV*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1993.
7. T.H. White, *The making of the President 1960*, New York, Atheneum, 1961. See also W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President Kennedy, Nixon and the 1960 Election*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2009.
8. D.E. Butler, R. Rose, *The British General Election of 1959*, London, Macmillan, 1999; M. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain since 1945*, London, Macmillan, 1997; D. Wring, "Political marketing and Party Development in Britain. A 'Secret' History", in *European Journal of Marketing*, 10/11, 1996, pp. 92–103.
9. See P. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900–1990*, London, Allen Lane, 1996.
10. For a reconstruction of the first instances of political personalisation during the Fourth Republic see R. Brizzi, "Alle origini della 'telecrasia'. L'evoluzione della comunicazione politica in Francia durante la Quarta Repubblica", in *Comunicazione Politica*, 1–2008, pp. 11–28.
11. A. Mabileau, *La personnalisation du pouvoir*, op. cit., pp. 47–48.
12. W. Mommsen, *Max Weber e la politica tedesca*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993 [J.C. B. Mohr, 1974]. Wolfgang Mommsen compared de Gaulle with

Weber's ideal type of charismatic leadership in the preface to the English edition of his work (Chicago, 1984) and in the conclusion of the French edition (Paris, 1985).

13. In the conclusion of the French edition of his study on Max Weber and German politics, Mommsen observed that "de Gaulle has been a Statesman that should be included in the category of the Caesar-like leaders". W. Mommsen, *Max Weber et la politique allemande 1890–1920*, Paris, PUF, 1985, p. 517. His opinion is shared by René Rémond, who in his study of the French Right argued the relation between Gaullism and the Bonapartist tradition. R. Rémond, *Les Droites en France*, Paris, Aubier, 1982. In European political theories, Napoleon III and Napoleon I are generally seen as embodiments of Caesar. The Roman dictator is often taken as exemplary of the destruction of the *res publica* and it is significant that in 1958 and, above all, in 1962, it was not rare to liken the system founded by de Gaulle to an authoritarian government that was going to herald a new ending (the comparison was with the 18 Brumaire 1799 and 2 December 1851) of the republican regime. See on this F. Mitterrand, *Le Coup d'état permanent*, Paris, Plon, 1964 and J. Duclos, *De Napoléon III à de Gaulle*, Paris, Editions sociales, 1964. At the time, this theory had enormous influence in Europe. In the Italian context, significant in this respect is the Mercadante's study where Gaullism is defined as a "plebiscitary democracy [...] the most evolved and softest that Europe has ever had". F. Mercadante, *La democrazia plebiscitaria*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1974, p. 74. However, events were to prove otherwise; these have shown that the system founded by de Gaulle was accepted by his successors, the opposition and even some of the main critics of the General (such as François Mitterrand). The return to power of de Gaulle seems rather to be the result of a compromise between the army and political power made possible by a national emergency, after four years of the Algerian War. In conclusion, we think that the archetype of Moses—the great helmsman who manages to keep his people together and lead them to salvation, another classic archetype of political leadership—seems to be much more apt to describe Gaullism. For interpretation of de Gaulle as a "political prophet" that makes explicit reference to Moses see P. Pombeni, *La ragione e la passione. Le forme della politica nell'Europa contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010, pp. 623–697; R. Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1986. This theory has been embraced by both contemporary historiography (M. Agulhon, *De Gaulle, Histoire, symbole, mythe*, Paris, Plon, 2000; G. Quagliariello, *De Gaulle e il gollismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003) and political science (B. Gäiti, *De Gaulle prophète de la Cinquième République (1946–1962)*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1998; J. Gaffney, *Political Leadership in France: From Charles de Gaulle to Nicolas Sarkozy*,

- Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). On the myth of de Gaulle in contemporary France, see also S. Hazareesingh, *In the shadow of the General. Modern France and the myth of De Gaulle*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012; P. Gueniffey, *Napoléon et de Gaulle: deux héros français*, Paris, Perrin, 2017.
14. For a more detailed study of the 1877–79 constitutional crisis, see O. Rudelle, *La République absolue. Aux origines de l'instabilité constitutionnelle de la France républicaine*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982. On the later association between parliamentarism and the republican model, see S. Berstein—O. Rudelle (ed.), *Le modèle républicain*, Paris, Puf, 1992; R. Rémond, *La République souveraine. La vie politique en France 1878–1939*, Paris, Fayard, 2002.
 15. For a study on the figure of the “political saviour” in contemporary French history, see D. Fischer, *L'homme providentiel de Thiers à de Gaulle: un mythe politique en République*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2009.
 16. See R. Brizzi, “Delegittimazioni del generale de Gaulle nella Francia della V Repubblica”, in F. Cammarano, S. Cavazza (eds), *Il nemico in politica. La delegittimazione dell'avversario nell'Europa contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010, pp. 171–200.
 17. R. Aron, “Démission des français ou rénovation de la France?”, in *Preuves*, 96, February 1959, p. 5.
 18. C. de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, *Avec le renouveau. Mai 1958–Juillet 1962*, Paris, Plon, 1970, p. 399.
 19. On the origin of Gaullist charisma, see M.E. Haskew, *De Gaulle: lessons in leadership from the defiant General*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
 20. A. Passeron, *De Gaulle parle*, Paris, Fayard, 1969, p. 1.
 21. On the connections between Gladstone and the ideal type of charismatic leadership, see P. Clarke, *A question of leadership: Gladstone to Thatcher*, London, Penguin Books, 1992.
 22. W. Bagehot, *The New Ministry*, in Id., *Collected Works*, VII, *The Political Essays*, London, The Economist, 1974, p. 162. Clearly, this new necessity for those in power to communicate with citizens was not welcomed by all. See in this respect the complaint of the British conservative leader Lord Salisbury to Queen Victoria: “This duty of making political speeches [...] is an aggravation of the labours of your Majesty’s servants which we owe entirely to Mr. Gladstone.” M. Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867–1939*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1982, p. 3.
 23. For more detail about Schmitt’s political thought in the twentieth century, see J.W. Müller, *A dangerous mind: Carl Schmitt in post-war European thought*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003.
 24. On the role of the idea of discussion and “sovereignty of reason” in Guizot for Schmitt and for more on connections between debate and representation see P. Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985.

25. B. Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1995, p. 236.
26. *Ibidem*, pp. 229–242.
27. The first to realise this in the 1960s were political experts who progressively distanced themselves from deterministic theories. Most studies of political elections concluded that electoral behaviour could not be explained solely by voters' social, economic and cultural profile. The personality of the candidates and their political programme were also crucial. See on this V.O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, New York, Knopf, 1961; Id., *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting, 1936–1960*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1966; G. M. Pomper, *Voters' Choice. Varieties of American Electoral Behaviour*, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1975.
28. This issue was promptly acknowledged by commentators and intellectuals during the first years of the Fifth Republic. Georges Vedel commented “on the significant renewal of the French political institutions” that occurred from 1958, emphasising that television was indispensable for de Gaulle's construction of the personalisation of political power. The small screen, in particular, was held responsible for the “end of ‘mediated’ democracy, that is to say a system in which the electorate chooses somebody who has in his turn to choose. When the only means of transport were horse coaches, citizens designated great electors who elected Members of Parliament. Then the locomotive and the newspaper made possible the direct elections of MPs, who chose the government. With the advent of the automobile, radio and television citizens were able to choose the Head of Executive. Things went as simply as this.” G. Vedel, *La leçon de 1962*, in *L'Express*, 27 December 1962, p. 12.
29. Manin, *Principi del governo rappresentativo*, cit., p. 257.
30. R. Neustadt, *Presidential Power. The politics of leadership*, New York, J. Wiley and Sons, 1961. See in particular Chap. 3 entitled *The Power to Persuade* (pp. 33–57). In the preface Neustadt points out that his study focuses on “personal power and its exercise: how this is obtained, how it is maintained, and how it is used [...] This study is not about the organization of the presidency, the powers given to the President under the Constitution, or historical customs, the procedures adopted by the supreme magistratures.” Before the publication of this study, the presidency was studied essentially from the point of view of the role and the powers of the President. The scholars that followed this approach were Clinton Rossiter and Edward S. Corwin. Corwin (*The President: Office and Power, 1787–1957. History and Analysis of Practice and Opinion*, New York, New York University Press, 1957) studied the figure of the President in relation to his constitutional powers and those given to him by the Statute. Rossiter (*The American presidency*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1956)

- focused on the prerogatives of the President including that of Commander in Chief, party leader and so on. According to both these studies presidential leadership could be studied through the President's formal powers, rather than the concrete use of these powers.
31. For a study of this issue, see J.K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical presidency*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987.
 32. C.A. Smith, K.B. Smith, *The White House Speaks: Presidential Leadership as Persuasion*, Westport, Praeger, 1994.
 33. It suffices here to quote a few examples: François Goguel noted that “communication” constituted the determining factor used by de Gaulle “to convince masses to support his politics”. F. Goguel, *Quelques remarques sur le problème des institutions politiques de la France*, in *Revue française de science politique*, 1, 1964, p. 18; the political expert Albert Mabileau insisted on the fact that the Gaullist system created an “opinion government” founded on that “direct contact between the leader and public opinion necessary to exercise leadership”. A. Mabileau, *La personnalisation du pouvoir*, cit., pp. 61–62; law expert Léo Hamon noted that “the tendency toward the embodiment of power”, that is to say, the act of “giving the leader a physical presence recognizable to all”, was an effect of “radio and television: they made possible for a single man to reach all his people”. L. Hamon, *Rapport d'ensemble*, in L. Hamon et al. (eds), *La personnalisation du pouvoir*, cit., pp. 460–461; Maurice Duverger's talk during the aforementioned conference noted that “the essential factor for the affirmation of leadership” was the development of “means of mass communication—radio and television [...] make this State and his representative closer and closer [...]. Personalization of power needs a degree of contact with the personalized leader.” M. Duverger, *Institutions politiques et personnalisation du pouvoir*, in L. Hamon et al. (eds), *La personnalisation du pouvoir*, cit., p. 426.
 34. The only study of lexical statistics available in this issue is J-M. Cotteret, R. Moreau, *Le vocabulaire du général de Gaulle*, Paris, A. Colin, 1969. On this see also the analysis of a selection of seven speeches given during the Second World War in T. Herman, *Au fil des discours. La rhétorique de Charles de Gaulle (1940–1945)*, Limoges, Lambert-Lucas, 2008. Some interesting arguments can be found in the more recent D. Mayaffre, *Paroles de président. Jacques Chirac (1995–2003) et le discours présidentiel sous la V République*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2004.
 35. It is significant that in the “manifesto” for a new French political historiography proposed by l'Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris under the direction of René Rémond, one of its 11 chapters was dedicated to the history of media. See J-N. Jeanneney, *Les médias*, in R. Rémond (ed), *Pour une histoire politique*, Paris, Seuil, 1988, pp. 185–197.

36. On this, see the pioneering study by J. Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, Paris, Ina-Anthropos, 1990. For a study that focuses on government control in the Gaullist era, see A. Vassallo, *La télévision sous de Gaulle. Le contrôle gouvernemental de l'information (1958–1969)*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2005.
37. On this, see the special issued entitled *De Gaulle et l'usage des médias*, in *Espoir. Revue de l'Institut Charles de Gaulle*, 66, 1989 and the proceedings of the conference *De Gaulle et les médias* organised in 1992 by the Institut Charles de Gaulle in Aa. Vv., *De Gaulle et les médias*, Paris, Plon-Fondation Charles de Gaulle, 1994. Historiographical studies have generally neglected this issue; however, a very interesting contribution to this issue comes from sociologist of communication J.K. Chalaby in his study *The de Gaulle presidency and the Media. Statism and Public Communications*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002.
38. A conference was organised at the Center for European History of the Twenty Century (Chevs) by the Fondation nationale des sciences politiques to mark the opening to the public of the Michel Debré Archives. Its proceedings are published in S. Berstein, P. Milza, J-F. Sirinelli (eds), *Michel Debré Premier ministre 1959–1962*, Paris, PUF, 2005.
39. I. Gaillard, *De l'étrange lucarne à la télévision. Histoire d'une banalisation (1949–1984)*, in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire*, 91, 2006, p. 16.
40. As from 1920s de Gaulle published several articles on specialised periodicals such as *Revue militaire* and *Revue de l'Infanterie*. His ideas were collected in a series of studies that emphasised the need for the mechanisation of the French army that, he thought, was not prepared to face a war of movement. On this see, *La Discorde chez l'ennemi*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1924; *Le Fil de l'épée*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, 1932; *Vers l'armée de métier*, Paris, Berger. Levrault, 1934; *La France et son armée*, Paris, Plon, 1938.
41. C. de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, I, Le Renouveau 1958–1962, Paris, Plon, 1970, p. 301.
42. J-M. Cotteret, *Gouverner c'est paraître*, Paris, Puf, 2002, pp. 23–24. For a study focused on the French case in a nineteenth-century historical perspective see C. Ollivier-Yaniv, *L'Etat communiquant*, Paris, Puf, 2000.
43. J. Julliard, *De Gaulle et le peuple*, in *La Revue Tocqueville*, XIII, 1, 1992, pp. 43–52.
44. C. De Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, IV, *Pour l'effort. Août 1962–Décembre 1965*, Paris, Plon, 1970, pp. 390–391.

The Mass Media in France Between 1944 and 1958

1 THE PRESS AND THE RADIO IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING THE LIBERATION

On 19 August 1944, Paris rose against the Nazi oppressor. In the evening an operation led by some Resistance groups took possession of hundreds of recordings kept at Radio-Paris. The following day Jean Guignebert, temporary Minister of Information, began broadcasting from the studios of Radio-Paris, secretly occupied by his men a few days before, in order to boost the morale of those who, at that very moment, were fighting the Wehrmacht soldiers in the streets of Paris. At 10.31 p.m. on 20 August 1944, after a laconic “Here is the national French Radio”, the Marseillaise played for the first time in several years.¹ The radio, after a long period of subordination to Nazi occupation, began the insurrection. From late afternoon until the following morning, the call to arms from the headquarters of the Forces Françaises de l’Intérieur was broadcast every quarter of an hour, interspersed with military and symphonic music by banned composers such as Darius Milhaud, François Lang and Igor Stravinsky.² For the next three days, amid furious battles in the streets, the free radio in rue de L’Université kept French people informed of events; their broadcasts were rewired by the BBC and the American radio in Europe, which spread news of the events in Paris all over the world.

On 25 August the French capital was liberated and the days of the inevitable reckoning came closer and closer. After walking down the Champs-Élysées amidst cheering crowds, General de Gaulle, before leaving for

London, returned to the offices of the Ministry of War he had vacated in 1940. This was a symbolic act designed to show he stood for the continuity of the French nation. The same afternoon, he went to the Hôtel de Ville, historically the place where revolutionary proclamations and announcements of changes of regimes had taken place. At the suggestion of Georges Bidault, the President of the National Resistance Council, de Gaulle refused to repeat the rite of proclamation of the new Republic. He thought it was unnecessary to announce that the Vichy Republic was over because it had never really existed in the first place. According to him, a regime that had not been legitimised could not interrupt the republican legality, a legitimacy that de Gaulle himself had symbolically embodied ever since his 18 June announcement. This did not mean that he intended to forget about the Vichy crimes and its collaborators; on meeting the neo-prefect of the Seine Department in front of the City Council, he told him: "How are we getting on with the purge? ... it is necessary ... that this gets solved in a few weeks."³

Political consensus deemed it was necessary to punish all those who had collaborated with the system of propaganda in the Vichy years.⁴ It was also understood that a break with the past necessarily meant that the whole political system had to be found again. In actuality, this would prove a much more complicated affair than anticipated. In the subsequent 15 years, the mass media underwent radical changes: the major national daily papers and Parisian press would face a series of crises arising from fallout following the end of the Nazi occupation and new competition from the proliferation of provincial papers and weekly publications; radio became more and more important and television took its first steps towards its destiny to become the most important media. In addition to the ascendance of some media and the decline of others, it is important to emphasise that, by the end of the fifties, very little remained of those ideals that had fuelled the movement that led to the Liberation: the importance of the State as guarantor of pluralism, the exclusion of large business interests and a strong intellectual *engagement* were all a far cry from the past. The financial difficulties in the years of reconstruction forced the dependence on private capital; at the same time, the strong tradition of control of the mass media by the government, that in France dated back to the times of Chappe's optical telegraph,⁵ returned with renewed vigour, becoming even stronger due to the state of emergency accompanying the wars that would gradually lead to decolonisation.⁶

The political priority of the Resistance was the purge of those institutions that had collaborated with the Nazi oppressors and the Vichy regime in providing them with information. Though the radio was not free from culpability,⁷ it was the press that appeared to have been most guilty of treason. In fact, its degeneration, that is to say, its deep ethical decline and unacceptable moral compromises (the inevitable consequences of its promiscuous relationship with economic powers), had begun much earlier. On 21 August 1944, the opening editorial of the first number of *Combat* went straight to the heart of this matter: “It is not enough to restore that apparent freedom France was content with in 1939. We would have done a terrible job if the future French Republic was to find itself dependent on the same capital it was in the Third Republic.”⁸ The philosopher Albert Camus remarked, “a country is worth as much as its press”; Camus later argued that the signs of the disaster that befell France in 1940 were already looming in the crisis of moral values and compromised character of the press that preceded it.⁹

Consequently, the punishment of those “personalities” that had collaborated was not enough to restore the freedom of the press.¹⁰ To break completely with everything connected with the old system and build a new and healthy one it was necessary to purge all past practices that had corrupted the press.¹¹ An ordinance was passed on 30 September 1944 that defined the criteria for the suppression of those newspapers that had been compromised: “The publication of the following is, and will remain, forbidden: 1. All those newspapers that were published for the first time after June 25th 1940; 2. All the daily papers and periodicals that already existed before June 25th 1940 and continued to be published for more than fifteen days after the armistice.”¹² The state of national press was completely revolutionised, and almost all existing publications were suppressed. The harshness and extent of these measures made France a unique case in Western Europe.

Despite this purging of the press, in 1945, France seemed swept by a “craving for information”: in Paris newspapers that were suspended at the time of the armistice such as *L’Humanité*, *Le Populaire* and *L’Aube* started to circulate once again and new ones appeared, among these *Le Monde*, *Combat*, *France-Soir*, *Le Parisien-Libéré*. On 6 September 1944, the satirical weekly newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* also resumed publication. Its slogan “a devastating laugh to ridicule evil”, invented by the newspaper’s founder Maurice Maréchal, provided an apt expression to represent the historical era that France was leaving behind.¹³ Sales of

newspapers quickly reached and then surpassed levels of the period before the war. More significant, however, was that the press went through a complete restructuring: the regional press (i.e. *Ouest-France*, *La Voix du Nord*, *Le Provençal*, *L'Est Républicain*, etc.) led this revival and became more popular than the national Parisian press (Tables 1.1 and 1.2).

During 1945, sales of the 26 Parisian newspapers remained at the same level as 1938, with a total of 532,000 copies sold every day, against the 7,532,000 of the 153 local newspapers that registered a 65% growth since the years before the war.

Table 1.1 General information and political newspapers (numbers of copies distributed in 1000s)

<i>Year</i>	<i>National newspapers</i>		<i>Local papers</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Number of newspapers</i>	<i>Total print run</i>	<i>Number of titles</i>	<i>Total print run</i>	<i>Total print run</i>
1945	26	4606	153	7532	12,138
1946	28	5959	175	9165	15,124
1947	19	4702	161	8165	12,867
1948	18	4450	142	7859	12,309
1949	16	3792	139	7417	11,209
1950	16	3678	126	7256	10,934
1951	15	3607	122	6634	10,241
1952	14	3412	117	6188	9600
1953	12	3514	116	6458	9972
1954	12	3618	116	6559	10,177
1955	13	3779	116	6823	10,602
1956	14	4441	111	6958	11,399
1957	13	4226	110	7254	11,480
1958	13	4373	110	7294	11,667
1959	13	3980	103	6930	10,910
1960	13	4185	98	7170	11,355
1961	13	4239	96	7087	11,326
1962	13	4207	96	7198	11,405
1963	14	4121	94	7434	11,555
1964	14	4107	93	7617	11,724
1965	13	4211	92	7857	12,068
1966	14	4391	91	7831	12,222
1967	12	4624	86	8005	12,629
1968	13	5034	85	8039	13,073
1969	13	4596	81	7572	12,168

Source: J-M.Charon, *La Presse en France de 1945 à nos jours*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, p. 94

Table 1.2 Main newspapers and print run figures (in 1000s, December 1944)

<i>Paris</i>		<i>Provinces</i>	
<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Total print run</i>	<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Total print run</i>
<i>L'Humanité</i>	326	<i>Ouest-France</i>	300
<i>Ce Soir</i>	288	<i>La Voix du Nord</i>	300
<i>France-Soir</i>	264	<i>Les Allobroges</i>	227
<i>Le Populaire</i>	235	<i>Nord-Matin</i>	185
<i>Le Parisien libéré</i>	222	<i>Sud-Ouest</i>	180
<i>Libération</i>	196	<i>La Nouvelle République</i>	180
<i>Combat</i>	185	<i>La Marseillaise</i>	180
<i>Franc-Tireur</i>	182	<i>Le Provençal</i>	180
<i>Front national</i>	172	<i>L'Est républicain</i>	150
<i>Résistance</i>	160	<i>Le Progrès de Lyon</i>	136
<i>Le Monde</i>	150	<i>L'Union</i>	120
<i>L'Aube</i>	148	<i>Les Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace</i>	110

Source: D'Almeida and Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France*, op. cit., p. 147

The overall topography of the press was completely transformed and, for the first time, the local press occupied—at least as far as distribution was concerned—a dominant position, a trend confirmed over the subsequent duration. Another distinctive feature that characterised the press sector in the immediate aftermath of the war was the interference of public bodies; this went well beyond mere mediation.

An early and significant example in this respect is the newspaper *Le Monde*, founded in November 1944 thanks to General de Gaulle. The Head of the provisional government wanted a newspaper that could be a standard bearer, similar to the role *Le Temps* had occupied at the beginning of the war (before it was curtailed due to collaborationism). Its role was to unofficially report the positions of Quai d'Orsay at what was to be a crucial moment for the internal and foreign politics that would shape the subsequent destiny of France. Politically and financially the birth of *Le Monde* was managed by de Gaulle's Cabinet and the Ministry of Information. The government also played a key role in deciding who worked for the paper as well and its structure of management. Apart from the director Hubert Beuve-Méry—a renowned independent expert who was a correspondent for *Le Temps* in Czechoslovakia before the Munich

Agreement—other key positions in the directorship and in the newsroom included Christian Funck-Brentano, Maurice Ferro, Edouard Sablier and Rémy Roure, men de Gaulle knew and trusted from the Resistance years.¹⁴

Government interference was not limited to this paper. Until 15 June 1945, the government imposed control through censorship measures that were justified on the grounds of the continuation of hostilities. Moreover, all newspapers were subjected to strict rules that imposed the same price, the same amount of paper, the same format and the same number of editions. Interference was also evident in the press' associated infrastructure: transport services, information and advertisement agencies and all those companies that provided paper. When not already publicly owned, these were under the firm hand of the government. The creation of *l'Agence France Presse*, a State company managed by a General Director under the authority of the Ministry of Information, meant that all sources of information were under the control of the State.

During the years of the Liberation that followed the end of the Vichy regime, the task of reconstructing the French media was devolved to the Republic. The press ceased to be dependent on the market, and instead became dependent on the State, whose intervention through direct or indirect public funding became necessary to alleviate its precarious financial situation.

2 THE OSTRACISATION OF THE GENERAL FROM RADIO

The radiophonic system was reorganised according to hard line principles dictated by the Republic during the Liberation years, principles more rigorous than even those applied to the press. These included the reinstatement of the State monopoly as the only means possible to guarantee the freedom and independence of the media, an unwavering belief in a national centralised system of information and dissemination and the prevention of the introduction of private capital investment in any possible form. Following the ordinance of 26 March 1945 all authorisations given before the war to private radio enterprises were cancelled and a State monopoly on radio information was created with the aim of offering a public service that was supposedly objective, impartial and truly national. That at this particular historical moment the radio news was directly overseen by the Ministry of Information was hardly surprising, as only the government could have provided the conditions for truly democratic information. Many argued, however, that this should have been the first

stage towards the creation of a statute that made French Radio Diffusion (RDF) independent from the State as far as financial matters and editorial guidelines were concerned. Soon, however, it became clear that any hopes for such a statute had died. De Gaulle was to leave the political arena in January 1946 momentarily, at a time when political negotiations for a broad-based coalition government failed and a period of international stand-offs ensued. In this increasingly beleaguered situation the government showed its intention to exert institutional control over the information sector. As radio broadcasting was a monopoly lacking a statute, it was easy for political parties to exert their will and establish complete control on information.

In the spring of 1947 an event involving the Prime Minister, Paul Ramadier, and the General himself proved to be of key significance for the future action the government was to take. Soon after abandoning the leadership of the government on 20 January 1946, de Gaulle entered again into the cauldron of political debate in the summer of the same year, first with his Bayeux speech (16 June 1946) followed by another in Épinal (29 September 1946), in which he openly rejected the possibility of the forming of a parliamentary Republic, favouring instead a system centred around a strong executive power and Head of State. The negative response of the political parties and the press was immediate. Paul Ramadier,¹⁵ who between 1944 and 1945 had been Minister for Provisions in de Gaulle's provisional government (earning for himself the nicknames "Ramadan" and "Ramadiète"), reacted with an article published in *L'Aveyron libre*—his department's newspaper—in which he evoked the spectre of demagoguery and suggested that the General had become victim of a Bonapartist degeneration.¹⁶ His preoccupation with the government escalated after the Bruneval speech on 30 March 1947, when it transpired that de Gaulle didn't just intend to attack the government from outside, but also to enter the political arena as leader of a new political party: the Rally of the French People (RPF).

In a calculated attempt to head off the General's plans, Ramadier decided to meet him secretly in his country house in Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises. There he warned him that his return to active politics would cost him the cancellation of all the protocols that accompanied his speeches and result in the curtailment of their broadcasting on all national radio channels. Faced with the firm rebuttal of the General, on 3 April Ramadier notified the general director of the radio, Wladimir Porché, to take an exceptional and temporary measure: all live and recorded speeches or parts of speeches

made during political or parapolitical events were to be banned for a whole week, regardless of the author of the speeches; the only exceptions were to be those of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister.

Officially this ban was not meant for one person only, but for all political leaders. However, the singular coincidence between the date of ban and the launch of the RPF—that occurred precisely on 7 April in Strasbourg—aroused suspicions. The ban, decided by the Prime Minister and judged as ‘wise’ by the Head of State,¹⁷ was scrupulously observed by all the major parties and nobody chose to condemn it. That de Gaulle was becoming an ever more concrete threat for the “Third Force” parties (socialists, Union démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance (UDSR), radicals, Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP) and moderates) was reconfirmed by the administrative elections of October 1947 when, against all expectations, the RPF achieved 35% of the national vote and won a majority in 14 of the 25 main French cities: Paris, Marseille, Bordeaux, Lille, Algiers, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Nancy, Le Mans, Grenoble, Saint-Étienne, Reims, Angers and Caen. While the RPF’s electoral success did not mean it could immediately govern the country, these results were extremely worrying for the government majority. Combined with the positive results of the Parti communiste français (PCF), this election destabilised the status quo. The executive power had to face a double opposition that was particularly threatening because “it did not conform to democratic rules”. The only way out, as Vincent Auriol, Head of State and mediator, confided to Ramadier, was to act defensively and concentrate energies on two sectors: “There are some Ministries we cannot do without: the Ministry for Supply and the Ministry of Information.”¹⁸

The renewed government intervention led to a suffocating control on radio information and a prolongation ad infinitum (though this was not formalised) of Ramadier’s diktat. With the sole exception of a few minutes during the 1951 electoral campaign, no speech by General de Gaulle was to be heard on the radio until he returned to power in 1958. The period between 1947 and 1958 saw the succession of 21 governments headed by 13 leaders representative of the most diverse political groups¹⁹; none of these ever called into question Ramadier’s treatment of de Gaulle.

The “radio silence” imposed on the General during the Fourth Republic was particularly problematic because it took away from him an instrument that, since his first radio broadcast on 18 June 1940, had crucially contributed to the construction of his charisma. However, the General was not the only victim. The impossibility for political figures to address the public in a direct and personal way inevitably damaged other party leaders.

Ultimately, Ramadier's actions were designed to serve the interest of the "Third Force" parties, disempowering those "hard-hitting" opposition parties that relied for their appeal on the charisma of their respective leaders—de Gaulle and Thorez—precisely at a moment in which the Parliament was marked by instability, collegial exercise of power and the inability to obtain the consensus of public opinion.²⁰ Devoid of a statute and subjected to executive power, French radio became a monopoly not of the State but of the government. As the moderate Paul Raynaud remarked, it acquired the reputation for being "the most disciplined radio in Europe".²¹

3 THE PROBLEMS OF THE PRESS AND THE BEGINNING OF ADVERTISING (1947–54)

During the Liberation years the press was marked by an increased localism, though from a qualitative point of view the main Parisian newspapers were still the most important ones. Preoccupied mainly by local news, the regional newspapers did not manage to take advantage of the importance they had acquired. An acute observer noted that "the provincial newspapers ignore their new power [...]. *Ouest-France* is to *Le Figaro* as word of mouth is to the national radio."²²

The prestige that some national newspapers like *Le Figaro* managed to retain and others like *Le Monde* achieved was only part of the deeper changes that became evident in the 1940s. The overall picture was one of crisis for the daily papers: their circulation dropped from a record high of 15,124,000 copies in 1946 to 9,600,000 in 1952; in the same period the number of newspapers diminished from 203 to 131. Parisian newspapers, in particular, decreased by 50% and out of a total of 28 only 14 remained. Though the decline of Parisian newspapers was compensated for by the growth of the provincial press, the situation remained worrying. The fall in the number of newspapers had mainly financial causes. In autumn 1949, a survey showed that 65.18% of those who stopped reading newspapers did so because they were too expensive²³; the price of newspapers had risen from 4 francs in 1947 to 15 by 1951 (Table 1.3).

Higher and higher production costs, rising inflation and stricter national rules on funding made things impossible for several newspapers. An editorial in *Le Monde*—significantly entitled *The Price of Freedom*—described in detail the growing expenses connected with the production of newspapers and noted that "the freedom of the press might well be guaranteed by law, but in actual fact it is strongly limited by economic

Table 1.3 Number of daily newspapers and print run figures (in 1000s) (1946–58)

Year	Paris		Provinces		Total	
	Number of newspapers	Total print run	Number of newspapers	Total print run	Number of newspapers	Total print run
1946	28	5959	175	9165	203	15,124
1948	18	4450	142	7859	160	12,309
1950	16	3678	126	7256	142	10,934
1952	14	3412	117	6188	131	9600
1958	13	4373	110	7294	123	11,667

Source: D'Almeida and Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France*, op. cit., p. 157

pressures and oppression caused by inflation”.²⁴ The main losers in this crisis were the large popular newspapers, whose situation had progressively deteriorated since the end of the First World War, when France still had four “millionaire” newspapers led by the famous *Le Petit Parisien*.²⁵

Stricter controls over private funding that dated to the 1944 laws discouraged wide distribution, but the real problem was that the whole system was not oriented towards generating the material wealth necessary to sustain newspapers. Particularly exemplary in this respect was the introduction of advertising.²⁶ This is a phenomenon that happened relatively late in France and was frowned upon. At the beginning of the 1950s, 70% of American newspapers’ budgets came from advertising in comparison to just 20% for French papers; this also shows that in the 1950s revenues from advertising were considerably lower than before the war.²⁷

A second category of newspapers, “opinion papers” (which in France enjoyed a stable success that continued throughout the Third Republic), fell into an irreversible crisis during the 1950s. From the revolution onwards the press had managed to cover the entire range of political and cultural positions: all parties or political trends, any intellectual movements and even several statesmen, Thiers and Clemenceau, to name but two, could rely on their personal newspaper. Despite being generally short-lived and having a limited circulation, these newspapers had represented one the most unique and vital aspects of the French press.

The 1944 laws and the introduction of public funding that followed the aftermath of Liberation ostensibly seemed to mark the most prosperous

period for the opinion press, particularly welcomed in those years by the new political class because traditionally it was estranged from the resources of large financial capital.²⁸

Most of the 28 national papers that were in circulation at the beginning of the Fourth Republic were the mouthpiece of the opinions of national political parties and political trends. But the crisis that from 1947 started to engulf the whole press sector proved particularly onerous for opinion papers, and, in particular, for the communist ones. In 1947 *L'Humanité* sold almost three million copies every day, but five years later this figure had shrunk to 900,000.²⁹

The decline of the opinion press had two consequences: firstly, those papers that did not have adequate finances to ride the turbulent waves of political and economic crisis disappeared (this was the case of the communist *Ce Soir*, the social–communist *Libération*, the catholic *L'Aube*, the conservative *L'Époque* and all those political and literary weekly papers that had remained very healthy up until 1939, such as *Candide*, *Gringoire*, *Marianne* and *Vendredi*). The second consequence was the depoliticisation of the entire French press, including those regional newspapers that managed to survive the crisis. At the time of Liberation all Parisian newspapers used to have a front page article followed by an editorial that day after day gave voice to the opinions of the editor-in-chief of the paper or the main commentators in the newsroom. These editorials rapidly disappeared from papers such as *France-Soir*, *Le Parisien libéré* and *Ouest-France*. Soon all the most popular newspapers started to conform to a type of “neutral information” that seemed necessary to attract a broad public and maintain high sales.

A further significant consequence of the crisis of the press was the progressive inclusion of private business. Faced with the disappearance of several papers, repeated strikes of press workers and the bankruptcy of the *Messageries françaises*, the State decided to face reality and allowed private capital to enter the sector. A sudden deregulation took hold of a sector that up to that moment had been under the watchful control of the State. Manufacturing giants decided to invest in the newspapers and did so aggressively: within a few months, between 1950 and 1951, at the end of long negotiations that had started in 1947,³⁰ Hachette bought a 50% stake of the *Messageries française*, took control of *France-Soir*, the weekly magazine *Elle* and also bought shares in *Paris-Presse*. The advertising group Amaury bought *Le Parisien libéré*; Jean Prouvost's textile group took over *Le Figaro* and the two weekly papers *Paris-Match* and *Marie-Claire*;

Marcel Boussac, another textile giant, bought 74% of the capital of *L'Aurore*.³¹ In August 1951, an editorial in *Témoignage chrétien* entitled *The Press Is Dying* painted a sorry picture:

L'Aube will not appear for the whole month of August. In September it will be sent only to subscribers, because newsagents at the moment are too expensive. *Le Populaire* is reducing its format and the number of pages. Someone is predicting that it will soon disappear [...] In this way little by little, the opinion press is perishing [...]; either one decides to give more space to “dogs that have been run over and other similar items” as *Franc-Tireur*, or one dies, as it has happened to *L'Époque*. [...] The fact is that it [the press] relies more and more on “Capital”. The transportation and distribution of the papers have become once again—and more so than during the war—the preserve of “Capital”. The conditions imposed on their customers kill the weakest ones ... and leave them only two choices: prostitute themselves, or die. The leading newspapers sell themselves to “businessmen”, owners of textile industries and racehorses, or to press dealers.³²

The crisis that hit the most important opinion papers, a generalised process of depoliticisation, the appearance of industrial groups and advertisement, was proof that in the space of a few years, the ambitious project of the Resistance to create a national press free from the influence of financial interests had failed miserably.

4 PERIODICAL NEWSPAPERS AND THE ALGERIAN WAR

In the middle of the 1950s, the situation of the press seemed to stabilise. The crisis that had led to the disappearance of half the newspapers published at the time of the Liberation was coming to an end and “this new phase” was “inextricably connected with a growing influx of advertisement and the intervention of big financial groups”³³ that started once again to invest in the press sector. Four big newspapers stood out as far as sales were concerned “thanks to [...] money from ads”³⁴: *France-Soir*, *Le Parisien libéré*, *Le Figaro*, *L'Aurore* (Tables 1.4 and 1.5).

None of the other eight newspapers that covered politics in general (excluding specialised sport or economic papers) sold more than 200,000 copies.

In this period, two tendencies can be observed: firstly, illustrated weekly papers and women’s magazines in particular became increasingly popular, managing somehow to limit the haemorrhaging of readers the

Table 1.4 Print run figures referring to the four most important information papers (1954)

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Total print run</i>
<i>France-Soir</i>	1041
<i>Le Parisien libéré</i>	790
<i>Le Figaro</i>	468
<i>L'Aurore</i>	432
Total	2731

Source: *Les Maîtres de la presse française*, *France-Observateur*, 21 January 1955, p. 16

Table 1.5 Print run figures for other newspapers (1954)

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Total print run</i>
<i>Le Monde</i>	167
<i>L'Humanité</i>	158
<i>Paris-Pressé</i>	154
<i>La Croix</i>	153
<i>Libération</i>	127
<i>Franc-Tireur</i>	106
<i>Combat</i>	63
<i>L'Information</i>	62
Total	990

Source: *Les Maîtres de la presse française*, *France-Observateur*, 21 January 1955, p. 16

main popular newspapers suffered; secondly, the emergence of a new generation of *engagée* weekly papers that during the wars of decolonisation became—together with *Le Monde*—the last bastion of free information. In general, only popular illustrated weeklies managed to raise their sale figures during this critical period. In the middle of the 1950s, *Paris-Match*, founded in 1949 by the manufacturer Jean Prouvost, sold 1.5 million copies,³⁵ *France-Dimanche* 800,000 copies and *Ici-Paris* 700,000. Women's magazines represented another thriving sector, these included quality papers—*Le Petit Echo de la Mode* and *Elle*³⁶—and also the popular sentimental novel genre that included *Nous deux*, whose sales rose from 700,000 copies in the early 1950s to 1,600,000 by 1955. At the end of the 1950s, the 16 million copies sold by women's magazines proved to be a unique case. With the sole exception of some daily papers, such as *Le Monde*, these numbers were unimaginable for the avant-garde *engagée*

press mainly represented by a new generation of weekly papers, the so-called *nouvelle gauche* that included *L'Express*,³⁷ *France-Observateur*³⁸ and, to a certain extent, *Témoignage chrétien*.³⁹

These weeklies, very different from the so-called press at the service of capital,⁴⁰ were managed by a younger generation of journalists who began to be interested in politics during the Resistance, and later, faced with the instability and the impotence of the Fourth Republic, tried to promote political change. These were papers whose respectability and authority was founded on the respect for truth and objective information (“Truth and justice at all cost” was the motto of *Témoignage chrétien*). Their aim was to demonstrate that it was possible to practise opinion journalism outside the influence of political parties, and, in this way, escape the predominant logic of ideological contestation. Their readership was young (71% of the readers of *France-Observateur*, 64% of *Témoignage chrétien* and 55% of *L'Express* were under 40), and mainly made up of French citizens with good standards of education and diverse occupations (*Témoignage chrétien* was the most “popular” of the three, while 85% of the readers of *L'Express* were from the upper middle class).⁴¹

With the exception of the period of the Indochina crisis, the sales of these weekly papers never did justice to their political significance. In those years, they became an exceptional case in publishing documents censored by the military authorities, interviews with Vietnamese representatives and surveys of the morale of the army stationed in Indochina.⁴² All three papers were in favour of a negotiated settlement of the war up until the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, after which they argued in favour of an immediate ceasefire. The impact of the Algerian War, between 1954 and 1962, was to decisively strengthen the fame of these papers, albeit this remained modest.⁴³ In one of the darkest chapters of French history they—along with *Le Monde*—were on the front line of the battle for free information.⁴⁴ The comparison between them and *Le Monde* was made not just by those who commented favourably on the commitment of these papers, but also, although more indirectly, by those who were in favour of French Algeria, such as Jacques Soustelle, who in 1957 compared *France-Observateur*, *L'Express* and *Témoignage chrétien* to Hubert Beuve-Méry's paper and disparagingly called all of them “the four bugs of the French counter-propaganda”. The role of these weekly papers during the Algerian War was essentially that of sentinels of democracy; but they also predated politicians in suggesting that it was high time for change.⁴⁵

5 PRESS AND CENSORSHIP: THE MOLLET AFFAIR—LE MONDE

“Counter-propaganda”, “demoralization of the army and the nation” and “*Cartiérisme*”⁴⁶ were just a few of the most frequent accusations brought against the press that since the beginning of the Algerian War had been placed under the strict control of the authorities. The control of the press was made possible by the so-called Special Powers Law of 16 March 1956 and Decree 56.276 of 17 March 1956, which authorised the government or the Governor General in Algeria “to take all measures deemed necessary to control the whole information system”. The government could delegate these powers to the prefects, and civil authorities could delegate “all police powers as well as those mentioned in the present decree” to the military authorities. In actuality, it was the military authorities in Algeria that censored and confiscated the papers. Once a newspaper was printed the editor had to give a copy to three officials that were charged with the task of checking the content. The first official was from the Home Office, the second from the National Security Department and the third from the Ministry of Defence. If they reached different conclusions on the content, they had to refer the matter to the Minister of the Interior, who then, in the case of the national press, turned the issue over to the Prefect of Paris, or to the regional Prefect involved in the case of the local press. If the paper was confiscated, the editor had to print a second edition and could substitute the article with either a white space or another article. This penalised newspapers so much that several of them used a procedure of draft publication to take account of anticipated censorship: the editors-in-chief submitted a draft version of the paper and waited for the all clear from the authorities before printing the final one.⁴⁷

When during the Fourth and Fifth Republics military action became more brutal, the number of editions that were confiscated became so numerous that some newspapers stopped covering news of the conflict and others, such as *Témoignage chrétien*, suspended their distribution in Algeria for several months; 69 editions of this paper were confiscated and withdrawn between November 1954 and the 7 March 1958. Other papers, e.g., *Jeune Nation* or *La Nef*, only sent a couple of editions to Algeria and waited for approval before sending the rest. *L'Express* used to prepare a special “purged” edition for Algeria only.⁴⁸

Confiscation was not the only way to reign in those who refused to align themselves with official government views; the disagreement between Prime Minister Mollet and Hubert Beuve-Méry—the editor of *Le Monde*—is emblematic in this respect. Though their disagreement was formally and ostensibly about financial matters, in actual fact it was the exposé of the crimes committed by the French troops in Africa and the newspaper's firm opposition against the government's special powers that led to the fallout between the socialist leader and the most distinguished of the newspaper's directors. Their disagreement took place when Beuve-Méry had to raise the price of the paper from 18 to 20 francs to deal with higher production costs. To gain control of what in his eyes was a rebellious newspaper, the Prime Minister ordered Beuve-Méry that, as from 9 November 1956, the cost of the paper had to be lowered and brought back to its original purchase price, under the pretext that inflation needed to be kept under control. The real cause of the dispute was their meeting on 15 October 1956, during the inauguration of the *Week of solidarity with Algerian children*. At this meeting Beuve-Méry told Mollet that “instead of finding clothing for children, it would be better to stop torturing their fathers”.⁴⁹ To persuade the Prime Minister of the truth of his accusation, *Le Monde*'s editor sent him a dossier of actual witnesses, which included a number of people he considered trustworthy (including some officials stationed in Algeria).⁵⁰ Along with these testimonies, the Prime Minister also received a letter signed by Beuve-Méry himself in which, having laid claim to the newspaper's duty to inform the public, he then moved on to discussing the moral issue and the relationship between journalists' “objectivity” and “honesty”.⁵¹ The Prime Minister did not take kindly to the moral lesson that Beuve-Méry gave him. In the end, faced with threats of confiscation and expensive fines, Beuve-Méry was forced to lower the price of the paper.

This litigation also caused Mollet trouble within his own party. Some disliked his intransigence and the way in which the government had punished a man who was considered by national and international public opinion as one of the crown jewels of the French press. The Guy Mollet Collection (AGM), housed in the archives of the Office universitaire de recherche socialiste (OURS), contains a cache of letters of protest sent to Hôtel Matignon from respected members of Mollet's party, such as the socialist mayor of Toulouse, Raymond Badiou. When on 17 November the Prime Minister was asked to provide clarification about the *Le Monde* case, he answered with a rather evasive letter:

Contrary to what you have heard, the decision taken against the newspaper *Le Monde* hasn't anything to do with politics. Despite the fact that I am critical of the demoralising campaign led by this paper, I assure you my respect for freedom of the press is such as to make any punitive action unthinkable.

It is an economic problem. The price of the newspaper has a symbolic value, more or less like the price of a kilogram of bread. It is necessary that we monitor prices and it is not advisable that, right when we are about to fulfil our aims, we ruin everything only in order to be tolerant towards the newspaper *Le Monde*.⁵²

Badiou's answer leaves no doubt about Guy Mollet's failure to convince him:

I will tell you plainly what I think: I am surprised—to say the least—to hear your opinion about *Le Monde* and what you call their “demoralising campaign”. I am an assiduous reader of the newspaper, which I regard as the best in France and I do not feel “demoralised” at all. Your criticism is sadly similar to the talk of some army-men that have more courage than intelligence and, as soon as someone dares shed doubt on the fact that “Algeria is French”, start to talk of “demoralisation”. About the price of *Le Monde* as symbolic, like the price of bread, I cannot but express once again my surprise. I think, in fact, that the rise in the price of *Le Monde* would have gone unnoticed [...]. In any case, I trust that wholesale meat sellers and butchers will be subjected to the same measures that have been forced on *Le Monde*.⁵³

Though forced to accept the imposition of the lowering of the newspaper's price, Beuve-Méry did not intend to surrender. The battle of Algiers provided an opportunity to show once again his unwavering moral code and that, as far as he was concerned, no ends could ever justify certain means.

6 POLITICS ENTERS TELEVISION (1953–58)

At the beginning of the 1950s, television started to begin to emerge from its infancy. Its debut dated back to 1935, when, under the watchful gaze of the government minister Georges Mandel,⁵⁴ the first official broadcast took place from the lecture hall of the Ministry of Telecommunications in rue de Grenelle in Paris. However, it was not until the end of the Second World War that television began its gradual development. In February 1949 a decree reconfirmed the State monopoly on the audiovisual sector and

transformed the Radiodiffusion française (RDF) into French Radio television (Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF)); television had won its first battle for legitimisation. Some months later, on 29 June—the same day in which the Tour de France began—following a series of rehearsals, a young journalist Pierre Sabbagh, a mere thirty years old, launched the first edition of the television news. Initially, this was a random event that took place only on occasional evenings, but it subsequently became a daily fixture that would last a quarter of an hour between 9.00 and 9.15 p.m.⁵⁵ However, the small screen had not yet fully established itself; surpassed by the radio that boasted an audience of 20 million French people, television had no means, staff or budget and, last but not the least, no audience. Weekly broadcasting was restricted to 20 hours in total. Television's aim was to disseminate culture and to entertain, focusing in particular on theatre. It was some years before television's full potential was understood. The proper baptism of television came on 2 June 1953, on the occasion of the coronation ceremony of Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey. The impact was extraordinary, a taste of a brighter future to come. Some cinemas in Paris even interrupted their screening schedule to show this solemn ceremony on the big screen. A vignette on the weekly *L'Express* illustrated an article eloquently entitled *Incoronation Fever* showing a crowd of fanatics gathered around a television set on whose screen images of the coronation ceremony could be glimpsed.⁵⁶ A few months later, in December 1953, the importance of television became evident once again and this time it was the first step towards political legitimation.

On 8 December, Parliament began a debate on the financial planning for “the development and expansion” of television. Émile Hugues, Minister of Information, faced scepticism from some MPs (including Jean Lecanuet, who was particularly telegenic during the 1965 presidential election⁵⁷) who were not inclined to vote for a rise of radiophonic taxes to finance the expansion of television. The Minister, however, criticised the delay in the development of French television and announced a reversal of the existing relationship between radio and television: “Nowadays it is the radio that must see that television develops, tomorrow it will be the radio to benefit from the resources brought in by television.”⁵⁸ In the meantime, an increasing number of people began to think that television not only had great potential but could be instrumental in achieving a truly democratic dissemination of knowledge and culture. The astute journalist and novelist Michel Droit⁵⁹ drew attention to the fact that television had the peculiarity of reaching people across different social classes: “Television already is, and undoubtedly is destined to become more and more, the kind of entertainment for

those who cannot afford theatre, or those who cannot access cultural events because of geographical or various other reasons.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the rapid growth of the democratisation of television was an extraordinary phenomenon, and most particularly in respect of the increased ownership of television sets among the working class.⁶¹

From 17 December 1954 for the first time television broadcasted news connected with a political event of great importance, the election of the President of the Republic, which took place at Versailles where the two Houses of Parliament assembled. The emotion and anticipation surrounding the event was great. Shortly before the election members of the press invited the delegates to consider carefully their decision to involve television. *L'Express* opened its edition with an eloquent title that recalled Clemenceau's joke, “Please, not the dumbest one!”⁶² What nobody anticipated, however, was that it would need 13 successive ballots taking place over seven long days and nights of incessant discussions, mediations and negotiations to agree on a new President. The television cameras placed inside the Congress Hall (where the poll stations were located), in the gallery and outside the building filmed the whole election, while three journalists, coordinated by Pierre Sabbagh, kept (the few) viewers informed with rolling commentaries and interviews.

Television's success in covering this event was enormous, but what also became clear was the collateral damage that accompanied it. The spectacle of political impotence viewers witnessed was remembered as “a scandal in the history of the Republic [...] that happened under the eyes of the television cameras”.⁶³ The small screen, as Michel Droit remarked, was “the only one that has come out of the Versailles rodeo victorious”. In these humiliating days television's extraordinary “objectivity” was merciless. In short, it was necessary to reflect on television's usefulness as a “means of communication with extraordinary possibilities to keep people informed”, but one that could transform itself into a “terrible weapon of knowledge”.⁶⁴

On the sixth day, when the final ballot was yet to be concluded, it was decided broadcasting must stop. A heated debate ensued. *Le Monde* reported the sudden decision to end all broadcasting, and on 24 December published a supplement entitled *Censored Images*. *L'Express* in its editorial of 23 December criticised the unacceptable spectacle of Versailles and praised the truthfulness of the new medium:

The Versailles spectacle has humiliated us [...] There is one single regret: that on this occasion French people did not have 5 million television sets but only 70,000. Salvation will only be possible if public opinion is informed as well as possible on the real state of the political leadership in this country

[...]. And had the Versailles events been kept hidden, how long would public opinion have had to wait to find out what was going on? [...] We all knew that what this country needed to wake from its torpor was a shock.⁶⁵

Thanks to television the incompetence of a political class that too often hid behind the impenetrable wall of Parliament became apparent. François Mitterrand, a one-time Minister of Information, noted in his weekly paper that “viewers’ engagement with the various phases of Congress had been more assiduous than that of Members of Parliament”. He, then, wondered about the political consequences of the permanent control of television on parliamentary events and its elected members whose conduct could at any time be checked and examined.⁶⁶ Aware that there was no way back, several politicians were seduced, dazzled but also scared by television, while others continued to ignore it. However, after the presidential coverage, only a few remained who, when faced with the camera, would imitate Antoine Pinay before the vote who exclaimed, “Well, I never! It has also sound!”⁶⁷

But the golden age of politics and television was yet to come. Leaders particularly keen to communicate directly with the public, such as Pierre Mendès France, still ignored television completely, preferring the radio, a more popular means of communication that allowed politicians to reach what was then a much bigger audience. When Parliament debated the issue of the dissemination of information, it was almost exclusively with reference to the radio.⁶⁸

In 1954 the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) conducted a survey to find out whether French people acquired information “through the newspaper or through the radio”⁶⁹; television was not even among the possible options. This is hardly surprising, as in 1954 there were just 75,000 television sets in France in comparison with 9 million radios. Nevertheless, a significant change was about to happen: in January 1955 the number of television sets soared to 150,000. By December that same year, the figure had reached 266,000 (against 1.4 million in the UK).⁷⁰ In the same period, technological advancements led to an increase of television transmitters on French territory and introduced mobile micro transmitters that allowed television journalists to move around more freely. Where once coverage of political events had been scarce—less than 10% of the total time of the news—it now started to attract attention as a consequence of the increasing interest of political

parties and politicians in television. News bulletins began to include speeches in France and abroad by senior members of the executive. The first reports were broadcast.

Television also began to receive coverage in the press. In major newspapers specially assigned journalists started to write on the progress of this means of mass communication. These included André Brincourt for *Le Figaro*, Michel Droit and Janick Arbois for *Le Monde*, Jean Cotte for *France-Soir*. The new generation of weekly papers also began to devote columns to it; in *L'Express* these were written by François Mauriac, while André Bazin collaborated with *L'Observateur*. In 1955 the first specialised television magazine—*Télé Magazine*—was published.⁷¹

Television's increasing popularity with the political class inevitably brought about stricter controls on the information it was delivering, particularly during the Algerian crisis. On 6 February, just five days after the election of Guy Mollet as Prime Minister, his first visit to Algiers was televised. Images of the violence of the mob of *pieds-noirs* that were shown throwing tomatoes and eggs at a Prime Minister who was considered a champion of the withdrawal from Algeria marked a watershed moment. Subsequently, control of television became as strict as that of radio. From 1 June 1956, the directorship of the news was separated from that of programmes and was placed under the direct control of the director for television information who was supported in this appointment by the editor-in-chief.

In autumn, the Suez crisis complicated the situation still further and control over information became stricter still; as the international situation became increasingly critical, political powers closed ranks. In September 1956, during the programme *London Today*, Jacques Sallebert, the English correspondent for the RTF, interviewed a young Labour MP on the decision to send a Franco-British contingent to Egypt to protect the interests of the two countries whose economic interests were threatened by Nasser's plan of nationalisation. In front of the television cameras Kenneth Younger, a former colleague of Bevin and Morrison in the Foreign Office, declared that by joining the British conservatives in this imperialist venture Mollet was betraying the socialist cause. These accusations so enraged the government that the programme was stopped immediately and the unfortunate Sallebert called back to Paris. The *Témoignage chrétien* criticised the interference of the government on mass media:

We always come back to this: all governments consider the RTF as theirs, to be used for personal propaganda, while the radio must be for the public, at the service of the nation ... that funds it. Our socialist government breaks all records as far as interference is concerned, as the Sallebert case has recently proved [...] And please let us not hear that to free radio–television from censorship and the permanent control of the executive is a utopia. Britain has shown precisely the contrary. Will French public opinion ever demand a State radio instead of a government radio?⁷²

The critical international context was hardly favourable to the executive softening its position on this matter and it continued to place its men in strategic positions, regardless of their professional suitability. In the autumn of 1956, Wladimir Porché—Director General of Radio and Television Information—was forced to resign and was replaced by Gabriel Delaunay, Prefect of Basses-Pyrénées and professor of history and geography. Delaunay possessed no knowledge whatsoever of radio and television. His only merit was that he was a trusted socialist. On 3 December, in the midst of the Suez crisis, Mollet urged Gérard Jacquet—State Secretary of Information—to exert complete control over all news programmes: “It is necessary for party comrades to be given the task of reading in advance news reports of radio bulletins every morning before 7 a.m.”⁷³

The end of the Mollet government did not bring a change of policies or the end of practices that were in actual fact integral to the system. On the contrary, the worsening of the Algerian situation and the continuing political crises that engulfed the government provided a legitimization of practices that often had very little connections to the national interest. In *Le Monde*, television expert Janick Arbois commented:

What is so irritating at RTF is that the control—or censorship—is practiced in a vague and almost unspoken way. There is an unwritten law: don’t stir things up. But who should follow this rule? Neither the minister nor the constituted bodies. And nobody knows who should check that this law is followed. We have seen that several programmes have been suppressed, that several sanctions have been given for declarations that have been considered, whether rightly or wrongly, inopportune [...] But who takes these decisions? Nobody knows. It appears that it could be either the Director of the Programmes, or the Director General, or a minister, or even the Prime Minister, depending on the circumstances.⁷⁴

During the demise of the Fourth Republic—accelerated by the incompetence of those in power—the situation was such that even those subject to control did not know who was controlling them. Faced with graver and graver political events, the government felt increasingly impotent and reacted with directives and vetoes: what came from the ministries had to be reported verbatim and without comment. In other words, journalists were prevented from doing their job. Self-censorship prevailed: the news carefully avoided covering the most hotly debated issues. *La Nef* accused television of providing a kind of information that concealed the truth, and noted that the only guerrilla warfare that was covered by the French news was the Cuban one led by Fidel Castro. This article also lamented that nothing was said about Algeria; referring in particular to two television news programmes broadcast in May 1958, the journalist noted that out of 18 news stories only 2 concerned Algeria: one of these was on a military parade and the other was a football game at Oran. If journalists were “victims of the censorship of censorships”, it is important also to point out that “there is an official censorship, but also a self-censorship”. The overall situation left little space for doubt: “It is incredible to have to admit that if tomorrow a dictatorial regime was to seize power, it wouldn’t have to change anything in the present organisation of the television news.”⁷⁵

For those who made misjudgements the sanctions were immediate. During the evening news on Saturday, 27 May, in the midst of the crisis, Michel Droit dedicated a few seconds more than agreed to the news of Jacques Soustelle’s arrival in Algiers. The State Secretary for Information, with the approval of the Cabinet Vice-President, punished Michel Droit by taking him off the television screen. But the government’s days were numbered and one of Droit’s colleagues in an attempt to cheer him up said: “What are you complaining about? In eight days de Gaulle will come to power and you will return triumphant to the news.”⁷⁶ As it was, the time was even shorter than predicted: five days after, the National Assembly gave a vote of trust and full power to the General. Though the Fourth Republic had only five days remaining, there was still enough time to make one last desperate attempt to control television information about the famous “Republican” anti-Gaullist demonstration organised by the parties of the Left on 28 May.

The following anecdote provides an amusing and grotesque representation of power in a demobilisation phase, deprived of any legitimacy it previously had, but still at the mercy of Pavlovian like reflexes:

News editor: "You will talk of 250,000 demonstrators..."
 Journalist: "No Sir, I will quote the prefect estimate: 70,000".
 News editor: "250,000..."
 Journalist: "70,000".
 News editor: "Come on, say at least 20,000..."
 Journalist: "All right, I will say 85,000..."
 News editor: "175,000 not one less..."
 Journalist: "97,000 not one more..."
 News editor: "All right, we will say 150,000..."
 Journalist: "125,000..."⁷⁷

NOTES

1. C. Brochand, *Histoire générale de la radio et de la télévision en France*, II, 1944–1974, Paris, La Documentation française, 1994, pp. 9–10.
2. For a study of music during the occupation, see M. Chimènes (ed), *La vie musicale sous Vichy*, Bruxelles, Complexe, 2001.
3. R. Aron, *Histoire de la libération de la France*, Paris, Fayard, 1959, p. 441.
4. For an overall picture of the French press during the occupation see P.-M. Dioudonnat, *L'Argent nazi à la conquête de la presse française 1940–1944*, Paris, Jean Picollec, 1981; M. Cotta, *La collaboration, 1940–1944*, Paris, Colin, 1964; O. Wiewiorka, *Une certaine idée de la Résistance. Défense de la France, 1940–1949*, Paris, Seuil, 1995.
5. P. Rosanvallon, *L'état en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1990, pp. 106–107.
6. F. D'Almeida and C. Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France. De la Grande Guerre à nos jours*, Paris, Flammarion, 2003, p. 139.
7. The purge also involved the radio, though cases here were rarer. See R. Duval, *Histoire de la radio en France*, Paris, Editions Alain Moreau, 1979, pp. 359–360.
8. *Le combat continue*, *Combat*, 21 August 1944, p. 1.
9. "The desire for money and the indifference towards the *grandeur* had the effect of producing a press that, with very few exceptions, had no other purpose than make someone more powerful; its only effect was to lower everyone's morality. Therefore it was not difficult for this kind of press to become what it has been between 1940 and 1944: the shame of our nation." A. Camus, *Critique de la nouvelle Presse*, *Combat*, 31 August 1944, p. 1.
10. Sanctions for journalists were to be softer in comparison to those for industries. In some extreme cases (the most famous one was that of Brasillach) some journalists were executed; however, normally they were sanctioned by temporary suspensions. In the 9000 dossiers that have been analysed,

- temporary suspensions are about 700, 90% of which were less than two years in duration. C. Delporte, “La trahison du clerc ordinaire: l’épuration professionnelle des journalistes (1944–1948)”, in *Revue Historique*, 292, 1994, pp. 347–375.
11. J-C. Bellanger et al. (eds), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, IV, *De 1940 à 1958*, Paris, Puf, 1975, pp. 186–189.
 12. D’Almeida and Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France*, op. cit., p. 140.
 13. For a reconstruction of the history of this weekly, see L. Martin, *Le Canard enchaîné ou les Fortunes de la vertu. Histoire d’un journal satyrique: 1914–2000*, Paris, Flammarion, 2001; M. Laurent, *Le Canard enchaîné. Histoire d’un journal satirique 1915–2005*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2005.
 14. For an account of the founding of this newspaper, see J-N. Jeanneney and J. Julliard, *Le Monde de Beuve-Méry ou le métier d’Alceste*, Paris, Seuil, 1979 and P. Évêno, *Le Monde 1944–1995. Histoire d’une entreprise de presse*, Paris, Le Monde Editions, 1996.
 15. For a biography of Paul Ramadier, see S. Berstein (ed), *Paul Ramadier, la République et le socialisme*, Bruxelles, Complexe, 1990 and A. Fonville-Vojtovic, *Paul Ramadier (1868–1961), élu local et homme d’État*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1993.
 16. In French history the President that governs directly and is not responsible before Parliament has a name: Louis Napoleon Bonapart! Quoted in P. Foro, “Paul Ramadier et le gaullisme (1947–1958)”, in *Annales du Midi. Revue de la France méridionale*, 230, no. 2, 2000, p. 203.
 17. V. Auriol, *Journal du septennat 1947–1954*, I, 1947, Paris, Armand Colin, 1970, p. 755.
 18. *Ibidem*, p. 495.
 19. For a reconstruction of this particular set of circumstances, see the monumental history of the Fourth Republic in three volumes edited by Georgette Elgey, *La République des illusions*, I, 1945–1951, Paris, Fayard, 1993; *La République des contradictions*, II, 1951–54, Paris, Fayard, 1993; *La République des tourmentes*, III, 1954–1959, Paris, Fayard, 1993.
 20. H. Eck, “La Radiodiffusion et l’opposition RPF (1947–1951)”, in *De Gaulle et le RPF, 1947–55*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1998, pp. 718–719.
 21. J. Montaldo, *Dossier O.R.T.F. 1944–1974. Tous coupables*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1974, p. 74.
 22. B. Féron, *Les quotidiens de province ignorent leur nouvelle puissance*, in *Témoignage Chrétien*, 5 October 1951, p. 6.
 23. G. De Sède, *La presse française a perdu depuis 1939 un million de lecteurs... Pourquoi?*, *L’Observateur*, 13 April 1950, pp. 12–13.
 24. See *Le prix de la liberté*, *Le Monde*, 27 February 1951, p. 1.
 25. Back copies of *Le Petit Parisien* are kept at the national archives, series 11AR. Interesting studies of this include M. Dupuy, *Un homme, un journal*,

- Jean Dupuy (1844–1919]*, Paris, Hachette, 1959 and M. Dupuy, *Le Petit Parisien, le plus fort tirage des journaux du monde entier*, Paris, Plon, 1989.
26. For a history of advertising in France see M. Martin, *Trois siècles de publicité en France*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1992; M. Martin, “Le marché publicitaire et les grands médias”, in *Vingtième siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 20, 1988, pp. 75–90; C. Delporte, “De Bibendum à Culturepub. La publicité à la conquête des masses”, in J.-P. Rioux and J.-F. Sirinelli (eds), *La Culture de masse en France de la Belle Époque à aujourd’hui*, Paris, Fayard, 2001, pp. 410–434. As concerns the profession of the advertiser see M.-E. Chessel, *La Publicité. Naissance d’une profession, 1900–1940*, Paris, Cnrs Editions, 1998.
 27. Bellanger et al. (eds), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, op. cit., p. 406.
 28. Charon, *La presse en France de 1945 à nos jours*, op. cit., pp. 129–134.
 29. *Les maîtres de la presse française*, in *France-Observateur*, 21 January 1955, p. 16.
 30. The debate in Parliament on Hachette becoming a major shareholder of *Messageries françaises* began in 1947; at that point, however, the opposition of the socialists of Prime Minister Ramadier blocked the whole operation. On this see *Pas de monopole du trust Hachette*, *Le Populaire*, 22 March 1947, p. 4 and P. Parpais, *Grâce à la ténacité des élus socialistes le trust Hachette est mis hors d’état de nuire*, *Le Populaire*, 30 March 1947, p. 1.
 31. D’Almeida and C. Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France*, op. cit., pp. 156–158.
 32. *La presse se meurt*, in *Témoignage Chrétien*, 3 August 1951, p. 1.
 33. *Les maîtres de la presse française*, op. cit., p. 16
 34. *Ibidem*.
 35. The escalation of the sale of *Paris-Match* is significant: 212,000 copies in 1949; 360,000 in 1950; 694,000 in 1952 and 1,500,000 in 1955. See *Les maîtres de la presse française*, op. cit., p. 16.
 36. Print run figures of *Le Petit Echo de la Mode* and *Elle* in 1954 were 1,240,000 and 650,000 copies, respectively.
 37. For a bibliography on Jean-Jacques Servan Schreiber and his times at *L’Express* see S. Siritsky, F. Roth, *Le roman de l’Express*, Paris, Julian, 1979; A. Rustenholz and S. Treiner, *La saga Servan-Schreiber*, Paris, Seuil, 1993. More recent studies are M. Chapsal, *L’homme de ma vie*, Paris, Fayard, 2004; J. Bothorel, *Celui qui voulait tout changer. Les années JJSS*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2005.
 38. For a reconstruction of the first years of this weekly see the study in two volumes by P. Tétart, *Histoire politique et culturelle de France-Observateur. Aux origines du Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2001.
 39. For a biography of Georges Montaron, editor-in-chief of this weekly between 1949 and 1996, see C. Hamsy, *Georges Montaron, le roman d’une vie*, Paris, Ramsay, 1996.

40. A. Wurmser, *C'est la presse de l'argent, l'Humanité*, 9 March 1957, p. 1.
41. These figures are from C. Estier, *La gauche hebdomadaire 1914–1962*, Paris, Colin, 1962, pp. 235–244.
42. See *Note sur le moral dans l'armée, L'Express*, 7 November 1953, p. 12; *La paix trahie en Indochine*, in *L'Express*, 19 December 1953, p. 1.
43. In 1958, print run figures for *L'Express* were 157,000 copies (making it the 25th biggest French weekly), *France-Observateur* was in 40th position with 72,000 copies and *Témoignage chrétien* 58,000 copies. See D'Almeida and Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France*, op. cit., p. 160.
44. P. Baudorre (ed), *La plume dans la plaie. Les écrivains journalistes et la guerre d'Algérie*, Bordeaux, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2003.
45. Since 1955 *Témoignage Chrétien* distanced itself from the position of the Home Minister, François Mitterrand, and clearly announced that what was necessary in Algeria “was a radical transformation of its political institutions [...]. This means independence, an Algerian nation, an Algerian Republic”. See *Le problème est politique, Témoignage Chrétien*, 10 June 1955, p. 3.
46. This term refers to the opinions of the French journalist Raymond Cartier, whose articles in *Paris-Match* on 11 and 18 August and 1 September 1956 heralded the imminent end of the French colonial empire. His famous formula “la Corrèze avant le Zambèze” summed up the idea that colonies were too expensive for France, demanding higher and higher investments that stop the French economy from growing and, above all, they were useless as their independence was inevitable. The Raymond Cartier archive contains several excerpts of his articles, correspondence and other material. It is kept in the private archive section of the French National Archives [AN], series 14AR.
47. Censorship prior to publication officially started between 25 May and 1 June 1958, during the most brutal military actions in Algeria that brought de Gaulle back to power. See C. Barthélémy, *Les saisies de journaux en 1958*, in L. Gervereau, J-P. Rioux and B. Stora (eds), *La France en guerre d'Algérie: novembre 1958–juillet 1962*, Paris, Nory, 1992, pp. 122–126.
48. *Ibidem*.
49. D. Lefebvre, *Guy Mollet le mal aimé*, Plon, 1992, p. 236.
50. The archive Hubert Beuve-Méry (BM) at *Centre d'Histoire Européenne du Vingtième Siècle* [CHEVS] of the *Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques* [FNSP] contains several testimonies on torture in Algeria. See flap envelope BM 137–143.
51. “We would need to know whether torture is progressively going to become normalised during interrogations. Some odious practices started to be used in Indochina; now it seems they are spreading; they are seen as a widely accepted necessity because of the horrid crimes committed by the

- enemy. How should those editors of papers or, as the Minister of Information has called them ‘editors of consciences’ behave in this case? Would not to remain silent about these crimes, in these extreme cases, mean to adopt the same behaviour that we ourselves have criticized in those Germans who used to declare that they did not see or hear or know anything?” See BM 139, Hubert Beuve-Méry letter to Guy Mollet, 17 October 1956.
52. See AGM 28, Guy Mollet letter to Raymond Badiou, 10 November 1956.
53. See AGM 28, Raymond Badiou letter to Guy Mollet, 6 December 1956.
54. On Georges Mandel see J-N. Jeanneney, *Georges Mandel: l’homme qu’on attendait*, Paris, Seuil, 1991. For a biography that comments on the backstage of parliamentary relations see N. Sarkozy, *Georges Mandel. Le moine de la politique*, Paris, Grasset, 1994.
55. D’Almeida and Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France*, op. cit., pp. 153–155.
56. *L’Intoxiqué du couronnement*, *L’Express*, 6 June 1953, p. 6.
57. Lecanuet expressed some criticism and noted that “this rise will affect 500.000 senior citizens [...]”, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mardi 8 décembre 1953*, p. 6314.
58. E. Hugues, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mercredi 9 décembre 1953*, p. 6331.
59. See M. Droit, *Les lueurs de l’aube. Journal 1958–1960*, Paris, Plon, 1981; M. Droit, *Les clartés du jour. Journal 1963–1965*, Paris, Plon, 1978; M. Droit, *Les feux du crépuscule. Journal 1968–1970*, Paris, Plon, 1977.
60. M. Droit, *Le financement de la télévision*, *Le Monde*, 3 December 1953, p. 13.
61. The percentage of workers and clerks that bought television sets was higher than their percentage calculated for the entire population. At the end of the 1950s, clerks were 7.5% of the population and owned 10% of television sets. Workers were 24% of the population but they owned 25.5% of television sets. See. I. Gaillard, “De l’étrange lucarne à la télévision. Histoire d’une banalisation (1949–1984)”, in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’Histoire*, 91, July–September 2006, p. 12
62. *Surtout pas le plus bête!*, *L’Express*, 12 December 1953, p. 1.
63. A. Chenebenoit, *L’arbitre introuvable*, *Le Monde*, 20 December 1953, p. 1.
64. M. Droit, *Quand la TV nous conte Versailles*, *Le Monde*, 22 December 1953, p. 13.
65. *Le choc*, *L’Express*, 26 December 1953, p. 3.
66. F. Mitterrand, *La Télévision accusée*, *L’Express*, 2 January 1954, p. 12.
67. J. Bourdon, *Haute fidélité. Pouvoir et télévision, 1935–1994*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 41.

68. See, for example, the MPs Paul Gosset's and Jean-Michel Flandin's intervention in *Journal Officiel, de la République Française, Séance du lundi 31 janvier 1955*, pp. 503–506.
69. Thirty-seven per cent of those interviewed answered that the radio was their preferred means of information; 14% answered that they preferred newspapers and 44% said that they used both in the same measure. See B. Blin, *La radiodiffusion et la télévision*, in M. Duverger, F. Goguel, J. Touchard (eds), *Les élections du 2 janvier 1956*, Paris, Colin, 1957, p. 181.
70. *Ibidem*, p. 178.
71. C. Ulmann-Mauriat, *La critique de télévision, initiateur et témoin*, in M-F. Lévy (ed), *La Télévision dans la République. Les Années 50*, Bruxelles, Complexe, p. 159.
72. J-G. Moreau, *Toujours le Statut, Témoignage Chrétien*, 26 October 1956, p. 7.
73. See E. Cohen, *Télévision, pouvoir et citoyenneté*, in Lévy (ed), *La Télévision dans la République*, op. cit., p. 38.
74. J. Arbois, *Max-Pol Fouchet et la liberté d'expression*, *Le Monde*, 17 January 1958, p. 17.
75. J-D. Laurent, "Le petit journal officiel illustré", in *La Nef*, June 1958, p. 73.
76. M. Droit, *Les lueurs de l'aube*, Paris, Plon, 1982, pp. 59–60.
77. Montaldo, *Dossier O.R.T.F. 1944–1974*, op. cit., p. 117.

The Personalisation of Politics and Government Communication During the Fourth Republic

1 THE SPECTRE OF POLITICAL PERSONALISATION

We are terrified of personal power. We fear someone could abuse it, take hold of it and perpetuate it in order to limit our freedoms. In short, we think personal power is reactionary [...]. In France, it is the parliament that is seen without a shadow of doubt as the most—indeed the only—authentic expression of the universal suffrage.¹

In France, at the beginning of the 1950s, television was far from having an important and autonomous role; radio, with an estimated 20 million listeners, had far greater reach and could count on a much bigger audience. Moreover, television had no means, staff or budget. In those times it was therefore easy for politics and television to ignore each other. The association between the two began only in 1958, with General de Gaulle's return to power. That he was the tele-performer par excellence was already known; what was not yet known was that with him television was destined to become the means through which he could form a direct connection with the public devoid of any intermediaries. This for de Gaulle represented the origin of political legitimacy. Before 1958, despite France's rapid process of modernisation, which also included the electronic sector, television did not manage to develop into a mass media and struggled to get any attention at all from politicians.

The reasons for this protracted lack of interest in television are several: the disrepute that befell the use of propaganda after the war following the Vichy government's attempts to build an efficient and modern "consensus machine"²; the inability of political leaders to legitimise and define the natural limits of government information within a democratic framework that allowed for debate; wariness towards the personalisation of power that had remained a strong concern within the French political system ever since the traumatic end of the Napoleonic era. The sole exception to this was during one of the most dramatic moments in French history, when, during the First World War, the political status quo grudgingly relied on the radical Georges Clemenceau, who was pushed to the marginals as soon as the conflict ended.

In an article that appeared in *Le Figaro* on 7 October 1952, the political expert André Siegfried attempted to analyse the reasons for the unwillingness of French politicians to associate themselves with television. He wondered whether the small screen was not more suitable for the American presidential regime—which he referred to as "consular and, up to a point, plebiscitary"—than for the French political system, where members of Parliament "do not look favourably on any media that allows the executive to come into direct contact with the public opinion". These reflections point to an issue of central importance: political communication inevitably depends on the kind of technology that it can deploy, as well as the institutional context in which it develops. In the specific case of France, this meant that the "absolute parliamentarism" that represented the foundation of the republican tradition made the National Assembly the only institution to represent popular sovereignty.³ All this had direct consequences for the way politicians communicated with the public, as well as on the public image of those politicians that held the destinies of the nation.

Since the last decades of the nineteenth century, republican political culture provided members of Parliament with a monopoly over the dialogue with their citizens. Legitimate ways of discussing politics remained traditionally the prerogative of the representatives of the nation who exercised this prerogative in various ways: from common public rallies and party assemblies to formal parliamentary discussions. It is telling that, in the final period of the Third Republic, whenever political leaders attempted to implement institutional reforms to escape the progressive paralysis of the parliamentary system, they realised that this could not be done without changing the way communication was managed by the government.⁴

During the 1930s, André Tardieu and Gaston Doumergue's project of parliamentary rationalisation went hand in hand with their pioneering employment of mass media, and, in particular, the radio. They tried to introduce "a sincere and direct political communication with the people".⁵ These attempts were immediately branded as subversive and reactionary by the republican leadership hostile to any form of personalisation of the political system that could lead to a challenge of the institutional and political centrality of Parliament.⁶ The socialist leader Léon Blum, for example, vehemently attacked what he called Gaston Doumergue's "radio sermons" and noted that, from the point of view of republican standards, "the presidential *I* and *me* are beginning to be mentioned a bit too frequently".⁷

And so it was that the watchful keepers of the Republic managed to swiftly get rid of those politicians who were accused of having "monarchic" ambitions (because they wanted to reinforce the executive power) or of being "bonapartist" (because of their attempts, through establishing direct and regular personal channels of contact with the nation, to make elections become a vote of moral confidence in their person). While recalling the circumstances that forced him to resign, Doumergue wrote that the introduction of "fireside speeches" on the radio inspired by Roosevelt contributed to progressive resentment among members of Parliament:

I naively believed that in a democracy the Head of the Government had the right to address the people directly through "the radio" [...] Experience has taught me that I was wrong [...] I was judged guilty of violating the rules and this fault was so grave that it was one of the reasons, or the main reason, to withdraw support, and I was finally forced to offer my resignation to the Head of State.⁸

During the "sovereign" Republic of the 1930s the Prime Minister's "right" to make use of mass media communication was still seen as an authoritarian move. This situation remained unaltered after the Second World War, when the radical project of reform of institutions proposed by de Gaulle and Bayeux was rejected and the new Republic was founded around the primacy of Parliament, which was seen as the only democratic institutional arrangement that could enable the principle of sovereignty of the people to be realised.

Since 1946 the French political system was a form of "mediated" democracy that was not very well disposed towards the personalisation of debates and political campaigns.⁹ It was rumoured that Henry

Queuille—Prime Minister between 12 September 1948 and 28 October 1949 (and also from 2 and 12 July 1950) and a staunch upholder of parliamentarism—often confided to his collaborators that his greatest wish was not be recognised in the street by his citizens.

Between the 1940s and the 1950s, there were two changes that thanks to the presence of new political leaders brought about significant changes to all this.¹⁰ One of these changes concerned the collective imagination. If during the Third Republic the depersonalisation of power was one of the necessary conditions for democracy, the Nazi occupation of 1940 brought to the fore that transparency of power was not necessarily always to be considered a virtue. During his imprisonment Léon Blum, the socialist leader who in the 1930s was one of the staunchest defenders of the absolute sovereignty of Parliament,¹¹ writing “à l’échelle humaine” admitted that he was mistaken and blamed the omnipotence and the irresponsible attitude of the two Houses for the demise of the Third Republic. The humiliation suffered in the *drôle de guerre*, a conflict that was lost almost without fighting, was such a huge national trauma that, little by little, it soon replaced in the collective memory the defeat of Bonapartism and the rout of the Prussians in 1870. In the years after the war, that same national imagination that feared personal power also started to regard with growing intolerance and increasing suspicion the inconveniences caused by lack of power.

The second change concerned the quick development of mass media and its newly acquired legitimacy. From the 1950s, the various alternate governments that led France established a new political framework that was destined to have a bright future: this marked the birth of a new age of government information, focused on the actions of the Prime Minister and his ministers.¹² In this first phase the executive began to realise that it is was necessary to have a more direct form of communication to get in touch with its citizens. Opposition to government both from inside and from outside the country and attacks from strong anti-establishment groups (gaullists, poujadists and communists) forced the government to respond to criticism and defend its policies. The ghost of the Vichy regime’s indoctrination of the public was overcome and new democratic demands emerged. As Albert Gazier, the Minister of Information during the Plevin and Queuille governments between 1950 and 1951, noted:

Propaganda is a sort of exhortation, but there are different kinds of propaganda. There is a propaganda that appeals to passions and contrasts with democracy [...] but there is also another kind of propaganda that mainly

appeals to reason. This second type confronts itself with rival kinds of propaganda and is perfectly compatible with the most severe rules of democracy. Its aim is to educate and provide information rather than seducing its audience.¹³

Hiding behind the necessity of defending itself against opposition criticism and the need to explain to its citizens the reasons for its decisions, the government progressively overcame the Republic's historical ban on propaganda.¹⁴ This change had a number of crucial effects, but one was particularly important. The rigid monopoly of the government on radio and television (an issue the previous chapter has focused on) was no longer sufficient to silence the opposition parties and leaders. To have legitimacy in the eyes of public opinion the total control of information was not enough; it was necessary to renew information practices and structures.

In the space of a few years what could be called a dynastic rupture occurred: the reign of traditional parliamentary eloquence began to be supplemented by the mechanism of mass media communication that became more and more pervasive. The conveying of government information was increasingly undertaken by prime ministers who wished to establish direct contact with their citizens, a privilege that until then was reserved exclusively for the members of Parliament.

During the 1950s, Antoine Pinay, Pierre Mendès France and Guy Mollet—whose experience was almost prophetic—pioneered an “active” employment of mass media that represented a deep institutional and cultural break with the republican tradition. Their experience anticipated the personalisation of power that during the Fifth Republic was realised through the direct relation between the leader of the executive and the public. This was achieved through the introduction of referenda and the direct election of the President of the Republic and, as far as communicative practices were concerned, through television.

Though it was the political and institutional collapse of parliamentarism and the moral collapse of the moribund Fourth Republic that put de Gaulle in a position to lift the veil that separated the government from the masses and establish television as a new public forum, it was also due to the failure of the political system to regenerate itself. Less spectacular than the gaullist revolution, but equally significant, was the slow change of the traditional power relations between the legislative and the executive branches of government marked by the increased importance of the figure of the Prime Minister who attempted to undermine Parliament as centre of the political debate.

2 ANTOINE PINAY AND THE BIRTH OF A “MYTH”

In the French system where crises gave way to charisma and collapse was the only way to get the best politicians into power, the year 1952 appeared to be a watershed moment. The financial crisis and political instability that caused seven different governments to be elected in the space of 24 months made any planning for economic recovery impossible and heralded the arrival of a charismatic personality that republican culture in normal circumstances would have abhorred. At the beginning of March, the satirical weekly paper *Le Canard enchaîné* noted with a certain irony that the times were so critical that a charismatic personality could well be expected to become leader of the country:

Things are bad, very bad ... France is staggering, bankruptcy is getting closer and closer and the foreigner gravely frowns. Paul Reynaud smiles satisfied; General de Gaulle rubs his hands “At last—they both think—my time has arrived.” They are the saviours, as we all know well, the saviours that France—far-sighted despite her carefree appearance—keeps in store very much like the good housewife that always keeps somewhere some provisions “just in case”.¹⁵

It was therefore a great surprise when, on 6 March 1952, Vincent Auriol, the President of the Republic, appointed Antoine Pinay—the Loire MP and an anonymous moderate—to form the government. This decision was immediately met with sarcasm from the press, which, even before he was appointed, began to attack this demure figure whose political record was modest: “Pleven was exceedingly capable, Edgar Faure exceedingly intelligent. Pinay excels in nothing.”¹⁶ Everything pointed to a transitional government as unremarkable as those that had preceded it. Pinay, however, proved a complete surprise—right from his inauguration speech, one of the shortest of the Fourth Republic. In this, he noted that the ways to overcome the spiralling economic inflation that had hit France were not to be found “on the left or on the right, they do not have parliamentary labels, they are technical measures that can only be taken in a period of political truce”.¹⁷ Pinay’s message did not so much insist on economic theories, as on the psychological and political aspects of the crisis; he addressed the nation with the purpose of restoring faith beyond political divisions. It was not a mere declaration of intent, but rather a contract that the Prime Minister was settling with the French people.

The press, tired of a succession of governments that “were born dead”,¹⁸ welcomed the unexpected determination of a Prime Minister who seemed resolute in reintroducing the principle of responsibility into the political arena. *A Break-Through*¹⁹ was the headline of *Le Figaro* after the vote of confidence. With the sole exception of the communist *L’Humanité*, the opposition press also welcomed a “manager that knows well [...] that to govern is like to manage a huge factory”.²⁰ The reasons for Pinay’s popularity were his persona, for the old radical Edouard Herriot “an ordinary Frenchman” that had built for himself “the appearance of the common voter”, the methods he used and, above all, his ability to empathise with, what, Edgar Morin a few years later was to call, “the spirit of the time”.²¹ Pinay’s France was in the midst of reconstruction after the Second World War. It was still mainly an agricultural country that believed in the virtues of sobriety, labour and frugality so that money could be saved. Like an ordinary household, the State too had to be managed in a cautious way without overspending. A sense of balance, moderation and caution towards political parties’ whims were the traits that characterised the old and great civil servants, the *grands commis* of the nation—the Sully, the Colbert and the Poincaré.²² Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the most welcome characteristics of this new Prime Minister was “his housewife like memory of the cost of a kilo or a pound of sole, butter or spinach”.²³

The main change introduced by the new occupant of Matignon was his ambition to communicate directly with the public through a series of radio speeches aimed at reassuring the country and outlining the government’s plans directly to its citizens. Using plain and clear language, Pinay acquired for himself the image of the “anti-technocrat” and “anti-politician”²⁴ who was destined to become popular in a country marked by an anti-parliamentary wave made even stronger by the collapse of the Plevin and Faure governments in less than two months. A further indication that the new Prime Minister wanted to break with traditional communication practices came in the April of 1952, when he decided to launch the main policy of his financial plan: a public loan index linked to gold. In itself this was not a particularly original plan: this kind of loan—particularly safe precisely because the value of the investment would not have diminished—was neither unusual nor the first of its kind. The Ministry of Finance had already issued several others. What was different, however, was that the plan was not implemented by a commission of inspectors, but by the Prime Minister himself; his entourage and ministerial functionaries intervened merely to finalise technical details.²⁵ The economic situation in

which this loan was promoted was particularly delicate: its aim was to mark the end of the hard reconstruction years and the beginning of a new era that would restore faith in savers and herald the success of the government economic plan of recovery.

The originality of this move was its media coverage, which represented one of the first examples of productive collaboration between politics and advertising in French history. In times of crisis technical considerations were added to psychological ones. Pinay was perfectly aware of the importance of creating the right conditions for this project to succeed, and decided to involve Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet, founder of the advertising giant *Publicis*,²⁶ one of the main advertising companies in France of the time. The personalisation of this campaign had no precedent in French history. According to the advertising agency, “The loan should not be an anonymous deal, but rather an agreement between the government and its citizens. Agreements should be signed. You enjoy considerable trust within the country. It is imperative that this is represented as your loan and the advertising campaign be focused around you.”²⁷ And so it was, right from the beginning. Antoine Pinay was persuaded that his personal involvement was decisive and an exclusive interview was published in the popular newspaper *Paris-Press* *l’Intransigeant* announcing the main guidelines of this loan. The Prime Minister did not beat around the bush: “I am the first consumer of France,” he declared. “and I am leading a group of 43 million French people.”²⁸ As if by magic, from April 1952, all financial indicators showed a considerable drop in price: the price tags *Baisse Pinay* that sprang on the shelves of shops all over the country were the most obvious visual proof of this.

Cautious experts traditionally sceptical of these indicators stood back and watched one of the most incredible demonstrations of the power of advertising and psychological research. It was not only that prices had suddenly fallen in an unprecedented fashion, but that this was the consequence of a political figure taking a clear and official stance. Pinay’s fame was at its height; he was immediately renamed “Pinay-la-Chance” and his myth was born. His popularity was such that even General de Gaulle in exile at Colombey remarked sarcastically that “he had not saved France to consign it in the hands of Pinay”.²⁹ The launch of the loan was happening in a favourable climate—the main issue was not so much that this operation would be technically faultless; rather that it should be as attractive as it could possibly be. And so Bleustein-Blanchet suggested to Pinay that he adopt a two-pronged strategy that would have a strong psychological impact. In the first instance, the aim was to present the Prime Minister a

Table 2.1 Index of wholesale prices of 319 products (basis a hundred in 1949)

<i>Year</i>	<i>General index</i>	<i>Food products</i>	<i>Fuel and energy consumption</i>	<i>Industrial produce</i>	<i>Imports</i>
1949 (average)	100	100	100	100	100
1950 (average)	108.3	103.2	105.8	113.7	132.5
1951 (average)	138.3	119.7	126.7	148.7	181.5
1952 (average)	144.9	131.0	142.3	158.2	154.1
1952 January	152.5	135.5	141.7	171.3	169.0
February	152.0	133.8	145.6	170.2	166.6
March	149.3	131.2	145.8	166.5	161.8
April	146.8	129.9	145.6	162.2	154.9
May	144.6	127.9	143.2	160.0	153.1
June	143.0	128.2	143.2	156.0	155.4
July	143.5	131.5	143.2	154.3	154.5
August	143.7	134.1	140.2	153.2	147.2
September	142.6	132.6	140.2	152.2	147.1
October	140.6	128.2	140.0	151.9	147.6
November	140.1	128.3	139.4	150.8	146.9
December	140.5	130.3	139.4	150.0	145.2

Source: *La France économique en 1952*, p. 23

common man. This strategy culminated in a lunch invitation from the Prime Minister to the butchers of the Parisian market in Le Halles. At the end of the meal the Prime Minister offered to pay the bill, which turned out to be very cheap because, as *Le Figaro* explained, “the owner of the restaurant had decided to join the low prices scheme”.³⁰ Secondly, Pinay went out of his way to make the loan as transparent as possible: he decided to put it to the vote in Parliament, even though there was no legal requirement to do so (Table 2.1).

In the meantime, the advertising campaign continued and became increasingly personalised. The loan was advertised and understood by public opinion as if it was a “Pinay product”. All French newspapers included a whole page, framed in gold, with the headline *To Defend the French Franc, Subscribe the Loan of the Trust*, followed by the autograph of the Prime Minister. The final act of a shrewd and innovative marketing campaign was Pinay’s radio speech on 26 May 1952 in which he invited all “small and big” savers to act for the national *grandeur*. The campaign was a resounding success. According to an (Institut français d’opinion publique) IFOP survey, the popularity of the Prime Minister reached levels unknown to any of his predecessors. Pinay became the “President Pin-up”.³¹ François Mauriac revealed that his

sardonic comments in *Le Figaro* about the Prime Minister's populism caused a storm of "protest letters from his readers whose tone was at times bitter and sad, at times offended and at others downright furious".³²

The weekly satirical *Canard enchaîné* commented that popular veneration of the Prime Minister had firm roots, and was no different from the national unwavering faith in charismatic leaders in period of crisis:

French people firmly believe in Pinay and they see "the tanner from Saint-Chamond" as a new Messiah sent to France by Providence so that he can perform the miracle [...] The French trust him in the same way their grandparents trusted Boulanger, and their parents trusted Poincaré and they themselves have trusted first Pétain and then de Gaulle.³³

The vignette that appeared with this article, an illustrated caricature of the Prime Minister talking on the radio, highlighted the growing importance given to the mass media in the process of orchestrating consensus. The caption read *Here Radio-Pinay*. The popularity of Pinay's leadership did not, however, produce political stability: soon the government faced new enemies from within Parliament, which did not want to lose its privileges. Political tensions built around the European Defence Community (EDC) issue and resurfaced during the debate on cuts in public spending. This provided the pretext to get rid of a political figure that in the eyes of the Parliament was becoming all too powerful. By dispensing with a politician that commanded wide public support, members of Parliament were restating what the constitutionalist expert Capitant called one of the unwritten laws of the Republic according to which "Parliament has sovereignty not only over the prime minister but also over the whole electoral body".³⁴ While the "Pinay experiment" was very brief, it contributed significantly to placing the issue of political legitimacy at the centre of attention. From this moment on, this issue could no longer be ignored; the question became, "Is it possible to govern and manage a State without having the trust of the subjects who are governed?"³⁵

3 THE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF PIERRE MENDÈS FRANCE

The progressive crisis of the regime had brought attention to the risks connected to the depersonalisation of power and prepared the ground for leaders determined to break away from the traditional closed circle of politics, in order to establish more direct contact with the public. The example

provided by Antoine Pinay did not remain an exceptional case for long. In June 1954, the Indochina crisis and the traumatic humiliation of Dien Bien Phu created the conditions for change. The anti-Parliament movement gathered strength and brought to power a politician who would transform the Third and Fourth Republic. That politician was Mendès France. Though he overlooked television, preferring the radio because it could reach a much wider audience, this radical leader played a central role in bringing about a change in political communication that led to the circumvention of the only kind of political dialogue possible in those times: the one between prime minister and Parliament. This attempt to domesticate the National Assembly from outside became clear from the way Mendès' candidacy was launched by some popular newspapers. Faced with the international repercussions of the Indochina conflict and the inability of various governments to assure a stable political direction, some respected newspapers started to express more and more sympathy for the Louviers' candidate. The first newspaper to focus attention on Mendès' heterodox ideas and his decisive attitude—rather unusual for the republican standards of the time—was *Le Monde*. On 10 April 1953, Hubert Beuve-Méry's paper carried an article signed by Mendès that caused a furore. The issue was one Mendès felt very strongly about: besides institutional changes, if one wanted to focus attention on the way political figures were voted in, it was also necessary to make changes in the national and collective psychology.³⁶ The support for Mendès from the newspapers in rue des Italiens never gave way, but it was *L'Express* that became the main champion of Mendès France's political success. Founded in May 1953 by Françoise Giroud and Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *L'Express'* explicit intent was to create "a methodical strategy by which other men as resolute as Pierre Mendès France could rise to prominence, so that French politics could escape its routine".³⁷ *L'Express* was at the time a modern weekly paper that soon managed to establish an important place within French intellectual circles due to the contributions made by some of the most prominent writers among the cultural intelligentsia of the time (from Camus to Mauriac and Sartre). *L'Express* was probably the clearest expression of the emergence of a new Left that wanted to break with the imperatives of the past and look to the future unfettered by old prejudices. This new Left saw Mendès France as its leader³⁸ and openly welcomed his rise to power in June of 1954.³⁹

It was immediately clear that Mendès wanted to break with past traditions. In a highly symbolic gesture that showed that his was above all a diplomatic mission, he moved his offices to Quai d'Orsay (where the

Foreign Ministry was). Equally significant was also the fact that the very night that he faced a vote of confidence he decided to send a radio message to the nation. He announced that it was his intention to make communiques such as these frequent during his period in office: “I believe that one of my duties is precisely to explain to the public the significance and the consequences of our actions.”⁴⁰

The radio was to remain in the collective imaginary the symbol of the political adventure of this radical leader. Inspired by the prestige and role played by the BBC in the United Kingdom, as well as the example of Roosevelt (from which he got the nickname “Pmf”), Mendès France modelled his political programme around the principles of “choice”, “action” and “communication” between the government and the general public. He decided to address the nation once a week, every Saturday at 8 p.m. through a radio message. He was to do this a total of 26 times during the seven months he remained at Matignon. Mendès’ goal was to forge a close bond with his audience and in order to do this he constructed a message that was clear and effective, focusing attention on two or three key concepts that were expressed concisely and in a colloquial style. He did not give his public address from a studio but from Matignon, or from his country residence or sometimes, when he was on an official mission, from abroad. He always told his audience where he was talking from, in order to build a sense of intimacy. Emblematic in this respect was the radio message he delivered from Lake Geneva just a few weeks away from his investiture, right at the time in which delicate negotiations on Indochina were happening. On Saturday, 17 July, negotiations reached an impasse due to disagreement between the French and the Soviet delegations, with the latter backing up the Viet-minh. At five minutes to eight, Mendès France was resolute in interrupting any diplomatic negotiations in order to address France’s citizens:

I am speaking tonight from this villa on the Geneva Lake, where—as the press has already informed you—the French delegation has its general head-quarter [...]. Right at this moment, confrontations and discussions continue in the next-door room. I excused myself because I have to talk to you, so that each of you, whatever the outcome of this meeting, will have the clearest possible idea of the reasons for our success, or the causes of our failure.⁴¹

The desire to inform citizens of the government’s action was total; the screen that traditionally had separated the citizens from power and its secrets seemed to suddenly dissolve. While the typical Third Republic

politician systematically eschewed any contact outside the Parliament and thereby avoided hostilities from colleagues, from the 1950s some political leaders used the mass media to achieve a consensus of public opinion and put pressure on the Parliament. A new form of leadership was emerging from the apex of the political institutions. The reasons for Mendès France's huge popularity was his unconventional style and eloquence, which he perfected during his years as a lawyer, as well as the political decisiveness that led him in just two months to find a solution to political dilemmas that had confronted France for years (Indochina, Tunisia and the EDC).

The day after the ratification of the peace treaty with Indochina, *L'Express* noted that the "political 'style' of the country" has been transformed in the space of "only four weeks" and went on to state "the Geneva agreement has stemmed the terrible Indochina haemorrhage, putting an end also to a chapter of French political life".⁴² In *Le Figaro*, a newspaper that was certainly nowhere close to the Prime Minister's positions, Raymond Aron wrote that Mendès France had "won his bet in conditions that left no space for criticism".⁴³ François Mauriac, who stopped his car along a country road to listen to Mendès' speech from Geneva, commented that the Prime Minister's talent for communication was a rare thing: "We hardly ever hear a humane word in politics; it is the cry of Clemenceau exhausted with joy on 11 November 1918; it is the desperate invocation of Churchill to his people and his promise of tears and blood; it is de Gaulle prophesying from the depth of the abyss that France will be liberated."⁴⁴

The huge popularity of Mendès is testified to by the data gathered in numerous IFOP surveys published in the mid-1950s in the periodical *Sondages*. Mendès was the only President whose approval rating remained above the 50% threshold of public satisfaction during his mandate, a popularity that even superseded Pinay's. The figures gathered in August 1954 reflect the record of public opinion during the brief Fourth Republic: 62% declared they were satisfied, against 7% of unsatisfied (the remaining 31% did not answer or were indifferent). Moreover, Mendès—alongside Pinay—was the only Prime Minister of the Fourth Republic whose resignation was not welcomed by the majority of the French public. The day after his government fell, only 12% of those interviewed said they were "happy" (Table 2.2).

Probably more than any other data, what shows the extraordinary consensus Mendès France enjoyed was that his popularity extended across the various political parties. For the first time a political leader seemed able to

Table 2.2 The fall of the government made you happy, unhappy or left you indifferent?

	<i>February 1955 (%)</i>
Happy	12
Unhappy	54
Indifferent	30
I have no opinion	4
Total	100

Source: “L’opinion publique deux jours après la chute du ministère Mendès France”, in *Sondages*, 1955

straddle the traditional Right–Left divisions, thus anticipating the gaullist period. Mendès France’s consensus had no equal in French politics and his talent for communicating contributed in a decisive way to his success. From the pages of *L’Express*, François Mauriac commented: “It is this [weekly radio] appointment that at the moment makes him invulnerable [...] The most powerful cannons could not stop his flight”⁴⁵ (Table 2.3).

Even a caustic castigator of the vices of power such as *Le Canard enchaîné* admitted that it was difficult to criticise the Prime Minister:

It must be said, that here at *Canard* we are annoyed. And here we are, we have become pro-government, pro-government, it is terrible! [...] We are here, like idiots, applauding him, while our role should be to tell him off because he is the Head of the Government. We are sure we will finally come round to do just this. Surely, it can’t go on. In the meantime we are very embarrassed. We will certainly be criticised for switching sides of the barricades.⁴⁶

Mendès France’s decisiveness and innovative style were appreciated not only by the French public, but also by foreign diplomats and the international press. The American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles gave him the nickname “Superman”; both *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* were full of praise and, on 12 July 1954, *Time* magazine, which traditionally showed little interest in French political figures, dedicated its front cover to him.

Paradoxically, it was precisely this extraordinary popularity which, in this particular political context, became a double-edged sword. It contributed significantly to the deterioration of the Prime Minister’s relationship with a Parliament that regarded his desire to create direct dialogue with

Table 2.3 Consensus for Mendès France (September 1954)

	<i>Happy (%)</i>	<i>Unhappy (%)</i>	<i>Indifférent (%)</i>
Communists	40	18	32
Socialists	78	2	18
Radicals	85	1	13
MRP	60	7	30
Moderates	63	10	24
Gaullists	60	13	24
Total	62	7	26

Source: P. Laborie, “Le gouvernement Mendès France et l’opinion: la logique de l’exceptionnel”, in F. Bédarida and J-P. Rioux (eds), *Pierre Mendès France et le mendésisme. L’expérience gouvernementale (1954–1955) et sa postérité*, Paris, Fayard, 1985, pp. 165–174

the public as an intolerable challenge to its legitimacy. As soon as the Indochina and Tunisian crises and the EDC issue were resolved, political parties began to launch attacks on the Prime Minister. It is noteworthy that their attacks concerned the actions, as well as the ideas that had informed Mendès’ government. The catholic Pierre-Herry Teitgen, in a speech he made at Tarbe on 18 October 1954, said that “truth does not lie where public enthusiasm does”.⁴⁷

The direct relation with public opinion so annoyed some members of Parliament that during the party’s national congress on 13 and 14 November 1954, one of the leaders of the Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP), François de Menthon, questioned the constitutionality of Mendès’ initiatives.⁴⁸ Mendès’ demise was in the air: once the national emergency had subsided the political parties showed that they could be rid of him, in the same way that in the past they had got rid of other political luminaries (from Gambetta to Clemenceau and so forth) who came to the aid when the nation needed them. The hostility towards a political leader that had been guilty of trying to be the centre of attention was unanimous and came to fore on 6 February 1955, when Mendès lost a parliamentary vote of confidence with several members of his own party voting against him.

It is telling that during the last parliamentary debate members of Parliament, including communists, moderates and centrists, aggressively attacked Mendès France and accused him of attempting to “promote his own propaganda and will by all means possible and on all airwaves”. The Prime Minister’s use of the radio was seen as an unacceptable affront to the traditional monopoly of Parliament in political matters. Marked by

oligarchic features that were to be criticised by the future Prime Minister Michel Debré in *Ces princes qui nous gouvernent*,⁴⁹ the Fourth Republic once again forcefully restated its aversion towards any direct relation between government and governed, between the representative of the executive and the citizens. The fall of Mendès' government seemed to be the natural outcome of a premature attempt to challenge the "party regime" that was still too powerful to give way to the personal charisma of a single politician, within a system in which there was little opportunity for public opinion to channel its opposition to political parties. Despite the fact that it was short-lived, this government was to leave a long-lasting impression on the political scene; in particular it marked the first steps of "a process that saw the adaptation of the audio-visual medium to republican culture".⁵⁰ With Mendès France, the mass media became the instrument for realising a civic pedagogy that led to the establishment of a significant distinction in republican culture between legitimate government communication and indoctrinating practices typical of dictatorships. If the French political system was naturally suspicious of the direct contact between politicians and citizens, it was the memory of the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s that contributed to strengthening the conviction that mass media were used for propaganda ends in an authoritarian regime or for demagogic ones in a democracy. Mendès France offered a first and determining reassessment of these ideas. For him the main risk was disinformation. His last radio speech on 29 January 1955 can be interpreted as a sort of testament focused on his ideas about government information:

In order to function properly, a democracy should be founded on these exchanges, on the relationship of personal trust between the political representative and those who have trusted him with a mandate [...]. In short the Prime Minister has the task to manage and curb individual interests, and bring to the fore what is needed to promote the common good. A direct and open dialogue between who is elected and the electoral body is central; this has to be frequent and familiar [...]. Everything that makes this dialogue difficult and infrequent is bad, while on the contrary, all that encourages it is good.⁵¹

In the aftermath of the fall of the radical leader, an editorial in the newspaper *Paris-Press* significantly entitled "The Price of Popularity" provided a clear description of the divergence between the workings of Parliament and public opinion:

It is well known that the parliament does not want anything to do with either Mendès France or Pinay. However, if some pollster keen to find out about the popularity of our politicians invited the French people to rate those who have been in power in the last ten years, there is no doubt that the top two in the list would be Pinay and Mendès France, or Mendès France and Pinay. [...] Both of them are very popular, each of them in his own way [...] It is precisely because of this popularity that the Parliament has chastised them. They are guilty of failing to fit traditional patterns.⁵²

A system like the French one was not yet ready to attempt to use public consensus for self-legitimation and as a way to influence Parliament's choices. In this climate, the fall of Mendès France's government represented the victory of the logic of the political system over the illusions of a Prime Minister that had become too ambitious. Though it was unsuccessful, this unorthodox "experiment" contributed in shaking the foundations of parliamentary quasi-despotism and conditioned the public to accommodate themselves to the idea of being governed by a leader, that is to say, a powerful politician who could be held responsible for both the successes and failures of the government. Without this personal responsibility democratic dialogue would be merely illusionary, as there could be no electoral sanction without such personal responsibility.

At the moment of their apparent triumph, political parties did not take into account that their decision to get rid of such a popular leader as Mendès France, far from instilling new life in a worn-out system, was going to accelerate its crisis, further discrediting it and in this way creating the conditions for the return of its worst enemy, General de Gaulle, who had foretold the fall of this ignominious system ever since 1946. There is little doubt that the executive led by Mendès France—in the way it came to an end, for its decisive character and the personalisation of its political conduct—contributed to opening the way to Gaullism.⁵³

4 GUY MOLLET: TELEVISION ENTERS MATIGNON

Mendès France's government had a profound effect on politicians who began to understand that the time had come for changing the traditional channels of political communication (that is to say, the press) and the designated places in which communication happened (the Parliament). Beginning from the 1950s a progressive extension of the boundaries of the *agorà* started to take place: the parliamentary hemicycle ceased to be

the place where discussions of the destiny of the *polis* happened and new media platforms started to emerge. These included radio and, later on, television. During the December 1955 electoral campaign the small screen played a secondary role. Television airtime for each party was limited to five minutes during which the party was supposed to present its political programme; several parties did not even take up the invitation, showing their lack of interest in this media. Even a shrewd communicator like Mendès France had no confidence in television and his message was short and blunt: “I have a program and I am going to tell you about this on Friday on the radio.”⁵⁴

The future Prime Minister, the socialist Guy Mollet, was the first politician to understand the potential of television and to make full use of it. On 4 February 1956, three days after he was elected, he addressed the French people simultaneously on radio and television. For the first time the small screen was acknowledged by a political leader, who declared that he wanted to use it to establish direct contact with the country. In a short speech Mollet explained clearly his vision of mass media. In his view the role of the radio and of the press was “to inform”, the role of television was “to establish a direct contact”. “Every week the Prime Minister, or one of his ministers, will come on television to speak to you [...]. This government is your government. Press and radio will inform you daily on the government actions, however this will not replace the direct contact with you that I intend to create.”⁵⁵ After a few weeks, while the Algerian crisis was raging, Gérard Jacquet, the Minister of Information, had the task of explaining to the Parliament the new need for government information in order to endorse a new democratic imperative:

In the midst of this never ending debate, the government cannot remain a passive spectator; it has no right to leave public opinion in a state of ignorance as to the worries and the problems that it has to face to secure the general interest for which it is held responsible in front of the whole nation. In the century of the popular press, of continuous revolutions in communicative techniques, when television conquers new viewers by the day [...], a government that neglects its duty to inform inevitably neglects its commitment to the people.⁵⁶

What was once a sinister aspect of totalitarian regimes was transformed into a democratic instrument necessary for the advancement of democracy. The Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, decided to become the spokesperson

for this change of perspective and decided to do so through television. During his government, which lasted 16 months, he addressed the French people a dozen times through the small screen. On ten occasions he appeared in a television studio in interviews and debates with newspaper journalists on issues of contemporary relevance that were suggested to him (at least this was the official version) in letters received from members of the audience.

The most successful formula of these television appearances consisted of Mollet being interviewed at Matignon by the renowned state journalist Pierre Sabbagh. For the first time, television cameras filmed the official residence of the Prime Minister, who appeared behind the desk of his office. This programme was entitled *Vingt minutes avec le président du Conseil* and was broadcast on two occasions: on 6 June and on 12 November, soon after the 8 p.m. news. The structure of the programme was somewhat theatrical⁵⁷ and carefully pre-prepared; questions ranged widely from the minister's private life to international affairs. These new programmes were favourably received by the public, and particularly the second one, which was broadcast in a delicate political moment during the aggravation of the Algerian conflict, and the Suez and Hungarian crises.

There is little doubt of the success these broadcasts had: though the press remained rather indifferent, the public was enthusiastic. The Guy Mollet archive contains several letters in which various viewers congratulate the President on these television programmes. To provide an idea of their success, some fragments of the letters that arrived at Matignon on 12 November—the day after the second broadcast—are reported below. What follows is a selection of letters that were written by citizens who openly declared they were not socialists.⁵⁸

13 November 1956—Robert Brun (Nice)

Last night I have listened carefully to your interview, I was deeply impressed. I am really enthusiastic about this initiative; it was as if the head of the family was speaking to his children. I am but a simple worker, without any clear political ideas, as politics never interested me particularly. However you can be absolutely sure that your sentiments are also mine, and those of all French people that put their country above everything else. In my opinion you are worthy of the words French and Head. I beg you to believe me when I say that it is the first time that a man's words have left such a vivid impression on me. I heartily thank you.

13 November 1956—Brumeau (Paris)

Even if I do not always share your ideas, please accept my most sincere compliments for the speech you gave yesterday on television.

13 November 1956—Sender unknown

Distinguished President [...] I do not agree with all your ideas. You belong to a great and noble party of which, however, I do not share the ideology. The very serious and simple ways with which you have spoken to all French people led me to believe (and I fear not to be wrong) that you are a great patriot, with a magnanimous soul and, most importantly of all, an honest man.

13 November 1956—Mme Chapelard (Enghien les Bains)

I am still moved after I have heard and seen you, and I thank you for speaking to us the way you did. It makes us more confident about the future. I really hope you will be able to speak to us every week, as, in these difficult times, French people need to be reassured.

13 November 1956—Mme Tréguer (Bois Colombes—Seine)

I have watched and heard you on television yesterday Monday 22nd November. Allow me to express all my admiration and gratitude for your noble words [...]. I am just a mother who, like the rest of my family, has suffered a lot because of the war and its consequences. You are the only one that for a long while now has managed to give back some courage and hope for the future of our country.

13 November 1956—M. Ernest Blanche

I am a Frenchman like many others and I wish to compliment you for your television speech on November 12th. You have comforted us, and given us hope that you will often speak to us. This is necessary to boost everybody's morale. One feels less lonely [...] believe me, we need you to speak to us often. After listening to you we feel that we still have the right to be proud to be French.

13 November 1956—Mme Badan (Paris)

I was very happy to watch you speaking on television: it was urgent given that everyone is panicking. I cannot express how relieved I felt to realise that here it is an honest man that believes in all he says, something that hasn't happened in a long while. You must speak to us EVERY week [...].

The trust inspired by the Prime Minister during these broadcasts was particularly crucial because France was at that very moment in the midst of a severe international crisis. For the first time in the history of France, Guy Mollet managed to build a direct relationship with public opinion through television. This was particularly crucial, as the small screen was for many still a mysterious and magical object, whose power was demonstrated by the following letter written by a landowners' family and delivered to Matignon in March 1957, a few weeks before the fall of the government and the disappearance of the socialist leader from the political scene.

12 November 1957—M. and M.me Bafoil (Cantal)

Distinguished President,

I am writing to you from a farmhouse in the depth of the Cantal region to send the compliments of a farmer's family. Last night, my husband, our labourers and myself were about to have dinner when your image appeared from behind the television screen. We stopped eating and listened with great surprise and respect, we had never seen you before. Mister President, we were not yet acquainted with the kind way in which you speak to us. Our daughter Nicole (10 years of age) and Brigitte (3 years old) encouraged by our elder son have taken turns to kiss you on the television screen.⁵⁹

If, on the one hand, television broadcasts like these could reassure a confused public opinion, on the other hand, their conditioning effect should not be exaggerated. Firstly, television was not yet popular and, secondly, the institutional system did not allow the Prime Minister to take full advantage of his popularity. Governments that enjoyed popular consensus could still be overthrown and did not have the possibility to appeal to the "sovereignty" of the people. This was precisely what had happened to Pinay and Mendès, and what was going to happen to Mollet, who lost the vote of confidence of the Parliament on 21 May 1957. This happened in a very difficult historical moment both internally (the inflationary spiral reappeared) and internationally (namely, the sensational revelations of the "torture" scandal in Algeria and the consequences of the disastrous Suez expedition). No alternatives seemed possible and the final crisis that brought the system down was inevitable. A few months afterwards an article published in the magazine *La Nef* provided a clear explanation of the "common vices" of these political leaders: "Three Prime Ministers were able to use modern means of propaganda: radio in the case of Antoine Pinay and Pierre Mendès France, and television in the case of Guy Mollet. Parliament was not going to forgive them for that."⁶⁰

5 THE DEMISE OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

On 13 May the Algerian revolt brought down the Fourth Republic. For too long, this “party system” refused to realise the seriousness of a crisis that inevitably undermined the credibility of those political institutions that, for over a century, had characterised the French Republic. The effect of this crisis was to relegitimise the primary enemy of this system, who had always prophesied the failure of parliamentarism—the very foundation of the Republic even since its beginning in 1946.

Overseas, in the aftermath of the Algerian insurrection, reporters painted a pretty clear picture of the French situation: “The indecision and flabbiness of successive French governments since 1945 has led to a feeling of frustration and hopelessness and a determination ‘to set things right’. Gen. Charles de Gaulle is the only man who can do this, many of them feel.”⁶¹ Paradoxically, the situation appeared much more confused to French commentators. Even for the most authoritative of these commenting on the situation on the spur of the moment was to invite a blunder. This happened to René Rémond who, on 16 May in the pages of the Catholic weekly paper *Témoignage chrétien*, attempted an imprudent prophesy and bet on the “extraordinary resilience of the regime [...] one of the strongest ever, that could be compared to those adolescents who are told they will die young but, contrary to expectations, live to be a hundred”.⁶²

Even French public opinion got acclimatised to the constant political instability; many were resigned to face what looked to be the 22nd crisis in the 12 years of the Fourth Republic. In May 1958, the reflections of Edgar Faure appeared cogent as never before: “The crisis does not represent the political sanction, rather it has become the pretext for getting a concession. Devoid of its solemnity, deformed in its meaning, it produces a sort of intermittent governance.”⁶³

The disinterest showed by French people in the face of the tumultuous political events of the spring of 1958 is testified by the fact that there was no clamour for more information. In this respect it is important to revise the myth—perpetuated by many leading scholars—of a craving for information that would have gripped the whole of France right at the moment of the collapse of the Fourth Republic. René Rémond, for example, noted that this was evident in the “increase of the number of newspapers sold,

the presence of an assiduous radio and television audience and a series of other data that one day should be studied and evaluated with care, if we want to replace common places with scientific data”.⁶⁴ Others confirmed his ideas *ex post facto*, and noted that the 1958 French crisis “brought a noticeable increase in newspapers’ print-run figures”.⁶⁵

As a matter of fact there is nothing, least of all data concerning the press, that provides proof that French citizens were particularly interested in the chaotic political situation. As can be noted in Table 1.1 in the previous chapter, the increase in the overall print-run figures of French newspapers between 1957 and 1958 was very limited (1.6%). This data should also be considered as part of a positive trend typical of the years between 1952 and 1957 when the number of newspapers printed went from 9.6 million copies in 1952 to 11.5 million in 1957.

As Fig. 2.1 shows, despite the fact that 1958 was a year full of particularly important political events—the May crisis, the nomination of de Gaulle as Head of Government, the referendum on the Constitution and political elections—the increase of printed copies was insignificant in relation to

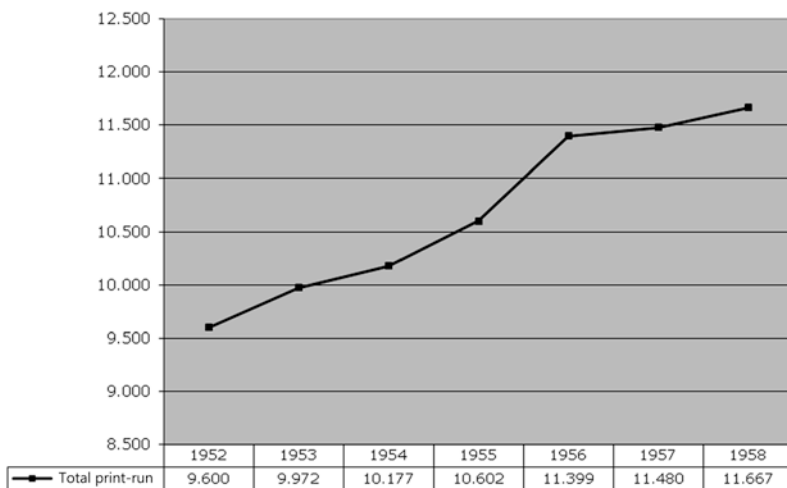


Fig. 2.1 Average print-run figures of national and regional newspapers from May to June divided per years and expressed in thousands of copies (1952–58)
Source: *Tableaux statistiques de la presse, 1987–1988*, Paris, Sjtj—La Documentation française, 1990, p. 111

that of previous years and in any case remained below the average. More specific data concerning the crisis that ended with the return to power of General de Gaulle shows that the most noticeable increase in the number of copies printed was limited to the month of May, and does not exceed the 10.5% of the previous year, rising from 4,108,000 copies in May 1957 to 4,540,000 in May 1958.⁶⁶ Besides, as from June, the increment had already halved (5.8%) (Table 2.4).

Similarly, apropos television sets—which saw a great expansion in these years—there is no noticeable difference in sales between 1958 and previous or successive years (Fig. 2.2).⁶⁷

Moreover, recent studies have shown that the most likely reason for the increase of sales of television sets in 1958 was connected to a summer packed with international sports events (the World Cup football tournament in Sweden and the first Tour de France broadcast live on radio and television).⁶⁸

In the spring of 1958 French public opinion was dominated by a mood of resignation and passivity. This attitude could be seen as fostering a kind of political “neutrality” that caused the political parties in power to become more marginalised and fragile, thus paving the way for the return to power of one of the fiercest critics of a profoundly delegitimised system that dragged the Republic to the edge of the abyss.

Table 2.4 Evolution of the average print-run figures of national newspaper during the May–June 1958 crisis (in thousands of copies)

	<i>May 1957</i>	<i>May 1958</i>	<i>June 1957</i>	<i>June 1958</i>	<i>Peak sales with dates</i>
<i>Aurore</i>	472	482	501	485	534 (31–5)
<i>Combat</i>	58	62	58	61	83 (16–5)
<i>La Croix</i>	154	104	154	103	127 (27–5)
<i>Le Figaro</i>	491	508	492	501	625 (30–5)
<i>France-Soir</i>	1350	1459	1342	1381	2100 (14–5)
<i>Humanité</i>	210	251	210	226	418 (16–5)
<i>Libération</i>	113	121	112	125	160 (30–5)
<i>Le Monde</i>	203	227	204	230	304 (16–5)
<i>Paris-Journal</i>	–	147	–	148	194 (30–5)
<i>Parisien Libéré</i>	829	903	836	875	1006 (30–5)
<i>Paris-Presse</i>	161	202	160	181	313 (27–6)
<i>Populaire</i>	14	19	14	15	124 (28–5)
<i>Information</i>	63	55	65	58	65 (31–5)

Source: *L'Année politique 1958*, Paris, Puf, 1959, p. 572

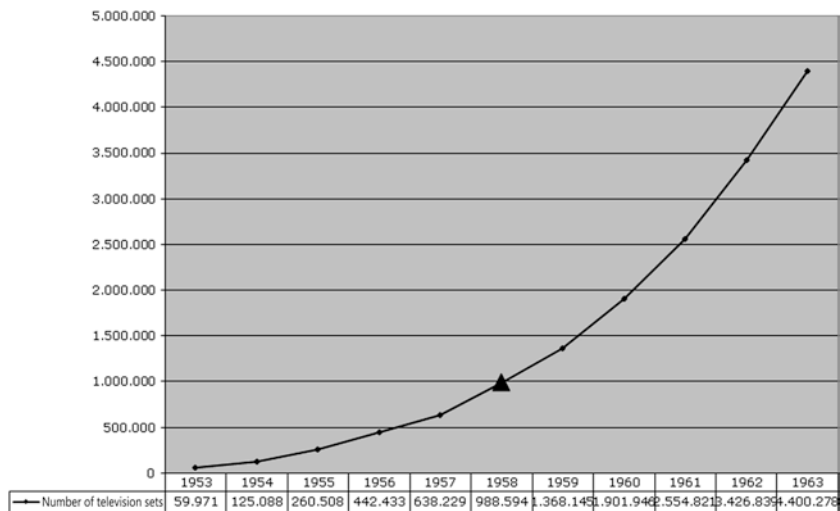


Fig. 2.2 Number of television sets in France (1953–63)

Source: J.K. Chalaby, *The de Gaulle Presidency and the Media*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2002, p. 215

The IFOP surveys on the popularity of the successors of Guy Mollet—no less than two in one year before and after the political crisis that continued for over a month⁶⁹—leave little room for ambiguity over the deep divisions between politicians and public opinion in the last years of the Fourth Republic (Table 2.5).

At the beginning of 1958, parliamentarianism fell into unprecedented disrepute; the desire to reform institutions and the electoral system paved the way for the personal cult of the political leader. To grasp the extent of this phenomenon, a comparison with the past is illuminating (Table 2.6).

This shows an evolution that began at the end of the Second World War: in less than 15 years there was increasing discontent towards Parliament; its failure to take decisions and indifference towards public opinion had contributed to diminish the widespread reservations at the beginning of the Fourth Republic about the wielding of personal power.

The complete loss of credibility suffered by the political system paved the way for a revolutionary change that in previous years was unsuccessfully attempted by political leaders such as Pinay, Mendès France or Mollet. Their failure can be explained by the hostility they met from the “party

Table 2.5 All in all are you satisfied or unsatisfied with the present government?

	<i>Bourgès-Maunoury</i> (September 1957)	<i>Gaillard (January</i> 1958)
Satisfied	27	20
Unsatisfied	42	38
Indifferent/no opinion	31	42

Source: IFOP, *Sondages*, 3, 1958, p. 61

Table 2.6 Would prefer to vote for a man or for a political party?

	<i>November 1944</i>	<i>January 1958</i>
A man	16	52
A party	72	27
No opinion	12	21

Source: IFOP, *Sondages*, 3, 1958, p. 61

regime”, still too strong and vital to accept a “drift” towards the personalisation of power. The gaullist era marked changes both in the institutions and in government uses of communication, changes that were to eventually gain widespread legitimacy among the French public and offer changes that they had been yearning for over a number of years.

NOTES

1. A. Siegfried, *Le pouvoir personnel*, *Le Figaro*, 4 May 1947, p. 1.
2. See on this I. Di Jorio, *Tecniche di propaganda politica. Vichy e la Légion Française des Combattants, 1940–1944*, Roma, Carocci, 2006.
3. Rémond, *La République souveraine*, op. cit.
4. N. Roussellier, “La contestation du modèle républicain dans les années 30: la réforme de l’Etat”, in Berstein, Rudelle (eds), *Le Modèle républicain*, op. cit., pp. 319–335. See also N. Roussellier, *La force de gouverner. Le pouvoir exécutif en France, XIXe-XXIe siècles*, Paris, Perrin, 2015.
5. A. Tardieu, *La profession parlementaire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1937, p. 27.
6. For a more detailed account concerning the hostilities met by Tardieu and Doumergue see N. Roussellier, “André Tardieu ou la crise du constitutionnalisme libéral, 1933–34” in *Vingtième siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 21, 1989,

- pp. 57–70; F. Monnet, *Réfaire la République. André Tardieu: une dérive réactionnaire (1876–1945)*, Paris, Fayard, 1993; J. Rives, *Gaston Doumergue. Du modèle républicain au Sauveur Suprême*, Toulouse, Presses de l'Institut d'études politiques de Toulouse, 1993.
7. L. Blum, *Le "moi" présidentiel*, *Le Populaire*, 1 November 1934, p. 1.
 8. G. Doumergue, *Mes causeries avec le peuple de France*, Paris, Reboul & fils Editeurs, 1934, p. 7.
 9. It is not by chance that during the Fourth Republic the only political groups to personalise their communication were those that remained in a marginal position—gaullists, poujadists and, above all, the communists. Philippe Buton has shown how communist iconography was radically different from that of party government. This was visual proof of the Communist party's desire to differentiate itself from the other parties, which they regarded as part of the system of the bourgeoisie. See P. Buton. "L'adieu aux armes? L'iconographie communiste française et italienne depuis la Libération", in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 80, no. 4, 2003, pp. 43–54.
 10. J. Julliard, *Que sont les grands hommes devenus? Essai sur la démocratie charismatique*, Paris, Saint-Simon, 2004, p. 119.
 11. It is interesting to reread the editorials published by Blum after the Doumergue's proposal for constitutional reform on 10 October 1934. What made this proposal even more unacceptable to him was that the Prime Minister used the radio to bypass Parliament directly address the nation. The titles of the editorial are significant. L. Blum, *Alerte!*, *Le Populaire*, 20 October 1934, p. 1; Id., *Le coup d'Etat légalisé*, *Le Populaire*, 23 October 1934, p. 1; Id., *Monarchisme et bonapartisme*, *Le Populaire*, 25 October 1934, p. 1; Id., *Le 16 mai revu et corrigé*, *Le Populaire*, 24 October 1934, p. 1; Id., *Aux ordres des fascistes*, *Le Populaire*, 28 October 1934, p. 1.
 12. C. Ollivier-Yaniv, *L'Etat communiquant*, op. cit., pp. 94–95.
 13. A. Gazier *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du vendredi 15 juin 1951*, p. 1186.
 14. D. Georgakakis, *La République contre la propagande*, Paris, Economica, 2004.
 15. R. Tréno, *Les sauveurs du pays en état d'alerte*, *Le Canard enchaîné*, 5 March 1952, p. 1.
 16. S. Jansen (ed), *Les grands discours parlementaires de la Quatrième République. De Pierre Mendès France à Charles de Gaulle: 1945–1958*, Paris, A. Colin, 2006, p. 149.
 17. A. Pinay, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du jeudi 6 mars 1952*, p. 1182.
 18. F. Mauriac, *Les intérêts particuliers*, *Le Figaro*, 5 March 1952, p. 1.
 19. L. Gabriel-Robinet, *Un tournant*, *Le Figaro*, 7 March 1952, p. 1.

20. R. Roure, *Journée des dupes*, *Le Monde*, 8 March 1952, p. 1.
21. E. Morin, *L'esprit du temps. Essai sur la culture de masse*, Paris, Grasset, 1962.
22. R. Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 68.
23. *La crise française*, *Paris—Match*, 22 March 1952, p. 14.
24. S. Guillaume, *Antoine Pinay ou la confiance en politique*, Paris, Presses de la Fnsp, 1984, p. 68.
25. C. Rimbaud, *Pinay*, Paris, Perrin, 1990, p. 200.
26. During the 1930s, Bleustein-Blanchet tried without success to persuade important French politicians to use the techniques he had learnt in the States. He achieved some notoriety after the war when he introduced Ernst Dichter's motivational theories in France. He obtained contracts worth millions with leading companies in France and abroad. Among these were Colgate-Palmolive and Prénatal in 1947, Shell in 1954, Singer in 1956, Renault in 1963. Personal communication by Laurence Rey, Director of Communication of the *Publicis Conseil* (15 November 2004). For his biography see M. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, Paris, Laffont, 1970.
27. *Ibidem*, p. 380.
28. A. Pinay (interviewed by M. Bromberger), *Je suis M. Consommateur et prends la tête d'une ligue de 43 millions de Français*, *Paris-presse l'Intransigeant*, 18 April 1952, p. 1.
29. P. Viansson-Ponté, *Histoire de la république gaullienne*, Paris, Laffont, 1971, p. 402.
30. R-G. Schwartzenberg, *L'Etat spectacle. Essai sur et contre le star system en politique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1977, pp. 48–49.
31. R. Tréno, *Le président Pin-up*, *Le Canard enchaîné*, 26 March 1952, p. 1.
32. F. Mauriac, *La dégelée*, *Le Figaro*, 28 April 1952, p. 1.
33. R. Tréno, *Les cornichons et les autres*, *Le Canard enchaîné*, 5 May 1952, p. 1.
34. R. Capitant, *La Réforme du parlementarisme*, Sirey, Paris, 1934, p. 8.
35. A. Siegfried, *Le libéralisme dans l'expérience Pinay*, *Le Figaro*, 22 April 1952, p. 1.
36. P. Mendès-France, *La réforme constitutionnelle suffira-t-elle?*, *Le Monde*, 10 April 1953, p. 4.
37. See E. Faure, *Mémoires*, I, *Avoir toujours raison c'est un grand tort*, Paris, Plon, 1982, p. 429.
38. Since the very first issue, published on 16 May 1953, a lot of space is devoted to Mendès France; in particular this issue contains a long interview to Mendès France. P. Mendès France, *La France peut supporter la vérité*, *L'Express*, 16 May 1953, p. 6.
39. E. Roussel, *Pierre Mendès France*, Paris, Gallimard, 2007, pp. 214–215.

40. *Ibidem*.
41. P. Mendès France, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, *Gouverner c'est choisir, 1954–1955*, Paris, Gallimard, 1986, p. 129.
42. *La France après Genève*, *L'Express*, 24 July 1954, p. 1.
43. R. Aron, *Un pari bien gagné*, *Le Figaro*, 22 July 1954, p. 1.
44. F. Mauriac, *Le Bloc-notes*, *L'Express*, 24 July 1954, p. 12.
45. F. Mauriac, *Le Bloc-notes*, *L'Express*, 31 July 1954, p. 16.
46. Hamlet, *Enfin, un gouvernement d'opposition!*, *Le Canard enchaîné*, 1 September 1954.
47. J-P. Azéma, “L’ambivalence”, in F. Bédarida and J-P. Rioux (eds), *Pierre Mendès France et le mendésisme. L'expérience gouvernementale (1954–1955) et sa postérité*, Paris, Fayard, 1985, p. 106.
48. E. Roussel, *Pierre Mendès France*, op. cit., p. 340.
49. M. Debré, *Ces Princes qui nous gouvernent. Lettre aux dirigeants de la nation*, Paris, Plon, 1957.
50. J-F. Sirinelli, *Aux marges de la République*, Paris, PUF, 2001, p. 83.
51. P. Mendès France, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, op. cit., pp. 696–698.
52. P. Gérin, *Le prix de la popularité*, *Paris-presses L'Intransigeant*, 12 February 1955, p. 1.
53. S. Berstein, “Le gouvernement de Pierre Mendès France et les partis”, in F. Bédarida and Rioux (eds), *Pierre Mendès France et le mendésisme*, op. cit., p. 116.
54. B. Blin, “La radiodiffusion et la télévision”, in M. Duverger, F. Goguel and J. Touchard (eds), *Les élections du 2 janvier 1956*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1957, pp. 165–181.
55. Cohen, *Télévision, Pouvoir et Citoyenneté*, op. cit., p. 30.
56. G. Jacquet, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mardi 13 mars 1956*, p. 875.
57. Exemplary is a fake telephone ring that puts an end to the interview. At this point the Prime Minister returns to his work and the journalist comments “not everybody knows that you are on television”. INA, Mollet collection, 18 June 1956, 20'04”.
58. These letters, of which only some fragments are quoted, are kept in AGM 71.
59. *Ibidem*.
60. J. Ferniot, *Comment devenir Président du Conseil*, *La Nef*, January 1958, p. 30.
61. B. Welles, *Moves in Algeria*, *The New York Times*, 18 May 1958, p. 2.
62. R. Rémond, *Les chances d'un coup d'Etat, Témoignage chrétien*, 16 May 1958, p. 20.
63. E. Faure, *La crise de la démocratie*, *Le Monde*, 27 March 1953, p. 1.

64. R. Rémond, “Le nouveau régime et les forces politiques”, in *Revue française de science politique*, 1, 1959, p. 168.
65. J-C. Bellanger et al. (eds), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, V, *De 1958 à nos jours*, Paris, Puf, 1976, p. 168.
66. *L'Année politique 1958*, op. cit., pp. 571–572.
67. The only way to measure television consumption in an era in which no data on audience rating existed is represented by the number of television sets sold.
68. I. Gaillard, “De l'étrange lucarne à la télévision, histoire d'une banalisation (1949–1984)”, in *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 91, July 2006, pp. 9–23.
69. The first government was led by Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury (12 June–30 September 1957) and the second by Félix Gaillard (5 November 1957–15 April 1958).

De Gaulle and the Press: A 30-Year-Long Misunderstanding

1 A DEVOTED BUT SUSPICIOUS READER

Nothing interested him more than reading the paper—French newspapers, the Parisian papers, the provincial ones, but also those from the United Kingdom, America and Germany. Above all, he liked daily papers. He liked the smell of paper and fresh ink; he had a deep dislike of anonymous and spruced up press reviews. Nothing annoyed him more than a late paper delivery. The management of these deliveries was one of my main preoccupations and more than once I found myself [...] waiting for the motorcyclist of the national police who was going to deliver the much-longed package.¹

The General was a tireless reader of newspapers. Every morning—no matter whether he was at the Élysée or in his country residence in Colombey—after getting up, before setting to work he used to dedicate an hour to reading daily papers. Besides the main national and regional French papers, he also read several foreign papers such as the *Daily Telegraph*, the *New York Times* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.² Even though he was a devoted reader, de Gaulle had a poor opinion of French journalists and used to call them “the experts of nostalgia, of denigration and hate ... they exude hate, they spit venom”.³

The blatant contradiction between the insatiable reader and the contemptuous one who referred to journalists as “a coalition of corrupted writers” explains the ambiguous relationship that the General had with the

press throughout the 30 years he remained on the public scene. On the one hand, thanks to his pragmatic attitude, the General was quick in seeing the deep transformations the French mass media were undergoing, hence his partiality for the radio first and later for television. On the other hand, de Gaulle's passion for the written word never faded and always remained a source of frustration as he felt that newspapers never supported him.

The contempt the General felt towards the press—unequivocally expressed by a long list of biting comments scattered throughout the two volumes of his memoir⁴—had deep roots. Born in 1890, de Gaulle witnessed not only the accommodation much of the press made with the Nazi occupiers during the Second World War, but, beforehand, its corruption during the Third Republic, when the relation between politics and the newspapers had been, to say the least, muddy. Ever since the First World War, every year the parliamentary vote on expenditure incurred by the Home Ministry for “secret agents hired for general security reasons” used to cause long debates during which the government was often accused of using a part of these “secret funds” to subsidise journalists. In 1884, e.g., the MP Carret declared that of the two million francs from this fund, 400,000 were given to the press, 600,000 to the police prefecture, but of the remaining one million francs nobody knew anything.⁵ In 1892 the Panama Canal scandal revealed the corrupt relations between politicians, entrepreneurs and the press. The latter were paid to cover the financial troubles of the company that was hired for the construction of the canal, allowing “toxic” shares to be placed on the market with the full complicity of key political figures.⁶

The General's resentment towards a press that had no interest in national honour became even stronger in the 1930s, when the then Colonel de Gaulle vainly tried to find a newspaper that was prepared to circulate his unorthodox ideas on the need to build a professional army and prepare for a war of movement.⁷ What soon became apparent was that this was merely the tip of the iceberg of the abjection and moral degradation that surfaced in the 1940s in the collaboration between “the ignoble radio and the degraded press” and the propaganda system set up by Vichy.⁸

Even towards the end of the war, after the Liberation of Paris, the press did not redeem itself as some hoped. Late in the autumn in 1944, while German attacks continued in Alsace, de Gaulle pointed out that military operations were given “very little space and were commented on in a banal manner”. When he summoned the chief editors of the main newspapers to ask them to give more visibility to these events, he was told: “We will do

our best. However, we have to take into consideration the public taste; readers, it seems, are not terribly interested in military actions.”⁹ Needless to say that for the General this was blasphemy. Soon after Liberation, de Gaulle began to reform the press system.

He played a key role in the foundation of *Le Monde* that rose from the ashes of *Le Temps*.¹⁰ However, faced with the return of old practices that he hoped had disappeared with the end of the ignominious Third Republic and the disgraceful Vichy experience, the General soon realised that his reforming efforts were in vain and a deep sense of frustration set in.¹¹ In the years of the RPF and his “desert crossing”, the General’s unease towards the press—the only means of mass communication available to him after Ramadier banned him from the radio in 1947—increased. According to Gaullism, newspapers were deeply implicated (along with political parties) in a system that had ruined France in 1940 and that—had it not managed to reform itself along the lines advocated during the Bayeux speech on 16 June 1946—would have continued to dishonour the nation. In his memoir, de Gaulle described this period as “twelve years [...] of machinations, intrigues and parliamentary treasons fed by congresses and committee motions under the journalists’ threat”.¹²

And yet, despite his growing sense of frustration, de Gaulle always remained keenly interested in the press. For he not only read all the main newspapers every day, he also asked RPF leaders to give him detailed information about newspapers’ coverage of party actions and his own speeches. Papers from the archives of the *Fondation Charles de Gaulle* show that the General received regular and comprehensive press summaries that contained the name of the newspaper, the page number, the font size of the title and even the number of lines of the article:

Hostilities in *Franc Tireur*, 200 lines in the first page; in *Ce soir*, 120 lines distributed in three pages; in *L’Humanité*. *Le Monde* has a hundred lines that are “rather positive” in its first page by Rémy Roure and it quotes the complete speech. This is also quoted by *L’Intransigeant* and *Le Figaro* always in the first page, but here the title has a bigger font.¹³

Despite the fact that de Gaulle’s associates went to great pains to give him detailed reports that evidently reflected the very diverse opinions of the newspapers, the unwavering belief of the General was that the press was unanimously hostile. In the late spring of 1958 de Gaulle was convinced that journalists were among his staunchest enemies.

2 THE PRESS AND THE RETURN OF THE GENERAL

A historical myth has it that General de Gaulle, when he returned to power in 1958, used the small screen as his “secret weapon”¹⁴ in an attempt to balance the hostility towards him from the press.¹⁵ This is in fact a rather partial interpretation based on the General’s notoriously idiosyncratic attitude towards journalists, his tempestuous relations with the chief editors of some of most famous national papers—especially Hubert Beuve-Méry the founder of *Le Monde*¹⁶—and a tendency to read uncritically the General’s frequent expressions of victimisation in his memoir.

Recalling the events on 8 January 1959—the day René Coty nominated the General as first President of the Fifth Republic—de Gaulle wrote that as soon as he got out of the car that had taken him through the Champs-Élysées amid cheering crowds he immediately thought about the enemies that he would have to face: “the potentates of our times: political parties, big business, the trade unions and the press”.¹⁷ At the time of his personal triumph, when the “possibility of a great undertaking was materialising” the General was sure that his action “to regain *la grandeur*” was going to be strongly opposed by the “continuous vilification from businessmen, journalists and intellectuals”.¹⁸

Acrimony towards the General displayed itself on the eve of his election and continued unchanged during the long years of “the desert crossing”. This ostensibly points to the general attitude of hostility of the press towards the General’s return to power. But in fact things are not as straightforward as they appear. During his political resurrection and the introduction of the new Constitution—that is to say, from the May 1958 crisis to the referendum on 28 September of the same year—the press was anything but hostile to the General; on the contrary it showed growing support for him and his project of political stability. Despite the profound unease caused by the Algerian turmoil and faced with the spectre of civil war becoming ever likelier, the only opposition left to the return to power of “the Man of 18 June” came from the Communist party.

The weekly papers of the so-called *nouvelle gauche*—*France-Observateur*, *L’Express*, *Témoignage chrétien* that were going to become the thorn in the side of Gaullist power in the years to follow—commented that the return to power of the General could be risky especially because of the Algerian Generals’ plot. Despite this, even they were not unanimously against the return to power of the General.

The most critical position was that of *France-Observateur*, which claimed that May 1958 and de Gaulle's connivance with the Algerian *putsch* organisers were going to destroy the myth of the General and forever tarnish the memories of the heroic days of June 1940 and the Liberation. The ignominious outcome of Gaullism, in other words, was "dictatorship".¹⁹ Roger Stéphane,²⁰ a former member of the Resistance, stated laconically "only yesterday I was a Gaullist".²¹ The catholic weekly *Témoignage chrétien* kept an open-minded attitude; faced with this dramatic situation, it simply noted that "the involvement of a man of great historical and moral integrity" probably represented "the last chance for the country".²² Opinions from *L'Express* were diverse; on 22 May it published a questionnaire that divided its journalists: "de Gaulle yes or no?"²³ For its chief editor, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, the reappearance on the political scene of the General was a sign that the country "was moving from confusion to hope".²⁴

His most famous collaborators were not of the same opinion. Among those who opposed his position were Pierre Mendès France and Jean-Paul Sartre, while François Mauriac agreed with him. Mauriac went to great pains to explain to the readers that the varied positions within the paper provided a mirror of the French public opinion: "Our violins at *L'Express* are not always tuned, but then again ... who in this last month has not been torn between shame and hope?"²⁵

During the last week in May 1958, the situation became even more aggravated: the revolt extended from Algeria to Corsica and rumours started to spread of paratroopers to be dropped in Paris. It was then that the press started to converge towards supporting the General, who was thought to be the only political figure that could restore order among the rebels, and, at the same time, preserve a form of republican legitimacy. The fear of a "Spanish solution" to the French crisis contributed in changing the opinion of part of the press and boosting the General's support. It is significant that the day after René Coty appealed to de Gaulle to form a new government, the two "spiritual chief editors of the bourgeois press"²⁶—the chief editor of *Le Figaro*, Pierre Brisson, and Hubert Beuve-Méry of *Le Monde*—explicitly approved this move. Méry, in particular, on 14 May after attacking the "follies" of the *ultras* and pleading for the respect of "Republic legality everywhere and on the part of everyone"²⁷, admitted having discovered "the bitter truth": "[U]nable to be decent, the Fourth Republic has also been unable to end in style [...] Today, right now, despite all reservations one might have for the present and—even more—for the future, General de Gaulle seems to be the lesser evil."²⁸

In a similar way, Pierre Brisson, broke a silence that lasted weeks²⁹ and, on the eve of the parliamentary vote of confidence, remarked that the General represented the only hope to save the country from complete ruin: “Today is going to be decisive, the danger has not been averted [...]. However, now all of us know where to place hope to retain our freedoms.”³⁰ Even the socialist newspaper *Le Populaire*, which since 13 May had firmly positioned itself against the Algerian rebels, on the eve of the parliamentary appointment suddenly started to adopt a moderate tone and limited itself to a mere detached narration of the events.³¹ The Right were obviously exulted. The main popular Parisian papers also heralded the return to the political scene of the General and the more peaceful climate he brought with him. “France is ready to begin again.”³²

The parliamentary vote of confidence in de Gaulle was welcomed by almost all the newspapers, or at least accepted as a decision taken as a last resort. Moreover, during the following months—from the drafting of the Constitution to the referendum that approved it—the attitude of the press towards de Gaulle improved. This change was particularly noticeable in the regional press that previously, during the May events, had maintained a cautious position. Only the communist press and the weekly *France-Observateur* were openly critical of the new Constitution. During the referendum week, the headline on its front page read: “For the third time in twenty years, to have courage means to say no.”³³ Next to this headline was a picture of de Gaulle and juxtaposed to this some others of Daladier returning from Munich and of Pétain addressing the crowd.

The other two weekly papers of the “nouvelle gauche” were internally split. *L'Express* refused to take a firm stand and simply reported the differing positions of its most important journalists. *Témoignage chrétien* in an editorial confessed its tormented agnosticism and invited French people to put aside their divisions after the vote, whatever the result.³⁴

The two main national newspapers, albeit with different degrees of conviction, were both in favour of a “yes” vote. André Siegfried, *Le Figaro's* leading political columnist, argued there were no alternatives to the referendum because “to vote ‘no’ means sending General de Gaulle back to Colombey and hence falling back into the dramatic situation of May 14th.”³⁵ Three days before the vote, the chief editor of this paper, Pierre Brisson, declared, “I will vote yes.”³⁶ The same position was expressed by the chief editor of *Le Monde*, Hubert Beuve-Méry, who, on 26 September, two days before the ballot, summed up the diverse attitudes

of those working for the newspaper.³⁷ He noted that “All in all, those who have voted ‘yes’ last May, hadn’t so far had any reasons for opting for a ‘no’.”³⁸ The regional press almost had a consensus in favour of voting “yes”; *Ouest-France*, *La Voix du Nord*, *Le Dauphiné libéré*, *Midi-Libre* and *Paris-Normandie* declared more or less openly that they were supporting the General. *Est républicain* asked the chief editor of *Le Monde* to explain to the readers that events were likely to lead “not to personal power but rather to a new Republic”.³⁹

During the 50th Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière (SFIO) congress the party decided to back up the referendum. After that, the main socialist newspapers, with the sole exception of *Dépêche du Midi* in Toulouse, also stopped opposing the Constitution of the Fifth French Republic. In some cases—*Nord-Matin*, *Bourgogne Républicaine* and *Le Provençal*—some concessions to Gaullism were also made. The Socialist party’s approval of the Fifth Republic was most clearly symbolised by its official newspaper *Le Populaire*. The day after the vote, it firmly restated its decision to support de Gaulle and distanced itself from the extremist position of the PCF:

At a first analysis the results of the referendum are so clear that they hardly need to be commented on [...] We are not talking about the touching effort of the “Communists” to hide their disloyalty from their followers. The arithmetic is clear: in the majority of their constituencies the number of “no” votes is slightly—or at times definitely—inferior to those the PC registered during their last consultations [...] It is clear that all kind of pressures from Moscow did not aid their cause; a good part of the traditional “Communist” voters was not persuaded to vote “no” [...]. Despite all the tricks, truth has not two sides to it. The constitution of the Fifth French Republic has been adopted also thanks to the compact and conscious support of the authentic French Left.⁴⁰

The schism that a few months afterwards divided Communists and Socialists and their different positions towards the new regime could not have been more clearly expressed. Right at the beginning of the Fifth Republic, the marginalisation of the PCF from the rest of the Left provided a political equivalent of the state of the press, which had almost unanimously backed up the General. Despite all this, in his memoir the General lamented: “As expected, even on this occasion I have received no help from the press that, as usual, has proved to be needlessly critical, acrimonious and stupid.”⁴¹

3 DE GAULLE AND THE PRESS (1958–69)

The truth about de Gaulle's relations with the press between May 1958 and the end of his presidency is decidedly more complex: despite de Gaulle's lamentations in his memoir, the press never showed an inflexible opposition towards him. In fact, press treatment of the General was much more positive than generally believed and only deteriorated over time.

What follows is a brief illustration of the positions taken by the main newspapers (22 altogether—equally divided between national and regional papers—representative of 65% of the whole press release) in relation to the General and Gaullism during the presidential elections and the referenda between 1958 and 1969.⁴² It is based on information and data found in the electoral studies published by the Association Française de Science Politique, Jean K. Chalaby's comprehensive study on the press during the Gaullist presidency as well as original data gathered by the author.⁴³

In several instances analysing the press attitude towards de Gaulle is a simple case of drawing a distinction between those newspapers that were decidedly for or against him. In other instances—particularly in the case of the regional newspapers that during the 1970s went through a progressive process of depoliticisation—the issue is more complex because their position was not clearly stated. Though the editorial has been the main reference point for classification, in several cases analysis has gone beyond explicit declarations of support or criticism in the attempt to also offer a classification of those newspapers that rather than taking an explicit position offered an implicit one, albeit one that was clear for the readership, through the construction of a particular context. That is to say, through a careful choice of what to write and what to pass over in silence. Whenever this final type of classification has not been possible the newspaper has been labelled as “neutral”.⁴⁴

In these ten years, with the exception of the communist press, the strongest opposition to Gaullism came from the three weekly papers of the “nouvelle gauche”. These differed in the intensity of criticism they expressed (see Table 3.1): only *France-Observateur* expressed outright opposition to the end, while *Témoignage chrétien* and *L'Express* on various occasions took a position of either more or less benevolent “neutrality” or outright support for the General (this is the case of *Témoignage chrétien* during the 8 April 1962 referendum on the Evian agreements that put an end to the Algerian War). In this respect, it is important to take into consideration that

Table 3.1 The position of *L'Express*, *France-Observateur* [*Nouvel Observateur*] and *Témoignage chrétien* towards General de Gaulle during the 1958, 1961, 1962 and 1969 referenda, the 1965 presidential election and during the 1962, 1967 and 1968 general election

	<i>First referendum</i> 28-9-1958	<i>Second referendum</i> 8-01-1961	<i>Third referendum</i> 8-4-1962	<i>Fourth referendum</i> 28-10-1962	<i>General election</i> 18/25-11-1962
<i>L'Express</i>	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Neutral	Neutral	Decidedly against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition
<i>France-Observateur</i> [since 1964 <i>Nouvel Observateur</i>]	Decidedly against de Gaulle	Moderately against de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Campaigning against de Gaulle	Campaigning for the opposition
<i>Témoignage chrétien</i>	Neutral	Neutral	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Against de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of the opposition

	<i>I round presidential election</i> 5-12-1965	<i>II round presidential election</i> 19-12-1965	<i>General election</i> 5/12-3-1967	<i>General election</i> 23/30-6-1968	<i>Fifth referendum</i> 27-4-1969
<i>L'Express</i>	In favour of Lecanuet and Mitterrand	Campaigning for Mitterrand	In favour of the opposition	In favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>France-Observateur</i> [since 1964 <i>Nouvel Observateur</i>]	In favour of Mitterrand	Campaigning for Mitterrand	Campaigning for the opposition	Campaigning for the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>Témoignage chrétien</i>	In favour of Mitterrand	Campaigning for Mitterrand	In favour of the opposition	In favour of the opposition	Against de Gaulle

these weekly papers were hardly representative of the popular weekly press⁴⁵ and very often—even during the periods of most intense criticism of the President's politics—published articles by famous Gaullist supporters (exemplary in this respect is the example of François Mauriac at *L'Express*).

Compared with these weekly papers, the position of the daily press was far less homogeneous. The majority of these supported the President, at least until the resolution of the Algerian War (1958–62). The newspapers began to change their position when Gaullists proposed introducing direct universal suffrage to elect the President of the Republic (this proposal was the subject of a fourth referendum on 28 October 1962). However, even on this occasion opposition to the General was still not unanimous: 47.6% of the newspapers (corresponding to 51.2% of the total newspapers printed) supported a “yes” vote (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3).

In general, during the whole period of the presidency the percentage of papers that supported de Gaulle during the referenda and presidential elections, or the majority during legislative elections (see Table 3.5), was less than 50% only during the October 1962 referendum (10 newspapers were in favour, 11 against), the political elections in March 1967 (9 in favour, 11 against) and the April 1969 referendum (8 in favour, 11 against). However, looking at the total newspaper circulation, it is notable that on the eve of all the elections (including the aforementioned) support for the General always remained over 50% (see Table 3.4).

The overall picture of the press between 1958 and 1969 appears rather variable but in no way antagonistic or prejudiced towards the General. More precisely, the relationship between the press and de Gaulle had three typologies.

The first type includes “leftist” newspapers that showed an enduring hostility towards de Gaulle. This included the communist press (in particular *L’Humanité*), but also weekly papers such as *France-Observateur*, or regional newspapers such as *La Dépêche du Midi*. These maintained an enduring opposition to the General.

The second type includes a significant number of national newspapers (*Le Figaro*, *La Croix*, *France-Soir*, *Le Parisien libéré*) along with several centrist and Christian democratic papers (such as *Ouest-France*, *La Voix du Nord*, *Le Républicain Lorrain*, *Nice-Matin*, *La Montagne*). These gave substantial, albeit always conditional, support to de Gaulle’s politics. Though they approved of the General, they distanced themselves from some of his decisions, in particular those that concerned international affairs whenever they significantly diverged from the traditional Atlanticist politics characteristic of the governments of the Third Republic.

The last category included a group of newspapers (the most important of which was *Le Monde* and *L’Express*) that remained cautious. These never took a consistent position in favour of or against the General. Journalists writing for these newspapers included fierce critics of the General, writers who looked upon him favourably (such as Jean Daniel at *L’Express*, Pierre

Table 3.2 The position of the main political newspapers towards the General during the 1958, 1961, 1962 and 1969 referenda, the 1965 presidential election and during the 1962, 1967 and 1968 general election

	<i>First referendum</i> 28-9-1958	<i>Second referendum</i> 8-01-1961	<i>Third referendum</i> 8-4-1962	<i>Fourth referendum</i> 28-10-1962	<i>General election</i> 18/25-11-1962
<i>L'Aurore</i>	Campaigning for de Gaulle	Moderately against de Gaulle	Moderately against de Gaulle	Decidedly against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition
<i>Combat</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately against de Gaulle	Decidedly against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition
<i>La Croix</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Neutral	Neutral
<i>Le Figaro</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of the opposition
<i>France-Soir</i>	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority
<i>L'Humanité</i>	Decidedly against de Gaulle	Decidedly against de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly against de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of the opposition
<i>Libération</i>	Decidedly against de Gaulle	Decidedly against de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle (but not to his persona)	Decidedly against de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of the opposition
<i>Le Monde</i>	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Against de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of dell'opposizione
<i>Paris-Jour</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority

(continued)

Table 3.2 (continued)

	<i>First referendum</i> 28-9-1958	<i>Second referendum</i> 8-01-1961	<i>Third referendum</i> 8-4-1962	<i>Fourth referendum</i> 28-10-1962	<i>General election</i> 18/25-11-1962
<i>Paris-Press</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority
<i>Le Parisien Libéré</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	Neutral	Neutral	Against de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority
	<i>I Round Presidential election</i> 5-12-1965	<i>II round presidential election</i> 19-12-1965	<i>General election</i> 5/12-3-1967	<i>General election</i> 23/30-6-1968	<i>Fifth referendum</i> 27-4-1969
<i>L'Aurore</i>	In favour of Lecanuet	Against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition	Decidedly in favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>Combat</i>	In favour of Lecanuet	Against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition	Decidedly in favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>La Croix</i>	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
<i>Le Figaro</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of de Gaulle
<i>France-Soir</i>	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of the parliamentary majority	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle

<i>L'Humanité</i>	Decidedly in favour of Mitterrand	Decidedly in favour of Mitterrand	Decidedly in favour of the opposition	Decidedly in favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>Liberation</i>	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Le Monde</i>	Against de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of Mitterrand	Moderately in favour of the opposition	Moderately in favour of the opposition	Decidedly against Gaulle
<i>Paris-Jour</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of the parliamentary majority	Decidedly in favour of the parliamentary majority	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle
<i>Paris-Presse</i>	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority	Decidedly in favour of the parliamentary majority	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle
<i>Le Parisien</i>	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of de Gaulle
<i>Libéré</i>					

Table 3.3 The position of the main regional newspapers towards the General during the 1958, 1961, 1962 and 1969 referenda, the 1965 presidential election and during the 1962, 1967 and 1968 general election

	<i>First referendum</i> 28-9-1958	<i>Second referendum</i> 8-01-1961	<i>Third referendum</i> 8-4-1962	<i>Fourth referendum</i> 28-10-1962	<i>General election</i> 18/25-11-1962
<i>Le Dauphiné Libéré</i> [Grenoble]	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition
<i>La Dépêche du Midi</i> [Toulouse]	Against de Gaulle	Against de Gaulle	Neutral	Decidedly against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition
<i>L'Est Républicain</i> [Nancy]	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of the parliamentary majority
<i>La Montagne</i> [Clermont-Ferrand]	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of the parliamentary majority
<i>Nice-Matin</i> [Nice]	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	the parliamentary majority
<i>La Nouvelle République</i> [Tours]	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Against de Gaulle	In favour of opposition
<i>Ouest-France</i> [Rennes]	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority
<i>Le Progrès</i> [Lyon]	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition
<i>Le Républicain Lorrain</i> [Metz]	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of the parliamentary majority
<i>Sud-Ouest</i> [Bordeaux]	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	Against de Gaulle	In favour of the opposition
<i>La Voix du Nord</i> [Lille]	In favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

	<i>I Round Presidential election 5-12-1965</i>	<i>II Round Presidential election 19-12-1965</i>	<i>General election 5/12-3-1967</i>	<i>General election 23/30-6-1968</i>	<i>Fifth referendum 27-4-1969</i>
<i>Le Dauphiné Libéré</i> [Grenoble]	In favour of Mitterrand	In favour of Mitterrand	In favour of the opposition	In favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>La Dépêche du Midi</i> [Toulouse]	Decidedly against de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of Mitterrand	In favour of the opposition	In favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>L'Est Républicain</i> [Nancy]	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	In favour the opposition	Moderately in favour of the opposition	Against de Gaulle
<i>La Montagne</i> [Clermont- Ferrand]	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of the parliamentary majority	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle
<i>Nice-Matin</i> [Nice]	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of the parliamentary majority	Moderately in favour of the parliamentary majority	Neutral
<i>La Nouvelle République</i> [Tours]	Against de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of Mitterrand	In favour of the opposition	In favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>Ouest-France</i> [Rennes]	In favour of Lecanuet	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Moderately in favour of the opposition	Moderately in favour of the parliamentary majority	Against de Gaulle
<i>Le Progrès</i> [Lyon]	Decidedly against de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of Mitterrand	In favour of the opposition	In favour the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>Le Républicain Lorrain</i> [Metz]	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of the parliamentary majority	Decidedly in favour of de Gaulle
<i>Sud-Ouest</i> [Bordeaux]	Against de Gaulle	In favour of Mitterrand	Decidedly in favour of the opposition	In favour of the opposition	Decidedly against de Gaulle
<i>La Voix du Nord</i> [Lille]	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of de Gaulle	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of the parliamentary majority	In favour of de Gaulle

Table 3.4 Percentage of newspapers (22 altogether that represent the 65% or the total printout) in favour and against the General during the 1958, 1961, 1962 and 1969 referenda, the 1965 presidential election and during the 1962, 1967 and 1968 general election. Data refer to printout numbers

	<i>First referendum</i> 28-9-1958	<i>Second referendum</i> 8-01-1961	<i>Third referendum</i> 8-4-1962	<i>Fourth referendum</i> 28-10-1962	<i>General election</i> 18/25- 11-1962	<i>I Round Presidential election</i> 5-12-1965	<i>I Round Presidential election</i> 19-12-1965	<i>General election</i> 5/12-3- 1967	<i>General election</i> 23/30-6- 1968	<i>Fifth referendum</i> 27-4-1969
Print run of national newspapers in favour of de Gaulle	91,5	77,2	84,9	51,2	73,5	77,4	77,4	76,6	75,6	73,1
Print run of national newspapers against de Gaulle	8,5	22,8	15,1	48,8	26,5	22,6	22,6	23,4	24,4	26,9
Print run of regional newspapers against de Gaulle	91,4	92,5	100	51,1	52,6	34,7	51,8	27,9	45,9	75,4
Print run of regional newspapers in favour of de Gaulle	8,6	7,5	0	48,9	47,4	65,3	48,3	72,1	54,1	24,6
Total print run in favour of de Gaulle	91,4	85,6	92,8	51,2	63,3	55,2	64,1	50,8	61	74,3
Total print run against de Gaulle	8,6	14,4	7,2	48,8	36,7	44,8	35,9	49,2	39	25,7

Table 3.5 Number of provincial and national newspapers (22 altogether that represent 65% or the total printout) in favour and against the General during the 1958, 1961, 1962 and 1969 referenda, the 1965 presidential election and during the 1962, 1967 and 1968 general election

	<i>First referendum</i> 28-9-1958	<i>Second referendum</i> 8-01-1961	<i>Third referendum</i> 8-4-1962	<i>Fourth referendum</i> 28-10-1962	<i>General election</i> 11-1962	<i>I Round Presidential election</i> 5-12-1965	<i>I Round Presidential election</i> 19-12-1965	<i>General election</i> 5/12-3-1967	<i>General election</i> 23/30-6-1968	<i>General election</i> 27-4-1969	<i>Fifth referendum</i>
National newspapers in favour of de Gaulle	8	7	8	4	5	6	6	5	5	5	5
National newspapers against de Gaulle	2	3	2	6	5	4	4	4	4	4	4
Regional newspapers in favour of de Gaulle	10	10	10	6	6	5	6	4	5	3	3
Regional newspapers against de Gaulle	1	1	0	5	5	6	5	7	6	7	7
Total newspapers in favour of de Gaulle	18	17	18	10	11	11	12	9	10	8	8
Total newspapers against de Gaulle	3	4	2	11	10	10	9	11	10	11	11

Viansson-Ponté or Jean Lacouture at *Le Monde*) and outright admirers of the General (e.g. François Mauriac at *L'Express*). All of these newspapers did not lead a systematic or ideological opposition to Gaullism; however, their positions on a series of issues, particularly the increased presidentialisation of the political system, clashed with those of the General and became the focus of their opposition. An ever greater distance from the General could also be noted in a group of regional papers (*Le Progrès*, *Sud-Ouest*, *L'Est Républicain*, *La Nouvelle République*) that, for this reason, can be included in this last category.

De Gaulle did not like the newspapers included in the first category for obvious reasons; in the ten years he spent at the Élysée those included in the third and even the second group often exasperated him. He was profoundly critical of a kind of press that alternated support and criticism depending on the issues covered. Conditional support irritated him as much as agnosticism. As he remarked to the Chief Editor of *Sud-Ouest*, Henry Amouroux, “I don’t like your paper [...] because it cannot decide which side to take.”⁴⁶ The efforts of Gilbert Pérol, the Press Officer in charge at the Élysée, to reassure the General that “in France the opposing of power [...] has always been a characteristic of French intelligentsia”⁴⁷ were all in vain. De Gaulle’s resentment towards the press had long-standing roots, and, with the passing of time, became aggravated by his conviction that the press had little regard for the national good.

De Gaulle’s two favourite papers—*Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*—were no exception. The fact that Pierre Brisson’s newspaper supported the General and that, for his part, the General was interested in Hubert Beuve-Méry’s newspaper (so much so that before leaving for his usual weekend at Colombey he demanded a copy be delivered⁴⁸) did not change things overall. Like all the others these two newspapers had “lost any sense of national pride” and were always ready “to take the side of the foreign powers”.⁴⁹ Despite the different positions they held, according to de Gaulle, both of them ultimately represented and defended the same interests.

In actual fact there are two kinds of bourgeoisie, the moneyed bourgeoisie that reads *Le Figaro* and the intellectual bourgeoisie that reads *Le Monde*. They go hand in hand; they strike agreements to share power. That the journalists are all against me leaves me indifferent. In fact, I would be annoyed if this wasn’t the case [...] The day *Le Figaro* and “*L’Immonde*” start to support me, it will be a national catastrophe.⁵⁰

4 THE ARISTOCRATIC DETACHMENT OF THE GENERAL AND DEBRÉ'S ACTIVISM

De Gaulle always felt deeply disappointed by journalists for whom he harboured a profound resentment. Despite the efforts of his most trusted advisors, who tried to convince him to take a more appeasing attitude,⁵¹ he always kept them at a distance, though he was well aware that this caused feelings of dislike and rancour. "I know well how much they dislike the fact that I keep them at a distance. The reason why I do that is not because I despise them, for me there is a principle involved."⁵²

Exemplary of de Gaulle's reticence towards journalists was his relationship with Hubert Beuve-Méry who, in 1944, de Gaulle asked to direct the then newly inaugurated *Le Monde*. Between 1944 and 1969 Beuve-Méry met de Gaulle on only two occasions. The first time was in January 1945, when the General refused to give him permission to attend the weekly meetings of the members of the Ministry of Information. The second meeting took place on 18 September 1958, a few days after the referendum on the new Constitution. Though the newspaper supported a "yes" vote, their conversation was not the friendliest.

De Gaulle: "Ah! *Le Monde* ... What a talent, what a success, what sales. We all read it. I read it too and it is a lot of fun. You know a lot of things there ... newspapers are very amusing..."

Beuve-Méry: "Mr General, to amuse is not exactly the intended purpose of this newspaper, that was founded amid thousands of difficulties, as you yourself know. But after all the Kings of France had their fools who amused and sometimes were of service to them."

De Gaulle: "I did not mean that ... Fifteen years ago I was convinced, and I am still convinced, that French institutions needed to be reformed, transformed and I could lead this process. When you started to think otherwise [the allusion is to the second referendum on the Constitution of the Fourth Republic in 1946, AN] I realised that you are not one of my allies any longer. Perhaps you have never been one [...]⁵³

The two were not to meet again during the ten years that de Gaulle spent at the Élysée. From 1962, Alain Peyrefitte, Minister of the Information and personal friend of Beuve-Méry, tried hard but in vain to reconcile them. Neither the journalist, resentful of the General's arrogance, nor the Head of State, who did not intend to waste any time with the director of a newspaper too inclined to "throw mud" at him, agreed to meet again.⁵⁴

The distance that the General always kept from the press marked a great departure from the close relationship between the press and political power during the Fourth Republic. This contributed to the spread of unease among journalists towards the General. Up until 1958, at the end of cabinet meetings ministers customarily shared car journeys with journalists in order to brief them about the meeting. On returning to power, de Gaulle immediately put an end to what he considered an unacceptable and promiscuous relationship, causing much discontent from the press. Some of the most important journalists in de Gaulle's times recalled with nostalgia the relationship between the press and the government during the Fourth Republic—"the golden age" of the relationship between politics and the press. Talking to Alain Peyrefitte, they complained that the 12 years between 1946 and 1958 were, by contrast, really "good times. The ministers used to tell us all we wanted to know. Now everything is a mystery. The General doesn't even know what information means."⁵⁵

De Gaulle could not understand how his inner circle could be on friendly terms with the press. To Alain Peyrefitte—who because of his institutional role had frequent contacts with people working in the press—he kept asking in disbelief, "But do you get along with the journalists?"⁵⁶ The General was not just incredulous, but he also feared that anyone who had close contact with the press was destined, along with all political parties, to become part of a plot against the national spirit. It was the Minister of Information, or, more often, the Prime Minister himself—Michel Debré—that managed the interface between the journalists and the Élysée, and, in this respect, he was a key figure. Articles and newspaper clips from his archive⁵⁷ show that the first Prime Minister of the Fifth Republic not only took a keen interest in press coverage, but also maintained regular personal contacts with journalists, which went far beyond press conferences and official occasions. Some notes show that Debré, in a way that was not at all Gaullist, periodically organised aperitifs and dinners for a select group of guests at Matignon.⁵⁸ These occasions became more and more frequent and, in the first part of 1962, they took place

every two months. The regulars at the Minister's table were essentially the chief editors or political editors of the main national newspapers, or, more rarely, of the regional newspapers, while the radio and television journalists were always excluded. Among the regular guests were Jean Ferniot from *France-Soir*, Jacques Fauvet from *Le Monde*, Pierre Limagne from *La Croix*, Raymond Tournoux from *Paris-Match* (this was the only weekly paper represented on these occasions) and delegates of two pro-government newspapers *Le Figaro* and *Paris-Press* represented by Louis Gabriel-Robinet and Pierre Charpy.⁵⁹ In some cases, convivial occasions with the journalists went beyond aperitifs and dinners, as Jean Ferniot, who was invited to Debré's house in Montlouis (a village in the Loire Valley) to spend a weekend in the countryside, has stated.⁶⁰

These convivial occasions were not the only way Debré stayed in contact with journalists. Like a true Gaullist, he was a careful reader who did not hesitate to put pressure on the press, and especially on those newspapers perceived as pro-government, whenever these were alleged to have taken a critical view of government actions.

His efforts, however, did not always achieve the desired results, as shown by the correspondence between the Minister and Pierre Brisson, the director of *Le Figaro*.⁶¹ In January 1961, despite all the pressure exerted on the press and the seizing of copies of certain newspapers during the last phase of the Algerian War,⁶² Michel Debré grudgingly had to admit to Louis Terrenoire, the Minister of Information, that exercising government control over the press "was more complicated and difficult"⁶³ than over radio and television.

In the attempt to curb the rebelliousness of several newspapers, the Prime Minister repeatedly tried to put the main source of information, Agence France-Presse (AFP), under the control of the government. Debré was irritated by the space this agency was giving to the leaders of the opposition on the Left and saw this as proof of an entrenched hostile attitude towards the government. To put an end to this, in 1959 Debré began to plan changes to the statute of the AFP, especially in respect of the autonomy it had been granted back in 1957.⁶⁴ The Prime Minister's plan was to double the number of members of the AFP Board of Administrators appointed by the government and for its President to be chosen from a group of candidates the Board itself recommended. The plan drew vociferous protest from the opposition and the press. In the attempt to overcome an impasse and above all to prevent Jean Marin, suspected of being close to Mendés France and Mitterrand, from having his appointment as

director renewed, Debré was persuaded to stop State subsidy to the AFP. As he confided to the Minister of Information, the partiality of this agency symbolised “all the shortcomings of the Press and God knows there are so many”.⁶⁵ The controversy that ensued spurred the press and the opposition parties at a moment that was politically crucial for the way the Algerian crisis developed. All of this precipitated the intervention of the President who invited a discredited Debré to renounce his plans.⁶⁶

The different attitude and approach towards the press of the President of the Republic—de Gaulle was less actively involved and less interventionist than the Prime Minister—is reflected in Debré’s attempt to provide Gaullism with an official tabloid that could challenge the popularity of the “nouvelle gauche” weekly papers. Debré’s efforts did not gain the support he hoped for from the General. During the summer of 1960, after a series of exchanges with the Minister of Information,⁶⁷ Debré met de Gaulle to take stock of the situation:

I have formed a working group; after some hesitation I have contacted the heads of the publisher Hachette: it would be possible to have a national Gaullist weekly paper as early as next spring. It is necessary to contribute 180 million old Francs. I might need your support with this—it will be enough to let everyone know that you are supporting this project. I am planning a weekly paper because I had to give up on the idea of a daily paper. The press is a like fortress that is so impenetrable to the State, so indifferent to the future of the nation that it is difficult to conquer. To create a new daily paper it would require investing at least one billion old francs.⁶⁸

Robert Meunier du Houssoy—the owner of Hachette—would have been charged with raising funds. However, he was never actually involved because the whole project depended on the President’s approval. Debré repeatedly attempted to convince de Gaulle to support the project⁶⁹ even after he had left Matignon:

It is possible to create a national newspaper. Only the government can make this happen in a discreet way. It has the right to do it: all the newspapers we have, were born after Liberation and it can be expected that in 1962 or 1963 another newspaper is founded, this will be independent but its foundation must be orchestrated in order to avoid the drift we know all too well.⁷⁰

The insistence of the “closest advisor” of the General could not overcome the indifference of de Gaulle. He was more interested in monopolising television than investing in the press; for him it was enough to have some

newspapers with a modest circulation⁷¹ or some ad hoc publications by his party and Gaullist committees on the occasion of the referenda and electoral campaigns.⁷²

5 AN AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP

The hostile attitude of the General towards the press can be described as aprioristic and antagonistic; it was not the result of specific circumstances and was not based on an objective analysis of the actual positions the newspapers held towards him. Let's take, e.g., the October 1962 referendum. As has been noted (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3), the press was split in two with half the newspapers supporting the General and half opposing him. Yet in his memoir de Gaulle lamented that "almost all national and regional newspapers are trying to convince public opinion and voters to vote against my project [...] With time I have grown rather indifferent to this attitude from the press."⁷³ Like political parties, the press was, according to Gaullist logic, the irreducible expression of particular interests, and as such, should have been, if not openly fought against, at the very least ignored.

The energy with which de Gaulle turned to television should not therefore be understood as a rational and well-planned attempt to rebalance the hostility of the press (such an attempt should have been founded on an objective analysis, and above all, a use of television directly proportional to the aversion shown by the press). For de Gaulle television was the most obvious way to counter the siege of the "potentates" and to build a direct relation with the whole nation without any intermediaries.⁷⁴ As we will see in the following chapters, de Gaulle's appearances on television did not depend on the contingent hostility of the press, rather on other kinds of motives and above all on the need to address the nation in moments of "crisis". It is not by chance that the majority of de Gaulle's televised speeches occurred during the first four years of his mandate, which marked the most dramatic phases of the Algerian crisis, at a time when television coverage was still limited in France and press support for the General far stronger than it had been during the previous seven years.

The events surrounding the electoral campaign in 1965 also provide proof of the lack of correlation between the use of television and a genuine necessity to rebalance the aversion of the press. On that occasion, the General was reluctant to be seen in the same way as the other candidates and, for this reason, he refused to lead the campaign and, despite little support from the press, to appear on television before the election's first round. After the first round, right at the moment when the press—in particular the

regional press (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3)—aligned itself to Gaullist positions, he decided to enter the electoral arena and appeared on television five times in a week. Documentation from the presidential archives shows that after the second round, Gilbert Pérol, the press officer at the Élysée, sent the General some memos entitled *The Press and the Presidential Elections* in which he analysed in detail the main positions of the regional and national papers on the two ballots inviting de Gaulle to pay more attention in future to the press:

Such unanimous hostility that the press has shown towards de Gaulle during the presidential election has few precedents. This evaluation however should be softened. If we look at things more closely [...] one notes significant differences in the newspapers' positions that deserve close scrutiny. The electoral map is more or less that of the regional dailies: this provides proof of the fact that these reflect faithfully the orientation of the whole nation. At the same time, this is also proof that these can condition public opinion more effectively than television or that you yourself can do [...] It could be concluded that, on the one hand, the attitude of the press is not uniform but heavily nuanced, on the other hand, the power of the press on public opinion remains unrivalled and neither the radio nor the television have overshadowed it.⁷⁵

What is criticised is not just the General's conviction of the hostility of the press (Pérol's detailed analysis concluded that "if we consider circulation, the number of those 'in favour' is considerably higher than those 'against'"⁷⁶), but, first and foremost, the General's attitude of ignoring the press in order to concentrate solely on television.

Pérol's recommendation, like Debré's, did not produce any substantial change. The General's contempt of "Sunday journalists" not only persisted but he never made any effort to hide it. This was again confirmed on 2 January 1967, during the traditional New Year meeting with the press. De Gaulle addressed the assembled journalists in a way that was far from cordial: "All of you should keep in mind that what you write is forgotten immediately; I have gone through so much in these last thirty years that having the press against me is nothing by comparison."⁷⁷ This comment is emblematic of the huge misunderstanding that marked the relationship between de Gaulle and the press during the ten years he spent at the Élysée and possibly beyond, throughout his entire life.

At the origins of this misunderstanding lay an ambiguity. In his attitude towards news information the General can be defined as a modern man, generally tolerant of his relationship with the press. Ever since the end of

the war he was keenly aware of the need to have “impartial” rather than party papers. Rather than providing news only, according to de Gaulle, papers should provide in-depth explanations and analyses. His refusal to interfere directly with the editorial policy at *Le Monde* should be understood in this light. Further confirmation of this attitude comes from the fact that the General always refused to establish a great Gaullist paper and never attempted to use his influence to secure control of or purchase any of the main newspapers. At the same time, however, as Jean-Marie Charon noted, the General remained old-fashioned in his approach⁷⁸ and, according to him, the press was divided into newspapers that were friends and those that were enemies. The newspapers that opted for a neutral position or gave only conditional support were subjected to fierce criticism.

In conclusion, we are left with a paradoxical situation: a President of the Republic that each day read dozens of papers voraciously while loathing the journalists who he insulted publicly and in private; a political leader who devoted his time and attention to reading all the major French and international newspapers, while realising that the era of the press was fast declining and television was destined to be the future of political communication.

NOTES

1. G. Pérol, *Auprès du Général de Gaulle*, in *Espoir*, 14 March 1976, p. 21.
2. E. Burin des Rozières, private communication, 12 November 2004.
3. C. De Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, IV, op. cit., p. 63.
4. In his memoir the General mentions the press 72 times; in 5 instances he is positive about it, in 17 instances he is neither positive nor negative, in 50 instances he is critical. J.K. Chalaby, *The de Gaulle Presidency and the Media*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002, p. 69.
5. Bellanger et al. (eds), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, III, op. cit., p. 249.
6. P. Bousset, *L’Affaire Dreyfus et la presse*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1960, pp. 15–16.
7. See in particular C. de Gaulle, *Vers l’armée de métier*, op. cit., 1934 and Id., *La France et son armée*, op. cit.
8. C. de Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, I, *Pendant de la guerre. Juin 1940–Janvier 1946*, Paris, Plon, 1970, p. 46.
9. C. de Gaulle, *Mémoires de guerre*, III, *Le Salut 1944–46*, Paris, Plon, 1958, p. 140.

10. The first issue was published on 18 December 1944, the editor-in-chief Hubert Beuve-Méry was undecided about the title; possible titles included *Le Continent*, *L'Univers* and *Le Monde*. See L. Greilsamer, *Hubert Beuve-Méry 1902–1989*, Paris, Fayard, 1990, p. 247.
11. What the General said to the Minister of Information Alain Peyrefitte is significant in this respect: “I am not saying that nowadays the so-called French press receives gifts from foreign embassies, as it used to regularly happen before the war. [...] Actually I am convinced that America and the UK give the press money in an indirect way. I am inviting you to hold some conferences! I am inviting you for dinner! I am inviting you to spend a semester at a university! I am inviting you on a propaganda trip! I am going to send you a box of whisky! It doesn’t take much to corrupt them as the Anglo-Saxon snobism of the French bourgeoisie is incredible.” See A. Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, I, *La France redevient la France*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, pp. 395–396.
12. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d’espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 12.
13. In this detailed relation, they were considered “positive” commentaries published by *L’Aurore*, *Le Pays*, *France-Soir*, *France-Libre*, *Ce Matin*, *L’Aube* and *Le Parisien* (all in the first page). The editorial in *Libération* was defined “rather positive” while *Combat* was defined “objective”. Archives de Fondation Charles de Gaulle, BK 30.
14. E. Sablier, *L’arme secrète du Général*, in Aa.Vv., *De Gaulle et les médias*, op. cit., pp. 241–252.
15. See, for example, J-P. Azéma, “De Gaulle et les médias”, in Aa.Vv., *De Gaulle en son siècle*, I, *Dans la mémoire des hommes et des peuples*, Paris, La Documentation française/Plon, 1991, pp. 401–407.
16. On this see J-N. Jeanneney and J. Julliard, *Le Monde de Beuve-Méry ou le métier d’Alceste*, Paris, Seuil, 1979; P. Sainderichin, *De Gaulle et Le Monde*, Paris, Editions Le Monde, 1990 and, more recently, P. Événô, *Histoire du journal Le Monde: 1944–2004*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2004.
17. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d’espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 39.
18. *Ibidem*.
19. C. Estier and G. Martinet, *Au bout du gaullisme la dictature*, *France-Observateur*, 22 May 1958, p. 6.
20. Roger Stéphane was one of the founders of the Resistance network (and of the newspaper) *Combat*. See R. Deforges, *Roger Stéphane ou la passion d’admirer*, Paris, Fayard/Spengler, 1995; P. Lienhardt and O. Philipponnat, *Roger Stéphane. Enquête sur un aventurier*, Paris, Grasset, 2004.
21. R. Stéphane, *Hier encore, j’étais “gaulliste”*, *France-Observateur*, 22 May 1958, p. 7.
22. *Il faut défendre la République et la refaire*, *Témoignage chrétien*, 23 May 1958, p. 2.

23. *De Gaulle oui ou non?*, *L'Express*, 22 May 1958, p. 1.
24. J.-J. Servan-Schreiber, *La Nation de la confusion à l'espérance*, *L'Express*, 22 May 1958, p. 3.
25. F. Mauriac, *Bloc-notes*, *L'Express*, 19 June 1958, p. 32.
26. J. Chapsal, *La vie politique en France depuis 1940*, Paris, PUF, 1966.
27. Sirius, *Folies*, *Le Monde*, 15 May 1958, p. 1.
28. Sirius, *L'amère vérité*, *Le Monde*, 29 May 1958, p. 1.
29. Pierre Brisson stopped to sign editorials since the Algiers' insurrection on 13 May 1958. In his last article he forcefully denounced the risks of "dissidence and of a brand of patriotism that degenerates into factionalism". See P. Brisson, *Événements dramatiques à Alger*, *Le Figaro*, 14 May 1958, p. 1.
30. P. Brisson, *Tourbillons*, *Le Figaro*, 30 May 1958, p. 1.
31. *Pressenti hier soir par le Président de la République, le général de Gaulle a accepté de former le gouvernement*, *Le Populaire*, 30 May 1958, p. 1.
32. P. Le Gall, *Pleins pouvoirs à de Gaulle*, *Le Parisien Libéré*, 2 June 1958, p. 8.
33. *Pour la troisième fois en vingt ans, le courage est de dire non*, *France-Observateur*, 25 September 1958, p. 1.
34. *Quel que soit le choix...*, *Témoignage chrétien*, 26 September 1958, p. 1.
35. A. Siegfried, *Devant le choix*, *Le Figaro*, 6 September 1958, p. 1.
36. P. Brisson, *N'oublions pas*, *Le Figaro*, 24 September 1958, p. 1.
37. In general, *Le Monde* was moderately in favour of the new Constitution. However, in the weeks before the vote, it published articles by important personalities—such as Georges Vedel, Maurice Duverger, Raymond Aron—who expressed their perplexities concerning the Gaullist project.
38. Sirius, *L'option*, *Le Monde*, 26 September 1958, p. 1.
39. Bellanger et al. (eds), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, V, op. cit., p. 169.
40. P. Herbaut, *Le Parti socialiste à l'avant-garde de la Cinquième République*, *Le Populaire*, 30 September 1958, p. 1.
41. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'Espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 68.
42. My analysis does not include the 23 and 30 November general elections as these happened just after the referendum on the Constitution on 28 September.
43. See on this Chalaby's exhaustive study. The data in Tables 3.2–3.5 concern the position of the daily press during the first, fourth and fifth referenda, of the 1965 presidential elections and of the 1967 general elections. J.K. Chalaby, *The de Gaulle Presidency and the Media*, op. cit., pp. 26–27; 44–45; 60–62. The data on the weekly press (Table 3.1) are mine. Also mine are the data in Tables 3.2–3.5 concerning the position of the daily press during the second and third referenda and the 1962 and 1968 general elections.

44. This classification is based on personal considerations.
45. None of these three were at the top of the list as concerns print run figures of the weekly press. In 1962, for example, print run figures for *L'Express* were 225,000 copies, those for *France-Observateur* 80,000 copies and those for *Témoignage chrétien* 45,000. These were far lower than those of the weekly *Paris-Match*, which was supporting the General—1,530,000 copies. These data are taken from B. Voyenne, *La presse dans la société contemporaine*, Paris, Colin, 1963, p. 294.
46. P. Sainderichin, *De Gaulle et Le Monde*, op.cit., 1990, p. 154.
47. AN5 AG 1/294, Gilbert Pérol's note to General de Gaulle, 23 December 1965.
48. Bourdon, *Haute fidélité. Pouvoir et télévision 1935–1994*, op. cit., p. 58.
49. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 394.
50. *Ibidem*, p. 394.
51. E. Burin des Roziers, personal communication, 12 November 2004. See also G. Pérol, "Auprès du Général de Gaulle", in *Espoir*, 14 March 1976, p. 17.
52. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 312.
53. Sainderichin, *De Gaulle et Le Monde*, op. cit., p. 144.
54. *Ibidem*, p. 158.
55. The journalists involved were the so-called four musketeers: Jacques Fauvet from *Le Monde*, Jean Ferniot from *France-Soir*, Georges Altschuler from *Europe n°1* and Bernard Lefort from *Paris-Jour*. This event is reported in Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 120.
56. *Ibidem*, p. 296.
57. See, for example, the detailed press conferences on his election and the ministerial reshuffling in February 1960 in AMD, 2DE10.
58. See, for example, the aperitif that was organised on Wednesday, 29 June 1960, at 6.15 p.m. The journalists invited were Fauvet from *Le Monde*, Benedetti from *Paris-Presse*, Sainderichin from *Sud-Ouest*, Le Gall from *Le Parisien Libéré*. See AMD, 2DE3, Michel Debré's note, 25 June 1960.
59. C. Delporte, "Michel Debré et les médias", in Berstein, Milza and Sirinelli (eds), *Michel Debré Premier ministre 1959–1962*, op. cit., p. 293.
60. J. Ferniot, *Je recommencerais bien*, Paris, Grasset, 1991, p. 267. Ferniot himself remarked that, during 1963 after leaving *France-Soir* to join *L'Express*, he realised that people that were part of the Gaullist entourage changed their attitude towards him. The Minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte, explained the reasons for this: The fact that Ferniot left a newspaper that supported Gaullism to join an "opposition" paper had been interpreted by the administration, and in particular by Georges Pompidou, as treason. *Ibidem*, pp. 296–297.

61. Complaining about an article published in this French daily about the teachers' strike that was protesting against the reform of education proposed by the government, Michel Debré wrote to Pierre Brisson: "Illustrious President, you will have to admit that I am very reluctant to intervene when freedom of the press is at stake. I totally respect the freedom of expression of newspapers, their editors and collaborators [...]. Please allow me this exception to the rule. I was shocked by the article by Papillon that appeared in today's *Le Figaro*, in which some opinions that your newspapers had previously expressed on the very delicate situation of the teachers are once again remarked [...]." Brisson's answer was very firm: "As concerns the political character of the teachers' strike, *Le Figaro* cannot certainly be blamed for minimizing the risk of the communist threat [...] Let me also add, that the balanced views of *Le Figaro*, the attention with which it defends its independence and the thoroughness of its reports—whose sole objective is the general interest—mean that this paper is often placed in a difficult position and that its job is always an ungrateful one." AMD, 2DE3, Michel Debré letter to Pierre Brisson, 10-4-1961 e Pierre Brisson letter to Michel Debré, 12 April 1961.
62. C. Barthélémy, "Les saisies de journaux en 1958", in Gervereau, Rioux and Stora (eds), *La France en guerre d'Algérie*, op. cit. pp. 122–126.
63. AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Louis Terrenoire, 31-1-1961.
64. J. Huteau and B. Ullmann, *AFP. Une histoire de l'Agence France Presse, 1944–1990*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1992, pp. 189 ff.
65. AMD, 2DE3, Michel Debré note to Louis Terrenoire, 24 January 1961.
66. Delporte, *Michel Debré et les médias*, op. cit., p. 292.
67. Debré and Terrenoire decided to ask the famous journalist Pierre Lazareff, pioneer of television news, to become editor-in-chief of the paper: "[Lazareff] is noting down some lists of possible editors- in-chiefs and editors. We have already found the typographers and they are ready to start. Premises are also ready." See AMD, 2DE3, Louis Terrenoire letter to Michel Debré, 20 June 1960.
68. AMD, 2DE3, Michel Debré's note to General de Gaulle, 23 August 1960.
69. In June 1961 Debré insisted on this point with the General: "Concerning the press, as it is not possible to close down some papers, there is only one way: a positive action, that is to say the creation of one, if not two, national papers and some regional papers. There is no other way to overturn the present situation." AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 1 June 1961.
70. AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 7 September 1962.
71. The most important was *La Lettre de la Nation*, which circulated amongst the most active groups.

72. During the 1961 referendum, *France-Référendum*, a four-page Gaullist paper, started to be published. Its print run figures were over one million copies. He was free and as far as pagination and print were concerned it was similar to the daily *France-Soir*. See F. Goguel (ed), *Le référendum du 8 janvier 1961*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1962, pp. 42–43.
73. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, II, *L'Effort*, Paris, Plon, 1971, pp. 80–83.
74. “The attitude of our press is scandalous. I have been saying this for twenty-three years. French press hates France. It is not by chance that for twenty-three years in order to address the French people I try to avoid the press and I used first the radio and now television. The press is always against me.” Quoted in Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 397.
75. AN, 5 AG 1/294, Gilbert Pérol's note to the General de Gaulle, 23 December 1965.
76. *Ibidem*.
77. J. Foccart, *Journal de l'Élysée. Tous les soirs avec de Gaulle, 1965–1967*, Paris, Fayard/Jeune Afrique, 1997, p. 538.
78. J-M. Charon, “1958–1968, divorce avec la presse?”, in Aa.Vv Plantey, *De Gaulle et les médias*, op. cit., p. 168.

Political Control on Television

I THE GENERAL'S NEWS

On a certain Sunday, it was the first of June 1958, all France was waiting for the result of the parliamentary vote that was to take General de Gaulle to power. The television cameras were ready at Palais-Bourbon to record this moment that was to put an end to our tribulations. Once again television could have been an emissary to truth that was going to record a historical key event. But this did not happen! Danièle Breem during the evening news hastily hinted at this with a brief and apathetic comment. The rest of the news was almost entirely devoted to the Bordeaux-Paris cycling race [...] When one day children at school will be asked, “What happened on June 1st 1958?” they will say without a moment of hesitation “Jean Marie Cieliczka won the Bordeaux-Paris race”.¹

The day after the investiture of General de Gaulle, on 1 June 1958, the daily paper *Le Figaro* commented sarcastically that public television failed to give adequate coverage to a key event for the destiny of the nation.

De Gaulle himself, who on 1 June was watching the 8 o'clock news, was not in the least happy to see that it devoted more time to a second-rate cycle race than to the vote of confidence from Parliament. He was, however, not surprised. After 11 years of media ostracism, he knew well that the State radio and television had never been particularly generous towards

the opposition. De Gaulle was also aware that once he entered Matignon the balance of political coverage would change. It was simply a question of hours, at the most of days.

French audiovisual archives show that the change came quickly: on 5 June 1958, just four days after the vote of confidence, the evening news dedicated over 18 minutes to the Prime Minister's journey to Algeria. The RTF showed the entire speech by de Gaulle, which lasted 9 minutes and 40 seconds. He was filmed in three-quarter profile from the balcony of the government palace in Algiers addressing a crowd of Europeans that burst into exultation when the General began his speech with the long awaited "I have understood you". The news bulletin continued for another nine minutes showing film footage of the Prime Minister's journey where he appeared in military uniform and képi saluting the cheering crowd, talking to the mariners on a warship, concluding with footage of his car driving through cheering crowds as it departed from the main square in Algiers.²

This news bulletin became a faithful barometer of the state of political affairs. In a few weeks, a revolution in the structure of the information sector in the RTF occurred and provided confirmation of anticipated changes of personnel in senior positions. Jacques Soustelle, one of the most important representatives in French Algeria, was appointed Minister of Information. The Gaullist Christian Chavanon, member of the State Council, became Director General of the RTF. Louis Terrenoire, an important figure in the press and during the Resistance, as well as the General's ally during the RPF and the "desert crossing", was rewarded for his 20 years of Gaullist militancy with the post of director of radio and television news.³ The motive behind these appointments was certainly no mystery. As soon as he was confirmed in his post, Terrenoire himself admitted to the newsroom: "I am not to going to hide that the reasons I am here are political. But here I intend to be a journalist among other colleagues."⁴

The weekly *France-Observateur* published an article entitled "The Entrenchment of Radio and Television"⁵ denouncing the state of the mass media. This included a list of the most important journalists and managers that were ousted, because they were not welcome by the new government, and, along with this, another containing "Gaullist" appointments. This was not the only change introduced by the new government. Although previous Fourth Republic governments were just as keen to have a strong hold over information, in the Fifth Republic the Head of State became a recurrent presence on the small screen.

The protagonism of the General on the media and the consequent personalisation of politics represented something totally new in French history. In the space of a few weeks the General, not content with playing a prominent role in the news, also started to address the French people with speeches that were televised at the beginning of all three daily news broadcasts.⁶ Further advances in the “Gaullist occupation” of the small screen took place in September 1958. On the 4th of September the Director of the news, Jacques Anjubault, began to experiment with new multiple angle filming techniques that were used in the broadcast of de Gaulle’s speech in Place de la République, in which he set out his plan for a new Constitution.⁷ The news began half and an hour before the usual time. Between 7.30 and 8.30 p.m., with multiple cameras positioned in strategic points in the square, the speeches of both André Malraux and de Gaulle were broadcast against a backdrop of an occasionally cheering crowd that interrupted an otherwise almost religious silence. It ended with images of the square packed with people singing *La Marseillaise*.⁸ De Gaulle seemed to be affected by a “television binge” as if all he cared for was to make up for the long years of media exclusion.

This impression was reconfirmed during the referendum campaign, which culminated with the Prime Minister’s speech on 26 September (just two days before the vote) being televised at the beginning of the news. It showed the deep disparity in the television coverage of those who supported a “yes” vote and those in favour of a “no” vote. Pierre Viansson-Ponté, whose views were normally even-handed, remarked that the recent Gaullist’s invasion of the small screen was without historical precedent:

Never, since the Second Empire, with perhaps the only exception of the 1877 election, has France seen this kind of propaganda. The control over the RTF, the deliberate falsification of radio and television information has never reached such levels. The electoral debate has mocked the principle of equanimity as never before. The abuse of public powers has never been so obvious [...] The fact that the public has remained apathetic and has not grown indignant faced with these excesses should not stop us from recalling that the Fifth Republic was conceived in sin and born amid lies [...] Even if cynics keep on repeating that in politics, more than anywhere else, the ends justify the means, these four weeks in September 1958 will mark the historical moment in which, taking “direct democracy” as pretext, what loyalty and honesty remained in electoral campaigns has forever disappeared from our public life.⁹

2 THE RTF STATUTE

Since 1949 the RTF had been a public administration establishment that depended directly on the Ministry of Information. Its statute and the way it functioned were controlled by the government, which administered it with maximum discretion. In the last years of the Fourth Republic, the need to reform radio and television came to the forefront of attention: the opposition parties wanted to have more access to these media; the trade unions and the employers demanded that workers' right be addressed; advertisers hoped that rapid developments in the small screen would enable them to diversify their activities and fully exploit the potential of the visual image to condition the public. If on the one hand, everything seemed to point to an imminent "golden age" of television, on the other hand, the only thing that was clear to everyone was that television was managed financially and administratively in an outmoded way. When de Gaulle returned to lead the country, a new statute for radio and television was seen as a sort of miraculous remedy that alone could achieve a more democratic dissemination of information and put an end to the shortcomings of a system too subservient to the government, one whose inefficiency and anachronism became dramatically apparent at the height of the Algerian crisis.

While the new political leadership was aware of the need to change the governance of the RTF in line with the rapid transformation of the media, it had no intention to renounce government's monopoly of information. That radio and television had to remain two emanations of the executive power was taken for granted. The General himself, faced with his exclusion from the media at the time of the "desert crossing", remained curiously unperturbed.¹⁰ Confronted with the absolute need to stabilise the new Republic and faced with a press that, he believed, was indifferent to the destiny of the nation, de Gaulle thought that to give up control over radio and television would have been an unforgivable mistake.

When he became President of the Republic in January 1959, the General immediately asked the Prime Minister, Michel Debré, and the Head of the Ministry of Information, Roger Frey, to rapidly draw up plans for a new regulatory system that, during a very delicate political transition, could guarantee strict control of information. It is significant to note that at this moment Frey combined the roles of Minister of Information and secretary general of the Union pour la nouvelle République (UNR). This provides proof that the Ministry was seen as highly strategic, so much so that in the ten years de Gaulle was in power

it was to be led only by those who were “immaculate” Gaullists. Frey immediately remarked that the defence of pluralism was not going to be the inspiring and guiding principle of the reform project: “The State has an instrument that provides information and direct contact with the public. It would be absurd if it allowed this instrument to be used by all in the press and elsewhere who do nothing but criticize and sabotage its actions.”¹¹

It was not long before a court order dated 5 February 1959 was approved by the cabinet. This provided a response that satisfied the needs of the General and met the strategic aims of the Minister of Information. The document, a mere six typed pages, was published in the *Journal Officiel de la République Française* on 11 February¹² and was composed of three main components. The first—and least controversial—concerned the nature and scope of the monopoly. This was considerably extensive, as it included the planning and maintenance of its institutional structures, the collection of television licences, broadcasting of programmes and the definition of norms and rules concerning radio diffusion and programme production. This form of “absolute monopoly” achieved a broad consensus: trade unions and employers alike felt reassured by the productive and industrial arrangements of this institution. The majority of them recognised the eminently political nature of radio and television. The second component concerned the juridical definition of the monopoly. On paper the RTF was given more autonomy, because it acquired a separate moral quality that transformed it into a state and public establishment with an industrial and commercial character. However, instead of being under the legal jurisdiction of a ministerial department, the court order provided that the RTF was “managed by a Director General under the authority of the Minister of Information”. The intention of creating a Board of Administrators to protect it from the suffocating control of the political administration disappeared. All the senior figures of the RTF, apart from the Director General, were “appointed by cabinet decree”.¹³ The third component concerned the way the RTF was funded. Though many understood that financial autonomy was a necessary precondition for greater independence from the interference of the political administration, according to the court order “this establishment remains subject to the same financial control”. In the transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic, the dependence of the RTF on the Ministry of Finance continued unaltered.

This long-awaited reorganisation reasserted the status quo and fell below the expectations of many observers. *Le Monde* called it *A missed*

reform.¹⁴ Even *Le Figaro*, usually much closer to Gaullist positions, distanced itself from this “pseudo-statute”:

From this statute we expected that: 1. this establishment could be managed under the sign of continuity, that is to say immune from the effects of political instability [...]; 2. this establishment ceased to be as long as information is concerned a mere instrument of the government [...] The twenty-eight projects for a new statute that have been drafted since 1928 have attempted in different ways to find a solution to these two underlying issues. It is sad to have to come to terms with the fact that the final statute has avoided to address both issues. It sounds incredible, but this is it, and we must accept it.¹⁵

By submitting the radio–television sector blatantly and completely to the power of the government (and in particular of the Ministries of Finance and Information), the statute dispelled once and for all any doubts as to parliamentary control. From this moment the grip of the executive over television began to be articulated on different levels and involved three different political figures: the Minister of Information, the Prime Minister and, obviously, the President of the Republic.

3 THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION: A ROLE “UNDER TUTELAGE”

To illustrate the role of the main political actors who during the first ten years of the Fifth Republic controlled and managed television, it is necessary first of all to look at the relevant context. The instability of the Fourth Republic had given the RTF senior executives considerable power and stability in the exercise of their role. In fact, the years between 1946 and 1958 were characterised by the contrast between the frequent changes of the Minister of Information (12 in total) and continuity in the RTF management. For 11 years—from 1946 to 1957—Wladimir Porché was the Director General and Vital Gayman remained Director of Information from 1946 to 1958.

When General de Gaulle reappeared on the political scene, this changed drastically. The media historian Jérôme Bourdon in his pioneering study on television control in the Gaullist decade has stated that, starting from 1958, the situation changed completely: “The government and the Ministry of Information were characterized by stability while the direction

of radio and television became more and more unsettled, in particular in respect of the information department.”¹⁶ While Bourdon’s comments on the growing instability of the direction of the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF)—Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF) after 1958—with five different General Directors and six in the Information Department¹⁷—is factually accurate, this description is only in part correct (Table 4.1).

The perception of stability at the Ministry of Information in the first decade of the Fifth Republic needs to be revised. Compared with the 20 Ministers of Information during the Fourth Republic, the 10 during de Gaulle’s presidency does indeed seem to suggest continuity. However, this raw data needs to be understood within the general context of stability of the administration. From this perspective, it is interesting to note that the Minister of Information was, especially in the first years of the Gaullist presidency, one of the least stable positions of the government. Between January 1959 and April 1962, when Michel Debré was Prime Minister, the Minister of Information changed three times: Roger Frey (until February 1960), Louis Terrenoire (until August 1961) and Christian de la Malène (until April 1962). Of the 20 ministers that made up the executive led by Debré in January 1959 5 remained in power until April 1962¹⁸; only in the Ministry of Education (with five different Ministers in four years) were ministers changed more frequently than in the Ministry of Information.¹⁹

Given all this, what is the reason for the comparative instability that characterised the Ministry of Information? To provide an answer it is use-

Table 4.1 Ministers of Information (1958–69)

Jacques Soustelle	July 1958–January 1959
Roger Frey	January 1959–February 1960
Louis Terrenoire	February 1960–August 1961
Christian de la Malène	August 1961–April 1962
Alain Peyrefitte I	April 1962–September 1962
Christian Fouchet	September 1962–December 1962
Alain Peyrefitte II	December 1962–April 1964
Alain Peyrefitte III	April 1964–January 1966
Yvon Bourges	January 1966–April 1967
Georges Gorse	April 1967–May 1968
Yves Guéna	May 1968–July 1968
Joël Le Theule	July 1968–June 1969

Source: J. Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, Paris, Ina/Anthropos, 1990, p. 300

ful to reflect on the functions of this Ministry, which were essentially two-fold.²⁰ Firstly, the Ministry controlled radio and television: the February 1959 ordinance clearly stated that the RTF was “under the authority of the Minister of Information.”²¹ Secondly, the Minister was officially responsible for the government’s public relations; he was the spokesperson of the executive inside and outside of the French territory. As the last Minister of Information of the Debré government, Christian de la Malène, explained, his role was to inform the public of “the government’s problems and decisions”. Notwithstanding all this, what is important to bear in mind is that in actual fact this Ministry was to remain “under tutelage” because of strong interference from the senior members of the government.²²

In terms of the control and planning strategies of the information sector, the Minister resembled more an intermediary between the Élysée, Matignon and the RTF than an actor involved in decision-making. Information became a crucial sector, in particular during the Algerian War and precisely for this reason was under the strict control of the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic. This complicated the role of the RTF executives that were forced to accept—in several cases not without difficulties—the guidance of their superiors. An example is provided by Louis Terrenoire, who, in a diary entry dated August 1960, lamented Michel Debré’s continuous interferences and his peremptory instructions: “The excellent Debré leads the State like a carter drives his cart: by whipping his horses.”²³

In respect of the implementation of policy, the Minister of Information had little leeway, as the President of the Republic and his *entourage* did not fail to remind him. Pierre Lefranc was a typical example of this; he was a close ally of the General and technical adviser to the Ministry of Information from the Élysée. Only one month after Alain Peyrefitte’s appointment, he advised him against the preparation of a new statute for the RTF, which, as the neo-Minister had declared during the previous cabinet, was a matter of urgency. In rather harsh tones, Lefranc suggested that the priorities were different:

It is said that you are preparing a statute for the RTF. I was asked [he does not say by whom according to the Élysée’s rules] to warn you against the temptation to build a mechanism whose effects would be to free the RTF from your control. Keep the capacity to appoint who you want where you want. If a Director General does not do the business, change him; it is easy enough: you simply propose it at a Cabinet meeting that will not make any

difficulties. If a director or head of department is not loyal, you can revoke or transfer him. If a radio or television journalist presents the news from an unfavorable angle for the Government, marginalize him. Through the authority that the law gives you, you should be able to put the RTF on track. Instead, you allow it to continuously derail. Would you exchange your authority for a generic tutelage that would deprive you of the right of intervening in any way you want? The General would never consent to this.²⁴

Peyrefitte knew well that Lefranc's words gave voice to the presidential thoughts: the Minister of Information was not asked to start to reform a system that was very advantageous for the executive, but merely to impose his authority. Had this not happened, it was not the statute that was going to change, but the Minister himself. This scenario was to be confirmed by Peyrefitte's secretary; informed of the young Minister's intentions of pushing forward a new statute to replace the 1959 ordinance, he warned him: "Then, you will not remain here for long. I have seen at least ten ministers planning a statute for radio and television; they all had to leave their appointment almost immediately."²⁵ The following week, Peyrefitte was invited to vacate his office in avenue de Friedland. A three-month "suspension" proved to be sufficient to make him realise that his independence was not a quality that was particularly appreciated by his superiors.²⁶

Instead, the Minister was expected to be an intermediary between the political executive and radio and television management and to make sure that information given to the public was in line with the President's wishes. In order to obtain managerial positions in the RTF it was necessary to prove to be a devoted Gaullist, and this alone was no guarantee of staying in the job for long. Ministerial pressure was constant and turnover frequent.

Jacques Sallebert, director of the news in July 1958, was hired under the most favourable conditions; his credentials were beyond doubt as he himself boasted: "The Minister of Information was one of my witnesses during my wedding and I attended the same high school as the director of his advisory board. I could not wish for happier circumstances to start my new job."²⁷ Despite his connections with the most important personalities in avenue de Friedland, Sallebert was not guaranteed preferential treatment. As he recalled with chagrin, the Ministry of Information's control over news bulletins was absolute:

Almost all mornings I am summoned to the Ministry of Information where Roger Frey or the director of his board ask me to provide some kind of explanation: “It appears that yesterday, during the news, this or that has been said [...] And then I must fetch the registration to prove that, most of the time, it is a misunderstanding of some overly zealous member of some ministerial Cabinet.”²⁸

Subjected to all kinds of the pressures from the Ministry, Sallebert remained in charge only for a few months and was forced to resign because during the news he decided to show a report on some incidents between veterans and the police during a demonstration. De Gaulle did not approve of this decision; it was his friend—minister Roger Frey—that reluctantly had to give Sallebert the sack. It was essentially Matignon and the Élysée that controlled and decided the form and content of information. The Minister of Information was the mere go-between between the executive and the media and was often forced to take responsibility for decisions that he had not taken directly and, in some cases, even met with his disapproval.²⁹

The Minister of Information’s role was not so much to be the spokesperson of the executive—a function that was already ably guaranteed by the President of the Republic—but consisted of regulating access to television at a crucial historical moment when the small screen was turning into the media favoured by politicians. For the representatives of the opposition parties the prospect of appearing on the small screen was a mirage; for the party of the majority and the government there were codified hierarchies enforced by the Minister of Information that had to be respected.

The only one who could appear on television as he pleased was the “Général-micro”, who would not hesitate to use it to address the nation before a referendum, to announce some turn of events in Algerian politics, or to review the international situation. The Prime Minister was also privileged in this respect; he had the right to appear not only on television in periods of crisis (as happened with Debré during the Algerian *putsch* in April 1961 and to Pompidou during the May 1968 crisis), but also at other crucial political moments such as electoral campaigns for legislative elections when de Gaulle used to keep a low profile. The situation of the other ministers was completely different. They were subjected to more restrictions and their appearance on television depended on the Minister

of Information. He examined their applications and informed them of his decision, which was generally positive.

As Edouard Sablier—Director of Information since April 1965—stated, ministers' requests to appear on television were very frequent: "Ministers wanted to appear on television at all costs. It was difficult to resist their pressures."³⁰ Several letters found in the archive of the Minister of Information confirm this. In one of these dated March 1963, e.g., Alain Peyrefitte assured the Minister of Labour, Gilbert Grandval, that he was going to do all he could to grant him "a debate on a Saturday afternoon immediately after the news."³¹ Sometimes it was the members of his entourage who warned the minister against the risks of being excessively accommodating towards the requests he received from colleagues. Jean-Paul Pourcel, head of the cabinet of the minister de La Malène, e.g., advised him not to accept the request of Minister of Agriculture Joseph Pisani to dedicate a part of the news twice a week to discussing problems in rural areas. What he feared was that "other ministers (education, labor, economy and so on) would then demand to appear on television to be interviewed about problems faced by their ministries."³² Given the increasing desire of ministers to inform the ever-growing television audience of their achievements in office, the fear of this happening was genuine. The satirical weekly *Le Canard enchaîné* did not fail to note that the news was progressively becoming reduced to a procession of ministers intent on what appeared to have become their main occupation, that is to say, "cutting some ribbon under the camera's eyes."³³

Ministers' determination to be seen on the small screen was evidently a direct consequence of the transformation of television into the most important mass media. When they did not receive a satisfactory answer from the Ministry of Information, the only alternative for a minister eager to appear on television was to seek an intervention from the Prime Minister who—as shown by the following excerpt taken from a letter from Michel Debré to Christian de la Malène—often imposed his authority on the Minister of Information: "Dear friend, our friend Foyer (Minister of Cooperation) would like to talk about Black Africa on television. I think we should accede to his request."³⁴

Requests from ministers became so numerous that it was often an embarrassing business for the successive ministers in avenue de Friedland to manage them. It was also the Prime Minister on this occasion that interceded to make a decision. Both Michel Debré and Georges Pompidou,

just a few months before the beginning of their mandate, put a great deal of effort into setting up the rules that ministers had to follow to have access to television. These were relayed in a circular prepared with the cooperation of their respective Ministers of Information (Roger Frey and Alain Peyrefitte).

On 15 May 1959, Michel Debré sent his ministers a document entitled “Ministers’ participation in radio and television broadcasting”. This document illustrated three types of television or radio appearance ministers could choose from. The first one consisted of an individual declaration three minutes long during the evening news; the second one, which was relevant when more complicated issues arose, consisted of a “ten–fifteen minute interview” on the television programme entitled *Problèmes de gouvernement*; in the third instance, the ministerial broadcast took the form of taking part in a debate that included some “selected” newspaper journalists. The letter concluded by stating that ministers may appear on television even without “the consent of the Prime Minister [...] but through the intermediation” of the cabinet of the Minister of Information,³⁵ a formula clearly meant to avoid completely discrediting the Minister of Information.

Some years later, Georges Pompidou sent out the same circular to the members of his administration remarking that “in order to preserve the unity of action in the government, it is useful that the Prime Minister is informed of the issues that will be discussed and, if necessary, about the general tone of the declaration that will be released”.³⁶ In this case, no effort was made to preserve an appearance of formal respect of the roles of the Prime Minister and of the Minister of Information; on the contrary, this circular provided a legitimization of the influence that the most powerful ministers of his executive had over him.

Scholarly research of the political control of television in the Gaullist era has concentrated attention almost exclusively on the figure of the Minister of Information or on the internal mechanisms of the RTF administration³⁷; what is important to keep in mind though is that—especially in the first years of the Algerian crisis—the Minister of Information was under strict supervision. Raymond Janot, Director General of the RTF between May 1960 and February 1962, has admitted that his role consisted in trying to manage orders that came from different institutions: “I knew that orders came not just from my Minister, but also from Matignon and the Élysée.”³⁸

4 MICHEL DEBRÉ: THE IMPLACABLE GUARDIAN OF GAULLIST ORTHODOXY

Michel Debré was not a fan of television. He was neither an assiduous viewer nor particularly telegenic, unlike the General who was a master of the art of appearing on television. The difference between the two came to the fore in April of 1961, during the Algerian *putsch*, when the General and the Prime Minister's speeches continuously followed one another for a whole night. Nowadays it is possible to retrieve these broadcasts in the Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) archives; the comparison between the two is embarrassing, almost painful: the one proud in his military uniform peremptorily pronouncing the triple "hélas!" before firmly ordering, in the name of the whole France, to use all means possible "to stop these individuals everywhere until they are made harmless"; the other pale with a trembling voice begging the rebel paratroopers, which it was believed were about to descend on Paris, to desist.³⁹

Debré's blatant inability to "puncture the screen", and the fact that in his writings there is not a shred of any of the interest he presumably should have had in radio or television, has misled historians who have underestimated the role he played in the management of these mass media. His archive—now open to the public—provides a different, almost opposite, version in which, as media historian Christian Delporte has noted, the Prime Minister was, contrary to general belief, thoroughly mindful of information issues.⁴⁰

A rigorous, close scrutiny of archival documents⁴¹ shows that Debré cannot be likened to a protagonist actor—his modest talent and the General's assiduous appearances on television made this role impossible; rather, he can be defined as an *éminence grise*.

Raymond Janot, Director General of the RTF between 1960 and 1962, has corroborated the heavy interference that was forthcoming from Matignon and the Élysée, adding that each of these had precise roles: instructions from the Élysée concerned "the long period", while "the Prime Minister, who was perfectly attuned with the President, inevitably concentrated on the medium period".⁴²

The role that Debré had to fulfil was twofold: he was the intermediary between the presidency of the Republic and the Minister of Information in relation to the control of the RTF, and, by association, he was responsible for information policies concerning the Algerian crisis. In this respect Debré also acted as an intercessor between Paris and the military authorities stationed across the Mediterranean.

Debré's opinion of the media was polarised: on the one hand, there were those media over which the State did not have a direct control (small radio stations and the press). From these the Prime Minister expected loyalty as far as government Algerian policies and respect of the law were concerned. On the other hand, there were those media that by law were explicitly under the authority of the State: major radio and television stations.⁴³ Here, government interference was suffocating. Far from guaranteeing the plurality of information to the public, the role of radio and television media was completely subjugated to the overriding government conception of what was in "the national interest", or, more explicitly, to the guidelines issued by the President.

In the context of the critical situation of the Algerian crisis, Michel Debré appeared to be the most intransigent guardian of Gaullist orthodoxy. In a secret memo entitled *General Directives on Information about Algeria* sent in June 1960 to the Foreign Ministry and later forwarded to all diplomatic offices, Debré reinforced the belief that, in a moment that was so critical for the destiny of the nation, there was an absolute need "to speak with one voice". The document contained a detailed account of the positions the diplomatic representatives at Quai D'Orsay had to express during public debates, interviews, or "spontaneous declarations", "in order to condition the reaction of public opinion and the press".⁴⁴ The "guidelines" illustrated by Debré were inspired by the television speeches of the General (so much so that long excerpts are quoted in his memo), which represented the bible meant to orient the position of all the representatives of the nation, in France and abroad.⁴⁵

Debré's efforts were meant to determine the entire national information system. He often used his authority to dispense rebukes, and more occasionally to threaten sanctions so that he could conduct a vast and harmonious Gaullist symphony. Debré's commitment to control the small screen was maniacal and was not limited to the coverage of current events. A television programme that reconstructed episodes taken from medieval history could become the subject of indignation and reprimands to senior staff in the information sector.⁴⁶ The constant focus of the Prime Minister's discontent was that radio and television were not "sufficiently direct".⁴⁷ As he told all ministers of information, the absolute priority was to "be obeyed completely".⁴⁸

Debré himself was also under pressure, in particular in relation to the Algerian situation, and not just from the Élysée. A letter from General Challe, who was in charge of the army in Algeria, addressed to Matignon

in January 1960 (a few days before the “week of barricades”) shows that Debré acted as referent for the highest ranks in the army who believed that propaganda was as important as military action:

The causes of the present degraded psychological situation—causes that originate from the fact that France is a Western democracy—are the following three: political uncertainty; poor propaganda; and the justice system that is not tailored for a revolutionary war. [...] Poor propaganda has its causes in anarchy and bad information. FLN’s coherent strategy [...] is not counteracted by an equally coherent and enduring effort to win a battle that we can win [...] The timid attempts made recently do not show enough strength and are not persuasive. [...]. As concerns the means, this is called the press, radio–television and cinema. We ask them not to betray us, something that some of them do [...] Nasser has already shown that it is possible to win a war while losing battles. As concerns the radio we have already lost the first half. Will we lose also the second? There is great talk of neutrality, objectivity! What is the value of these words when what is at stake is a question of the utmost importance for the nation! Will we be able one day to force all the experts to help us in our effort rather than sabotaging us? Powerful organization, ample budget, modern techniques: We must have these things if we want to win. And, above all, we shouldn’t forget that in an Arab country, the radio is a very powerful weapon, more powerful than conventional ones.⁴⁹

Dating precisely from the “week of barricades”, Debré returned to his surveillance role with renewed energy. The first measure he would take in the February 1960 ministerial reshuffle consisted of a complete reorganisation of the Ministry of Information: Louis Terrenoire became its Minister and Raymond Janot took the place of Christian Chavanon as Director General of the RTF. Once removed from his job, Chavanon publicly criticised the conditions under which he was forced to work and the complete subordination of radio and television to the executive.⁵⁰

A mere couple of weeks after he was appointed in his new role, Terrenoire was given a taste of Debré’s interference. Debré wrote to inform the Minister of Information that “some functionaries in the RTF have recently been accused and even arrested for having helped the FLN. I think that it is time to begin disciplinary sanctions that, as you know, are independent from penal sanctions. It is better that we proceed with some suspensions while awaiting the verdict of the Disciplinary Council.”⁵¹

Debré's priority was to shape information on the Algerian question⁵² and in his eyes the attitude of radio and television was so detrimental that he repeatedly asked the General to intervene:

This sector is even more difficult to straighten out than the one that I have just mentioned [public administration, *AN*] and up to now I have experienced only disappointment. And yet, we must persevere. As regards radio and television it is necessary to proceed with an immediate administrative and political restructuring. It is imperative to exercise authority over staff [and this can be done only after the law on strikes has been enforced]. It is then necessary to carefully investigate the ambiguous complicities of some television programmes [a detailed study is ongoing]. Then it is necessary to improve the quality of the staff [...]. I intend to take this up personally, without intermediaries, with the Director General of the RTF.⁵³

The increasingly central role played by Debré in the radio–television sector and the direct relation between Matignon and RTF executives in the final years of the Algerian War was accompanied by the progressive marginalisation of the Minister of Information. The Prime Minister's recommendations to Raymond Janot, RTF Director General, became more and more insistent. They were usually aimed at convincing him to treat information from Algeria in a favourable way for the government⁵⁴ and, on some occasions, he ended with the inevitable demand that the “cult-prits” be sanctioned.⁵⁵

On other occasions, recommendations concerned the possibility of starting new programmes that highlighted government's reforms⁵⁶ or gave visibility to international events that could damage the opposition.⁵⁷

Debré was also a zealous viewer, and as such he did not just interfere in the content of information; the form of the broadcast was equally important for him. And so it was that he invited Director General Janot to check more carefully the tone of voice used by journalists—this should not be “emphatic” but “calm”—and without beating around the bush let him know of his gender preferences: “I am against using female voices.”⁵⁸

Though it is now forgotten, Debré's manic attention to television was well known to all those working in the sector, as shown by the following article that appeared in the weekly *La Nef*, published in the autumn of 1961:

Everybody knows that Debré watches the news on Sundays at 1.00 pm. On Sundays he is in his country house in Versailles. He has time on his hands. It is almost certain that half an hour after the news he is going to call the

Minister of Information, who will call André Gérard, who will call Pierre Sabbagh, who will call etc. If, unfortunately, that day a journalist forgets that Michel Debré hates *Afrique-Action* and during the press conference quotes from a recent editorial, Michel Debré gets mad and starts to call everyone.⁵⁹

Senior RTF executives remembered that they and their colleagues were not the only ones to know about the Sunday habits of the Prime Minister: “As soon as the telephone started to ring on a Sunday, my children would shout: ‘Daddy, it is Debré’.”⁶⁰

The frequent changes of executives in the information sector during the three years of the Debré government⁶¹ provide unassailable proof that his control over this sector was very strict. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the Prime Minister was convinced that all his efforts were in vain.⁶² What he found disappointing was that radio and television did not fully realise what he considered to be their mission. A brief extract from a letter sent to Louis Terrenoire, the Minister of Information, is in this respect representative of Debré’s feelings: “I cannot but express my sadness and anger faced with a radio and television sector that is unable to be simply: calm, national and Gaullist.”⁶³

5 THE GREAT PUPPETEER OF THE SMALL SCREEN

De Gaulle was completely indifferent to the need of controlling information. I have not known of any kind of pressure from what it is customary to call “the Elysée”. I cannot say that other sectors maintained the same distance. During the seven years I have had the responsibility of the news, I have had the honour to be frequently received by the President of the Republic. Never was television the object of any of these meetings.⁶⁴

The above remark by Edouard Sablier, Director of RTF Information between 1963 and 1969, seems to suggest that the General avoided exerting political control on the television. Sablier also insisted that de Gaulle never put pressure on him and, on the contrary, on some occasions he personally defended him against the frequent interferences on the news from members of the executive.⁶⁵

The notion that the General’s influence on issues concerning radio and television information was negligible was also affirmed by Jacques-Bernard Dupont, Director General of the RTF between 1964 and 1968.

He recalled that the Head of State “used to watch television, and he watched it frequently, but he never issued an order or a recommendation after watching a television programme [...]. He met me three times during my mandate and he never commented on any specific issues.”⁶⁶

According to this testimony it would seem the interest of the General towards the small screen was accompanied by a certain indifference from the *Élysée* towards the political domestication of a means of communication that precisely during the 1960s was conquering a central role in the media. Things are in fact more complex and require consideration in some more detail.

The General’s passion for the small screen was well known to everyone, so much so that he was known as “the first French Viewer”,⁶⁷ a nickname that was given to him by the novelist Romain Gary. Personalities in the inner circle of the General have confirmed that he would never miss the eight o’clock news.⁶⁸ This presented an occasion in which he could admire himself while giving a speech, during a press conference, while touring around France or abroad, or making various declarations and appearances at official occasions. It was not only the news that fascinated the General, he often watched historical programmes⁶⁹ and topical current affairs programmes, and also had a soft spot for sports, in particular athletics. With his entourage he did not make a mystery of his evening entertainment in front of the small screen.⁷⁰

The idea that de Gaulle was indifferent or passive in relation to the need to control information is a myth. Rather, the General seemed to act as a sort of puppeteer of the small screen, inclined to delegate precise tasks to the Prime Minister or the Minister of Information, but always alert and active as far radio and television and their management were concerned.

His actions in controlling these media included regulating television’s access as far as members of the executive were concerned; coordinating televisual strategies of the Parliament majority during electoral campaigns, and evaluating the designations for the RTF executive positions proposed directly from Matignon. Father and Master of the small screen, often in the role of protagonist actor, de Gaulle managed with great care the access members of the government had to television and, at the same time, monitored the work of the Minister of Information who, in his view, was supposed to look after day-to-day issues and act as intermediary between the *Élysée*, Matignon and the RTF executives.

Archival documents show that de Gaulle was rather jealous of the contact he established with citizens through his appearances on television and did not like the idea of sharing this privilege with other members of the

administration. This was true throughout his presidency with the sole exception of his Prime Ministers, in particular Debré. He repeatedly invited him to go on television and address the French during the most delicate phases of the Algerian War, and yet he was deeply irritated with the procession of ministers on television, whose only preoccupation was, in his opinion, to boast the achievements of their respective ministries. He often encouraged Debré to go on television and reminded him “to fix another appointment with viewers”⁷¹; to his ministers he recommended just the opposite. France had to speak with one voice, the voice of the President, on issues of great importance, or alternatively the voice of the Prime Minister when relaying the government’s contingent political action. Other voices or faces were not welcomed, not even indirectly. To the Prime Minister, who often showed him the drafts of his television speeches, he used to say: “I agree on almost everything”⁷² but “not to mention the names of the ministers”.⁷³

With all the other members of the executive de Gaulle was quite forthright in telling them that he did not like to see them on television. The Minister of Information was no exception and did not enjoy any preferential treatment. The General rebuked Alan Peyrefitte when in December 1962 he appeared on television arriving in the avenue de Friedland: “I have seen you on television [...]. You must remember that it is better not to be shown on television unless there is a particular reason for it.”⁷⁴ The embarrassed attempts of the Minister to defend himself were unsuccessful, and the Head of State remarked that he did not like even the form of his television appearance: “Just go on television as little as possible. Do not let cameras shoot you unless you have prepared something to say that helps the people to understand better French politics. Also, tell me, what is the meaning of all those official cars, all those porters at the Ministry that rush to open car doors, those lackeys? I will tell you: they mean nothing.”⁷⁵

The second form of intervention of the President in respect of his control of television relates to electoral campaigns. The General defined the rules of political campaigns and determined what media space would be apportioned to political parties and leaders before the vote. During the referendum campaign in October 1962, e.g., Burin des Rozières in a short memo to the Élysée listed the rules for parties’ radio access that had to be decided:

As far as radio is concerned there are six parties. I think we must give each of them twelve minutes to be used in a single address, and all must use their allotted time before Thursday the 18th [when I will talk]. It would be better

to put three on the 16th and three on the 17th. So in total they will have the same time as myself, Pompidou and Fouchet. Don't be cowed by the self-interested protests of our opponents.⁷⁶

The same recommendations and attention to detail resurfaced during political elections, when the General kept a rather low profile and avoided taking part directly in the electoral campaign. At the same time, he would take all measures to define with precise detail who among the members of the executive had to appear on television and the content of their speeches. The letter he sent a few weeks prior the vote in March 1967 to the then Prime Minister Georges Pompidou is telling:

Dear Friend, as concerns television and radio, I think that the best things would be 1. You will talk about the present and the future in general, particular attention should be given to social and economic issues, the electorate is very interested in them. In this respect I think we should be clear about the principle of responsibility of the workers and the housing problem; 2. Giscard d'Estaing, who I think should talk about issues of currency [...] He should talk about this without excessively using jargon, rather he should aim at making it clear to all viewers that it is a fundamental issue from all viewpoints and that the Fifth Republic has guaranteed a stable currency and that, if political parties come back, it would not be possible to guarantee it; 3. Maurice Schumann will "vulgarize" [no pejorative meaning is intended] our foreign politics, past, present and future. I think he will be able to do that very well, comparing what we have achieved on the one hand and chaos on the other; 4. Capitant. He should in my opinion take care of the institutions [as he often does] in order to show that they are extraordinarily democratic and popular. They are the embodiment of direct power and self-determination for the people. The opposition would like to take this away from them; 5. Madame Troizier will take care of the National Health Service and social security [...] what has changed; 6. Somebody who is young [Mazeaud, maybe?]. He will have to say: "We, today's young French, have great ambitions, modern ambitions, ambitions of progress in all sectors. We know that in order to get things done, it is necessary to act, to get organized and be coherent; we know that the present regime gives us the opportunity to act and do things, while this is not possible under a party regime, despite the fact that some party men are worthy men. That is why the Fifth Republic is the regime for young people". I think all this constitutes a whole without redundancies, and it is all we need.⁷⁷

In short, whenever de Gaulle decided that he did not want to be the main protagonist, he embraced the role of director.

The third form of intervention of the President's control of television concerned the appointment of those responsible for this sector. Everything concerning information had to go through and be vetted by the General, who did not just decide who to appoint as Minister of Information, but also wanted to be regularly consulted on the executives at the RTF or at the Press Agency Havas, which was nationalised in 1945. The Minister of Information or, more often, the Prime Minister were the only ones that were authorised to deal directly with the General and they alone were given permission to work on their own initiative. Michel Debré, constantly preoccupied by the belief that he was not fully obeyed by the radio and television establishment, was particularly zealous. For example, soon after the government's reshuffle in February 1960, and "the week of barricades" he asked the General permission to proceed with a series of changes:

Mr. General, I am writing concerning issues about particular individuals. Actually, it is necessary to make a decision and, despite the objections you expressed last week, I take the liberty to reiterate what I have already said to you concerning the Agency Havas and the RTF. It is necessary to find as soon as possible a President of the Agency Havas. In actuality, this is a commercial agency and cannot survive without a manager [...] To be frank, I believe that Chavanon, who is up for this role, can be a good choice. As secretary of the Information sector and, later, as Director of RTF he has always proved to be very loyal. I know him well enough to be sure of his honesty [...] Allow me also to add that the importance of the Agency Havas cannot be overestimated. It is a commercial agency that can prove useful for small provincial newspapers and for this reason it is a good idea to appoint a friend in its top position [...]. In respect of the RTF I think we can try to appoint Janot. The RTF has never had a strong leader. It is necessary to take steps in this direction. If you agree with these appointments, we must immediately inform the establishment of the Agency Havas of the government's decision and then during next week's Cabinet we should appoint the new director of the RTF.⁷⁸

The first Prime Minister of the Fifth Republic was one of the most fervent loyalists and enjoyed the complete trust of de Gaulle. Sure enough, a week after the letter was sent, Christian Chavanon became President of Havas and Raymond Janot Director at the RTF.

Not only was the General unrivalled on the small screen, but he also controlled it discreetly and yet firmly. His role was not that of a mediator or *primus inter pares*; rather, he had the last word in the decision-making process. His reticence towards the radio and television establishment—confirmed by the testimonies reported at the beginning of this chapter—should

not be interpreted as a manifestation of his lack of interest in these media, but rather the result of an aristocratic way of interpreting the presidential role, according to which the President should take some distance from administrative affairs. It was also the result of the belief that it was necessary to keep a clear-cut separation of roles, one that saw only the Minister directly involved and the Prime Minister as the interlocutors charged with conveying presidential instructions.⁷⁹

Both were fully conscious of the importance that the information sector had for de Gaulle and the strict control they were subjected to. As Peyrefitte noted, the General did not talk much, though what he said was very clear. Of the several instructions the Minister of Information and the Prime Minister used to receive, they knew there was one in particular they had to always bear in mind: "Don't try to convince the establishment, just give them orders. The press is against me, the television is mine."⁸⁰

NOTES

1. A. Brisson, *Au J.T. incompréhensible carence de l'information*, *Le Figaro*, 3 June 1958, p. 17.
2. INA, *Télésoir*, 5 June 1958, 18'25".
3. AN—449 AP 1, Louis Terrenoire, personal diary, 1 July 1960.
4. M. Droit, *Les Lucurs de l'aube*, Paris, Plon, 1982, p. 98.
5. C. Estier, *L'opération quadrillage à la R.T.F.*, *France-Observateur*, 29 August 1958, p. 4.
6. On 13 and 27 June and on 1 August.
7. C. Lustière, "Le JT. L'évolution des techniques et des dispositifs", in Lévy (ed), *La Télévision dans la République*, op. cit., p. 58.
8. INA, de Gaulle Collection, 4 September 1958, 2 videotapes. Part of this document is also included in the documentary *De Gaulle voix de la France*, TF1, 1 January 1981, 58'14".
9. Viansson-Ponté, *Histoire de la République gaullienne*, op. cit., p. 44.
10. "The regime through its press and radio tries in all ways possible to paralyse me. After all it is expected." J-R. Tournoux, *La tragédie du Général*, Paris, Plon, 1967.
11. Montaldo, *Dossier O.R.T.F. 1944–1974. Tous coupables*, op. cit., p. 132.
12. *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, *Séance du mercredi 11 février 1959*, p. 1858 ff.
13. Brochand, *Histoire générale de la radio et de la télévision en France*, II, op. cit., p. 92; Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 27.
14. *Une réforme manquée. L'ordonnance sur la R.T.F. ne constitue pas un véritable statut de la radio-télévision*, *Le Monde*, 12 February 1959, p. 13.

15. A. Brincourt, *Après le pseudo-statut de la R.T.F. rien de changé!*, *Le Figaro*, 27 February 1959, p. 15.
16. Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 16.
17. RTF–ORTF Directors General: Christian Chavanon (July 1958), Raymond Janot (March 1960), Robert Bordaz (February 1962), Jacques-Bernard Dupont (June 1964), Jean-Jacques de Bresson (July 1968). Direction of Information: Louis Terrenoire (July 1958), René Thibault (November 1958), André-Marie Gérard (June 1961), Raymond Marcillac (September 1963), Edouard Sablier (April 1965), Jean-Louis Guillaud (January 1969). See Vassallo, *La télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., pp. 297–299.
18. Robert Buron (Public Works and Transport), Paul Bacon (Ministry of Labour), Pierre Sudreau (Building Works), Raymond Triboulet (Veterans), Maurice Couve de Murville (Foreign Ministry).
19. André Bouloche (January–December 1959), Michel Debré *ad interim* (December 1959–January 1960), Louis Joxe (January–November 1960), Pierre Guillaumat *ad interim* (November 1960–February 1961), Lucien Paye (February 1961–February 1962).
20. The minister also had control over the main public information agencies such as Havas, l'Agence France Presse, and Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française.
21. *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mercredi 11 février 1959*, p. 1858.
22. Vassallo, *La télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 65.
23. AN, 449AP1, note of Louis Terrenoire, 12 August 1960.
24. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 498.
25. *Ibidem*, p. 504.
26. Alain Peyrefitte was Minister of Information between 15 April and 11 September 1962. He resumed this post between 7 December 1962 and 7 January 1966.
27. J. Sallebert, *Entre l'arbre et l'écorce*, Paris, Stock, 1975, pp. 176–177.
28. *Ibidem*.
29. This repeatedly happened and particularly during the final dramatic phase of the Algerian crisis, which was marked by a suffocating control on radio and television and frequent confiscations or sanctions on the press sector. M. de Bussierre, C. Méadel and C. Ulmann-Mauriat (eds), *Radios et télévision au temps des "événements d'Algérie" 1954–1962*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999.
30. E. Sablier, private communication, 10 November 2004.
31. AN, F41–2321, Alain Peyrefitte letter to Gilbert Grandval, 5 March 1963.
32. AN, F41–2321, Jean-Paul Pourcel note to Christian de la Malène, 2 March 1962.
33. "The television news never fails to show us some official or other cutting a ribbon for the inauguration of a statue, some dungeon somewhere, or a

- market, etc. etc. It seems that it has become an irresistible past time. Let us try to guess whose turn it will be today: we haven't seen Minister Terrenoire." Télé-Mac, *On donne beaucoup de ciseau, Le Canard enchaîné*, 26 October 1960, p. 6.
34. AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Christian de La Malène, 13 March 1962.
 35. Vassallo, *La télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 87.
 36. Ibidem, p. 88.
 37. Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit.; Vassallo, *La télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit.
 38. R. Janot, *Les structures gouvernementales*, in Aa.Vv., *De Gaulle et les médias*, op. cit., p. 122.
 39. INA, de Gaulle Collection, 23 April 1961, 6'20".
 40. On this see Delporte, *Michel Debré et les médias*, op. cit., pp. 279–295.
 41. See in particular collections AMD, 2DE22, 2DE29 and 2DE30.
 42. Janot, *Les structures gouvernementales*, op. cit., p. 122.
 43. Delporte, *Michel Debré et les médias*, op. cit., p. 282.
 44. AMD, 2DE29, note of Michel Debré to the Foreign Ministry, 19 June 1960.
 45. "General de Gaulle's speeches do not need to be commented on. They determine the spirit and provide the orientation for the debate." Ibidem.
 46. See, e.g., the letter that was sent to the RTF Director General Christian Chavanon and to the Minister of Information Frey: "Dear friend, on Thursday evening, I was sitting in front of the television for a while. I want to share with you my experience [...]. My attention was captured by a programme on the beatification of Joan of Arc [...]. To my great surprise and indignation, the only salient piece of information given by the presenter about this figure was that Joan of Arc was probably the illegitimate offspring of Louis d'Orléans and Isabelle de Bavière! [...]. Why mention this stupid legend? The RTF journalist that has evoked [...] this absurd hypothesis deserves serious punishment, at the very least. One should be cultured, and when one is not, they should write instead about dogs run over on the last page of provincial papers, they should not be a presenter for the French Radio and Television [...]. I would like to know who these presenters of this awful programme are—there were two of them—[...]. Could you tell me what needs to be done to have these blunders and other similar propaganda disappear from our screens?" AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Christian Chavanon and Roger Frey, 4 December 1959.
 47. AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Louis Terrenoire, 24 April 1961.
 48. AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Louis Terrenoire, 30 April 1961.
 49. AMD, 2DE76, Dossier from General Challe to Michel Debré, 17 January 1960.

50. Chavanon got a reputation as a “dangerous independent” because of an article that appeared in a French weekly in which he noted that the RTF should be “provided with a solid administrative and financial autonomy. Given the present situation, it is illusory or at the very least difficult to improve better.” Ideally the Director should have been free to “select and keep staff on the basis of their talent and expertise and not because of political opinions and recommendations (...) The Director should maintain only sporadic contacts with the government.” C. Chavanon, *La R.T.F. réplique, La vie française*, 12 February 1960, p. 17.
51. AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Louis Terrenoire, 7 March 1960.
52. The correspondence between Debré and the Minister of Information, Louis Terrenoire, on this is voluminous. See, e.g., the following extract: “Dear Friend, can I draw your attention to the following issue? The RFT during the news devotes only a few shots to the province and, even less, to Algeria. In respect of Algeria, I am told that there are lots of reports, but that only a few of these go on air. This is something that I am asking you to rectify.” AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Louis Terrenoire, 8 June 1960.
53. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré note to the General de Gaulle, 23 August 1960.
54. “I have listened once again to the radio news and the television news yesterday. Would it not be possible to spend so much time on the Ferhat Abbas mission or on the declarations of this or that FLN member in Cairo or elsewhere? It wouldn’t be too difficult to be a bit more discreet about the activity of these people, also because we are not foreseeing any important decisions in the short term. Anyway, it doesn’t matter what I keep on saying for months and months; Algeria is mentioned only when there is an attack even when there are no casualties! [...] I cannot understand if it is a question of not trying, or people are acting in bad faith, or they are incompetent or a combination of all these things. In any case, I am asking you to take care of this immediately.” AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Raymond Janot, 6 March 1961.
55. “As concerns Thibault [Director of Radio Television Information NA] we must replace him.” *Ibidem*.
56. “Dear Friend, for the beginning of the next parliamentary session (see, I am not leaving it at the last moment) could you plan a nice programme about Parliament, and in particular about the lower chamber since 1959? There are a lot of things to say and it would be a good way to open the now parliamentary session [...]. Concerning how to do this and how it is going presented to the public, there are several possible options; I trust you to will provide me with some ideas, if needed.” AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Raymond Janot, 21 July 1961.

57. See the letter sent during the 1961 crisis that was going to lead to the erection of the Berlin Wall: "Dear friend, what is happening in Berlin—I am referring to the East Berlin population fleeing from East Germany—was at the centre of some well-done reports on television, however I think it is something we should cover more. Germans fleeing from a communist regime is a subject that should be broadcast again both on radio and on television." AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Raymond Janot, 7 August 1961.
58. AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Raymond Janot, 2 September 1960.
59. R. Bernard, "La censure au Journal télévisé", in *La Nef*, 8, October–December 1961, p. 65.
60. Bourdon, *Haute fidélité. Pouvoir et télévision 1935–1994*, op. cit., p. 66.
61. Between January 1959 and April 1962 there were three Ministers of Information (Roger Frey until February 1960, Louis Terrenoire until August 1961 and Christian de La Malène), three RTF Directors (Christian Chavanon until February 1960; Raymond Janot until February 1962 and Robert Bordaz), two Directors of Information (René Thibault until May 1961, followed by André-Marie Gérard) and four news Directors (Albert Ollivier until October 1959; Pierre Sabbagh until July 1961 and then Jacques Anjubault and Max Petit).
62. See, e.g., his bitter remark to the RTF Director General "Dear friend, sometimes I wonder what comes of my phone calls and letters." AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Raymond Janot, 6-3-1961.
63. AMD, 2DE22, Michel Debré letter to Louis Terrenoire, 24 April 1961.
64. E. Sablier, personal communication, 10 November 2004.
65. Ibidem.
66. Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 20.
67. R. Gary, *Gaulliste inconditionnel*, *Le Monde*, 23 June 1968, p. 6.
68. E. Burin des Rozières, personal communication, 12-11-2004; P. Lefranc, personal communication, 30 November 2004.
69. De Gaulle's favourite historical programme was *La Caméra explore le temps*. M. Crivello-Bocca, "L'écriture de l'histoire à la télévision. La mobilisation des consciences: La Caméra explore le temps (1956–1966)", in M-F. Lévy (ed), *La Télévision dans la République*, op. cit., pp. 89–106.
70. "Tonight I am watching Jazy [middle-distance and long-distance runner. In 1965 he set four world records in the mile and the 3000 meters NA]. Is he in good form? Has he recovered completely from his injuries?" J. Foccart, *Journal de l'Élysée*, I, op. cit., p. 236.
71. AMD, 2DE94, draft of Michel Debré's television speech on 21 March 1959 with hand corrections by General de Gaulle. No date.
72. Ibidem.
73. Ibidem.

74. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 504.
75. Ibidem, p. 505.
76. C. de Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets*, IX, *Janvier 1961–Décembre 1963*, Paris, Plon, 1986, pp. 265–266.
77. Id., *Lettres, notes et carnets*, XI, *Juillet 1966–Avril 1969*, Paris, Plon, 1987, pp. 74–75.
78. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 2 March 1960.
79. On more than one occasion, however, de Gaulle did not just define the general plans of action for this sector; he also personally intervened concerning specific episodes that, in his opinion, were particularly important. This is the case, e.g., of the protests following a television debate on 25 July 1962 during which the CBS correspondent in Paris, David Schoenbrun, had criticised the government financial politics saying “it will ruin France”. In his memoir Alain Peyrefitte describes de Gaulle summoning the Minister of Information and telling him: “Where did you find that Schoenbrun who insults me on my own television (...) It is unacceptable showing him on our television (...). We have no power over the press. At least it should be understood that the radio and television journalists have no right to attack the government!” A. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, op. cit., pp. 499–500.
80. Ibidem, p. 505.

The General and the Small Screen

I THE GENERAL FACES THE CAMERAS

On the morning of 13 June 1958, less than two weeks before he was elected President of the National Assembly, General de Gaulle was busy reading through the daily press reviews when an editorial article in *Le Figaro* suddenly caught his eye. The article, written by André Brincourt—the mass media expert of the newspaper edited by Pierre Brisson—considered the impact of the development of the latest means of mass media communication:

We live surrounded by sounds and images [...]. Modern men's appetite is becoming disquieting. During exceptional periods such as this, men have become insatiable. The problem is one of intoxication. In radio, cinema or illustrated papers, writing gives way to the image; television reporters have ceased to inform people; on the contrary people now passively receive information [...]. Books and the written press invite their readers to interpret a text. Mechanical media—like radio and television—impose themselves the way they are. And here the misunderstanding begins, if we are not careful.¹

Coincidentally, that same morning the General was due to record his first televised speech. Although his initial television appearance had occurred the previous month, 19 May 1958, on that occasion de Gaulle had simply responded to questions from a group of journalists² in a press conference staged in the Hall of the Hôtel d'Orsay. The attendant atmosphere had been one of heightened anticipation following his return to the public eye

(de Gaulle had not met with journalists since 30 June 1955). The event was considered a great success due to the General's sparkling and quick-witted repartee.³

As he prepared for his appearance before the RTF cameras, de Gaulle was mindful of Brincourt's warnings in *Le Figaro* about the risks of "the age of the image". These reflected his own strong reservations and anxieties about this new form of mass media and its implications for those that failed to understand the power of this medium. Ever since the Second World War, the General's destiny had been firmly tied to the brilliant oratory of his radio speeches and he was well aware of the potential hazards of appearing on television:

This is a unique media, that allows me to be everywhere, provided, however, that my appearances are successful. This is neither the most dangerous risk I have to face, nor is the only one, but it is a high risk all the same.⁴

Facing the cameras was indeed a risky venture, especially for novices; consequently, the first television performance of the General on 13 June was far from being an unequivocal success. The new President appeared on the French television at the beginning of the 8 o'clock news. Glasses perched on his nose, he read for a whole seven minutes during which he announced the institutional referendum and a national public grant. The tone of his voice was monotonous and the performance far from captivating.⁵

Among the three million people who witnessed this unprecedented televised address to the nation was the General himself. Seated with his wife, Yvonne,⁶ in the living room of the Matignon Palace, he watched the recording made earlier that morning. He was suitably unimpressed and admitted that the criticism he had received at the hands of Jacques Anjubault, chief editor of the news, was correct. Yvonne's impressions only made things worse; noticing how pale he appeared on screen, she remarked pitilessly "Charles, you look terrible!"⁷ At that moment de Gaulle had cause to regret he had angrily dismissed the television channel's make-up artist a few minutes before the recording started, insisting, "I am the President not an actor."⁸

The following day brought further confirmation of an appearance that was anything but successful. Anxious to get an expert's opinion, De Gaulle invited the advertiser Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet to Matignon⁹ to give his reaction to his performance. His verdict was scathing. Abruptly, he remarked:

Mr General, they have destroyed you! They filmed your profile with your glasses perched on the nose while reading from some notes. General de Gaulle should not enter people's homes in this way [...]. Maybe you thought you were going to talk to three million French people. You were wrong. You were talking to three people multiplied three million times.¹⁰

This was a harsh judgement that did not, however, anger the General, who was well aware that his role demanded that he constructed a double identity of himself: on the one hand, his real self, and, on the other, his public image. This had to be carefully constructed and adapted—with some help of experts—to meet the demands of a new media de Gaulle was still unfamiliar with. Charles, a regular citizen, became aware that he had to dedicate time and energies to constructing de Gaulle the mythical statesman. And so it was that the General was persuaded by Bleustein-Blanchet to make some changes: “To be true to my public persona, I must address the audience as if I was speaking directly to them, without notes or glasses.”¹¹

Consequently, for his second television speech, despite serious sight problems following two cataract operations, he appeared without his glasses. In order to help him to look towards the centre of the camera a special signal was arranged.¹² Afterwards he decided to give up notes and memorise his speeches, though he always carried his notes with him. Additionally, at the age of 68, like any other aspiring theatre actor, he started to take private acting lessons from a famous actor of the Comédie Française, Jean Yonnel.¹³

Finally, two weeks before appearing on television, following his wife's advice, he agreed to submit to being made up by a trusted make-up artist. De Gaulle was keen to avoid “the risk of seeing his face transformed into a sort of pasty ricotta cheese by some ill-meaning technician”.¹⁴ Therefore he began to employ some of the most famous French make-up artists: initially Igor Keldich and then, from 1960, Charles Koubesserian (who also worked for Jean-Paul Belmondo and Brigitte Bardot). He resorted to them during all his television appearances except one in April of 1961, because it was put together in great haste during the Algerian *putsch*.¹⁵ The General's make-up had to be done rapidly, in sessions lasting no more than between eight and ten minutes, during which the General never failed to point out: “I am not vain, you know, so don't take too long. I am not a Lady.”¹⁶ De Gaulle used to justify his make-up to his associates by explaining that it was not meant to falsify his appearance, but

to create an effect of reality: “Given that I am not an actor, I do not wear make-up to improve my appearance, but simply to appear the way I really am, that is to say very different from this white image of myself created by the projectors.”¹⁷

Already during his second televised appearance, on 27 June 1958, the General demonstrated he had learnt his lesson. Like a consummate actor he pointed his finger to the camera in a nonchalant way, he directly addressed the audience and, without preamble he said: “It is to you that I turn.”¹⁸ He proceeded by explaining that France’s problems were far from insurmountable; three of these were particularly urgent: Algeria, the financial and economic situation and State reform. Showing that he had mastered the tricks of the trade, he continued to address the French people, “staring at them in the eyes, without glasses or notes”,¹⁹ and concluded with a very personalised formula full of pathos: “French men and women, help me!”²⁰ From this day until his disappearance from the political scene in April 1969, de Gaulle remained the uncontested champion of the small screen²¹; he recorded 76 television broadcasts in total, a figure that shows he was certainly not reticent about appearing on television. Until the 1965 elections, he exercised complete monopoly over television, and it can be said that he invented the two main genres of television political communication: the speech and the press conference (Fig. 5.1).

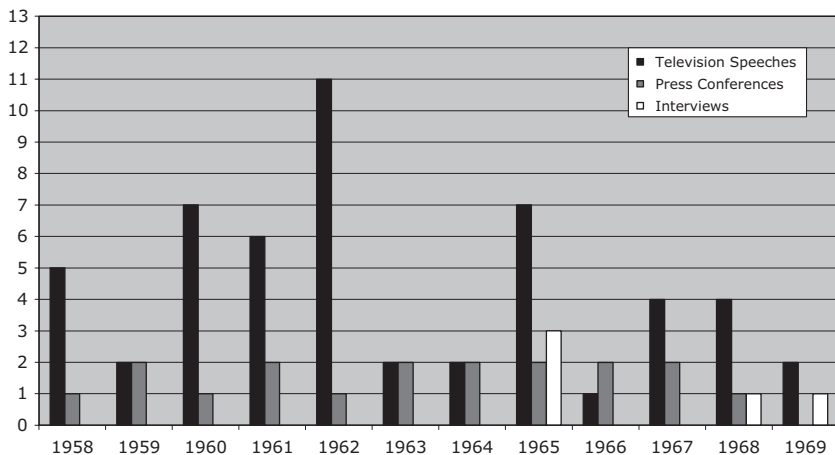


Fig. 5.1 Television appearances of General de Gaulle (1958–69)

2 GÉNÉRAL-MICRO'S MASTERPIECE: THE PRESS CONFERENCE

The press conference was undoubtedly the arena in which de Gaulle's talents shone.²² These were rarer than his speeches and described by the General as “excessively brief for the purpose of explaining important issues with sufficient precision”.²³ Press conferences were scheduled far in advance at rigidly set intervals once or (most often) twice a year. Not even the most dramatic of events modified this schedule. These press conferences were a sort of seasonal event: the first one took place at the beginning of the year and the second one in autumn. Unlike his speeches, they were not addressed solely to the nation but intended for a wider and more prestigious international audience. De Gaulle spoke in front of a public that included several foreign ambassadors and the conferences were broadcast by major television stations all over Europe.

Thus de Gaulle proved to be a pioneering figure in Europe (Fig. 5.2).

Overseas press conferences had become common practice ever since the presidency of the Democrat Woodrow Wilson,²⁴ who used to call them twice a week. However, the very first televised news conference, held in the Indian Treaty Room of the Department of State with a select group of admitted journalists, was delivered by Dwight D. Eisenhower on 19 January 1958, on the occasion of his 58th press conference.²⁵ The success of this experiment in the US both at home and with the international press²⁶ was such that de Gaulle—who shared the distinction of being a

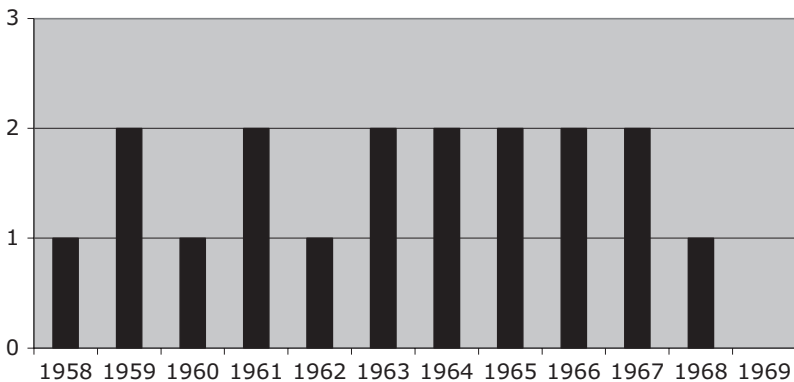


Fig. 5.2 Televised press conferences by General de Gaulle (1958–69)

General and who like Eisenhower was also a President that developed a passion for the small screen—was persuaded to introduce televised press conferences in France. Exactly four months after the US “premiere”, on 19th of May 1958, the RTF cameras filmed a press conference in which de Gaulle announced his imminent return to the political scene. Once re-elected it was clear that press conferences were going to become a common feature of his presidency.

De Gaulle’s first meeting with journalists was scheduled for October 23rd 1958. Viewers were struck by the solemn tone of the General, who “never before had been so regal”,²⁷ and especially by the majestic décor of the setting. The context could not have been more different from US press conferences, a much more sober occasion given the number of people in the audience and the communication style of the orator. Another important difference was also the frequency with which de Gaulle met the press; at the time of the “desert crossing” they met 15 times (though these conferences were not televised or transmitted by the radio). The day after de Gaulle’s premiere, *Le Monde* noted that

For the first time those in charge of writing, photographing, filming, recording were far more numerous than the crowds of supporters that, once upon a time, transformed these conferences at the Hôtel Continental or at the Hôtel of Palais d’Orsay into public meetings [...] And the novelty of this event was such that some ministers were seen taking notes.²⁸

Between January 1959 and April 1969 this state of affairs remained unaltered. Press conferences took place in the *Salle des fêtes* in the Élysée, a huge, solemn and majestic room adorned with gold decorations, though otherwise rather bare. The only pieces of furniture were enormous crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. At the end of the room was a stage with a wooden chair and a large desk completely empty, except for a microphone and a glass of water. Behind the desk, the only touch of colour in the whole room was a ruby red curtain. From behind it, a few minutes prior to the beginning of the conference, the General used to appear, while some of his advisors remained hidden behind the curtain throughout the whole conference ready to intervene in case some accident or unexpected event occurred.²⁹ Underneath the stage was the immense *parterre* for the invited guests, usually about a 1000 people. The audience was so large that, to make access easier, the nearby avenue de Marigny had to be transformed into a huge parking area. Two-thirds

of the audience were made up of French and foreign journalists from newspapers, radio or television; the rest were foreign diplomats, members of Parliament and high government officials.

A few minutes before the General made his entrance—just before 3 p.m. when the conference was due to begin—there was a long procession of ministers and under secretaries, followed by a group of other associates of the President. According to rigorous instructions, the ministers sat on the right of the presidential stage and other associates of the President sat on the left.

Surviving recordings provide testimony of how this ritual always followed the exact same pattern. At a fixed time, the curtain opened to show the General, with the photographers grouped before the stage. The audience obsequiously stood up and sat down again only after the General had taken his place behind the desk and gestured to those present that they could be seated. Once de Gaulle had cleared his voice and greeted the audience, the conference began. Mostly the opening consisted of a quarter of an hour presentation of the international situation.³⁰ At the end of the introduction, it was question time. Journalists' questions were vetted and previously agreed with the Élysée press office and filtered by the General himself, who used to draw up a schedule.³¹ The selection must have been meticulous considering the small number of topics discussed on each of these occasions—usually 4 or 5 per session for a total of 90 in 18 occasions, 70% of which were on foreign affairs.

In short, the format of the conferences was carefully planned in advance down to the smallest details. To make things even easier for the General, he was given a rather approximate map of the room showing where the journalists authorised to speak were. In this way de Gaulle while answering one question already knew more or less where the next question was coming from and was able in this way to face the right direction. At that point the journalist stood up and waved his hand and was given the floor.³² Pierre Vianson-Ponté, a respected journalist who was charged with reporting the press conferences, warned viewers that what they were watching was a farce: "Our viewers must know this: all these journalists that ask de Gaulle questions during a press conference and receive long and detailed answers, have accepted to act as his accomplices."³³

With the passing of the years, the General grew ever more hostile towards journalists, and progressively gave up this farce of predetermined questions and answers and began to openly propose the meeting's agenda: "If you agree we are going to have an open and calm discussion on foreign

public issues and French foreign politics, then we will talk about Djibouti, then about the social question and then the elections. I hope you like this programme.”³⁴ Moreover, the “programme” was often carefully planned and journalists were sidelined. Hubert Beuve-Méry, the day after a meeting on 21 February 1960—one that degenerated into a presidential soliloquy³⁵—denounced the progressive deterioration of these press conferences: “To say that the journalists are the main witnesses of these press conferences would be an exaggeration, it would be fairer to call them ‘conferences to the press’ as the traditional function of asking questions seems to have been forgotten.”³⁶ The news editor of *Le Monde*, Jacques Fauvet, intervened along the same lines and lamented the paradox of a press conference in which “the journalists merely witness questions that the General in actual fact asks himself”.³⁷

In other words, the press conference was a sort of meticulously prepared presidential monologue. As Etienne Burin des Roziers, the General Secretary of the Élysée, has revealed, this process lasted whole weeks during which de Gaulle would consult polls and seek out the opinions of experts.³⁸ The weekly *L'Express* described these preparations as follows:

For almost two months the Élysée has been in a state of turmoil. A battalion of technical advisors and “special assistants” is working for the General. The routine is the same. Each of them operates in their own sphere of competence and in connection with the Ministry he is charge of; then a dossier is prepared and sent to the general secretary Etienne Burin des Roziers. All this information serves to put together a series of notes that the Head of State does not always use. He also has other sources: there are people who write to him, he receives people, he himself sees ministers or technical experts. Georges Galichon, Head of Cabinet, has the role of “filtering” visitors for the General. De Gaulle sometimes takes notes but exchanges are rare. The President of the Republic slowly begins to form his best rhetorical formula that he repeats to one of his closest collaborators: Georges Pompidou, Maurice Couve de Murville, Burin des Roziers. During this preparatory phase it is strongly advised not to disturb the General, so much so that his collaborators sometimes complained that this causes delays in the completion of their dossier. This turmoil suddenly ended last week; as is customary the Head of State is now in the “changing room”, as people say in the Élysée, and in the process of finishing to write his speech that will then be learnt by heart.³⁹

Nothing was improvised; as his closest collaborators have recalled the General used to prepare his speeches, carefully writing them down and repeating them several times until he knew them by heart.⁴⁰ Obviously, surprises were not welcomed. If some journalists decided to contravene his instructions by asking “malicious questions to put me in difficulty”, de Gaulle had a plan: “I stop these attempts using irony.”⁴¹ Irony was undoubtedly one of the favourite weapons of the General.⁴² In any case, he could always count on the services of the RTF technicians, always ready to cut out those parts that were not liked by the Élysée,⁴³ or to check that the cameras—that often focused on the audience listening in religious silence to the Gaullist word—did not catch André Malraux, who rather embarrassingly had a “tendency to fall asleep at the very beginning and he is certainly not a light sleeper”.⁴⁴

The text of the press conference was kept secret until the last possible moment. “In the government of the word, the first exegetes are obviously the ministers. What did he mean? Did he really frown?”⁴⁵ remarked Viansson-Ponté, ironically.

Confirmation of the tense atmosphere that surrounded these press conferences came with the resignation of the MRP five ministers (Pflimlin, Schuman, Buron, Bacon and Fontanet) in the aftermath of the 15 May 1962 press conference, when de Gaulle introduced a change in European integration policy, fiercely attacking it and all those who believed in supranationality, those “without a homeland” who would have liked to think or write “in some common esperanto or volapük”.⁴⁶

Ministers were not the only ones to ignore the content of the declarations of the President; the same was true of foreign leaders. A few days before the 14 January 1963 press conference during which de Gaulle announced that France was against Great Britain's request to enter the common market,⁴⁷ the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, met the General at Rambouillet. After the meeting he had to admit that he failed to understand the General's intentions and for this reason he was going to follow with trepidation, just like any ordinary viewer, de Gaulle's press conference.⁴⁸ Nora Beloff, the first English female political correspondent (she worked for the weekly *The Observer*), remarked how this event lived up to the Gaullist *grandeur*:

The death sentence was pronounced in Paris in the afternoon of January 14th 1963, under the crystal chandeliers of the *salle des fêtes*, the biggest and most sumptuous room in the whole of the Élysée. The jury, the judge, the lawyers and the State's attorney were all symbolised by the omnipotent figure of general Charles de Gaulle. The sentence came on the occasion of the eighth press conference of the General. It was final with no right to appeal.⁴⁹

Viewed as spectacle, these press conferences were the highest expression of Gaullism's artistry, they represented "the regime's mass, the most important ceremony of the [Gaullist] ritual".⁵⁰ However, as far as their content was concerned, these were decidedly outreached by de Gaulle's speeches.

The regular character of the press conferences, accompanied by the presence of intermediaries that interrupted the connection between de Gaulle and the French people, deprived these events of the pathos that characterised some of de Gaulle's speeches (e.g., those during the week of the barricades or during the Algerian *putsch*). Speeches were the medium through which the General achieved an intimate dialogue with the French nation. The press did not fail to recognise this, and, ever since the end of the Algerian War, it started to remark on the limits of the press conferences. Pierre Vianson-Ponté from *Le Monde* noted that:

The July 29th press conference, as with the majority of those that had taken place in the previous five years, was unfocused and ranged vaguely across a variety of themes: the construction of a new regime, the slow path towards peace in Algeria, the sudden emergence of other foreign policy affairs. The climate of uncertainty before the press conferences now appears artificial, its vague content contrasts with the tone that is sometimes solemn and at other times caustic. A detailed exegesis that can be justified in relation to a kind of discourse that signifies a political act has now ceased to make sense.⁵¹

This opinion was supported by Hubert Beuve-Mery, the head of the same newspaper: "The press conference can be seen as a discourse from the throne, a message about the state of the nation, [...] its use is to provide confirmations and reprise ideas that are already familiar, and not to open new horizons, or trace new directions of future development."⁵²

If on the one hand the political content of the speeches was qualitatively superior and characterised by an emphasis on current events, on the other hand it is important to consider that the very place in which press conferences took place stood as a symbolic political act.

The scenographic setup, the organisation and the meticulously prepared background against which the General appeared had both a national and an international resonance. The press conferences were the great ceremonies of the regime celebrated by de Gaulle, the embodiment of a strong nation who commanded the respect of his citizens and foreign nations alike. Through the symbolic power exercised by television, the General appeared framed in an image of solemnity so that it was impossible to forget, even for an instant, the representative role of the Head of State. De Gaulle's image within the sumptuous context of the *Élysée* was that of a majestic and unapproachable monarch who dominated his audience of ministers, foreign ambassadors and journalists that were invited to formulate short and often ineffectual questions only once his long monologue had ended. Raymond Aron, commenting on the imperiousness of the presidential conferences, offered a similar picture:

The learned historical and political event that during the Fifth Republic is called "press conference" does not even remotely resemble what in the United States journalists refer to by the same name. De Gaulle's press conference is a work of art. The orator hovers over the universe, remembers the past and sheds light on the future. He showers some with praise and criticises others. He holds his enemies in contempt and does not even try to hide his satisfaction at the kind of France he is shaping. [...] But this work of art is also a political act [...]. This political act is part of a strategy and of a biography: the effect of his statements is uncertain, the short term objectives are not always clear, the long term ones are carefully kept ambiguous, shrouded in mystery and transformed into enigmas.⁵³

3 THE TELEVISION SPEECHES: THE GENERAL'S SECRET WEAPON

Television speeches represented the main medium through which, during the years between 1958 and 1969, the General entered into a direct dialogue with the French people. If the press conference was used to trace some broad outlines of international politics, de Gaulle's speeches were aimed mainly at the French public and not scheduled at regular intervals, but essentially used to comment on contemporary internal affairs.

The interval between one speech and another provided an indicator of the French political situation: speeches were most frequent during the initial years of the presidency, marked by the dramatic Algerian crisis,

by the reorganisation of the institutional system and by the frequent referenda (four out of a total of five referenda took place between 1958 and 1962). They became slightly less frequent from 1963 on, when a more stable political situation was restored and the direct relationship between the Head of State and his citizens ceased to be so indispensable (Fig. 5.3).

In his memoir, de Gaulle has described how he prepared for his speeches:

I write my speeches to the nation with great care—[...] as these are susceptible to all kinds of analyses and interpretations—I am very careful when I am in front of the cameras to say only what I have prepared beforehand. It is necessary that this seventy-year old man, sitting behind a desk under the implacable spotlights should look lively and spontaneous enough to catch the viewers' attention, without, however, succumbing to gestures that are not appropriate to the occasion.⁵⁴

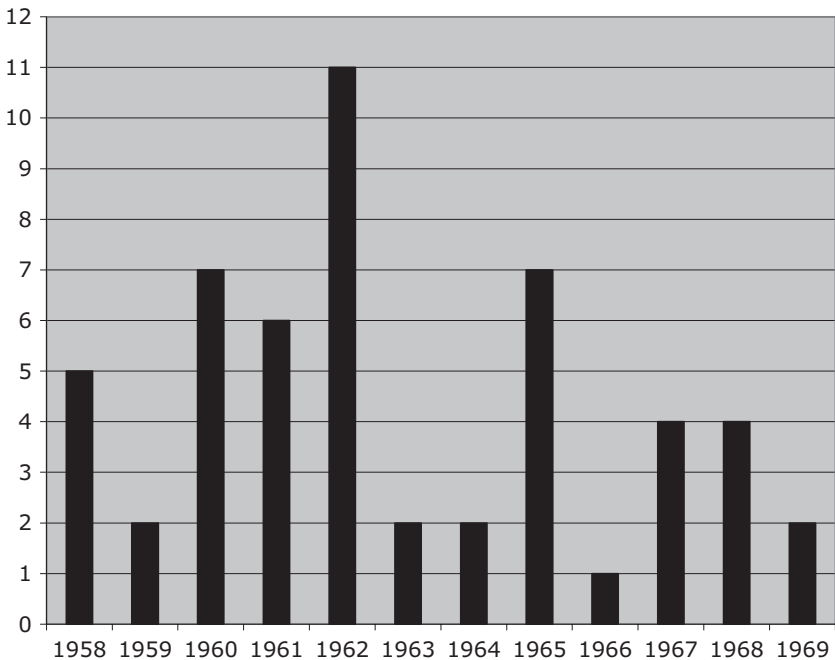


Fig. 5.3 Televised speeches of General de Gaulle (1958–69)

As many of his closest associates remarked: “Everything started from his refusal to improvise.” Speech writing was a task that he would never delegate to others.⁵⁵

In this respect it is necessary to refute a well-known myth according to which the General used to prepare the text of his speeches in secret. The director of the weekly *L'Express*, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, remarked on the aura of mystery that surrounded de Gaulle's speeches: “Nobody can do anything about this. Pompidou and Debré are in the dark as to what he is going to say. This way to govern the country is not healthy, no matter the man that leads it.”⁵⁶ The General—who used to write his speeches well in advance to have the time to learn them by heart—was undoubtedly very secretive, yet there was a very small circle of people, among whom the Prime Minister and the President's closest collaborators, that represented the exception to this rule.⁵⁷ Documents in the Debré archive show that de Gaulle used to let the Prime Minister know about the content of his speeches, and in turn he received advice and suggestions, especially during the most delicate moments of the Algerian crisis. Particularly interesting in this respect is the correspondence between Debré and the General leading up to the 29 January 1960 speech in which the President put an end to “the week of the barricades”. While in the first letter Debré merely advised the Head of State to be conciliatory towards the Algerian French,⁵⁸ the second, which de Gaulle received hours before the television programme began, suggested a series of very precise amendments:

Mr. General, allow me to explain what I noted last night. I do not think it is a good idea 1. To talk about 128 years of French presence in Algeria [...] it offers an argument (without a *do ut des*) to our enemies that consider our presence as illegitimate; 2. To insist on a climate of international hostility towards France. To hint at this is more than enough [...] I believe that it is desirable 1. To remind everyone of the reasons of the [...] legitimacy of our presence [...] What would the Sahara be, what would the Mediterranean be, what would become of French and European security without French authority in Algeria? The world balance would be shattered [...] now, I think it is necessary to spare a few words defending the French position in the World and in History; 3. Stress your commitment [...] your personal commitment to keep Algeria connected to France, while in the future the conditions for a possible statute will be discussed. In one way or another I think it is necessary to mention this commitment for the future.⁵⁹

A close reading of de Gaulle's speeches confirms the seriousness with which Debré's advice was taken into account and, at the same time, the limited power that Matignon had on the *Élysée*. Although de Gaulle followed some of the Prime Minister's suggestions (no reference was made to the 128 years of French presence in Algeria, or to the "hostility" of the international community towards France, and some kind words for the Algerian French were added), the General was resolute on the need to adopt a policy of self-determination, which he asserted was the only option possible, and, more importantly, the only meritorious one for France ("self-determination is the only policy that is worthy of France. It is the only way out possible"); de Gaulle was also clear on the fact that it was the President of the Republic alone that wielded executive power ("As you know, I possess the supreme responsibility. It is me who is responsible for the destiny of the country").⁶⁰

With the exception of the Prime Minister and the General Secretary of the *Élysée*, nobody else knew in advance what de Gaulle's televised speeches were going to be about, and often the decisions he announced in these speeches were even unknown to his ministers. "The Minister of Algeria found out that the Sahara region was going to be given to the FLN through a statement at the end of a sentence,"⁶¹ wrote Raymond Aaron, relaying the amazement of Jean de Broglie, Secretary of State for Algerian affairs during the Pompidou government. The aura of mystery left by the speeches contributed to enticing viewers' curiosity. The speeches were recorded in the morning so that there was time to send copies to Algiers and Oran, to watch them and make changes where deemed necessary. De Gaulle's speeches could hardly pass unnoticed by the viewers: they were in fact broadcast before the 8 o'clock news, repeated before the 11 o'clock news and screened a third time the following day before the 1 o'clock news. They inevitably conditioned the TV programming schedule. When the speeches were particularly long the schedule had to be adjusted to accommodate this; the news had to be cut or even cancelled. The 14 June 1960 speech is exemplary in this respect. Just before the end of the programme, the broadcaster announced that "due to a delay in the broadcasting of programs, the weather and news are cancelled". Needless to say that in their place, between 11:49 and 12:11, the speech of the President of the Republic was broadcast in full.⁶²

According to their length, the speeches can be categorised into three different types: the first type was the speech proclamation; this was short (6 to 8 minutes) made on the eve of some referendum or—more rarely—of elections, or in connection to critical events.⁶³ This was very personal

and aimed at achieving solidarity through a highly charged emotional message that exploited the intimate bond between the General and the nation, a bond that dated back to the Second World War when the General and French people momentarily were unified in spirit and aim.

The second type included speeches on political affairs and focused attention on the government's political agenda, in particular the Algerian situation—its actions, reasons and objectives. These were longer speeches (in some cases lasting over 20 minutes) in which there was no attempt at personalisation or emotionalism, but rather they were employed to explain the rationale of the policy. This kind of speech was intended both to inform and to educate the public. It is significant that of the 54 speeches de Gaulle made, the three longest ones were on 16 September 1959, in which “self-determination” was heralded⁶⁴; 4 November 1960, in which for the first time de Gaulle mentioned “Algérie algérienne”,⁶⁵ and 5 February 1962, in which de Gaulle announced that once peace was established, Algeria would become an independent sovereign state.⁶⁶

The third type of speech might be termed “end of the year speech”. This happened regularly at the end of December. They were of medium length (between 10 and 15 minutes) and their aim was to take stock of the last 12 months and draw some conclusions on the state of national and international affairs. In the solemnity of their tone and the issues discussed the end of year speeches resembled press conferences and provided an overall picture of the way the presidential agenda was unfolding. Up to 1962 these speeches were focused on the Algerian affair, but from 1963—after the Evian Accords and the referendum that put an end to decolonisation—the issues discussed became more diverse, ranging from economics to contemporary international affairs. Because of their regularity, the “end of the year speeches” were less influenced by the dynamics and contingencies of day-to-day politics. During the first years of his presidency, Gaullist televisual communication was based on the alternation of the first two types of speech.

According to the presidential strategy, “programmatic speeches” and “proclamation speeches” played important and complementary roles. This combination became particularly crucial prior to referenda: each consultation was invariably preceded by a long “programmatic speech” that set out the reasons and historical and political repercussions of the referendum. Two days before the vote the General always made a short proclamation speech to address the nation in which he would present a threatening alternative dramatically summed up in the formula “either me or chaos”. This, according to several commentators, signalled the

resurfacing of some Caesar-like inflections that had always been latent in French politics.⁶⁷ These proclamations carefully and scrupulously blended the above-mentioned two types of speeches within an overall plan aimed at confronting the nation with the inevitability of certain decisions through the alternation of rational arguments and emotive statements that were intended to convince the audience of the political irreplaceability of the General. The speeches invariably began with a description of the threat posed (the dissolution of the State and the ensuing catastrophe) and of the evil powers that posed the threat (for instance, those parties or groups that opposed a peaceful solution of the Algerian War), and then moved on to the figure of de Gaulle—referred to in the third person or by way of invoking metaphors of the imagery of the sea⁶⁸—portrayed as the helmsman who, confronted by tempestuous waters, knew how to lead the nation to a safe harbour.

In his television speeches de Gaulle staged the de Gaulle persona, alternating between the role he performed as President and the historical myth he embodied. His exaltation of the practice of the referendum, “the most direct, frankest and democratic form of political consultation that exists”,⁶⁹ celebrated “this absolute right that was conceded to me in 1945 and was, due to me, re-discovered in 1958 providing the Republic with stable institutions ever since”.⁷⁰ But it was also strategically instrumental to recall the glorious past of the General and restate his historical legitimacy at the moment when the outcome of the vote was about to acquire popular legitimacy.⁷¹ The referendum was transformed into a compact between the President and his nation. It was meant less to provide confirmation that the people approved of the President’s political choices than to become a testimony of the personal support of French people for the person of the General.⁷² What de Gaulle demanded of the French people was not blind faith in his political decisions, but in his persona, confirming in this way the messianic vocation bestowed on him in 1958 as a result of his services to the nation 20 years earlier.⁷³

Viewed in this light, the television speeches of the General “spoken *ex cathedra* open to all sorts of analyses and interpretations”⁷⁴ became central to realising the enormous didactic enterprise of convincing the nation of the inevitability of the Algerian independence. The day after the first speech of the new Prime Minister in June 1958, the editor of the journal *Esprit*, Jean-Marie Domenach, remarked that the main feature of Gaullist language was a singular form of rhetorical mimesis: “During these last fifteen days he has never stopped talking, but really he says nothing [...] All the words uttered by this ambiguous monarch

do nothing but reconfirm our prejudices.”⁷⁵ “Where is the Prince of equivocation leading us?”, wondered the then Minister Robert Buron.⁷⁶ His leading biographer characterised de Gaulle the “strategist of the tautology”.⁷⁷ To those who asked him to comment on the General’s declarations, Raymond Aaron used to say that “the rules to interpret the declarations given by the Head of State are as complex as those used to interpret ancient manuscripts”.⁷⁸

At the time, nobody doubted the fact that a correct interpretation of the General’s speeches would have provided useful indications concerning the main directives of French politics, and yet everyone knew that the only one who could disclose the mystery of those words was the General himself. Ambiguous statements such as “I have understood you” (4 June 1958 on the Algiers Forum), “Long live French Algeria!” (6 June 1958 at Mostaganem), “Let the peace of the brave come!” (press conference on 23 October 1958), “The Algeria of our fathers’ days is dead” (de Gaulle’s comment to the MP and editor-in-chief of *L’Echo d’Oran* Pierre Laffont on 1 May 1959) were suddenly followed by words and actions that, by contrast, left no doubt as to their interpretation, for instance, during the self-determination speech (16 September 1959) and the Constantine plan (October 1959). Similarly, in the following months the ambiguity of the phrases “complete the transformation of the Algerian Algeria” (speech on 14 June 1960) and “Algerian Algeria is coming on” (press conference on 5 September 1960) was followed by the unexpected mention of an “Algerian Republic” (speech on 4 November 1960) and the announcement of the referendum on self-determination for Algeria (8 January 1961), which led to the Evian Accords (March 1962) later reconfirmed by the referendum.

The end of the Algerian War came as a confirmation of the prophecies of the General.⁷⁹ In April 1962, de Gaulle completed his mission, showing that he could manage to steer the country through the blood and tears of the Algerian conflict and to a peaceful conclusion. He had completed a plan that was utterly different from that which the powers that had called him back had hoped for and from what the majority of his supporters had expected. De Gaulle, a republican monarch that had been given *carte blanche* by his nation, had managed to do what his predecessors during the Fourth Republic had never imagined.⁸⁰ The television and, in particular his speeches, were the secret weapons of the General, the medium through which, as de Gaulle himself remarked, he addressed the nation “without any intermediary”⁸¹ and managed to accomplish the “impossible mission”⁸² of ending the Algerian War and saving the Republic and democracy.

NOTES

1. A. Brincourt, *La dernière chance*, *Le Figaro*, 13 June 1958, p. 1.
2. During the press conference, to journalists who had suggested that his return to power was bringing forth a turn towards autocracy, the General replied “Do you really believe that at 67 years old, I am going to start a career as a dictator?” His answer went down in history. De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, op. cit., p. 10.
3. See, e.g., Françoise Giroud’s comment after the press conference: “At three o’clock General de Gaulle arrives wearing civilian clothes. He has aged; surrounded by photographers’ flashes and a mass of microphones, he looks almost like an elephant quietly determined to remain calm in midst of hundred fearless flies [...]. The tone of his voice surprises everyone; at first it is uncertain, almost faded. Then he finds his style. He speaks without notes with his familiar solemnity: it is dazzling, it is overwhelming, it is de Gaulle.” F. Giroud, *La lettre de L’Express*, *L’Express*, 22 May 1958, p. 2.
4. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d’espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 301.
5. INA, de Gaulle Collection, 13 June 1958, 6’56”.
6. For a recent biography of de Gaulle’s wife and her role in advising and supporting de Gaulle, see F. Neau-Dufour, *Yvonne de Gaulle*, Paris, Fayard, 2010.
7. INA, A. Saldich (dissertation under the supervision of R. Aron), *Politique et télévision en France sous de Gaulle*, 1971, p. 86.
8. *Ibidem*.
9. In his memoir, Bleustein-Blanchet mistakenly recollected he was received at the Élysée Palace. M. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La traversée du siècle*, Paris, Laffont, 1994, p. 176.
10. This quotation refers to recountings of the meeting in M. Bleustein-Blanchet, *La rage de convaincre*, Paris, Laffont, 1970, p. 181; Id., *Mémoires d’un lion*, Paris, Perrin, 1988, p. 217; Id., *La traversée du siècle*, op. cit., p. 177.
11. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d’espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 363.
12. See P. Lefranc, personal communication, 30 November 2004.
13. E. Burin des Rozières, personal communication, 12 November 2004.
14. A. Peyrefitte, *De Gaulle et la communication*, in Aa.Vv., *De Gaulle et les médias*, Paris, Plon-Fondation Charles de Gaulle, 1994, p. 109.
15. Charles Koubesserian, personal communication, 23 November 2004.
16. *Ibidem*. Other anecdotes can be found in C. Koubesserian, *L’Arménien. De de Gaulle à Belmondo, les mémoires d’un grand maquilleur du cinéma français*, Paris, Bayard, 2003, pp. 53–62.
17. Quoted in Saldich, *Politique et télévision en France*, op. cit., p. 76.
18. INA, de Gaulle collection, 27 June 1958, 8’05”.

19. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 302.
20. INA, de Gaulle collection, 27 June 1958, 8'05".
21. Viewers were impressed by de Gaulle's communicative talents. As early as in July 1958, the writer Jean Amrouche, in order to explain something de Gaulle had said, pointed out during an interview: "Let us not forget we are governed by a master of style." A polemical reply to this came on July 1958 in *France-Observateur* with an article by Jean-François Revel entitled *Les stylistes au pouvoir* (the plural refers to the General and André Malraux). This provided the initial idea for the pamphlet by J-F. Revel, *Le style du Général*, Paris, Julliard, 1959. Studies in the Anglo-American context have also focused on the communicative style of de Gaulle. See S. Hoffmann and I. Hoffmann, *The Will to Grandeur, De Gaulle as Political Artist*, New York, Daedalus, 1968.
22. For a pioneering study see J-C. Maitrot and J-D. Sicault, *Les conférences de presse du général de Gaulle*, Paris, Puf, 1969.
23. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, op. cit., p. 303.
24. For a reconstruction of the history and role of the press conference in the American political system see B.A. French, *The Presidential Press Conference. Its History and Role in the American Political System*, Washington, University Press of America, 1982.
25. C. Allen, *Eisenhower and the Mass Media*, Chapel Hill & London, University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
26. The *New York Times* defined Eisenhower's first press conference as "an example of democracy [...] a great victory for television as a channel for information." J. Gould, *President's Press Conference an Example to Millions of Democracy at Work*, *The New York Times*, 20 January 1958, p. 1.
27. *L'appel au cessez-le-feu du président du Conseil*, *Le Monde*, 25 October 1958, p. 4.
28. *Ibidem*.
29. E. Burin des Rozières, private communication, 12 November 2004.
30. "After years of international tensions, there are signs of detente in the Soviet front." INA, de Gaulle collection, 10 November 1959, 1h04'26"; "We live in a historical moment that is troubled to say the least. There are tensions in many regions of the world." INA, de Gaulle collection, 5 September 1960, 1h09'45"; "Our times and our world are dominated by an immense issue that affects the destiny of all people and every single individual. This obviously is atomic energy". INA, de Gaulle collection, 15 May 1962, 1h 10'30"; "My impression is that our meeting today is particularly important. This is due to the present situation: the world is changing, and, at the moment, shaken by several dramatic events." INA, de Gaulle collection, 9 September 1965, 1h29'15".
31. Passeron, *De Gaulle parle*, op. cit., p. 569.

32. P. Viansson-Ponté, *Les gaullistes, rituel et annuaire*, Paris, Seuil, 1963, p. 47.
33. *Ibidem*.
34. INA, de Gaulle Collection, 28 October 1966, 1h28'32".
35. "Ladies and Gentlemen, [...] Today I would like to talk to you about some issues that have caught my attention. Here they are: outcome of the presidential election; long term decisions concerning social and political issues and France financial economy; the Ben Barka affair; Nato; Europa; Vietnam. I will illustrate all these issues in this order and before starting to discuss a new issue, I will ask if there is something that you want to ask. Let us begin with some comments on the general election [...]" INA, de Gaulle collection, 21 February 1966, 1h08'33".
36. Sirius, *Pour l'honneur du navire*, *Le Monde*, 23 February 1966, p. 1.
37. J. Fauvet, *Pour un régime d'opinion*, *Le Monde*, 24 February 1966, p. 1.
38. E. Burin des Rozières, personal communication, 12 November 2004.
39. B. Gros, *Le Général entre en loge*, *L'Express*, 24 October 1966, p. 47.
40. On this see E. Burin des Rozières, personal communication on 12-11-2004 and G. Pérol, *Les conférences de presse*, in Aa.Vv., *De Gaulle et les médias*, op. cit., p. 273.
41. de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 303.
42. Irony was successfully used during the Press Conference on 9 February 1965. On this occasion the editor-in-chief of *l'Aurore* asked the General "Mr President, how are you?" De Gaulle smiled and answered: "Not too bad, but don't worry, one day even I will die." INA, de Gaulle collection, 4 February 1965, 1h15'31". Another example is the 21 February 1966 Press Conference when a journalist from *Nouvel Observateur* asked the President: "Why didn't you think it was necessary during the recent electoral campaign to provide the country with details that would have made possible for people to judge your personal contribution to the Ben Barka affair?" To this unexpected question de Gaulle shook his head and with an air of commiseration he replied: "It is because I am inexperienced." His answer generated hilarity from the audience. INA, De Gaulle collection, 21 February 1966, 1h08'33".
43. In some cases the intervention of the members of the presidential entourage resulted in the cutting of some passages they did not like, causing a delay in the programme. For example, on 10 November 1959, the direction had to announce to viewers that the press conference that was due to be televised in the afternoon was going on air at 7.30 p.m. In the report, the head of production notes that "the montage has been delayed because it was necessary to wait instructions from the Élysée". INA, Report of Head of Production, 10 November 1959. A similar note can be found in the archival collection of the RTF Director of Television Information. When he was asked the reason for the delay of a programme and why a passage on the situation of Iron Curtain countries was cut he wrote a

- note in which he explained to the management that “the cut had been done following a request from the Élysée that has contacted directly [...] the head of political reports of the news. There was no censorship on the part of the RFT that merely executed an order from the Élysée.” See ANF, Pierre Sabbagh collection, Pierre Sabbagh note to Charles Bonami, not dated.
44. Viansson-Ponté, *Les gaullistes, rituel et annuaire*, op. cit., p. 48.
 45. *Ibidem*, p. 46.
 46. INA, de Gaulle collection, 15 May 1962, 1h10'30".
 47. INA, de Gaulle collection, 14 January 1963, 1h21'07".
 48. For a study on the relationship between Macmillan and de Gaulle, see P. Mangold, *The Almost Impossible Ally: Harold Macmillan and Charles de Gaulle*, London-New York, Tauris, 2006.
 49. N. Beloff, *The General Says No: Britain's Exclusion from Europe*, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1963.
 50. Viansson-Ponté, *Les gaullistes, rituel et annuaire*, op. cit., p. 46.
 51. P. Viansson-Ponté, *Pas de surprise, des confirmations*, *Le Monde*, 31 July 1963, p. 1.
 52. Sirius, *Les "moyens de la puissance"*, *Le Monde*, 31 July 1963, p. 1.
 53. R. Aron, *Le secret du général*, *Le Figaro*, 25 January 1963, p. 1.
 54. de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 302.
 55. G. Pérol, *Les conférences de presse*, op. cit., p. 274.
 56. J-J. Servan-Schreiber, *Un vrai problème*, *L'Express*, 24 October 1966, p. 48.
 57. Etienne Burin des Rozières, General Secretary at the Élysée, has said that he had often assisted the Head of State while he was learning by heart his speeches. See E. Burin des Rozières, private communication, 12 November 2004.
 58. “Reasonable arguments are necessary, but some words of affection are also expected [...]. Algerian French have the impression not to be understood, or loved. They think that in Paris differences are made between Strasburg French and Algerian French, and obviously the latter are the most disadvantaged group. Say some words so that they know this is not true.” AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 28 January 1960.
 59. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré letter to the General de Gaulle, 29 January 1960.
 60. de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, op. cit., pp. 162–166.
 61. R. Aron, *Le secret du général*, *Le Figaro*, 25 January 1963, p. 1.
 62. INA, de Gaulle collection, 14 June 1960, 22'04".
 63. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of the speech during the Algiers *putsch*, de Gaulle's five shortest radio television speeches during his presidency were broadcast on the eve of referenda: 26 September 1958 (constitutional referendum): 5'12"; 6 January 1961 (referendum

- on Algerian self-determination): 6'14"; 6 April 1962 (referendum on the Evian Accords): 6'04"; 26 October 1962 (referendum on the direct election by universal suffrage of the President of the Republic): 6'22"; 25 April 1969 (referendum on the Senate reform): 6'09". INA, de Gaulle collection.
64. INA, de Gaulle collection, 16 September 1959, 23'04".
65. INA, de Gaulle collection, 4 November 1960, 23'13".
66. INA, de Gaulle collection, 5 February 1962, 23'02".
67. See Georges Vedel preface to P. Avril, *Un président pour quoi faire*, Paris, Seuil, 1965, p. 6.
68. D. Labbé, "Les métaphores du général de Gaulle", in *Mots*, June 1995, pp. 51–60.
69. INA, de Gaulle collection, 6 April 1962, 6'04".
70. INA, de Gaulle collection, 4 October 1962, 11'54".
71. On the eve of the referendum on self-determination in Algeria he said "for over 20 years, events have been such that I am the leader of this country in time of crisis". INA, de Gaulle collection, 6-1-1961, 6'14". A similar declaration was given for the occasion of the October 1962 referendum (its video is not available in the INA archives): "Because of our common desire and what we realised together, through misadventures, tears and blood, but also because of our common hopes, enthusiasm and successes, French people and myself have an exceptional binding connection." C. De Gaulle, *Discours et messages*, IV, *Pour l'effort. Août 1962-Décembre 1965*, Paris, Plon, 1970, pp. 22–23.
72. During all the speeches before the referendum, the General repeated to viewers the same concept: "French people, you know this, it is to me that you are about to answer [...] actually—and who does not know it?—this is between every single one of you and myself." INA, de Gaulle collection, 6 January 1961, 6'14".
73. Exemplary in this respect is the comment in June 1958, by the editor-in-chief of the periodical *Esprit*, Jean-Marie Domenach, someone who could not be accused of being a Gaullist sympathiser: "In June 1940 General de Gaulle is a unique man [...]. He has determination, imagination a talent for politics: he has great plans. The Vichy men think of metropolis, he imagines an Empire, when they think that the war is lost because France is occupied, he answers: 'This war does not end with the battle of France. This is a World War.' From the start, he sees the conflict in its cosmic dimension. It is because de Gaulle has a better and wide view of events that in the end he managed to keep the nation united." J-M. Domenach, *L'appel*, *l'Express*, 19 June 1958, p. 6.
74. de Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 303.
75. Domenach, *L'appel*, op. cit., p. 6.

76. R. Buron, *Carnets politiques de la guerre d'Algérie*, Paris, Cana, 2002, p. 119.
77. J. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, *Le souverain 1959–1970*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 112.
78. R. Aron, *Le secret du général*, *Le Figaro*, 25 January 1963, p. 1.
79. On this see Gaiti, *De Gaulle prophète de la Cinquième République (1946–1962)*, op. cit.
80. Before de Gaulle's return to power, expressions such as “negotiations” or “talks” were unthinkable in relation to Algeria. Pierre Pflimlin, the previous Head of State before the General's reappearance on the political scene, was fiercely criticised by the supporters of French Algeria because in his Strasburg speech, two years earlier on 2 May 1956, he dared to say he would do his utmost to “negotiate a ceasefire”. R. Rémond, *Le retour de Gaulle*, Paris, Complexe, 1983, p. 60.
81. INA, de Gaulle collection, 6 January 1961, 6'14”.
82. S. Berstein, *Histoire du gaullisme*, Paris, Perrin, 2002, p. 257.

Leadership and Television: The General and Constitutional Development During the Fifth Republic

1 AN AMBIGUOUS CONSTITUTION

In January 1959 the new regime represented a genuine enigma even for those who were directly involved in it. The most respected French political commentators had no doubt: the Constitution of the Fifth Republic “was founded on a load of ambiguities”.¹ The Charter’s main aim was indisputably to reinforce the executive power of a nation that during the Third and Fourth Republic had been characterised by governmental and political instability. Yet, the new Constitution entrusted executive power both to the President of the Republic—whose election was independent from Parliament—and to the government, which had its own areas of responsibility and authority.² Any attempt to use the existing political categories to define the institutional structure of the new Republic created difficulties even among the most authoritative political scholars. “The text is not clear”,³ noted Maurice Duverger; “all we can do is make suppositions”⁴ echoed François Goguel. Georges Vedel, in the course on constitutional law and political institutions he taught at the *Institut d’études politiques* in Paris, used a variety of examples⁵ to explain to his students that the difficulties in the interpretation of the new text of the Constitution were connected to a lack of established institutional precedents:

In the course that we are about to start, we will attempt to explain what is constitutional law. Constitutional law cannot be found entirely in written documents. France, like England, has its own constitutional “conventions”. However, here these “conventions” haven’t been created yet. This means that very often we will have to resort to hypotheses, sometimes because we ignore what the writers of the constitution mean, more often because we do not know what future directions the application of the constitution will take.⁶

It was evident that in order to go beyond a purely formal interpretation of the text that was inherently highly ambiguous, one had to understand the way institutional relations evolved. “A Constitution is made up of institutions, a spirit and a practice,”⁷ said the General. In January of 1959, what France had were institutions and the spirit, but what was lacking was a practice. In short, several possibilities both constitutional and political remained unresolved because, from a constitutional point of view, the Charter was completely new and claimed to be founding a new institutional structure. From a political point of view, the text of the Constitution taken in isolation, without considering men’s will and their personal and political power relations, meant very little. The Constitution began to take shape during the 40 months of the Debré government (January 1959–April 1962). In this crucial phase, the television speeches of the General played a particularly important role in persuading public opinion of the centrality of the Head of State. They were also of central importance in forging a different relationship between the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister and in contributing to create the informal and yet omnipotent “constitutional conventions” that were going to mark the transition from the parliamentary regime of the Fourth Republic to the semi-presidential majority system after 1962.

When Debré was nominated as Prime Minister, several commentators noted that the indeterminacy of the Constitution, together with the fact that he was a strong supporter of French Algeria (among the Gaullists he was second only to Soustelle), could generate friction between the Élysée and Matignon and result in setbacks to the day-to-day functioning of the administration.⁸ At the time, Debré’s record during his mandate as Senator for Indre-et-Loire between 1955 and 1958 raised questions about his support of General de Gaulle, should he abandon Algeria. His frequent statements and strongly worded articles published in the weekly *Courrier de la colère*, which Debré had founded in November 1957, reinforced these

fears. At the same time, however, the boundless admiration Debré had for the General and his historical mission made it difficult to imagine that he would have opposed him in such a decisive moment for the destiny of the nation. Nobody could doubt his lasting devotion to the 18th June Man.

Recalling his state of mind on 8 January 1959, during the ceremony that marked the end of the René Coty presidency and the beginning of de Gaulle era, the future Prime Minister spoke in terms more evocative of religious fervour than a relationship of political loyalty: “Among the people present at the ceremony I was not the only one that was eager to see this day, but nobody, it seemed to me, had worked with my same devotion to make this day possible [...] Today events have met my faith.”⁹

What emerges from the archives is that the personal relationship between the two highest figures in the executive played a key role in defining their own respective institutional roles. However, it is also clear that their relationship was not one between equals. Debré tried, with increasing difficulty, to find ways to work with an institutional balance that was increasingly unfavourable to him and constrained by his personal relationship with the General—in this respect he was more Gaullist than the President himself.¹⁰ For his part de Gaulle kept himself outside of the sphere of influence of the Prime Minister and sought to create a direct and constant relation with public opinion, most specifically through his use of televised speeches. This allowed him to circumvent Parliament and overcome any possible opposition from the Prime Minister. Yves Guéna, director of Debré’s cabinet in the first months of his mandate, relayed how the Prime Minister after his appointment confided to him that he meant to make full use of the privileges the Constitution gave him: “I will go to General de Gaulle twice a week to keep him informed of the actions taken by the government.”¹¹

2 DE GAULLE DROPS THE MASK OF THE “ARBITER”

Ever since January 1959 de Gaulle made it clear that he did not intend to be a mere arbiter. This amounted to a refusal to interpret the presidency as a body that—in the formula used by Michel Debré in his introduction of the Constitution to the State Council on 27 August 1958—“can only solicit another power”.¹² On the contrary, the President of the Republic wanted to be the active centre of the State and thus to be the real head of the executive, marginalising the role of the Prime Minister.¹³

Despite this, Debré's resolve to defend his rights was firm and ever since his first mandate he appeared determined to play an active role in choosing the members of the government.¹⁴ The authority granted to Debré by the General in these years contrasts with what was going to happen later on during the Fifth Republic, in particular the fact that various prime ministers after him were never able to put forward candidates as members of "their own" governments. Though now generally overlooked, Michel Debré defended his rights with energy and tenacity. When, e.g., in the summer of 1959, the previous minister—the radical Jean Berthoin—tried to join the government again as Minister for Home Affairs, reminding Debré that he could count on the approval of the General, the Prime Minister's answer (also sent to the Head of State) was final: "The Constitution is very clear: it is the Prime Minister that submits to the President of the Republic his proposals concerning the composition of the government, and the President of the Republic can hardly invite a politician to be part of the government, no matter his merits."¹⁵ The message was clear: Jean Berthoin would not be part of the government. Debré respected the President's authority to nominate appointments; at the same time he also defended his own power to propose and direct the actions of the government, something he always did during later ministerial reshuffles.¹⁶ On some occasions Debré went so far as to complain to the President of the Republic about his habit of dealing directly with ministers without consulting him.¹⁷ Debré firmly believed that article 20 of the Constitution should be respected. He not only followed it to the letter in conducting the policy of the nation, he also constantly participated in actively "determining" it, though he was always ready to recognise that the Head of the State had the last word in the most important decisions.

What caused a decisive reduction in the Prime Minister's prerogatives and increased the power of the Head of State was the ever more pronounced domination of the political agenda by the Algerian crisis. This was in fact an issue connected with the safeguarding of national independence and territorial integrity, hence under the aegis of article 5, or, at times, even article 16, which was concerned with situations of national emergency.¹⁸

The speech on 16 September 1959 marked the first gambit in de Gaulle's strategy in dealing with this crisis. In this speech he announced that the way to solve the Algerian problem was to pursue a policy of

self-determination. During the first months of its mandate the new government oversaw a period of economic and political stabilisation; however, no progress was made concerning the Algerian question—for Debré and his administration, the cessation of all rebel hostilities was a preliminary condition for political negotiations to begin. Lest the State should give the impression of impotence, de Gaulle decided to step in and announce a decisive change.¹⁹ The people of Algeria could choose one of the three following possibilities: secession, assimilation of Algeria into the French territory with French citizenship for Algerians or independence with some association with France. In taking it upon himself to offer a proposal of Algerian self-determination, completely independent from the prevailing opinions among members of the government, de Gaulle redefined his role as Head of State as no longer simply one of arbitration.²⁰ Effectively the President of the Republic became an initiating and executing force; he talked “in the name of” France and embodied the whole nation. In the magazine *Preuves* Georges Vedel noted that institutional practice was resolving the ambiguities of the Constitution:

On September 16th 1959 the regime began to take shape: the Head of State decides; the government executes these decisions ... Reality has blown away all texts, ideologies and confused mystiques. Of all the ideologies that have inspired our constitution, the monarchical one remains undoubtedly the most current.²¹

In a particularly delicate context, the General understood the need to consolidate further his role in the new constitutional setting. A letter he sent to Debré in October 1959 is significant; it shows how the General’s speeches and his private relationships played a central role in determining who had which role in the executive. It also draws attention to the General’s will to impose his authority, as well as providing one of the first signs of what was to become a conspicuous tendency during the Fifth Republic: foreign policy was treated as a *domaine réservé* of the Élysée. Indignant about only having been informed of the instructions given to the French delegation leading the discussions of French sovereignty by a note of the foreign ministry from Adélie Land during a conference on the Antarctic, the General vented his irritation on the Prime Minister:

I see that I have been informed only after the decision had been taken; on the contrary any form of negotiation on any territory where French sovereignty is under discussion—as is in this case—must start only after I have been informed and had the opportunity to express my opinion on the matter.²²

In the autumn of 1959 it was clear to all that, despite Debré's intentions, the gulf between Matignon and the Élysée was destined to get wider and wider. Thanks to his clever employment of television, the Head of State managed to reinforce his authority and announce directly to the French people the main issues of national policy, replicating an event that had already taken place with the speech on 16 September 1959. De Gaulle's need to maintain direct contact with the nation may have been inspired by a Rousseauesque desire to suppress any mediation between himself and the public. At the same time, however, it had the effect of establishing a formidable process of the personalisation of power, one that was perfected down to its smallest details, including the choice of scenography. The General's speeches were anticipated, criticised and argued over; but no matter what one thought of them, they were at the centre of the political debate. As Debré remarked to the foreign minister Couve de Murville: "General de Gaulle's speeches need not be commented on. They determine the spirit and the contingency of the moment."²³

In the space of a few months, a singular form of political discussion started to take shape in France, one that was dominated by a single voice, as it was impossible for the opposition to access television. This monopoly of public space in an institutional context in which it was still possible to capitalise on consensus (in particular in times of referendum) strengthened the hand of the Head of State who operated in an institutional framework that was still fluid.

In a long article published in May 1959, Duverger noted that, thanks to its extraordinary ability to communicate directly with the entire nation, in the space of a few months television had provided the General with a legitimation unknown to his predecessors:

Not since 1789 had a Head of State, or a Head of Government in France been so powerful for such a long time [...] Robespierre had the Convention to deal with, the two Napoleons had to deal with legislative bodies, General

Pétain had to work with the occupying forces, the President of the provisional government in 1944–45 with the Allied forces, internal resistance and communication difficulties. The “second” de Gaulle has not met any of these obstacles. The opposition is annihilated, the supporters are unable to criticise their leader [...] Everybody feels that the General is better than the Colonels that would replace him if he left power too early. Paradoxically the Republicans are today reduced to singing at the top of their voices the old invocation *God Save the King!* For the first time, in a long time, the nation trusts its leader. There still remains a tendency to minimise the deep disrepute into which the Fourth Republic had fallen, to forget the abyss that divided the people from its leaders. Democracy does not consist in mere juridical formulas [elections, parliament etc.]; these do not make sense unless they represent the nation, unless public opinion feels that their leaders act in their name. Before 1958 rituals were scrupulously respected, but there was no trust. Today traditions have been turned upside down, but trust in power has increased. [...] Undoubtedly today France has a special kind of democracy, one could define it as a “media led” democracy: the nation does not govern, does not vote for representatives who implement its politics: the nation is in the hands of one man.²⁴

Several political commentators discussed the countless risks connected with the excessive concentration of power, believing it was necessary to “disembody this arbiter [...] and transfer his prestige to an Assembly”.²⁵ Yet, because of the delicate moment that the country was experiencing through the autumn of 1959, a process of depersonalisation of power seemed almost impossible. The “week of the barricades” and the central role played on this occasion by the Head of State—who managed to solve a dramatic situation thanks to his charismatic appearance on the television screens—provided confirmation of the unstoppable presidentialisation of the system.

3 THE 29 JANUARY 1960 TELEVISION SPEECH

The date of 24 January 1960 marked the first open conflict between the General and the *ultras*. The removal of General Massu, called back to Paris for his rash declarations against the policy of self-determination that appeared in the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, caused a fierce insurrection of the Europeans in Algiers. Fourteen policemen were killed in the clashes. The barricades protestors erected

brought back memories of the dramatic events of May 1958. Algiers attempted once again to impose its own laws irrespective of France's wishes. Though furious, de Gaulle sought to find a diplomatic solution. On 25 January, he went on television and using a firm, almost paternal tone invited "those who rebelled in Algiers [...] to respect the law of the mother country [...] to respect the National order".²⁶ Then he stepped aside to allow diplomatic negotiations to commence. All the intermediaries—Generals Massu, Salan and the previous Governors General Jacques Soustelle and Robert Lacoste—were unable to placate the leaders of the rebel movement, the MP Pierre Lagayette, former president of the students in Algiers, and the right wing extremist Joseph Ortiz. After these diplomatic failures, it was the turn of Debré, who secretly travelled to Algiers to meet with the Colonels and the Generals, but this mission also failed: the Prime Minister was openly threatened and insulted by high-ranking French military officers stationed in Algiers. Debré was not indifferent to the protesters' motives and he returned distraught to Paris. Though he stood firm in maintaining the plan of action agreed with the General, he was morally and physically strained and felt sure that army insurrection was imminent. If in Paris the climate was heated, across the Mediterranean the situation was far worse. Tensions heightened on 28 January when the government delegate, General Paul Delouvrier, decided to abandon Algiers in response to rebel pressure. It was then that the vacuum of power in Algiers became apparent to all.²⁷

France was once again on the brink of a disaster from which there seemed no way back, but de Gaulle was convinced that the cause of the escalating crisis was due only to some isolated cases of fanatical officials when, in fact, the whole army was embroiled in it. He decided to counter-attack and, with a move that took everyone by surprise, announced a radio-television speech for the night of the 29th. This immediately attracted everyone's interest, civilians as well as soldiers, on both sides of the Mediterranean. One newspaper that could hardly be described as sympathetic to the Gaullists, nevertheless, admitted that whole nation was at a loss and "everybody hoped that the intervention of the Head of State could provide a solution of the crisis".²⁸

The 29 January speech undoubtedly represents one of de Gaulle's most successful televised speeches and the one that revealed the power of

the association of personal charisma and the small screen in conditioning the audience. The broadcast lasted 18 minutes and was shown in its entirety at the beginning of the evening news at 8 p.m. and again at 11 p.m. The General employed all his rhetorical gifts and expressive repertoire and surviving footage of the speech remains a document of paramount importance.²⁹ After a brief panoramic shot of the Élysée, the RTF cameras filmed the presidential room where the General was already sitting at his desk, dressed in his military uniform—a detail that shocked the whole nation gathered for the occasion around television screens. In his speech de Gaulle emphasised his double role of President of the Republic and Head of the Army. De Gaulle's face appeared immobile, his expression impassive, his jaw contracted and his hands, which rested firmly on his desk, were clenched into fists. After a few minutes of silence de Gaulle commenced to talk, gazing sternly and straight at the television cameras: "Today I am wearing my uniform because I want to stress that I am talking as General de Gaulle and as Head of State." To establish national cohesion around himself the President of the Republic felt it was important to evoke the Man of 18 June, thereby associating his historical legitimacy with his present democratic legitimacy won through the constitutional referendum on 28 September 1958 and the 21 December 1958 elections. The President's expression is exaggerated: while uttering his name he bends his head, opens his arms in a sign of resignation; he seems to grimace with self-deprecation.

But then, after a few seconds, the modest persona of Charles de Gaulle from Lille is transformed suddenly into the Head of State, the living embodiment of the nation; de Gaulle immediately recomposes his arms, straightens his back, raises his head, his expression becomes sterner, his eyebrows are raised: "In the name of France, I have taken the following decision: Algerians will choose freely their destiny." Appropriating the paternity of the policy of self-determination, he traces briefly the hierarchy of the mechanism of political decisions: "In short, self-determination is the only policy that is worthy of France. It is the only possible way out. It has been decided by the President of the Republic, by the government, approved by the Parliament and adopted by the France." The degree of personalisation of this speech is very high, probably one of the highest during the whole presidency (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Personalisation index in de Gaulle radio and television speeches (1958–69)

<i>n.</i>	<i>Type of televised address</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Personal references [je, moi, etc.]</i>	<i>Personalisation index [frequency‰]</i>
1	Speech [13-6-1958]	761	12	16
2	Speech [27-6-1958]	625	12	19
3	Speech [1-8-1958]	754	12	16
4	Speech [26-9-1958]	443	8	18
5	Press conference [23-10-1958]	3118	53	17
6	Speech [28-12-1958]	1346	18	13
7	Speech [30-1-1959]	902	14	15
8	Press conference [25-3-1959]	1666	15	9
9	Speech [16-9-1959]	2129	18	8
10	Press conference [9-11-1959]	5850	57	10
11	Speech [25-1-1960]	220	10	45
12	Speech [29-1-1960]	1605	53	33
13	Speech [31-5-1960]	1866	7	4
14	Speech [14-6-1960]	2047	12	6
15	Press conference [5-9-1960]	6412	74	12
16	Speech [4-11-1960]	2035	22	11
17	Speech [20-12-1960]	1480	11	7
18	Speech [31-12-1960]	1172	11	9
19	Speech [6-1-1961]	602	17	28
20	Press conference [11-4-1961]	6158	73	12
21	Speech [23-4-1961]	499	14	28
22	Speech [8-5-1961]	1671	8	5
23	Speech [12-7-1961]	1919	6	3
24	Press conference [5-9-1961]	4980	40	8
25	Speech [2-10-1961]	1367	4	3
26	Speech [29-12-1961]	1571	3	2
27	Speech [5-2-1962]	1944	7	4
28	Speech [18-3-1962]	616	4	6
29	Speech [26-3-1962]	881	18	20
30	Speech [6-4-1962]	516	2	4
31	Press conference [15-5-1962]	5607	72	13
32	Speech [8-6-1962]	1064	5	5
33	Speech [20-9-1962]	1632	34	21
34	Speech [4-10-1962]	985	28	28

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

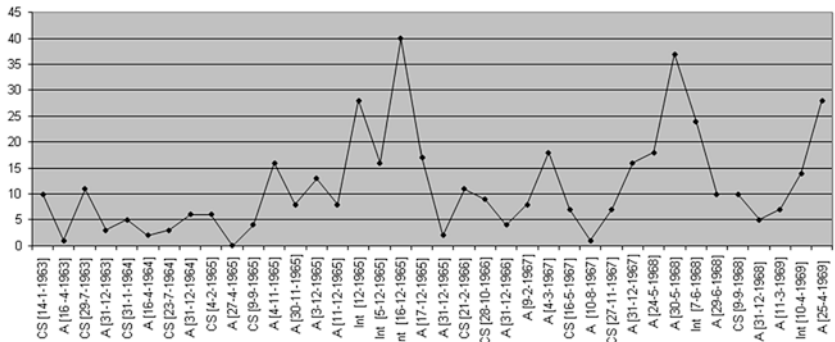
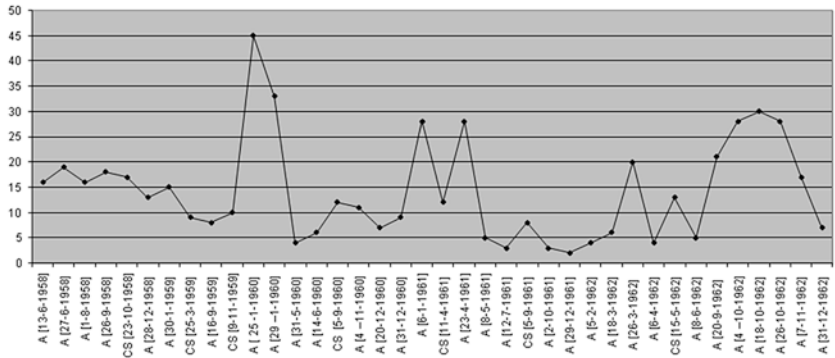
<i>n.</i>	<i>Type of televised address</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Personal references [je, moi, etc.]</i>	<i>Personalisation index [frequency‰]</i>
35	Speech [18-10-1962]	630	19	30
36	Speech [26-10-1962]	542	15	28
37	Speech [7-11-1962]	947	16	17
38	Speech [31-12-1962]	863	6	7
39	Press conference [14-1-1963]	6526	63	10
40	Speech [16-4-1963]	1777	1	1
41	Press conference [29-7-1963]	6218	67	11
42	Speech [31-12-1963]	1416	4	3
43	Press conference [31-1-1964]	7246	35	5
44	Speech [16-4-1964]	1691	4	2
45	Press conference [23-7-1964]	5496	17	3
46	Speech [31-12-1964]	1067	6	6
47	Press conference [4-2-1965]	6158	34	6
48	Speech [27-4-1965]	1476	0	0
49	Press conference [9-9-1965]	7515	28	4
50	Speech [4-11-1965]	699	11	16
51	Speech [30-11-1965]	1180	10	8
52	Speech [3-12-1965]	676	9	13
53	Speech [11-12-1965]	1041	8	8
54	Interview [12-1965]	3006	84	28
55	Interview [5-12-1965]	2978	48	16
56	Interview [16-12-1965]	2689	108	40
57	Speech [17-12-1965]	814	14	17
58	Speech [31-12-1965]	839	2	2
59	Press conference [21-2-1966]	5751	66	11
60	Press conference [28-10-1966]	6988	61	9
61	Speech [31-12-1966]	1097	4	4
62	Speech [9-2-1967]	1013	8	8
63	Speech [4-3-1967]	566	10	18
64	Press conference [16-5-1967]	6157	43	7
65	Speech [10-8-1967]	1862	1	1
66	Press conference [27-11-1967]	7417	53	7

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

<i>n.</i>	<i>Type of televised address</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Personal references [je, moi, etc.]</i>	<i>Personalisation index [frequency%_{oo}]</i>
67	Speech [31-12-1967]	951	15	16
68	Speech [24-5-1968]	624	11	18
69	Speech [30-5-1968]	427	16	37
70	Interview [7-6-1968]	4328	106	24
71	Speech [29-6-1968]	621	6	10
72	Press conference [9-9-1968]	5641	56	10
73	Speech [31-12-1968]	1389	7	5
74	Speech [11-3-1969]	1360	9	7
75	Interview [10-4-1969]	3898	53	14
76	Speech [25-4-1969]	527	15	28

Source: Data are by the author



A = Speech; CS = Press Conference; Int. = Interview

Source: Data are by the author

De Gaulle aims at showing his audience that the Head of State commands a singular authority: he is the only one that should be obeyed, the ultimate decision maker. In the speech he mainly addresses the “rebels” of the Front de libération nationale (FLN) and, after mentioning the possibility of beginning negotiations, before the end of hostilities, he stares into the camera with a resolute expression and with a firm voice announces: “I will not do it.” Then, he turns his attention to the army stationed in Algeria; the tone becomes solemn, the look austere, de Gaulle angrily bangs his fist on the table and utters his final command:

It is me—as you all know—that has supreme responsibility. It is me that is responsible for the destiny of this country. It is for this reason that all French soldiers must obey me [...] Listen to me carefully! While the Algerian insurrection is taking place [...] all soldiers are forbidden—lest they commit a grave crime—to take part, even passively, in the insurrection [...] I have ordered this, and I issue this order immediately.³⁰

The conclusion is addressed to the whole nation; its tone becomes paternal, firm but reassuring, and his facial expression seems to soften:

Well, well, my dear old country, here we are once again facing another serious ordeal together. By virtue of the mandate I was given by the people and the National legitimacy I have embodied for twenty years, I am asking all of you to support me whatever happens. At a time in which some criminals dream of usurping power using my decision about Algeria as a pretext, everybody everywhere must know, that my decision is final [...] Vive la République! Vive la France!³¹

The psychological impact of the General’s speech was enormous. The authorities in Algeria regained confidence. Nobody doubted any longer that the army was going to obey and respect the General’s order. Commenting on de Gaulle’s speech, Colonel Argoud, who was backing up the rebels, stated: “De Gaulle’s speech puts an end to all my hopes.”³² The rebels were marginalised and they had no choice but to flee: Lagailarde was arrested after an adventurous chase; Ortiz managed to cross the border and took refuge in Spain.

The success of de Gaulle’s speech was absolute.³³ Nothing in the speech was left to chance: the magic of the word and image of the General was the result of a carefully orchestrated strategy. Debré reflecting on the speech noted: “I understand the tactic of the General better now. On the first day

he made his position clear, then he left the stooges of the drama, myself included, on the stage. When the decisive moment approached, he re-appeared on the scene, to reaffirm and impose his will.”³⁴

In these dramatic times the popularity of de Gaulle, which had increased after the first nuclear test at Reggane in the Sahara on 13 February 1960, reached its highest peak, and made him the most popular politician in France since the end of the Second World War: 74% of French people were said to back the General, 17% were strongly against him, while 8% did not give an opinion.³⁵ An exhausted public had declared they were behind the General. The popularity of de Gaulle increased the popularity of his policies and, implicitly, the power of the President over State institutions.

4 THE PRESIDENT GOVERNS FRANCE

Raymond Aron, commenting on the barricades crisis noted that “during those five days, nothing existed any longer; not the regime, or the Constitution or the Government, which was divided and hesitant. What existed was only a man and a man alone.”³⁶ The General, however, was not content with a demonstration of power that led to a personal triumph. He felt that it was not enough to have shown that, under the new Republic, Paris commanded Algiers. Once he had solved the problem of the insurrection, de Gaulle set out to use his personal success to change institutional practices and the very structures of power. In the following two weeks the project of the presidentialisation of French politics would progress as never before. The events of 19 September 1959 were nothing by comparison. On 2 February de Gaulle called an extraordinary parliamentary meeting, during which a large majority (441 votes in favour against just 75 against) agreed that the government could legislate for a whole year with ordinances. A few days afterwards, the Ministerial reshuffle orchestrated by the *Élysée* marginalised the staunchest supporters of French Algeria (Jacques Soustelle and Bernard Cornut-Gentille) and provided further proof of the fact that the Head of State intended to govern like an American President; that is to say, by imposing his authority on Ministers who were made first and foremost responsible to him.

But the most significant move came on 14 February with the creation of the Committee for Algeria, which convened for the first time three days later at the *Élysée*. It was chaired by the Head of State and essentially served to short-circuit the Government—which despite the cabinet reshuffle remained somewhat divided—and exclude them from making

decisions about Algeria. Political personalities with four different roles and tasks (Head of State, Prime Minister, other members of the government, government officials and high-ranking officers in the military and civil service) started to convene periodically under the direction of the President of the Republic with the official aim of collective decision-making, though, in actual fact, the Committee merely expressed opinions and received directives.³⁷

In this way, the President of the Republic had absolute supremacy. Georges Vedel noted how “political power in 1960 does not work through arbitration, but through a direct form of government”. The crisis that occurred after the Algerian insurrection—the moment of “truth”—was enough “to erase the fresh ink of the Constitution and the complex division of political tasks between the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the ministers”.³⁸ By putting himself forward as “supremely responsible” for the nation, and as the highest authority of the State, the General effectively demolished the narrative of the Constitution. De Gaulle renounced his power of arbitration in order to become “one of those captains of rugby or of football teams that exercise their authority directly on the field instead of being content with giving advice during the interval”.³⁹ In an editorial in *Le Monde*, Duverger noted that the Gaullist will to take action in the face of the events along with the faith that French people had in the Head of State made the Constitution invalid:

The constitution defines the role of the Head of State as an arbiter. No doubt this is wrong. In the present world to have the Head of State as an arbiter means to condemn him to a passive role. If the President wants to have a political role, he must have responsibility over the executive. This is all the more so because the Head of State is de Gaulle.⁴⁰

Though Debré’s devotion to the General always remained intact, during the 1960s the Prime Minister started to feel increasingly uneasy about the President’s imposition of his own will on the political institutions. Respected jurists noted that the reassuring image of de Gaulle could not hide the institutional void that surrounded him.⁴¹ Debré himself wrote to de Gaulle expressing concern: “Are our institutions functioning as they should? One should be careful when answering this question because it is your authority that provides politicians with the necessary wisdom for institutions to exist.”⁴² A fragment of another letter that the Prime Minister addressed to the Head of State on 18 April 1960 confirms that

the situation between the two men was becoming increasingly critical. In this, the Prime Minister remarked on how difficult it was to reconcile the Constitution with the interests of the State, and suggested a reform that “reinforces the role of the President of the Republic and provides a clearer affirmation that the authority of the government derives, first of all, from a close relationship between the President and the government”.⁴³ The fact that the letter was signed but never actually sent to de Gaulle is a clear sign of the deep sense of unease felt by the Prime Minister.

In the following two months, the centrality of the President became even more evident through the implementation of a two-pronged strategy: the General started secret negotiations with the leaders of the Algerian rebels, while at the same time using radio and television to establish direct contact with the nation and inform the French people of any significant decisions about Algeria. In this way unwelcome intermediaries were completely eliminated from the scene. From the spring of 1960 relations between the government and the President became more and more strained: ministers often found out about the President’s decisions from the television, and became more like general secretaries of their respective ministries. This strategy was central to facilitating secret negotiations between the representatives of the French government and those of the provisional government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) formed by the FLN in Cairo in 1958. Negotiations were difficult and they appeared to reach an impasse after their initial failure at Melun in the summer of 1960. De Gaulle took full responsibility and involved only those that enjoyed his complete trust (among these Georges Pompidou, general manager of the Rothschild Bank, played a particularly important part despite having no official role in the State administration) while cabinet was only marginally involved.⁴⁴

To redemonstrate his direct connection with the public and prove to his Algerian counterparts that his intentions were genuine, the General used television once again. On 14 June 1960 he appealed directly to the leaders of the FLN. For the first time his offer was clearly spelled out: in short, he proposed to end the conflict honourably and begin peace negotiations. In his following speech on 4 November 1960, de Gaulle was even more explicit of this matter. On this occasion the speech was also agreed ahead of time with Debré; however, at the very last moment and without informing the Prime Minister, de Gaulle added the following crucial sentence: “the Algerian Republic that will one day exist”.⁴⁵ This statement was decisive for the FLN, as it signalled that the Head of State was in

favour of independence for Algeria, even though the rebels had not yet declared a ceasefire—a condition that de Gaulle always maintained was necessary to begin negotiations. The General's intention was to establish solid foundations for peace talks after the Melun failure, and to reinforce his relationship with liberal public opinion, which, faced with the seeming confusion and failure to make any progress on the matter, felt quite at a loss. On 4 November de Gaulle used the occasion to declare once again that “the spirit and terms of the Constitution demand that I perform a task that is above everything”⁴⁶; he also announced that he would hold a referendum to ask the French people to express their opinion on the President's policy on Algeria.

A solution for an independent Algeria started to become a possibility. For his part, de Gaulle made clear that he wanted to personally deal with this situation and created a new Ministry of Algerian Affairs independent from Matignon with direct authority over the Algerian Delegate General. The letter that de Gaulle sent to Debré on 22 November 1960 to inform him that he had nominated Louis Joxe as Head of this new ministry shows that the Prime Minister was left completely in the dark: “Joxe [...] obviously will be more than a simple delegate as he himself will have authority over a delegate [the Algerian Delegate General, *NA*]. I think you will agree with me.”⁴⁷ The logical consequence of the creation of the Committee for Algerian Affairs in February 1960 was to exclude cabinet.

For Debré this was a terrible blow: not only had his policy definitively and completely failed, but his institutional role was profoundly diminished. In a letter to the General he confessed his “deep anguish” that the mere mention of an “Algerian Republic” and de Gaulle's decisions on the matter caused him.⁴⁸ He considered resigning and discussed the possibility with his father and closest advisors, who persuaded him not to abandon the General on the eve of a referendum that would be decisive for the destiny of the nation.⁴⁹

The verdict of the electoral body was in actual fact a foregone conclusion; all that was in doubt was the margin of victory of the “yes” vote, and, as a consequence the future room for manoeuvre of the President. To achieve its objective, the usual Gaullist tactic was used in the three televised speeches delivered in short succession on the eve of the vote: dramatise and personalise in the extreme what was at stake in the referendum. In the first two speeches, the Head of State declared that a “no vote” or even an uncertain result would result in his departure from the political scene. The alternative was once again between de Gaulle and chaos. In the third

speech, on 6 January—two days before the vote—the General reiterated in a crystal-clear way the true meaning of the referendum: “French people, you already know this, it is to me that you will respond [...] and in truth—who does not know it?—this whole affair is between each of you and myself.”⁵⁰

On the evening of 8 January 1961, de Gaulle discovered that once again he had won his bet. The turnout was not high for the period (76.4%), but the scale of the “yes vote” was beyond even the most optimistic expectations: 75.26% of voters (55.91% of eligible voters) were in favour of the President’s Algerian policy. As in 1958, the Gaullist victory had exceeded expectations and provided the President with an authority and legitimacy crucial to dealing with the final stages of the Algerian crisis.

5 THE ALGIERS PUTSCH AND THE “VICTORY OF THE TRANSISTORS”

In the absence of any credible opposition, the nation reaffirmed its unconditional support for its leader. The only challenge to Gaullist legitimacy came menacingly from the French Algerian *ultras* and the army where *vichyste* anti-Gaullist allegiances still survived. The so-called week of the barricades threw Metropolitan France into a state of panic: at the end of the 1960s there was widespread fear that suddenly the blind rage of Algerian Europeans could result in new acts of civil disobedience. This fear was also shared by Home Minister Pierre Châtenet, as the following extract of a letter he sent to Debré shows:

Military success is indispensable and not enough [...] Those Europeans in Algeria that more or less openly wish for the return of the *status quo ante*—effectively the majority [...]—are not resigned, their rage is understandable and will lead to new episodes [...] All they are left with is to pursue their rage, no matter whether this is legitimate or not. They know success is not a possibility.⁵¹

At the beginning of spring in 1961 news of the intensification of negotiations between the French government and the GPRA led to the possibility of a coup among the highest-ranking officers in the army stationed in Algeria. This possibility became reality between the nights of the 21st and the 22nd of April. Generals Salan, Challe, Zeller and Jouhaud aided by paratroopers and legionnaires took control of the Algerian capital and arrested all the French authorities. Unfounded rumours and speculation

of the *putsch* spreading to Metropolitan France created general confusion and misinformation: the French militaries stationed in Germany were supposedly backing up the insurrection and, at that very moment, marching on Paris; America was going to intervene as an intermediary in order to save Algeria from the communists; several cities in Metropolitan France were said to be ready to join the insurrection. It was even rumoured that the Head of State had been assassinated.

In the midst of a situation that was not only dramatic but also very confused, the General appeared to offer the only possibility of salvation. The announcement of his radio-televised speech for the night of 23 April held everyone’s attention on both sides of the Mediterranean. In Metropolitan France, at the end of a spring weekend, people gathered in front of television screens in their houses or in cafés, anxious to see the “old sorcerer”.⁵² In Algeria broadcasting was in the hands of the leaders of the coup and the General’s speech was relayed by Radio Montecarlo. While generals and colonels were shut in their offices waiting for the General’s speech, soldiers, despite a prohibition imposed by the higher officer ranks, secretly gathered in their barracks with transistor radios (small battery-powered radio receivers extremely popular among conscript soldiers) that had escaped confiscation.

At 8 p.m., while Paris was under siege with its bridges under observation, air traffic forbidden, and volunteers responding to special bulletins alerts gathered in Place Beauvau, the General appeared on television. His speech, recorded a couple of hours beforehand, had been hastily composed. For the first time, since his debut on 13 June 1958, the General appeared on television without make-up. Charles Koubésarian was not even contacted.⁵³

Television images of the event show a majestic de Gaulle wearing, as in his speech on 29 January 1960, his military uniform. His haughty profile is the same of the “old Jacobin inquisitor”⁵⁴ that 15 months earlier had brought the barricades down. His expression is cold, his anger barely contained, his face is tense. His arms are resting on the table; the clenched fists on either side of the microphone look like two pistols in a duel cocked and ready to fire. The speech, though almost improvised, is among the most incisive of his presidency:

An insurrectional power has established itself in Algeria through a military *pronunciamento*. [...] Though this power has the appearance of a “quart-pot of retired generals”, the reality is it is comprised of a group of factious, ambitious and fanatical officials [...]. Their action is leading to national

disaster. The immense effort of reconstructing France began on June 18th 1940 from the bottom of the deepest abyss [...] and recommenced again three years ago with the aim of reconstructing the State, in order to preserve national unity, to be powerful again, to re-affirm our central role on the international scene, to continue a necessary process of de-colonization, all this risks failing on the very eve of our triumph [...] And why? Alas! Alas! Because of men whose duty, honour and *raison d'être* it is to serve and obey. In the name of France, I order that all means, and I say all means, be employed to stop them. I forbid any Frenchman, and above all any soldier, to execute any of their orders [...]. The future of these usurpers must be that which is reserved for them by the rigour of the law. Faced with tragedy looming ahead and the threat to the Republic [...] I have decided to invoke article 16 of the Constitution. As from this day, I will take, by direct action if the necessary, exceptional measures that I judge the circumstances demand. On this day, and in the future, I take this decision in the name of the French Republican legitimacy that the Nation has bestowed upon me and that I will defend no matter what, until my mandate is concluded, or for as long as I have strength and life in me, so this legitimacy will survive for posterity. Consider the risk France faces and what France was about to be once again. Women of France! Men of France! Help me!⁵⁵

The speech is undoubtedly a rhetorical masterpiece, its prosody a musical crescendo: from the sharp irony of the opening to the dramatic recounting of a process that began more than 20 years earlier and that risked collapsing right at the moment in which the Promised Land was in sight. France's progress is represented as inextricably linked to the legitimacy the General continuously claimed for himself from the time of his speech to the nation on 18 June 1940. It is in the name of this legitimacy that he demands the military obey him, that the nation has faith in him and, with increasing pathos, that he asks all France to help him, lest the nation fall victim to the will of a handful of Generals, as if this was not a great nation but some Caribbean Republic humiliated by unscrupulous dictators.

This is the speech that reveals more than any other the rhetorical power of de Gaulle's words. As one leading biographer put it, his speech was composed of "words that are incendiary and hit like bullets"⁵⁶

The powerful tone of the General's speech is even more striking when compared with Debré's announcement a few hours later at 11.45 p.m. Deadly pale and unshaved, he implored all citizens, when they heard the sound of the sirens, to rush "on foot or by car" to the airports to try to convince *putschist* soldiers to desist their actions.⁵⁷

For the first time in the history of French television, broadcasting did not end at midnight: the Head of State and the Prime Minister’s appeals continued throughout the night and into the following day. The small screen not only became the noble champion of the Republic; it also displayed side by side the solemnity of Head of State and the embarrassing dejection of the Prime Minister, and as such made clear to its viewers the designated roles each of them was playing.

Gaullist rhetoric also had a profound effect in Algeria. The National Minister of Public Transport, Robert Buron, who was at the time a hostage of the rebels, gave testimony to the grave effect the General’s speech had on his kidnappers: “What a difference between the confidence expressed by the General and the hesitation of the rebels [...] Listening to the Head of State we realised that the failure of this handful of Generals was inevitable.”⁵⁸ Colonel Antoine Argoud confirmed that the words and the charisma of the General had the immediate effect of psychologically conditioning the soldiers of the rebellious contingent: “They were impressed by the power of his statements [...] The majority were ready to defect [...]. The psychological impact weighed more than the close rapport among the forces. De Gaulle’s speech managed to restore a situation that had been compromised. The fear it provoked had a paralysing effect on those who were animated by good intentions.”⁵⁹

The voice of the General, relayed by transistor radios to Algeria, was enough to restore order in the ranks in the Algerian army. The “radio hunt” ordered by those in command of units that had fallen in with the *putsch* failed to prevent the dissemination of the General’s speech.⁶⁰ De Gaulle’s direct appeal marked the end of all the rebel’s hopes: on Wednesday 25 April Salan and Jouhaud fled, Challe and Zeller surrendered. *Le Monde’s* later reconstruction of events provides further proof of the impact that the General’s speech had on the army stationed in Algeria:

At 8 pm General de Gaulle speaks to the nation. Everywhere in the barracks, groups of soldiers of the (rebel) contingent cram around transistor radios to listen to the Head of State. There are of signs of approval, some groups use army equipment to record and reproduce the speech. From tonight, the movement of agitation is destined to spread quickly throughout the army, and then through the whole of Algeria [...] It is the end.⁶¹

Authoritative voices of the times have referred to the defeat of the rebel soldiers as the “victory of the transistor”.⁶²

Table 6.2 “Among the following options, which would you say are the reasons that caused the failure of the Algerian rebellion?”

<i>Answers</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
General de Gaulle’s actions	39
The determination of the French people	16
The attitude of the Algerians’ contingent	14
The loyalty of high-ranking military officers	7
Putschists’ mistakes	6
Insufficient support from civilians in Algier	5
The role of the US government	1
No answer	12

Source: M. Vaïsse, *Alger le putsch*, Bruxelles, Editions Complexe, 1983, p. 69

The impact of the speech was also extraordinary in France. The Institut français d’opinion publique (IFOP) surveys in the weeks following the speech show that public opinion in metropolitan France thought that the speech of the Head of State was the most important factor in the failure of the rebel’s plans (Table 6.2).

The whole nation, once again, sided with the General and faced with imminent disaster the entire spectrum of political opinion supported him. Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, a famous member of the Debré administration, recalled that, during the *putsch*, when news of an impending invasion of Paris by paratroopers from Algeria became an ever more realistic threat, Raymond Barre, the Director of Debré’s cabinet, told the Prime Minister of a telephone call from a high representative of the Confédération générale du travail (CGT), the trade union close to the PCF, who informed him that in case of a *coup d’état* his organisation was prepared to take action.⁶³

As in the aftermath of the “week of the barricades”, after the *putsch* de Gaulle’s popularity significantly increased with 71% of French people declaring themselves “satisfied” with the performance of the Head of State.⁶⁴ A nation that wished for peace and stability above all expressed its gratitude to its President. At a press conference on 19 May 1958 the President stated, “All French people have been, are, or will be Gaullist.” As a matter of fact this became almost plausible after 23 April 1961, though there were some dissenters. Commenting on the General’s speech that caused the barricades in Algiers to tumble 15 months earlier, Raymond Aron wrote in the magazine *Preuves*, “On that day, some of the last pagans converted, however, right at that moment, some others who two years earlier were among the most devout worshippers abandoned the church.”⁶⁵

6 DEBRÉ LEAVES THE POLITICAL SCENE

The Algiers *putsch* was the last move of the supporters of French Algeria. If several among the protagonists of those tumultuous days have highlighted the crucial role played by the General's television speech in re-establishing republican legality, archival documents show the importance this speech had also in determining further changes in the institutional relationship between the Head of State and the Prime Minister. On 24 April 1961, the General Secretary of the President of the Republic officially informed Debré of the decision taken by de Gaulle to form a restricted committee under his own authority:

As from today I will personally take all decisions concerning the Algerian issue and all that is related to this in Metropolitan France. The Prime Minister is my *subordinate collaborator* in these affairs. The ministers involved and the General Chief of Staff and General for National Defence must remain in direct contact with me. A committee that includes all the ministers involved [and in all instances: the Prime Minister, the Home Minister for Algerian affairs, the Minister of Defence and the Home Minister] will meet every day at the Élysée at 10 am.⁶⁶

The decision to invoke article 16 and to prolong its use until the end of the Algerian crisis and beyond the contingent emergency that effectively ended with the capitulation of the rebels on 25 April 1961 represented a further instance of the President working against the letter and spirit of the Constitution. The prestige of the President grew both in France and in Algeria where nobody doubted any longer that de Gaulle's intentions were peaceful. The outcome of the April crisis contributed to speeding up events. De Gaulle became convinced of the necessity to conclude peace talks as quickly as possible and for the final settlement to give a clear meaning to the agreed "peace". During the 5 September 1961 press conference he declared that:

Our idea of Algeria is completely different from the one we have practiced in the conquest of Algeria [...] Our objective is not to maintain political, administrative and economic responsibility of Algeria. If in the past this was a viable choice, it would now be anachronistic and futile [...] In short it is not our ambition to keep this region [...]. The Algerian problem can be summed up in three essential issues: the institution of an Algerian State, France's relations with this State and [...] the future of the Sahara.⁶⁷

If in issuing the 24th of April 1961 directive the President had reduced the Prime Minister's role to that of a mere "subordinate collaborator", in the following months he began to take full responsibility for decisions that concerned the whole nation. The only concession made to Parliament was that these decisions were communicated to the Prime Minister a few days before they were publicly announced to the nation.

Debré certainly didn't approve either of the General's overriding of existing institutional arrangements or his position on Algeria. He complained to the General: "Self-determination is no longer what it used to be—a choice between different systems—but a mere formality for the creation of a State."⁶⁸ Though clearly shaken, the Prime Minister remained loyal to the General. The letter he sent him on 16 September 1961 provides proof of an emotional scar that never led to an explicit political rupture. While remarking on his commitment to "the man of the liberation, of the struggle, of hope [...] of the grandeur", Debré also referred to some personal considerations:

I want to talk about my "weariness". I am not referring to being "weary" of power. In my case this condition is irrelevant, it cannot therefore be the object of discussion and does not have any consequences. However, present policy on Algeria, and the Sahara in particular, have worn away my authority. In these last three years I have said and done plenty of things. I have explained to parliament the policy of self-determination. I have explained Melun and Evian. I have signed instructions for the army, I have written directives to the Algerian administration. As far as the Sahara is concerned, my decisions and behaviour cannot be seen as reckless because essentially I have followed the official line. From now on, perhaps different things should be said, different instructions should be given. And this could also bring forth changes of those who say things or issue instructions, or, at any rate, a change [...] I will say no more, Mr General, as you should know me well enough by now.⁶⁹

Attached to this letter, in which he clearly raised the possibility of being replaced, Debré added a note about his doubts concerning the indefinite prolongation of article 16, whose use was justified in the exceptional circumstances of the April of 1961, but which might cause misunderstandings in the institutions, if this implementation was to continue for too long:

The first observation one can make concerns the uncertainty of constitutional regulations, I daresay, of the political regime. We are neither in a parliamentary democracy nor in a dictatorial regime. We are not in a parliamentary democracy because some decisions that concern individual freedoms or the functioning of the State are not the object of deliberation. But we are not in a dictatorial regime because there is freedom of the press, of local radios, of parliamentary activity and trade unionism.⁷⁰

In those difficult years there were two possible paths for France to follow and both depended on the centrality of the presidential role:

We can consider the end of the parliamentary regime or, more precisely, its interruption for some months. This would be a regime inspired by the honourable and useful dictatorship of Ancient Rome [...] It is a clear option where power rests totally on an individual. As an alternative, one could affirm the parliamentary character of our government, taking into proper consideration the responsibilities of the President of the Republic, by which I mean not just of his power of arbitration, but also of his deliberation and inclination.⁷¹

Faced with the drift towards the elimination of the parliamentary system, Debré clearly sided with a return to “normality”.⁷²

The General approved the Prime Minister’s suggestions and declared the end of his exceptional powers according to the provisions of article 16, commencing from 30 September. However, this did not mean a re-evaluation of the role of the Prime Minister. Debré himself saw his role as the one of a “faithful advisor—who, as he himself confessed to the General—has decided to walk in your footsteps”.⁷³ But, beginning with the Algerian crisis, Debré had lost not only his authority over the most pertinent issues facing the future of nation, but also the command that—in line with article 21 of the Constitution—the Prime Minister exerted over the conduct of government affairs.⁷⁴

Debré knew his days were numbered. The end of the Algerian crisis provided the General with a propitious moment to be rid of his Prime Minister. Debré’s resignation came soon after the 8 April 1962 referendum that approved the Evian Accords with a 91% majority and gave the clearest possible demonstration of the fact that the role of the Prime Minister was essentially of secondary importance. A mere faithful executer

of the decision of the President, he could be changed at the discretion of the Head of the State. Though formally the Constitution did not bestow this right on the President, it could be argued that the letter of the 1958 Constitution had never been the guiding principle for the General's actions. If this custom did not as yet exist, it might, nevertheless, easily come into being.

The letter of resignation Debré sent to the General, which was read at the last cabinet meeting before Pompidou stepped in, represents a unique document that illustrates the actual relationship between the Prime Minister and Head of State from 1958 to 1962, a relationship that went far beyond the letter of the Constitution and that forged institutional conventions that were to survive its creators:

Mr General, when, in January 1959, you did me the great honour of becoming your Prime Minister, the new government had the mandate to continue and develop the political, economic, financial and social restoration that, spurred by the Nation, you had begun six months earlier. At the same time, the new government had to guarantee a good start for the new institutional bodies [...] After three years and three months, it seems a great deal has been achieved. Though incomplete, I think the results are positive. Each member of the government has played his part. I can vouchsafe for this. Government action, however, has been dominated by the Algerian crisis. It was necessary, following your directives, to regain control of that territory, and then orient the destiny of Algeria along the path you have traced and which has received first the approval of parliament and then of the French people. Though there are still difficulties and obstacles, not to mention all the rest, today we have a glimpse of the eventual solution: peace will make self-determination possible and the Nation, which has been called upon once again to express its opinion, has given its approval for this political course while at the same time bestowing on you the necessary powers to complete it. As agreed, once this important result has been attained, I have the honour, Mr General, to present you the resignation of the Government. The official character of this letter demands that I restrain myself from expressing my personal feelings. You have known them for a long time and it is difficult to express them. I will simply say this: to be and to have been the first ally of General de Gaulle is a title that has no equal.⁷⁵

NOTES

1. M. Duverger, "Les institutions de la Cinquième République", in *Revue française de science politique*, 1, 1959, p. 101.
2. The stronger role of the government is highlighted by article 20: "The Government shall determine and conduct the policy of the nation." Special attention was given within the executive to the figure of the Prime Minister, who, according to article 21, "shall direct the actions of the Government". In several respects, the Prime Minister was subordinated to the authority of the President of the Republic; The President appoints the Prime Minister (art. 8); he can, on a recommendation from the Government when Parliament is in session, call a referendum (art. 11), declare the National Assembly dissolved (art. 12); he has special powers in times of crisis (art. 16). At the same time, according to article 5, his role seemed to be limited to that of an "arbiter", to ensure respect for the Constitution and the "proper functioning of the public authorities and the continuity of the State".
3. M. Duverger, *Les institutions de la Cinquième République*, op. cit., p. 101.
4. F. Goguel, "L'élaboration des institutions de la République dans la Constitution du 4 Octobre 1958", in *Revue française de science politique*, 9(1), 1959, p. 68.
5. Among Vedel's definitions of the new institutional system are "a Caesar-like democracy"; "Neo-Bonapartist Constitution"; "return to 1875"; "rationalised parliamentarism"; "Orleanist Constitution" and even "a Tito-like government" G. Vedel, *Cours de droit constitutionnel et d'institutions politiques, 1958-1959*, Paris, Les cours de droit, 1959, p. 762-65.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 757.
7. C. de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, IV, op. cit., pp. 221-222.
8. On Debré's support for French Algeria, see C. Morelle, "Debré et l'Algérie. Quelle Algérie française?", in Bernstein, Milza and Sirinelli (eds), *Michel Debré Premier ministre 1959-1962*, op. cit., pp. 449-470; S. Braillon (thesis supervised by M. Vandebussche), *Michel Debré et l'Algérie (1945-62). Un républicain dans la crise*, Université Charles de Gaulle—Lille III, 2004.
9. M. Debré, *Trois républiques pour une France. Mémoires*, III, *Gouverner 1958-1962*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1988, p. 13
10. Archival documents show that on several occasions, in particular when the General was very disheartened, it was Debré who had to instruct him in "Gaullist" politics. In the autumn of 1960 the Prime Minister reminded the President that "[W]hat interests General de Gaulle is history's judgement [...]. You cannot admit failure when failure is not there. You have

chosen the long path, one in which the exercise of power is slowed down by the right of freedom. Along this path there are more obstacles. But success is still within your reach.” AMD, 2DE29, Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 11 October 1960. Some months later Debré remarked to the Head of State that “a Gaullist has no right to be more Gaullist than General de Gaulle. However, General de Gaulle belongs to France and his return to power must remain imprinted on an era during which adversities and difficulties have been overcome”. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 25 November 1960.

11. S. Aromatario, *La pensée politique et constitutionnelle de Michel Debré*, Paris, LGDJ, 2006, p. 341.
12. M. Debré, *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de l'élaboration de la Constitution du 4 octobre 1958*, III, *Du Conseil d'Etat au référendum*, 20 Août–28 Septembre 1958, Paris, La Documentation française, 2002, pp. 264–265.
13. In his memoirs, the General defined the role of the Prime Minister as follows: “Given the importance and the vastness of the roles of the Prime Minister, he cannot be but ‘mine’ [...]. Just as on a ship, the old sea man experience requires that a second in command performs his duty next to the Commander, so in our new Republic the executive requires that the President (who takes care of essential and permanent issues) be supported by the figure of the Prime Minister that takes care of the contingent.”. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d'espoir*, I, op. cit., pp. 346–347.
14. After the Gaullist experience, this happened again with Chirac and Barre during Giscard d'Estaing's presidency and was again the case of Pierre Mauroy who, in 1981, was the victim of Mitterrand's domination and was unable to choose his own ministers. More recently, the same relationship of subordination has been noted between Nicolas Sarkozy and François Fillon, appointed by Sarkozy after the 2007 presidential election.
15. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré note to General de Gaulle, 3 August 1959.
16. On 7 January 1960, e.g., Debré thought that the Minister of Finance Antoine Pinay was “influenced by American views” and suggested removing him from office. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré note to General de Gaulle, 7 January 1960.
17. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 5 October 1959.
18. On this see S. Berstein, “Michel Debré et le général de Gaulle, analyse d'une relation politique”, in S. Berstein, P. Milza and J-F. Sirinelli (eds), *Michel Debré Premier ministre 1959–1962*, op. cit., p. 119–149.
19. It is significant that during his presidency the General used the term “arbitrator” only once during his first speech, on 30 January 1959. De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, op. cit., p. 77.

20. For a study on General de Gaulle's position on the Algerian question, with particular reference to his televised speech on 16 September 1959, see B. Stora, *Le mystère de Gaulle: son choix pour l'Algérie*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 2009.
21. G. Vedel, "Haute et basse politique dans la Constitution de 1958", in *Preuves*, 107, January 1960, p. 21.
22. AMD, 2DE29, General de Gaulle letter to Michel Debré, 29 October 1959.
23. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré note to Maurice Couve de Murville, 19 June 1960.
24. M. Duverger, "Un homme a remplacé l'Etat", in *La Nef*, May 1959, p. 5–10.
25. F. Fontaine, "L'arbitre et le libre arbitre", in *Preuves*, 104, October 1959, p. 43.
26. De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, op. cit., p. 161.
27. For a detailed reconstruction, see J. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., pp. 86–103; J-P. Guichard, *De Gaulle face aux crises*, Paris, Le cherche midi, 2000, pp. 169–211.
28. A. Chenebenoit, *Sauver l'Etat*, *Le Monde*, 29 January 1960, p. 1
29. INA, de Gaulle collection, 29 January 1960, 18'20".
30. *Ibidem*.
31. *Ibidem*.
32. A. Argoud, *La Décadence, l'imposture et la tragédie*, Paris, Fayard, 1974, p. 221.
33. For an analysis of the impact of de Gaulle's televised appearances, see G. Quagliariello, "L'immagine politica della Francia nei cinegiornali della 'Settimana Incom'", in A. Sainati (ed), *La Settimana Incom. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50*, Torino, Lindau, 2001, pp. 151–160.
34. M. Debré, *Trois républiques pour une France*, III, op. cit. p. 239.
35. J. Charlot, *Le phénomène gaulliste*, Paris, Fayard, 1970, pp. 44–45.
36. R. Aron, "Un seul homme, un homme seul", in *Preuves*, 109, 3, 1960, p. 7.
37. G. de Courcel in Aa.Vv., *De Gaulle et ses premiers ministres*, Paris, Plon, 1990, p. 30.
38. G. Vedel, "De l'arbitrage à la mystique", in *Preuves*, 112, 6, 1960, p. 19.
39. *Ibidem*, p. 18.
40. M. Duverger, *Les institutions et l'homme*, *Le Monde*, 4 May 1960, p. 1.
41. "Let us say that in our era the regime is founded on the figure of the Head of State. If he disappeared, what would be left of the 1958 Constitution?" G. Vedel, *De l'arbitrage à la mystique*, op. cit., p. 18.
42. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré note to the General de Gaulle, 23 August 1960.

43. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré letter to the General de Gaulle, 18 April 1960.
44. For a detailed history about the secret negotiations, see B. Tricot, *Les sentiers de la paix, Algérie 1958–62*, Paris, Plon, 1972.
45. De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, op. cit., p. 259.
46. *Ibidem*, p. 261.
47. De Gaulle, *Lettres, notes et carnets*, VIII, *Juin 1958–Décembre 1963*, Paris, Plon, 1983, p. 412.
48. AMD, 2DE29, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 25 November 1960.
49. Debré, *Trois républiques pour une France. Mémoires*, III, op. cit., p. 264.
50. INA, de Gaulle collection, 6 January 1961, 6'14".
51. AMD, 2DE76, Pierre Châtenet letter to Michel Debré, 6 August 1960.
52. Viansson-Ponté, *Histoire de la République gaullienne*, op. cit., p. 218.
53. C. Koubésserian, private communication, 23 November 2004.
54. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 167.
55. INA, de Gaulle Collection, 23 April 1961, 6'20".
56. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 168.
57. C. Ulmann-Mauriat, "Le putsch des généraux" in J-N. Jeanneney (ed), *L'Echo du siècle. Dictionnaire historique de la radio et de la télévision en France*, Paris, Hachette, 1999, p. 64.
58. Buron, *Carnets politiques de la guerre en Algérie*, op. cit., p. 148.
59. Argoud, *La décadence, l'imposture et la tragédie*, op. cit., pp. 272–279.
60. J. Fauvet and J. Planchais, *La Fronde des généraux*, Grenoble-Paris, Arthaud, 1961, p. 182.
61. *Du "putsch" à l'effondrement*, *Le Monde*, 27 April 1961, p. 3.
62. Buron, *Carnets politiques de la guerre en Algérie*, op. cit., p. 156.
63. The representative of the CGT asked Raymond Barre to let Jeanneney know that its organisation was prepared to stop electricity in the whole country, hence making it impossible for paratroopers to land: "Tell the minister that an order from him will be enough to stop electricity in the whole of the French territory." See J-M. Jeanneney, private communication, 1 December 2004.
64. Charlot, *Le phénomène gaulliste*, op. cit., pp. 44–45.
65. Aron, *Un seul homme, un homme seul*, op. cit., p. 3.
66. AMD, 2DE30, Etienne Burin des Rozières note to Michel Debré, 27 April 1961.
67. De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, op. cit., pp. 338–339.
68. AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 11 September 1961.
69. AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 16 September 1961.

70. AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré note to General de Gaulle, 16 September 1961.
71. *Ibidem*.
72. *Ibidem*.
73. AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 30 September 1961.
74. Debré's in his *Mémoires* confirms that he and the General disagreed during a meeting on 9 January 1962 when the Prime Minister suggested some change in the government: "The General at that point interrupts me to tell me that he does not like the expression 'change of government'. It gives the impression that the government is independent from the President of the Republic. He thinks that the government and the President of the Republic are one entity. I answer back that his analysis is only partially correct." Debré, *Trois républiques pour une France*, op. cit., p. 35.
75. AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 14 April 1962.

Gaullist “Telecracy” (1962–65)

1 THE GENERAL AGAINST THE PARTIES: THE HEATED AUTUMN OF 1962

The end of the Algerian War had created a climate of political uncertainty. For the vast majority of the French people the end of this dramatic crisis that had for so long seemed unsolvable conferred a kind of consecration upon the General. He had shown he was able to impose his authority not only on the executive branch of the government, but also over the army, the Europeans in Algiers and the French Right. On the other hand, the vast majority of politicians expected de Gaulle to renounce the *carte blanche* he was handed four years before, when the Fourth Republic collapsed. In other words, they expected the restoration of a political situation far more consistent with republican traditions—in short, the redistribution of power in favour of the Parliament. But the expectation of politicians was out of step with that of public opinion and for his part the General made quite clear that the moment to step aside or to depersonalise the presidential role had not yet arrived.¹

Once he had solved the Algerian problem, de Gaulle was determined to outmanoeuvre political parties and confront them on the same battlefield. Right at the moment in which political parties expected a scenario similar to the one at the end of the Second World War—the departure of the General and the return of Parliament—the Head of State decided to strengthen and formalise the presidentialisation of the system that he had shaped between 1958 and 1962.

Two irreconcilable visions of the Republic divided the General from the political parties. If the Algerian crisis had contributed to undermining the opposition, after April 1962 de Gaulle made three strategic decisions that caused a sudden reawakening of a political debate that had been dormant for the past four years.²

The first of these was the acceptance of Debré's resignation, which became official on 14 April (just a week after the referendum on the Evian agreements). Many were sceptical that Debré's resignation was spontaneous, as he himself privately hinted.³ De Gaulle's explanation was that the new political chapter that was about to begin necessitated a change at Matignon. Parliament was evidently discontent about this, as it was forced to come to terms with the fact that the new Prime Minister—appointed by way of a vote of confidence—was in actual fact the President's man, who could be disposed of as he wished.

The second decision concerned the profile of Georges Pompidou, the new Prime Minister appointed by de Gaulle. Pompidou was neither a leading politician, nor at the time a registered member of any political party, and was largely unknown to the general public. The sole explanation for the appointment of someone so outside the workings of parliamentary politics was his immaculate Gaullist pedigree: he had been member of de Gaulle's cabinet in 1944 and head of the cabinet both during the years of the "desert crossing" (up to 1954) and between June and December 1958,⁴ after he gave up his managerial post at the Rothschild Bank to join de Gaulle at Matignon.

The Prime Minister's role seemed increasingly to be that of a sort of vassal to the President and this image was re-enforced by Pompidou's appointment, which worsened the resentment of the guardians of republican orthodoxy.⁵ Their suspicions were confirmed by Pompidou himself in the words he used in appealing for Parliament's vote of confidence⁶ and later by his declaration, not without some irony, to an American diplomat a few days after his investiture: "You see, I did not want to become Prime Minister, but we are in a dictatorship and each of us has to do what is ordered."⁷

The third political decision that contributed to worsening relations between the General and the political parties was his proposition, in September 1962, to call a referendum to modify the Constitution in order to introduce the direct election of the President by universal suffrage, a change that needed to be approved by way of a referendum. Though this decision had long been planned,⁸ the decisive impetus to introduce this

change was the failed assassination attempt on de Gaulle at Petit-Clamart, organised by an Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS) commando on 22 August 1962, which he miraculously survived.⁹ Already the previous year, during a televised press conference de Gaulle had remarked that reform of the election of the Head of State¹⁰ was the only way to ensure continuity of the political institutions, after his departure. The attempt on his life encouraged de Gaulle to press ahead with reform. During a cabinet meeting on 12 September 1962, he announced his decision to invoke article 11 of the Constitution and call a referendum on his planned constitutional reform.

Constitutional reform would have provided the future President of the Republic with the necessary popular legitimation that de Gaulle, as a consequence of his previous service to the nation 20 years before, had commanded for himself on his return to power. The concerns expressed by certain government ministers about the reform rested less on its content, than the method of this revision. According to article 11, the President of the Republic could submit to a referendum "any Government Bill which deals with the organisation of the public authorities", but what remained ambiguous was whether in this instance it was legitimate to invoke this particular article. It should, in fact, be article 89 that deals with constitutional amendments. According to this article, however, amendments may be the object of a referendum only after a vote by both chambers of Parliament confirming the amendments.

If the reform itself did not meet any particularly strong opposition from within the government,¹¹ both the form and the substance of the reform represented an unacceptable challenge to the authority of the Parliament, and by implication an affront to the Republic. The result would have been an intolerable strengthening of the monarchical character of the regime: the Head of State, elected by the whole nation, the symbolic embodiment of popular sovereignty, was destined to have his power increased not only over the government, but also, and most especially, over the members of Parliament whose credibility after four years of Gaullism was at its lowest ebb. Battle lines were drawn up: on one side was the General with his party and allies—among whom, contrary to what has often been written, was Debré¹²—on the other were all the remaining political forces that united to defend parliamentarism. Between 2 October, the day on which Parliament met again, and the 28th of the same month, the day of the referendum, a political battle ensued between two opposite visions of democracy and the Republic.

2 THE ELECTRONIC COUP D'ÉTAT

The opening of the autumn session of the National Assembly marked the beginning of the first parliamentary crisis since the General returned to power. A coalition of oppositional forces that included, on the left, the communists and the socialists and, in the centre, the MRP, put forward a motion of censure of the method chosen by the Head of State to bring forward the announcement of institutional reform (that is to say, the direct appeal to the people through a referendum that effectively excluded both houses). The debate that took place in the National Assembly on 4 and 5 October 1962 was undoubtedly one of the most intense but also one of the most filled with pathos in the parliamentary history of the Fifth Republic. What was particularly significant was that the announcement to call a referendum to decide whether to elect the Head of State through direct universal suffrage was predominantly opposed by an older generation of politicians. This included many who in 1958 had welcomed the return to power of the General but now, for the first time, began to distance themselves from their leader. Amid cheering from various parts of the Parliament's hemicycle, the social-radical Maurice Faure said to Pompidou and to Gaullists: "It is all too easy to accuse all those who are not supporting your reform of practicing systematic opposition. Out of a total of 53 who have put forward censure measures, 45—I have personally counted them—have voted 'yes' in the first three referenda. How can you talk of systematic opposition given that this is the first time they will cast a 'no' vote?"¹³

Before comparing the powers "of the future President to those of Louis XIV", Paul Reynaud, a famous moderate conservative,¹⁴ confessed that taking his distance from the man "who fought next to me and who is a cornerstone of French history" made him feel uneasy.¹⁵ René Coty, who during the dramatic May 1958 crisis had decided to entrust the Republic to the General, in the autumn of 1962 also distanced himself from de Gaulle's reform, arguing it was a "misunderstanding of the contract" that de Gaulle had made with the French people four years earlier.¹⁶ Criticism was not just aimed at the institutional system that would be created as a result of the direct election of the Head of State, but also at the General himself and, in particular, his use of television.

On 4 October, Paul Reynaud opened the parliamentary debate. After explaining the juridical issues that led him to oppose the reform, he went straight to the heart of the matter and accused de Gaulle of having used

television to shift the centre of the *polis* away from Parliament. The main risk connected with the direct election of the President of the Republic was the much feared connection between the charismatic power and the small screen:

For us, Republicans, France is here and not elsewhere [...]. And this is the sore point: to admit that France is elsewhere means to admit that the Republic is no more and this is the core of the disagreement between us and General de Gaulle. This is what has allowed him to slowly impose a personal kind of power [...] And then there is television, a television that is extremely powerful and thanks to which the General enters into half the homes of the French people, talks to entire families and gets onto intimate terms with them [...] In conclusion this is the crossing of the Rubicon.¹⁷

Maurice Faure remarked on the increasing passivity of public opinion “under the effect of propaganda”; he expressed the need for fair access to television, which he felt was monopolised by Gaullism—in particular he pointed out that in a democratic regime, public debate should take place in the parliamentary hemicycle.¹⁸ The centre-right MP André Diligent, and several other members of the administration, criticised the excessive use of the media by the General, whose televised appearances got more and more frequent during the autumn of 1962: “We have sometimes the impression that some ministers are more at ease in the television studios and prefer to address silent viewers, rather than MPs who will not remain silent.”¹⁹

The broadcasting of the parliamentary debates during the news drew further criticism: the representatives of the opposition were given three minutes of airtime altogether, during which were broadcast fragments of Reynaud’s and Mollet’s speeches, while Pompidou’s reply was screened in its entirety and lasted 21 minutes and 45 seconds.²⁰ The unbalance was clear and emphasised, moreover, by the montage—the way clips were chosen, the reportage used and, more objectively, the amount of airtime allotted to individuals.

Press coverage became very heated. Servan-Schreiber, the Editor-in-Chief of *L'Express*, vocally attacked the media overexposure of the President of the Republic and accused him of being responsible for the first “electronic *coup d'état*”.²¹ In his editorial he proposed a definition of Gaullism freely inspired by the famous formula used by Lenin to sum up the founding elements of communism:

He has but one weapon to reach his victory, but this is a new weapon whose power is absolute: television. Through television, de Gaulle and his policies suddenly made their way into homes and consciences, they shred into pieces past beliefs, kill discussions in cafes, conversations in the street or in the city councils, erase press editorials: he wipes out all the conventional political weapons [...]. All Gaullism consists of is personal power plus television monopoly.²²

The transformation of the political scene caused by the Gaullist monopoly of television was total and made traditional political strategies completely ineffectual. During the censure debate, the catholic weekly *Témoignage chrétien* for the first time distanced itself from the General. According to its Editor-in-Chief, Georges Montaron, the most dangerous issue of the pitched battle that was taking place in Parliament and in the nation was not so much the decision to call a referendum on the institutional reforms proposed by the Head of State, but rather his monopoly of such an omnipotent means of communication as television: "What worries us is not so much the appeal to the citizens through the referendum [...] Given that General de Gaulle uses television, which should provide a public service, without restrictions [...] how could we back up someone who declares he bases his power on the people and then annihilates them with flattery?"²³

On 5 October for the first time since the beginning of the Fifth Republic, the government was ousted: the motion of no confidence passed with 280 votes out of a total of 480 votes; these included the whole of the communist and socialist groups, the broad majority of the democratic centre, the MRP, the independents, all the non-registered MPs and even four members of the UNR. The country was divided for the first time since de Gaulle's return to power. In the midst of the political vacuum caused by the dissolution of Parliament (on 10 October), the final decision was passed to the French people who on 28 October were asked to express their opinion on the institutional reform proposed by the Head of State. The rift was very clear: on the one side the General and the UNR Gaullists, on the other all the political parties, all the main political leaders, all the trade unions and the majority of the daily papers. What was at stake was not just the future of the Gaullist regime, but the very destiny of the national political system. Up to that point, the Third, Fourth and Fifth Republics followed one another as a continuous cycle; had the "yes" vote won, it would have marked the end of this continuity and of the parliamentary system.

Inevitably, television became the focus of criticism during the following two weeks of the electoral campaign. Ten days before the referendum, an unprecedented event occurred. For the first time since the beginning of the Fifth Republic, television journalists denounced the condition of political servitude into which they had been forced. The occasion was the intervention of the Editor-in-Chief of the news on a report by journalist Gilbert Lauzun on the financial policy of the Pompidou government, in order to ensure a pro-government take on the matter. Lauzun was not even informed of the changes. Several of his colleagues supported his remonstrations and, with the help of the trade union (the *Syndicat des journalistes de radio et de télévision* (SJRT), the trade union of radio and television journalists), they seriously embarrassed the RTF management.²⁴ Eleven days before the referendum, on 17 October 1962, in place of the 8 p.m. news, for 15 minutes viewers were showed images of a pond full of water lilies accompanied by a bizarre soundtrack. At 8.15 p.m. the announcer Catherine Langeais, without providing any explanation, reported that the news had been cancelled.²⁵ The following day, after a broad agreement was struck between the higher management and employees, regular broadcasting resumed. Two weeks later the “rebels” were subjected to mild sanctions—warnings or short suspensions—for failing to guarantee the continuity of the news, and for its part the news management vowed to provide a more balanced report of facts.²⁶

The controversy over the political enslavement of “an extraordinary means of communication [...] that every night simultaneously reached more than three million French households”²⁷ continued and became more and more heated, mainly due to the *nouvelle gauche* weeklies and the daily press, which for the first time denounced the government abuse of television media. As a matter of fact, in the weeks preceding the referendum, the General further intensified the frequency of his speeches (four altogether in a month: on 20 September and on 4, 18 and 26 October), during which he never failed to mention the direct ties that bound him and the French people.²⁸ The remaining six parties’ televised campaign had to make do with meagre leftovers.²⁹

The opposition press began to express a sort of deep pessimism about the employment of the small screen watched every day by millions of viewers that were transformed into a passive audience of this televised political theatre. What was criticised, however, was not so much the quality of television broadcasting, but rather its intolerable intrusiveness. Le Valliant writing in *France-Observateur* paraphrased Tchakotine’s characterisation of propaganda as an abuse of the masses in his book *Le viol defoules par la propagande politique*³⁰:

There it is! It is seducing [...] television is a sophisticated means and offers too many devilish possibilities [...] I am certainly not criticising the artistic qualities of that lot; as far as performance arts are concerned Charles de Gaulle is a master. He has “presence”, the right gestures, intonation, facial expression and the experience of an excellent actor. He knows his role well, his is a historical role, he likes it and plays it splendidly [...] The rest of the acting company are nothing but extras, whose role is ancillary [...] What I am criticising is the fact that this performance has no equal! And it is imposed, and subsidised by the State. This acting company is the only one that has the privilege of private property on the public scene [...]. And what is even more serious is that this devilish means is entirely in the hands of an organisation that, in the next few days, during the referendum and electoral battles will be transformed into a “gang” that is merely interested in realising its objectives. Viewers, beware! You are a mere cog in the wheel!³¹

It was in this climate of extreme political polarisation that French people cast their vote on 28 October 1962. The reform proposed by the Head of State was approved with 62.25% of the vote. The “no” votes totalled was 37.75%. The result is, however, more ambiguous than these percentages suggest. Though the victory of the Gaullists was a significant one, if one considers that 23% of the population had abstained and that the “yes” vote represented 46.66% of those eligible to vote, the electoral result can hardly be seen as a triumph for the President. For the first time, since 1958, the referendum did not provide de Gaulle with the consensus of the absolute majority of the voters. Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiben in *L'Express* called this result *An Aborted Crowning*.³²

The lead-up to the November election revealed clearly just how polarised the political system had become: on one side the Gaullists, on the other side the forces aligned to the “no” vote. While legislative consultations were going on, the General was forced to enter the electoral arena in a way he had never done before. And for de Gaulle to enter the political arena meant to address the French people through the small screen. During his televised speech on 7 November, ten days before election day, he appealed to the whole nation to reaffirm the vote of trust cast in the referendum; his was hardly the speech of a neutral arbiter:

French people, on October 28th you have signed the death sentence of a disastrous party system and have expressed your desire to see the New Republic carrying on its mission of progress towards a restored *grandeur*. On November 18th and 25th you will have to elect the members of parliament. Ah, be it that this second consultation does not contradict the first one! [...] I am asking you this while considering things well beyond my own person and role.³³

On the eve of the vote, it wasn't only the General that appeared on French television screens. For the first time, the small screen played a role, in an electoral campaign, albeit a relatively modest one. On the eve of the first round, 60 minutes broadcasting time in total was allotted to the main political parties participating in the election, while the government was given 20 minutes. In actual fact, though, the space given to the parties was not at all comparable with that given to the administration, as this was strongly limited both by the length of time allowed to each party (ten minutes) and by the fact that their speeches had to be packed into a single session that, following the same rules that had been agreed for the referendum campaign, was opened and closed by members of the government. Before the first round parties were allowed to appear on television on four evenings. Each evening was devoted to two party representatives. The only exception was the inaugural evening that was entirely taken up by the Gaullist UNR. Moreover, de Gaulle's speeches opened this series of evenings and Christian Fouchet concluded it. Between the first and the second round, it was agreed that only Georges Pompidou would be allowed to address voters.³⁴

The success of the Gaullists, who were favoured by the majority run-off two-round system, was complete: the Union pour la nouvelle République—Union démocratique du travail (UNR—UDT) won 29 constituencies (31.90% at the first ballot), 64 more than in 1958 and just 13 below an absolute majority. A majority government was formed thanks to some MRP and independent members of Parliament. The losers of the election were the moderates and the parties on the right of the political spectrum. The MRP lost 20 MPs and the independents 1/4 of their constituencies; the extreme Right disappeared. The victory of Gaullism marked a consolidation of the regime as both the President and the government could count on both a parliamentary majority and a party majority. De Gaulle emerged as the winner of this tug of war, but his victory came at a price: it meant that he had to abandon his role as presidential arbiter and bow to the logic of majority rule. The 12 television speeches given by the President of the Republic in 1962 contributed to transforming television into a major political tool that, according to the opposition, was responsible for his continuous electoral successes (i.e. his success during the referendum and the Gaullist triumph in the November elections). The Head of State had once and for all given up his role of arbiter to become head of the executive branch of the government. The presidential monopoly of the small screen—a weapon that seemed to possess huge power in conditioning voters—represented an intolerable distortion of the rules that should

determine a political contest in a democracy. As Morgan Lebesque of *L'Express* remarked the day after the first round of the November election: “Last Sunday the UNR voters have not cast a vote for a political program and a candidate that campaigns at their doors, but for a General-President that addresses them through television.”³⁵

3 THE OMNIPOTENT GAULLIST “TELECRACY”

In January 1963, when parliamentary meetings commenced, the small screen was the focus of the political debate. On 10 January during the National Assembly, Maurice Faure noted the new role played by television in determining electoral results and the necessity that its use was strictly regulated in order to avoid intolerable distortions of the democratic political process:

The introduction of television’s power to inform has changed traditional and familiar political analysis we have known until now: to the legislative, executive and judicial power we must add a fourth power that is becoming increasingly pervasive [...]. There is no doubt that it is growing fast. In less than ten years, television has suddenly and abruptly become part of our political habits, offering the most shocking example of the way technical progress is conditioning the functioning of our institutions [...]. Far be it from me, to recriminate and invoke a return to the good old times. If we want to find a way to protect democratic principles, it is necessary to realise that we are faced with a new and irreversible situation.³⁶

The disappointing results achieved by the opposition parties during the 28 October referendum and the November elections contributed to the belief that television was a very powerful, some thought, invincible, weapon in determining public opinion. Famous scholars presented these opinions with an aura of scientific objectivity. Exemplary in this respect is the work of Georges Vedel, who in *L'Express* remarked on the General’s “television binge” in the autumn of 1962:

It is an unassailable truth that the Head of State and the Government had the lion’s share of radio–television broadcasting. It is an unassailable truth that these means of communication have greatly conditioned the electorate, as can be seen from statistics that compare the “yes” vote with the regional distribution of radios and televisions in France.³⁷

Telecracy—a term that gained popularity from 1963³⁸—became a science. It served to provide an explanation for the sudden failure of what had previously been the usual state of affairs in French political life during times of crisis. Once the crisis had been solved, the man sent by providence to save the country (Clemenceau after the First World War, de Gaulle after the Second World War, Mendés France after the Indochina war) would be cast aside by the political parties' eagerness to restore the absolute parliamentarism that characterised national political life in normal circumstances.

The reason why the General had triumphed over all political forces, the greatest republican authorities, all the main newspapers and the trade unions, was because he could use television as he wished. The small screen was invested with the power of conditioning opinion and this had caused the overturning of power relations that had remained in place for more than a century of republican history. These considerations opened up important perspectives in methodological research on the relationship between information and public opinion, as well as its implications for the future of democratic societies.

It was precisely with the aim of empirically confirming the relationship between the possession of a television set and the unstoppable Gaullist consensus that the historian René Rémond and the sociologist Claude Neuschwander embarked on a study that was published in the *Revue française de science politique* in June 1963.³⁹ This considered all French departments and measured the relation between the distribution of television sets and the number of "yes" votes in the autumn 1962 referendum, at a time when, as already noted, Gaullist recourse to television became increasingly frequent, leaving little space for the opposition.

The results of this study were surprising to say the least: the correlation index between these two variables was absolutely non-existent and, at times, negative though insignificantly (-0.016). The Bouches-du-Rhône department was at the top of the list both for the number of television sets (24.4% compared to a national average of 11.7%) and for the percentage of "no" votes (32.7% of "yes" votes of the total registered electorate compared to a national average of 46.66%). Vandea, where television sets were not so common—2.6% compared to a national average of 11.7%—registered a record number of "yes" votes (59.64% of the total registered electorate). In Paris, the suburbs were characterised by the highest concentration of television sets, and yet here the percentage of "no" votes was higher than in the central boroughs. The authors very wisely ruled out the hypothesis

of a negative correlation between the two variables and concluded that there was no connection between them. Their final conclusions disavowed all theories on telecracy:

Shocked by the surprise of an unexpected defeat, it is not rare that those who are defeated are tempted to find an explanation for their unfavourable circumstances in external factors: they blame treason or divine punishment, political parties that lose blame power; rather than retracing their footsteps and considering their mistakes, they prefer to accuse their opponent or some *deus ex machina*. Could television be said to have taken up this unfortunate role and fulfilled a psychological need?⁴⁰

And yet, television's mysterious aura of omnipotence remained difficult to dispel. The suffocating control exercised by the executive was incontestable, even when taking into account the long tradition of government monopoly over the means of communication.⁴¹ From July 1963, after a trial period that lasted six months—the government formed the Interministerial Information Liaison Service (SLII), an agency that convened daily. It was under the direction of the Minister of Information and included representatives of the main ministries (internal affairs, finance, foreign affairs, public education, agriculture, defence, labour and justice) and the directors of radio and television information. Officially the aim of this agency was threefold: to inform all those responsible for radio and television information about ministry activity; to facilitate efficient coordination of government information; to establish a constant and direct connection between the government and the main information bodies. According to the Minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte, the SLII was the agency responsible for "government public relations" whose task was to aid the "coordination of government information".⁴²

Edouard Sablier, Director of Television Information between 1963 and 1969 and an important spokesperson for the SLII, described it as an agency that essentially had the aim to pass on to state radio and television exclusive information and scoops.⁴³ Similarly, Jacques Leprette, the first Director of SLII, remarked that this agency was born from the need to "provide those responsible [...] with information concerning government activity that was incontrovertible, proven and indisputable".⁴⁴ Despite all these authoritative opinions, the SLII soon became the symbol of government interference in the information sector; a sort of omnipresent censor ready to intervene at any moment and disrupt the regular management of radio and television

information.⁴⁵ Its creation contributed to reviving criticism of the government's control of the small screen. "We are right now the only example among European democracies to have radio and television in the hands of the institutional power",⁴⁶ lamented Maurice Faure in Parliament.

The exceptionally strict political control of the French government over television did not go unnoticed by foreign observers. The US periodical *The American Political Science Review* noted that paradoxically France had remained "one of the few countries in which the principles contained in article 11 of the Declaration of the rights of men and citizens dating back to 1789 are empty rhetoric".⁴⁷ Around the same period, the British *Sunday Telegraph* similarly stated that "France was the first western nation to have a designated body for State information whose propagandistic potential is stronger than that of past dictatorships and very similar to those in present communist regimes".⁴⁸

The French system of information was often compared with those in authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, which made it urgent to approve a new statute for radio and television.⁴⁹ Pressure on the General to do this also came from within his own entourage, who reassured him that he had nothing to fear because, as far as television was concerned, he remained the uncontested master (in particular, the political scientist Vedel told de Gaulle that nobody could equal him⁵⁰). In anticipation of the 1965 presidential election, de Gaulle finally decided to tentatively begin the process of liberalising information.

As from 1964 a new channel was founded and the choice of broadcasting increased; more importantly the long-awaited statute of radio and television was approved by Parliament on 27 June of the same year.⁵¹ The expectations of the centre and Left opposition parties were, however, to prove to be frustrated, for none of their requests were actually approved. The statute did not provide for a temporary mandate for the Director General (who was revocable at short notice); the majority of the members of the new Board of Trustees were appointed directly by the cabinet and none of them had a say in the choice of the Director General; the "parliamentary representation" in the Surveillance Committee only had powers of consultation and was convened by the Minister of Information once every three months. The new statute did, nevertheless, set out new rules. Most important of these was that the objectives of the public information service, whose main aim was to "satisfy viewers' need for information, culture, education and amusement" was defined by law. Another change involved the name: RTF changed into ORTF (Office de

radiodiffusion-télévision française). Radio and television became a single office indicating the end of its past dependence on the government and a newly found autonomy. Several of these new statutory regulations were, however, soon contradicted by political practices, or formally changed by new provisions. An example was the regulation concerning the retrospective financial control of expenses. Had this been implemented, it would have had important consequences, favouring the autonomy of the ORTF. As it was, on 31 July 1964, the Minister of Finance, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, reinstated a priori financial control through an ordinance.

Another crucial aspect concerned the reorganisation of managerial powers. The minister—who until the approval of the statute had occupied the highest place in the information sector—had his authority replaced with a general power of “tutelage”. His role was taken over by two supreme bodies: the Board of Trustees and the Director General; the Minister of Information was no longer allowed to call upon the Director General with a circular letter to ask him to execute an order, for example. Realistically, however, in cases of disagreement, the Director General was unlikely to contradict the minister that appointed him in his role. The suggestion of centrist MP André Diligent, supported by the opposition, that the Board of Trustees could appoint a General Director not under the control of the government was rejected. The Minister Peyrefitte retorted that it was impossible to suddenly “become far more liberal than the most liberal countries”.⁵²

4 TOWARDS THE 1965 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

As the announcement of the date of the 1965 election approached, during a press conference at the Élysée on 31 January 1964, the General advanced a further presidential interpretation of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic. Concerning this issue, the respected Professor of Law André Hauriou, in his book *Droit constitutionnel et institutions politiques* (Constitutional Law and Political Institutions) wrote:

There are three versions, or three different constitutions, that have originated from one another during these eleven years in a way that is reminiscent of those Russian dolls that are made to fit one inside the other and in whose centre one finds a core of hard wood: the 1958 compromise; the

1962 constitution and the constitution that originated from the President of the Republic press conference on January 31st 1964.⁵³

The announcement of this press conference—the ninth since de Gaulle’s election at the Élysée—was not greeted with particular excitement. Following his exceptional deployment of television throughout 1962, the General progressively reduced his televised appearances. During 1963 de Gaulle made only four speeches on television; in 1964, prior to 31 January de Gaulle had not yet even appeared on television. With the end of the Algerian emergency it seemed that the Head of State intended to make less use of his notoriously solemn television appeals to the nation. After all, he could now count on generous coverage on the RTF news of his many journeys abroad and to the French provinces. On 31 January, however, the General showed that he had no intention to abandon a tried and tested mechanism of communication which he knew he excelled in and that he could use to enhance his presidential status. According to Lacouture this was the moment in which de Gaulle—“the republican monarch that turn[ed] into reality the members of Parliament dreams in 1875 to see Mac-Mahon and Chambord wrapped in the Tricolor flag embracing each other”—decided “to illustrate the letter of the Law”⁵⁴:

The spirit of the new Constitution that leaves to Parliament legislative power is such that power ceases to be a question of political factions but derives directly from the people. Hence, it is only natural that the Head of State, elected by the nation, should be the source and guardian of this power [...]. In France it is normal that the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister are not the same person. What is not acceptable, however, is a division of power at its apex. This in actual fact does not exist. According to the Constitution the President is the man the nation has chosen to guide its destiny: it is the President who chooses the Prime Minister, who appoints him in the same way he does the other members of the government; it is the President that can replace him either because he thinks that the task he had given him has concluded, or because he does not approve of his conduct any longer [...]; it is the President who in cases of danger is entirely responsible for the nation; it is the President therefore who is the only one who has and represents the authority of the State. However, precisely because of the nature, length and capacity of his office, the President cannot take a deep interest in the political, parliamentary, economic and administrative situation. This is consequently the crucial and difficult sphere of competence of the French Prime Minister.⁵⁵

On this occasion de Gaulle made a clear conceptual distinction between the "political environment", which was the exclusive domain of the President of the Republic, and "politics", which was under the control of the Prime Minister. The way the State functioned was consistent with this description. Though in some areas one could recognise the personal imprint of the Prime Minister, in general he had more limited room for action in comparison to the Head of State, who claimed the right (though unratified by the Constitution) to demand his resignation whenever he liked. In a similar way, the ministers, no matter their personal worth, were considered mere interpreters of the presidential will.⁵⁶ By reiterating that the ultimate source of legitimacy was the Head of State because of his direct relation to the people, de Gaulle attempted to portray himself as a *super partes* leader for whom the forthcoming presidential elections were an occasion to renew his bond with the people. This expectation contributed to reawakening political conflict and dredging up political cleavages that had remained latent for some considerable time. Criticism became harsher and harsher, and the press was, for the most part, opposed to the President. "It is rare to hear the theory of absolute power expressed with more complacency," noted Sirius the day after the President's televised press conference.⁵⁷

The Fifth Republic faced the electorate with new rules for the political contest that transformed the presidential election into a key moment in the political life of the nation. Only time could tell whether the opponents of the General were prepared to take part in a contest whose very principles they had opposed, when during the October 1962 referendum they gave a "no" vote. Options for the opposition were few and not very prospective; essentially there were two possibilities: refuse to accept the new rules and not take part in the election or take part in the election by disavowing what they had strongly defended only three years earlier during the referendum.

The first choice had a double negative effect: it would have meant a rejection of the people's decision ratified by the referendum, and inevitably would lead to the marginalisation of any party excluded from the election. This option was in fact taken by Mendès France, who, according to Berstein, as a result lost almost all his political credibility.⁵⁸ The radical leader had strongly criticised the 1958 Constitution that, according to him, was tailored for one particular man and could not have continued in his absence. Using similar arguments, he had also criticised the increasing presidentialisation of the regime, and, from 1962, the direct election by

universal suffrage of the President of the Republic.⁵⁹ Mendès France represented a traditional form of republican anti-Gaullism that opposed institutions but not the persona of the President who was a close friend of his and for whom he felt affection.⁶⁰ The second choice was equally risky because participation in the presidential election would have contributed to confirming the legitimacy of a procedure that all the oppositional political parties firmly opposed and in which in all probability the role of the opposition would be that of *sparring partners* for the General.

The boycott of the election was not plausible. The opposition parties had no choice but to respect the verdict of the October 1962 referendum.⁶¹ For several opponents the imminent deadline of the presidential mandate meant that they could finally take advantage of the weakness of a regime that was founded almost entirely on an old man. Among Gaullists themselves, there were more and more insistent voices that described the General as tired and expressed doubts about the credibility of his candidacy. The December 1965 presidential election represented a decisive moment for the future of Gaullism, and, more broadly, for the destiny of the Fifth Republic.

NOTES

1. During the first cabinet meeting following the referendum, de Gaulle told members of the government: "I did not come back to power solely to solve the Algerian problem [...]. Now other problems have arisen that the Head of State has to solve. He has responsibilities towards himself and Parliament. Today I will not reveal to you the answer I am going to give to myself". J. Daniel, *De Gaulle et l'Algérie*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 281.
2. R. Brizzi and M. Marchi, *Charles de Gaulle*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008, pp. 163–165.
3. A letter sent some weeks after Debré's resignations to François Goguel and kept in the latter's archive provides proof that personal and political disagreements with the President of the Republic were the reasons for the Prime Minister's resignations: "My departure was inevitable, and in any case it is normal in politics. The problem was both personal and about the Constitution [...]". AFG, FG28, Michel Debré letter to François Goguel, 4 May 1962.
4. Berstein, *Histoire du gaullisme*, op. cit., p. 259.
5. In *L'Express* Pierre Mendès France gave voice to a rather widespread feeling in Parliament: "No we definitely haven't got the right to know the reason why the grand vizir has been replaced and what the consequences

- will be.” P. Mendès France, *Le changement de grand vizir*, *L'Express*, 19 April 1962, pp. 10–11.
6. Pompidou addressed the National Assembly as follows: “Appointed by the Head of State, who represents its source of power, the government is and remains responsible before Parliament.”. *L'Année politique 1962*, Paris, Puf, 1963, pp. 655–659.
 7. Roussel, *Charles de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 713.
 8. Michel Debré’s archive contains the correspondence between the General and Michel Debré. This shows that as early as the spring of 1960 the two started to have discussions on the presidentialisation of the system that revolved around the direct election of the Head of State with universal suffrage. AMD, 2DE29-30.
 9. J-N. Jeanneney, *Un attentat. Petit-Clamart, 22 août 1962*, Paris, Seuil, 2016.
 10. “I am aware of the fact that it is common opinion that the election of the President of the Republic by an electoral college—as foreseen by the actual Constitution—could not be sufficient for my successor [...]. I agree that this arrangement for the Head of State could be somewhat inadequate. To solve this problem and at the same time to reinforce what can be defined as ‘the personal equation’ of the future President it could be necessary that the President is elected through a universal suffrage system.” De Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, III, op. cit., pp. 301–302.
 11. The only significant repercussion in the executive was the resignation of the Minister of Education, Pierre Sudreau, who, in a letter dated 24 September 1962, explained the reasons for his decision: “This reform, which has no consequences while you remain, will paradoxically become dangerous when you go and I refuse to give *carte blanche* to whoever will succeed you.” Viansson-Ponté, *Histoire de la république gaullienne*, op. cit., p. 325.
 12. In this battle, Debré stood firm with the General. His letter to de Gaulle dated 7 September 1962—the week before the President officially announced his intention to call the referendum before cabinet—provides clear proof of the fact that Debré, far from remaining a silent figure, continued to be the most faithful keeper of Gaullism even after he left Matignon: “I think time has come for an important change, similar in a way to what happened at the end of 1958, when, after the referendum and the elections the new regime started. [...]. It is essential now that we make sure our opponents are defeated: political parties, trade unions, so-called élites [...]. The question of unity and stability of power is not resolved yet. We solved this problem in 1958 when de Gaulle became Head of State. Through his legitimisation and authority he has provided a solution to all the major problems. [...]. What about tomorrow? [...] We must remain in line with the 1958 Constitution, but we have to push for some changes

- [...]. The establishment of a figure whose authority is totally independent from political parties and Parliament is the only way to curb the latter's omnipotent power [...]. It is for this reason that it is necessary, that the universal suffrage system is adopted for the appointment of the President of the Republic, in place of the electoral college system created in 1958 [...]. France needs a monarch; monarchy in the present context is not viable, therefore we have to give France a 'Republican monarch'." AMD, 2DE30, Michel Debré letter to General de Gaulle, 7 September 1962.
13. M. Faure, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats Parlementaires, Séance du jeudi 4 octobre 1962*, p. 3.218.
 14. In 1940 when he was Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud aided the political career of the then almost unknown Colonel de Gaulle who was first appointed Under Secretary of State for National Defence and War in the Reynaud administration and then promoted to General. For a reconstruction of this, see J-P. Guichard, *Paul Reynaud, un homme d'état dans la tourmente, septembre 1939-juin 1940*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 2008. For a biography of Paul Reynaud, see T. Tellier, *Paul Reynaud, Un indépendant en politique*, Paris, Fayard, 2005.
 15. P. Reynaud, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Débats Parlementaires, Séance du jeudi 4 octobre 1962*, p. 3.210.
 16. Tournoux, *La Tragédie du général*, op. cit., pp. 433–436.
 17. P. Reynaud, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du jeudi 4 octobre 1962*, pp. 3.209–10.
 18. "The referendum necessitates that means of propaganda are balanced. The referendum requires that the referendum question is previously discussed by Parliament, and that the public debate is instrumental to dispel any public doubts about its meaning." M. Faure, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du jeudi 4 octobre 1962*, p. 3.219.
 19. A. Diligent, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mercredi 21 novembre 1962*, p. 2.930.
 20. INA, *Télésoir*, 4- October 1962, 29'48".
 21. J-J. Servan-Schreiber, *Technique du coup d'Etat*, *L'Express*, 27 September 1962, p. 50.
 22. *Ibidem*.
 23. G. Montaron, *Quitte ou double, Témoignage chrétien*, 5 October 1962, p. 3.
 24. Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., pp. 94–95.
 25. INA, *Télésoir*, 17 October 1962, 0'21".
 26. This rebalance led television news to reduce the amount of time dedicated to the electoral campaign and the candidates. During the 8 April 1962 referendum, the 8 p.m. news dedicated 35.8% of its total time to the electoral campaign (22% of time was taken up by the Algerian situation, which was connected to the referendum). In the autumn of 1962 the referendum

- campaign occupied 20.8% of the news. See M. Charlot, “La télévision”, in F. Goguel (ed), *Le référendum d’octobre et les élections de novembre 1962*, Paris, Colin, 1965, pp. 159–165.
27. C. Estier, *Les remous à la télévision*, *France-Observateur*, 25 October 1962, p. 8.
 28. Exemplary in this regard is the 18 October television speech, when de Gaulle remarked what he had already stated, that if the referendum had failed he was going to disappear from the political scene. He also pointed out that he would also have retired in the case of “a weak majority of ‘yes’ votes [...]. What could I do without a heart-felt trust from the nation?”. INA, de Gaulle collection, 18 October 1962, 6’ 28”.
 29. The six parties were allowed to campaign and went on air on the evenings of 22 and 23 October. In each of these two nights three representatives of political parties could address the electoral public for ten minutes each. The 60 minutes of electoral campaign allocated to political parties was further limited by the absence of any technical support during the programme (the studio was empty save for a table; the recording was done with a fixed camera). This political mini-marathon was followed first by Georges Pompidou’s long speech (who used the more attractive formula of the “fireside chat”) recorded in the elegant Palace Matignon and then by the inevitable presidential speech on 26 October that closed the electoral campaign. See M. Charlot, “La télévision”, op. cit., pp. 143–68.
 30. S. Tchakhotine, *Le Viol des foules par la propagande politique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1939.
 31. Y. Le Vaillant, *Oui...c’est. un viol!*, *France-Observateur*, 19 October 1962, p. 17.
 32. J-J. Servan-Schreiber, *Le Sacre manqué*, *L’Express*, 1 November 1962, p. 48.
 33. INA, de Gaulle collection, 7 November 1962, 11’02”.
 34. Charlot, “La télévision”, op. cit., pp. 160–161.
 35. M. Lebesque, *La France devant son miroir*, *L’Express*, 22 November 1962, p. 52.
 36. M. Faure, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du jeudi 10 janvier 1963*, p. 542.
 37. G. Vedel, *La leçon de 1962*, *L’Express*, 27 December 1962, p. 12.
 38. This term became popular from 1963 on and was used both in the daily press and in specialised periodicals. See R. Rémond and C. Neuschwander, “Télévision et comportement politique”, in *Revue française de science politique*, 13, 2, 1963, p. 327; “La France vit-elle en ‘télécratie?’”, in *Preuves*, 11, 1963; D. Cordelier, “La télécratie ou l’art de téléviser pour régner”, in *Le Monde et la Vie*, 2, 1965. This expression also appeared some years later in the title of a study on the control of television in France in the first years of the Fifth Republic: C. Durieux, *La Télécratie*, Paris, Tema, 1976.

39. Rémond, Neuschwander, *Télévision et comportement politique*, op. cit., pp. 325–347.
40. *Ibidem*, p. 327.
41. During the first four years of the de Gaulle's presidency he appeared on television 1506 times as compared to 4 appearances by Maurice Thorez and 8 by Jacques Duclos. Montaldo, *Dossier O.R.T.F. 1944–1974*, op. cit., p. 141.
42. Vassallo, *La télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 100.
43. E. Sablier, personal communication, 10 November 2004. For more details, see Sablier, *La télé du Général*, Paris, op. cit., pp. 111–116.
44. J. Leprette, *Le Service de liaison interministérielle pour l'information (SLII) de 1964 à 1966*, in Aa.Vv., *De Gaulle et les médias*, op. cit., p. 130.
45. "There, the journalists receive recommendations, directives, 'advice'. There, the news and other information programmes are reviewed". J-P. Manel and A. Planel, *La crise de l'Ortf*, Paris, Pauvert, 1968, p. 33.
46. M. Faure, in *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du jeudi 10 janvier 1963*, p. 542.
47. M. Harrison, "Government and Press in France during the Algerian War", in *The American Political Science Review*, 58, 2, 1964, p. 273.
48. Quoted in A. Morice, "Où en est l'information en France?", in *Revue politique des idées et des institutions*, 1, 1964, p. 19.
49. The political expert Maurice Duverger in the spring of 1963 noted that France—ever since the Fourth Republic—had faced an abnormal situation in comparison to other European countries: "It is one of the few countries in which the Statute of radio and television does not equate to the economic and political structures of the State. From a sociological point of view, radiotelevision should be free and public like in Great Britain, Belgium, Holland, the German Federal Republic, Italy etc. Instead, television remains a State monopoly directly managed by the government, like in the USSR [...]. It is telling that Parliament had never wanted to vote a new RTF statute during the Fourth Republic. And yet, the need for a statute is more and more urgent." M. Duverger, "Sociologie du statut de la Télévision", in *Les cahiers de la Télévision*, 3, 1963, p. 5.
50. Vedel, *La leçon de 1962*, op. cit., p. 12.
51. For a detailed account on the statute and its development, see Bourdon, *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., pp. 35–47 and Vassallo, *La télévision sous de Gaulle*, op. cit., pp. 78–83.
52. Bourdon, *Haute fidélité. Pouvoir et télévision 1935–1994*, op. cit., p. 79.
53. Quoted in Viansson-Ponté, *Histoire de la république gaullienne*, op. cit., p. 372.
54. J. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 170.
55. INA, de Gaulle collection, 31 January 1964, 1h31'15".
56. Roussel, *Charles de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 371.

57. Sirius, *Le Pouvoir absolu*, *Le Monde*, 2 February 1964, p. 1.
58. Berstein, *Histoire du gaullisme*, op. cit., p. 271.
59. Mendès’s position was distinct both from Gaullism and from communism; he believed in a liberal and parliamentary Republic. In his view democracy and the Republic were incompatible with personalisation of power: “To choose one man for his talents, merits, prestige and political capacities, implies that the people have given up their right to command, to determine their own destiny. It is the equivalent of people’s abdication, or regression.” R. de Lacharrière, “Mendès France et le général de Gaulle: l’impossible rapprochement”, in *Pouvoirs*, 27, 1983, p. 27.
60. J. Lacouture, *Pierre Mendès France*, Paris, Seuil, 1981 and Aa.Vv., *Pierre Mendès France et l’esprit républicain*, Paris, Le Cherche-Midi, 1996.
61. For an insightful account of the “domestication” of the French left to the system of the Fifth Republic see O. Duhamel, *La gauche et la Ve République*, Paris, Puf, 1993.

The 1965 “Tele-presidential” Elections

1 THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CANDIDATE: “MONSIEUR X”

The central issue of the 1965 presidential election is not the name of the future Head of State because, if de Gaulle decides to run—as it seems—he will most probably be re-elected [...] The real question is whether this election marks the first implementation of a system that will continue to be used in the future, or whether it is an isolated and exceptional case with no future.¹

The 1965 presidential election was heralded as a decisive moment in French politics: the Gaullists were about to find out just how deeply rooted the Fifth Republic was in their national culture; the opposition parties were forced to show their hand and decide whether they were prepared to accept the very rules they had previously so strongly criticised, but which had met the favour of the public opinion.² These circumstances, along with the fact that for the first time the Head of State was going to be elected through a direct universal suffrage system, anticipated significant changes, not least in political communication.

The most important and uncertain of these concerned the role television was going to play.

On 14 March 1964 the decree, proposed by the then Minister of Information, Peyrefitte, which defined the rules of the electoral campaign was approved. In particular article 12 allotted two hours of television time and two hours of radio time for each candidate. It was also stipulated that “during the electoral campaign, all candidates must receive equal treatment during news broadcasts on French radio and television [...]”. Before

the first round, each candidate is allotted two hours of television and two hours of radio time.”³

Television had already played a role in French electoral campaigns in 1956; however, in those times, its limited reach—only 3% of French families had a television set—meant that this role was very limited. Party representatives were allowed some airtime, but this was restricted; moreover, the numbers of viewers was relatively small.⁴ In 1965 this had increased dramatically and about half of French families had a television set.⁵ Moreover, the end of the government monopoly of this means of communication, combined with the introduction of the new system for the election of the Head of Government, opened up new perspectives and possibilities for television.

The opposition parties—the PCF and the SFIO in particular—had been the real losers of the previous elections in 1962; they had also failed to persuade French people that the proposal of the 28 October referendum was against the Constitution, and that the direct election of the Head of State paired with candidates’ use of television during the electoral campaign represented an anti-democratic procedure. The result of the following elections in November reconfirmed public support for Gaullism and the personalisation of power that characterised the Fifth Republic, rejecting the political coalition that sought a return to the past, in favour of continuation and stability.

If the Left wanted to avoid the political marginalisation they experienced during the first years of the Fifth Republic, it was necessary they adapted to the new political context and to the changes in communication practices that this had brought with it. Even the press (despite by this point having little regard for Gaullism) remarked on the need for the opposition parties to adapt to the personalisation of politics made possible by the increasingly central role played by television in politics. In the aftermath of the 1962 autumn election the following article appeared in *L’Express*:

This television [...] has intrinsic virtues upon which the Left should reflect. [...] What is certain is that television is merciless in the way it shows what is out there. Television throws in our faces what the newspaper, the public meeting or the radio merely suggests. Among other things, for example, it has brought to our attention how antiquated party leaders are and how inadequate is their way of communicating in the present political context [...]. Television has no time for old-fashioned habits. And neither has the Republic.⁶

Firmly opposed to the direct universal suffrage election of the President of the Republic and still pursuing their dreams of the restoration of the past, the opposition parties were tempted to delay the presidential election. The PCF, knowing they stood no chance in the election for the Élysée, closed ranks and tried to organise a united opposition front to the Gaullist system. For the socialists, the situation was more complex and uncertain. During the national party congresses in 1962 and 1963, the SFIO was divided between the “presidentialists” led by Gaston Defferre and those who supported “The Popular Front” led by Guy Mollet.⁷ The former were ready to accept universal suffrage for the election of the Head of State but proposed a rebalance of power; the second, though they did not explicitly support the new constitutional reform, championed classical forms of parliamentarism. In the hope of settling internal disagreements the Socialist party decided to try to postpone any debate on possible future candidacies and alliances.⁸

The disarray of political parties on the Left created an opportunity for those who saw the election as a possibility for change. As this kind of campaign represented the first of its kind in France, it was only natural that scholars and politicians looked abroad for inspiration. Particularly pertinent was the example of the US, not only because it represented the frontier of political communication, but also because presidential elections in the US were a familiar political tradition. The study by Theodore H. White entitled *The Making of the President, 1960*,⁹ published in France in the summer of 1962, was full of new ideas, information and suggestions. Focusing on the victory of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the American journalist explained how, with the help of a group of friends and counsellors, Massachusetts’ young senator successfully managed to impose his candidacy on the Democratic Party and defeated much more famous rivals. This study encouraged a faction within the opposition “to construct” an alternative candidate to the General. The plan was to start an intensive media campaign and then use public opinion as leverage to impose his candidacy.

And so it was that, in 1963, that the campaign of the socialist Mayor of Marseille, Gaston Defferre¹⁰—whose identity was initially hidden behind the mysterious appellation of “Monsieur X”—was launched. Inspired by the methods of political marketing, his candidacy was promoted by the weekly *L’Express* and its editor-in-chief Jean-Jacques Servan Schreiber—a personal friend of Defferre—with the support of the Jean Moulin Club, a lively think tank that grouped together social-democratic sympathisers. It also included a diverse group of about 30 people, among whom, besides Servan

Schreiber, were some members of the Moulin Club (Olivier Chevrillon, Maurice Duverger, Georges Suffert, Georges Vedel and Paul Vignaux) and other intellectual circles including *Citoyen 60* (e.g., Jacques Delors), some Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (CFTC) trade unionists (André Jeanson) and members of the reformist wing of the SFIO (Gérard Jacquet and Albert Gazier). The aim of this initiative was threefold:

- a) Elect a left-wing President; an objective that was not impossible; b) have one common candidate for all the Left; this would have represented real progress. There was the very real risk that the left parties would arrive at the first round still in disarray, each of them with their own candidate; c) The plan would produce a political renewal of the Left, by introducing “new energetic individuals” into it. The presidential election could thus become a rare occasion for public opinion to play a far more crucial role than the traditional political system had thus far allowed.¹¹

The nature of this initiative was “external” in that it was not promoted by any institutions or political parties; indeed, it was, at least in part, in opposition to the latter. The very choice of the candidate, a brilliant orator who came from of the “presidential” wing of the SFIO, was emblematic of the general intention to break with traditional political alliances. Defferre’s candidacy met with the dissatisfaction of the leaders of the SFIO worried—as Guy Mollet noted—that this move “could be interpreted by a badly informed public as a sign that we approve of the Gaullist system”.¹² The novelty of the whole operation was not just the candidate, but also and above all, the way his candidacy was launched. According to the committee of his supporters, this should follow the example of Kennedy’s success and be proactive, spontaneous and “television-led”.¹³

The supporters’ idea was to “prefabricate” a candidate; initially his identity was going to be kept secret in order to create a growing sense of expectation; his nomination would not be the result of party politics or democratic consultation (even though this was quite normal for the primaries in the US, the Committee of supporters insisted it would have been “impossible in France” as, it would have exposed the candidate to increased risks of “protests” and made the whole enterprise unworkable).¹⁴

The novelty of the whole operation consisted in organising a media strategy founded on poll studies, and the attempt to provide the Mayor of Marseille with a modern, attractive, authoritative image as an alternative choice to de Gaulle. It marked the first steps towards scientific marketing in

France. In January 1963, the section of the Jean Moulin Club concerned with its documentation and information centre launched a series of public opinion surveys to find out what "type" of candidate the French people thought was most likely "to take de Gaulle's place".¹⁵ This survey lasted eight months and its results were partially published in *L'Express* the following spring. In the meantime the whole operation began its grand launch in the pages of this newspaper, and was announced in the following terms: "Today, somewhere in France, there is a man who will present himself for the presidency of the Republic against de Gaulle."¹⁶ In the following weeks, this mysterious figure, described as a worthy opponent to the founder of Fifth Republic, made the front page of *L'Express*; it was the opinion of this paper that the time had come for France to embrace change.

Press coverage was full of this mysterious candidate: *Paris-Match* initiated a survey to find out the identity of "Monsieur X", but it was outflanked by the weekly *Le Canard enchaîné*, the first to reveal that the mysterious man was "the man with the Defferre mask".¹⁷ On 2 February 1964, during its national congress, the SFIO unanimously declared its backing for Defferre's candidacy; the party had finally united.¹⁸

For a few months, at least until the summer, all seemed to go well: Defferre's statements and public meetings were widely reported by the press,¹⁹ along with his visits abroad. In the attempt to build an international reputation for Defferre, his "brain trust" advised him to embark on a series of visits to Europe and the US during which he met socialist leaders (Willy Brandt and Harold Wilson) and Heads of State (Alec Douglas-Home and Lyndon Johnson). The whole point of this strategy was to project an image to the public that this new candidate, de Gaulle's opponent, had the attention and respect of the most prominent international leaders.

After a brilliant launch and some initial success, starting from the winter of 1964–65, Gaston Defferre's electoral campaign lost momentum. A year after his candidacy was announced, his race to the Élysée slowed down. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, his support committee's activity seemed to wane. The contribution of those that were supposed to mobilise support for the Marseilles mayor outside of the traditional political channels was not as enthusiastic as expected. When the time came to enter the traditional political arena the majority of the trade unions (including the catholics of the CFTC), civic associations and clubs—such as the Club Jean Moulin and Citoyens 60—that had initially strongly supported Defferre's candidacy had more and more reservations

about him. The communication strategy devised for the candidate gave signs of not wearing well in the long period. The beginning was brilliant: consultants managed to grab the attention of the public through a well thought out and carefully calibrated strategy focused on the preparation and articulation of his political appearances, statements and speeches, the creation of an international profile for Defferre as well as the careful construction of his image. Later, the campaign started to excessively concentrate on Defferre's image and became characterised by increasing exasperation. Defferre was advised to buy new clothes, to smile at cameras, to "adopt a more presidential stride".²⁰ Roland Cayrol, the then secretary of the Jean Moulin Club, has recalled, with a certain regret, the insistence with which Defferre was asked to modernise his image:

We demanded too big a change. We told him to talk without glasses, because this is what happened in the United States. So this man, who had a very bad eyesight, used to come on the stage with something that resembled a telephone directory because each piece of paper could not contain more than two or three words. We asked him to change his classical style of clothing, because it was unfashionable, so that he could look more modern. We taught him to adopt a solemn and majestic stride for the camera, so that he could look like a President. We inculcated ideas that were not exactly his, though when he was reading them out, he seemed to like them.²¹

The second reason for Defferre's candidacy faltering is related to the way public opinion received his candidacy. After the initial interest aroused by a clever campaign introducing him to the public in the press, the enthusiasm of the electorate seemed to progressively cool down, and the possibility for his success became more and more remote. In February 1964, 24% of people interviewed by the IFOP declared that in case of a second round, they would have voted for Defferre (42% said they would have voted for the General). In May of the same year, the percentage stabilised at 25% for Defferre (against 46% for the General). In the likely hypothesis of more than two candidates running, the socialist candidate was faced with an even more critical scenario: according to statistics dated to the end of May, when asked to choose among a group of five candidates (de Gaulle, Defferre, the communist Waldeck Rochet, the liberal André Cornu and the nationalist Tixier-Vignancour), less than 13% of the people interviewed declared they would have voted for Defferre. By October this percentage was 14% (against 42% declaring

they would have voted for the General).²² The percentage of those undecided remained high—corresponding to about a third of those interviewed—which clearly suggested that much depended on de Gaulle's decision to run again. It was clear that public opinion had not been sufficiently impressed by Defferre. His candidacy had rapidly and prematurely reached the limits of its potential appeal to the electorate and seemed to have arrived at a cul-de-sac.

A third—and decisive—element crucial to the withdrawal of Defferre candidacy was the lack of support from political parties. These had remained sceptical at best, hostile at worst, about Defferre. When he announced his candidacy, the mayor of Marseilles was hoping to be the man running on a united Left ticket. His strategy was founded on the hope that all opposition parties would rapidly converge around his nomination, which would have avoided the danger of long negotiations and divisions in the anti-Gaullist front. A year after the launch of his campaign his hopes were in pieces: the Radicals, Gilles Martinet's Parti socialiste unifié (PSU) and the PCF refused to support him without prior agreement aimed at putting together a shared programme. At the beginning of 1965, Defferre's initiative to launch the *Fédération démocrate et socialiste*—a kind of revamped version of the Third Force, with the SFIO and the MRP as its main parties—seemed a last desperate attempt to instil life into a project that was at this point moribund instead of a viable political strategy of a candidate for the presidency.²³

In June 1965, the sudden withdrawal of Defferre candidacy—an event whose details remain obscure—brought to the fore political divisions that were far from being solved. Later on, these divisions were made plain by the decision of the MRP and the Left group to run separately; Jean Lecaunet ran for the MRP and Françoise Mitterrand for the Left. Though unsuccessful, Defferre's candidacy was not in vain because it offered an important example of the way most opposition parties were finally ready to adapt to the new rules introduced by the Fifth Republic.²⁴

2 A "TELE-ELECTION"

During the 1965 presidential elections the connection between television and politics in France became increasingly stronger. The reasons for this are several; by this time the small screen was present in half the French households; more crucially, the principle, widely ignored during the Fifth Republic, according to which all candidates were allowed equal airtime,

was approved. After years of Gaullist monopoly, a sudden change in the balance of power relations in media communication seemed to take place. De Gaulle’s rival candidates numbered five altogether²⁵; none of them had ever appeared on television and suddenly they were allotted ten hours of television time²⁶ during peak time.²⁷ The effect was shocking.

The day on which the electoral campaign began—19 November—the public were shocked to see unknown politicians telling the French people that not all was fine, that de Gaulle was not the most suitable President to lead the country and that the present government in power was not the best government for France. Mitterrand, the leader of a Left that had finally united after years of internal divisions, relaunched his plan, published the previous year in his pamphlet *Le Coup d’Etat permanent*,²⁸ and declared that the Fifth Republic was an intrinsic authoritarian regime.²⁹ The centrist candidate, Lecanuet, preferred to focus attention on the international front and criticised the General’s “old-style nationalism”, highlighting the need for France to “move towards a true European integration”.³⁰ The French public discovered a new world, got to know new faces that they had never seen before; so unfamiliar were the candidates that it was necessary for them to introduce themselves to the viewers before starting their speech. The centrist candidate began with a laconic “My name is Jean Lecanuet, I am 45”: though he was the leader of MRP, one of the main political parties in France, not even his supporters knew what he looked like.³¹

It was Jean Lecanuet who would turn out to be the great star of the televised debate; his seductive charm and passionate rhetoric proved to be hypnotic, especially for female viewers. A lady who had always voted for de Gaulle, but admitted she was ready to switch to the centrist candidate after she had admired his appearances on television,³² said during an interview: “I really did not think there could be somebody who could speak as well as General de Gaulle.”

Communication analysts realised immediately that the main victim of the success of the centrist candidate was going to be the General himself:

If, after one of these spectacles of discussion we have all watched these past days, the General had gone to the hairdresser (as it is, it the hairdresser that goes to the General so that a Great Man saves time, though as a result loses contact with his people), had he been able to hear a beautician exclaiming with her thumb up “Have you watched Lecanuet last night, eh?”, no doubt a shudder would have run down his spine at the realisation of the terrible

effects the Goddess Television can produce on the destinies of the country, when the President is elected by universal suffrage. And he would be right to feel upset. But he would be wrong to think that he is without blame because after all he was the first one to sacrifice himself to this Goddess' cult, and it is he who has decided that, after nearly a century of the Republic, the President should be elected by universal suffrage.³³

The 1965 elections introduced a profound change in communication practices. Though face-to-face debates, in the form of the famous Nixon–Kennedy confrontation on television, never took place because of the firm refusal of the incumbent President to meet his opponents, these elections marked the end of the monopoly of the Gaullist monologues. These were replaced by interviews with well-known news presenters.

From closely studying the American experience, candidates learnt that television had created a “fourth dimension” of the candidate to emerge. Television appearances produced in viewers an instinctive feeling of support or rejection of the candidate that did not depend in the least on what he said. The style and the look of the candidates were increasingly important.³⁴ Candidates flocked to celebrities of the small screen to get advice about how to present themselves, which gestures to use, the tone of voice they should adopt and, in some cases, even the combination of colours they should wear.³⁵ All candidates started to seek advice on what was their best side for the camera, on what look was most captivating; they began to take elocution lessons and use make-up. During television recordings, the candidate that was revealed to be most concerned about all this was undoubtedly François Mitterrand.³⁶ He was a popular orator, much more at ease in public gatherings than in front of the cameras. Initially he would arrive at the television studios with a barber and some advisers who helped with technical issues. By the end of the campaign he would take four hours to record a broadcasting that lasted just 14 minutes. Unhappy about recording conditions he asked that the following one be made at his place. Though this request was turned down, he was granted four other demands: new cathode ray tubes, a larger and lighter recording studio, no technicians coming in and out during the recording and a cameraman of his own choice.³⁷

These broadcasts were such a success that several cinemas and theatres accordingly altered the time of their performances. Others—such as the theatres *Eduard VII* and *Théâtre de la Michodière*³⁸ in Paris—even decided to put television sets in their halls. Polls confirmed their success. Half of the

French population declared they watched the first round of the candidates’ television interviews. For the first time, a television electoral campaign had a bigger audience than the radio; in the Parisian metropolitan area, where the number of television sets was the highest in the country, viewers included more than 65% of the population. Though other and more traditional means of communication were still involved in the electoral campaign,³⁹ television indisputably played a major role.⁴⁰

Besides encouraging an extraordinary personalisation of power during the election, television also forced candidates to adapt new forms of manufacturing consent. The aim was not merely to win over the votes of traditional supporters, but to persuade as many viewers as possible to vote for them. The rules of political persuasion were unrelentingly changing: in order to convince voters it was necessary to seduce; in order to seduce one needed to know how to communicate effectively and this in turn demanded that one be familiar with techniques of how to address, not so much crowds, but individual viewers that watched candidates from the intimate spaces of their homes.⁴¹ It only took a few weeks for candidates—among these Jean Lecanuet—to adapt to these new terms of the electoral contest. As André Philip wrote in *Le Monde* the day after the first round of voting for the Élysée: “Something has changed: President de Gaulle is still an excellent actor, but he is no longer the only one who knows how to use television.”⁴²

3 THE GENERAL DOES NOT ENTER THE ELECTORAL ARENA

“No, Bongrand, the General has refused. He said he does not need to campaign. I am sorry.”⁴³ This is a fragment from the short telephone conversation in which Jacques Foccart informed the advertising executive Michel Bongrand, an old friend of his and a Gaullist sympathiser besides, that de Gaulle did not intend to hire a communication agency for the 1965 electoral campaign. The President’s well-known scepticism towards practices that he considered too “American” may provide an explanation of his behaviour. In actual fact, this had to do with institutional considerations associated with his role of Head of State, as well as the specific nature of the imminent election.

The outgoing President kept his candidacy secret for such a long time that the UNR commissioned various polls to assess potential support for Georges Pompidou in case de Gaulle decided not to run.⁴⁴ When he

announced his candidacy, on 4 November 1965, just one month before the vote, the General was so sure of his special relationship with the electorate and the public's favourable views of his previous government, that he decided, with the exception of intending to send a message the public two days prior to the vote, not to take part in the campaign and forfeited the television airtime allotted to him. To those ministers who were perplexed by this, he answered dryly: "Do you really think I am going on television and say 'My name is de Gaulle'? I prefer to act differently from all the others: French people will understand. The more the others revel in the mud, the more people will appreciate the fact that I maintain my dignity."⁴⁵ Faced with the insistence of some of his closest collaborators, who, increasingly worried, were asking him for instructions to launch the campaign, an irritated de Gaulle answered: "Naturally, I will not forbid meetings, and you will do the same. However, believe me, our advantage, our peculiarity is that we are different from all the others. The fact that they have meetings or organise events does not mean that we have to do the same. The more we are able to present ourselves as different the better for us."⁴⁶

Unlike the 1962 election, when de Gaulle played the role of party leader and Head of the Government, in 1965 he adopted another, almost opposite strategy: he kept a low profile; his candidacy was shrouded in mystery⁴⁷ initially, then in silence.⁴⁸ According to the Gaullist view, the vote for the 1965 election was one that expressed identification, gratitude and continuity; in short, it was a personalised vote.⁴⁹ However, it was precisely the personal and the media-based nature of the election that made the Gaullist strategy so risky. In particular, Gaullists were guilty of underestimating the dangers of the first televised political campaign in the history of France.

Gaullists failed to understand that the direct election of the President of the Republic was inevitably going to elevate the role of organising the campaign and of the means of mass communication. The organisation of the campaign—managed by a committee made up of Olivier Guichard, Jacques Foccart and Pierre Lefranc⁵⁰—was entrusted solely to the Association nationale pour le soutien de l'action du Général de Gaulle; Malraux's Association pur la V^e République and the UNR were excluded. The General thought it was not necessary to waste resources, energies and time on a "battle that was already won".⁵¹ Gaullist strategy was strongly criticised by the press, and met with the disapproval of a growing section of the public. In November, after the televised campaign had started, the

numbers of those who disapproved of the silence of the Head of the State escalated and was estimated to be 46% of the population in contrast with 36% who supported this decision, while 18% expressed no opinion on the matter.⁵²

The time of the “man of providence” seemed to have passed. In a country that had freed itself from the grip of crisis and the ghosts of the past, for the first time the General’s age and his own glorious past turned against him. This change of perspective became evident with the introduction—following the American example—of negative campaigning in election posters aimed at denigrating opponents. The Gaullist *entourage* that had traditionally emphasised the historical legitimacy of its leader did not miss the opportunity to comment, with heavy irony, on the lack of political experience, or, in some cases, on the embarrassing past of the General’s opponents. Gaullist posters were full of examples such as “Mr Mitterrand is running for President. Do you know anything of the career of this old politician?”, “Who is Lecanuet?” or, again, “I will not vote for Lecanuet because he has never been put to the test”.⁵³ The real surprise though was to see the anti-Gaullists take up the challenge and fight the General on his own ground by drawing attention to what was thought to be one of the gravest handicaps of the candidate: his old age. This argument was exploited by all candidates: Tixier-Vignancour on television spoke of “an old actor who still insists on staying in the limelight, while he would be better advised to leave the political stage”⁵⁴; Mitterrand said that “the 1965 model of Gaullism represents all I fear most, it is *passé*, it smells of dust and mothballs”.⁵⁵ Lecanuet, though showing more respect, did not miss to remark that “at his age the President of the Republic should retire to private life and take with him his past glory, the glory of June 18th and the Resistance”.⁵⁶ The opponents’ election posters gave even more emphasis to the issue of age. The Mitterrand campaign’s posters were dominated by the slogan “a young President for a modern France”; on one of the advertising posters of the centrist candidate was written “I prefer Jean Lecanuet—45 years of age”. Merciless anonymous stickers urging young people not to vote “for a 75 year old grandpa” started to circulate. Faced with these attacks, Mauriac in *Le Figaro littéraire* was forced to respond and noted that Lecanuet and Mitterrand “are the same age as Molière’s beggars”.⁵⁷

Under the pressure of the polls, de Gaulle broke his silence. A month before the vote, surveys had predicted a victory for the General in the first round with 66% of the vote, but a week before the election this advantage

had narrowed considerably. No less worrying for the Gaullist staff that were assigned to constantly monitor the voting intentions of the electorate were changes of voting intention among those that possessed television sets: in the space of a couple of weeks the General's polling fell from 46% to 31.5%; Mitterrand's grew from 15% to 19% and for the most "telegenic" candidate, Jean Lecanuet, this went from 2% to an astounding 16.5%.

Lecanuet, a member of Parliament for Seine-Maritime, almost unknown in national political circles, grew in popularity by the day thanks to an innovative campaign managed by the advertising company *Services et Méthodes* owned by Michel Bongrand (the very person who before the beginning of the campaign had had the offer of his services to the General turned down).⁵⁸ As expected, Lecanuet became the favourite target of the Gaullists who did not miss an opportunity to make fun of his employment of marketing techniques. He was referred to as "that small Kennedy [...] sold as if he was a brand of washing up liquid".⁵⁹

The Lecanuet "phenomenon", this new political star, appeared out of the blue and caused disarray and disorder in a political status quo, which had seen itself as unassailable.⁶⁰ He had robbed the General of his seemingly unassailable position as the most popular political personality ever to appear on television, and was threatening to rob him also of an important section of the moderate vote at the first turn. The ripples of his success spread widely, crossing France's national borders to appear on the front pages of some of the most respected English newspapers:

The telepolitician is a figure with whom we are all familiar in England. The ability to behave naturally in front of the cameras has become an essential requisite in an aspiring politician's armoury. But in France, at least until the presidential election began, the genre was almost unknown. There was of course one tele-performer par excellence. The General himself [...] Now he has a rival, challenging not only his tele-popularity but also his position as President. The emergence of M. Lecanuet has completely changed the character of the French presidential election [...] the chief single factor of his meteoric rise to the top is undoubtedly his use of television.⁶¹

Faced with demands from his increasingly alarmed campaign staff⁶² de Gaulle ultimately decided to make use of the last two television sessions available before the first ballot; the first was on 30 November and the second on 3 December. The traditional formulaic appeal of de Gaulle to the nation at a moment in which crisis had faded from memory sounded anachronistic. Slogans such as "Either me or chaos", or "No to the unknown"

could no longer mobilise a public that remained indifferent even to Gilbert Bécaud's pro-de Gaulle record *Tu le regretteras* (*You will regret it*), a song sympathetic to the General.⁶³ The small screen seemed to be taking revenge on those who thought they could do without it. The General's performances were not up to those of his opponents. In the first of his two televised appearances de Gaulle appeared old and pale; he was wearing a suit that had not been pressed and looked stained. Some viewers worried for his health phoned the Élysée to make inquiries after him.⁶⁴ On *Candide*, Emmanuel Berl noted that the General "might well be sure about all he is saying but seen from close up he does not give this impression".⁶⁵

Despite de Gaulle's indifference to the campaign, few doubted his victory during the first round. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing remembered a conversation with the Home Minister, Roger Frey,⁶⁶ on the Wednesday before the election while he was waiting to have his weekly meeting with the General to discuss some issues pertaining to the Minister of Finance. As Frey left the office of the General he told d'Estaing: "I have just given the last polls to the General. He is a bit disappointed because he will not have the advantage he anticipated. But in any case he will win easily at the first round."⁶⁷

The results four days later proved to be very different: the General got 43.75%, Mitterrand 32.2% but the most significant result was Lecanuet's with 15.9% of the votes. Analysis of these results confirmed that the centrist candidate was the one who benefitted from the losses suffered by de Gaulle. Thanks to a modern and dynamic style, Lecanuet had led not only to the erosion of electorate's support for the Head of State, but also to undermining the Gaullist myth. The success of Lecanuet's campaign showed that the moderate electorate had taken its first steps towards the inexorable demystification of Gaullism.⁶⁸

4 DE GAULLE IN THE SECOND ROUND

On the evening of 5 December, it became clear that the General had failed to win the election in the first round. The disappointment of the Gaullist leaders and followers who had to passively stand by and watch the success of the opposition's electoral campaign was voiced by the President of the National Assembly and one of the most authoritative Gaullist "barons" Jacques Chaban-Delmas⁶⁹:

“When one wants to run for elections of this kind, one has to take responsibility.”⁷⁰ In *Le Monde*, Jacques Fauvet noted that “Gaullism has not paid enough attention to public relations [...] De Gaulle has not fought, he has tied the hands of his supporters. He hasn’t understood that all elections, presidential elections included, are not referenda. The General has consciously ignored this, and today he is paying the price.”⁷¹

While the profoundly disappointed de Gaulle was seriously considering withdrawing his candidacy,⁷² reports from the prefects of the various regional departments started to arrive at the Élysée explaining what had gone wrong and consequently what should be done before the second round. The prefect of the Oise, one of the departments with the highest voter turnouts (88%), provided an explanation for what had happened that distinguished between structural and circumstantial causes:

The reasons for the surprise result of the first turn are certainly complex, but it is possible to distinguish between contingent factors and more structural ones [...] Structural causes are connected with a lack of contact with the public. The problem was not the lack information about government policies on television, radio or the press: this has been taken care of by the Head of State during his press conferences [...]. The problem was that all this has not been the subject of public debates: parliamentary debates have lost the impact they used to have when they represented a challenge for the government; the press is, or it is considered, biased and in any case has lost the powerful role it used to have in shaping the opinion of the people; the forum to discuss state affairs is now the radio and, above all, television.⁷³

If television had become the primary means to lead an election campaign, for some important Gaullists—such as the prefect of Marne-et-Loire—it had become an excuse for complacency:

During these last seven years, the six UNR Members of Parliament of Marne-et-Loire have stayed under the protection of the General, without making any attempt to create political or party connections [...]. They have dedicated no more than three or four days to the electoral campaign. They seemed more interested to have confirmation from Paris that the General would have fought for them on television, than to fight for themselves in their constituencies.⁷⁴

Others, such as the prefect of Calvados Raymond Jacquet, singled out the disorganisation of the electoral campaign and the fact that it was not taken

seriously enough. He also pointed out that the passivity of the General was the reason for his losing consensus.

Instructions from Paris arrived late. Propaganda has remained defensive and traditional in style. Nobody knows what to expect from him. The other three candidates came to important meetings. UNR on the other hand has organised only one private meeting with Terrenoire and Triboulet and gave the impression it was a formality. There is therefore some personal criticism of the figure of de Gaulle: 1. His enigmatic and secretive character [...] 2. A contemptuous attitude towards public opinion.⁷⁵

After a brief moment of disorientation, Gaullists began to close ranks: de Gaulle gave way to pressure from his staff (the Secretary General at the Élysée, Burin de Roziers, the Minister of Information Peyrefitte and the Press officer of the Élysée, Pérol) and decided to campaign. The General not only agreed to use all the airtime he could have according to electoral regulations, but, for the first time, he also consented to be interviewed on television.⁷⁶ Among those who advised de Gaulle to make a comeback on the small screen there was a fortune teller who some weeks before the first round had foretold the concrete possibility of the second round and the need for the General to appear on television more frequently:

Illustrious President, here is the message you were waiting for. In 1955, three years before it actually happened, I foretold your return to power and the dissolution of parliament. On September 1963 I foretold that you were going to have an operation, more precisely between March 29th and May 3rd 1964: you were operated on April 17th 1964. On September 29th 1965, on St. Michael's Day I made a prediction about the Presidential elections. Today, you are at the second round. Despite this, I can foretell that all has changed in your favour after a television broadcast [...].⁷⁷

Michel Droit, who was chosen to conduct the interviews with de Gaulle, was a famous journalist, whose father—a veteran from the First World War and a fairly famous painter⁷⁸—the General knew well. The three television interviews took place in the Ambassador's room at the Élysée. A public tired and irritated by the attitude of the General, who had previously given the impression of being remote, appreciated a de Gaulle that like a regular candidate explained with precision and clarity his political programme. De Gaulle's modest tone and use of simple and ordinary language was new to the French public.⁷⁹ The issues covered were diverse, ranging from

European policy, social security, agriculture and inflation. Comments from the press were rather flattering: *The General has come down from his high horse* and *The General enters the electoral arena* were some of titles in the major newspapers.

The prefects started to send enthusiastic reports to the Élysée on the alleged impact of the television appearances of the Head of State. From the Rhône-Alpes department, e.g., the prefect Roger Ricard sent data on the way voters' intentions were progressing: “December 10th de Gaulle 50.45% Mitterrand 49.45%; December 14th de Gaulle 52.94% Mitterrand 47.06%; December 17th (two days before the second round), de Gaulle 53.03% Mitterrand 46.97%.”⁸⁰ What is interesting is to note is not only that these opinion polls were reliable,⁸¹ but that de Gaulle's televised appearances were integral to his “recovery”. “The style of the interviews given by the Head of State have given the impression to viewers of being with the General and of chatting with him about their pressing every day problems.”⁸²

Indeed, on 19 December the electoral results turned out to be positive for the General. At the end of a rainy day that, nevertheless, did not discourage people from voting (turnout was very high with a mere 15.45% abstention), 12.5 million French people reconfirmed the General at the Élysée with 54.5% of the vote against 45.5% for Mitterrand. “Ah! If only you had talked to me like that right from the start” was the regretful comment of *La Marianne*, a character by the caricaturist Faizant, in a cartoon published in *Le Figaro* the day after the vote.⁸³

5 WAS IT REALLY “TELECRACY”?

Some months after the elections, André Philip's wrote:

The methods used in electoral campaigns have been renovated. What is clear is that circulars and manifestoes were useless [nobody read them]; the traditional meetings à la Tixier-Vignancour, despite their success and high turnout were also useless [...]. Interest for the campaign was limited to debates on the radio and the television. President de Gaulle has lost votes in the first turn because he despised these means of communication.⁸⁴

The majority of political analysts shared his views. According to the General's most faithful followers, the prefects and several commentators, the first round of voting could be explained by the decision of the Head of

State to renounce his airtime and not to take part in the campaign. For others, the decision of the Gaullist government to suddenly allow the opposition candidates airtime was not a happy one: “it is not a good idea to suddenly move from a diet to a binge,” the president of the ORTF Board of Administrators commented in *Le Figaro*.⁸⁵ Everybody agreed about television’s key role in determining the electoral destinies of the candidates and the different results obtained by the Gaullist at the two rounds.

The theory of “telecracy”, which gained popularity during the referendum and the following legislative elections in the autumn of 1962, was reconfirmed by the events surrounding the 1965 presidential elections. The small screen was the greatest innovation of these elections, and particularly crucial to the candidates’ destinies. De Gaulle had presumptuously disregarded it, and television had taken its revenge by momentarily favouring the telegenetic Lecanuet. In the second round, however, it rewarded the General who between the first and the second round performed his “television penance” much like Henry the Fourth at Canossa.

Taking inspiration from the survey on the 28 October 1962 referendum undertaken by the historian René Rémond and the sociologist Claude Neuschwander,⁸⁶ what follows is a study of the 1965 presidential campaign that aims to provide empirical evidence of the supposed relationship between television ownership and the result of the vote. In this analysis, four variables—calculated on the basis of all the 90 French departments—are compared: the concentration of television sets (given the lack of data concerning the audience of television programmes, this is the most significant indicator for television consumption); the decrease of Gaullist votes between the 1962 referendum and the first round of the 1965 presidential election; the increase of Gaullist votes between the first and the second round of the election; the votes received by Lecanuet in the first round (Table 8.1).

From what experts and scholars who studied the electoral campaign have noted, it can be assumed that:

- a) The reduction of “Gaullist” votes between 1962 and the first round of the 1965 presidential election was more marked in departments with a higher television set ownership. As de Gaulle deserted the small screen before the first round, it is reasonable to imagine that the General lost more votes in those departments where the number of viewers was higher.

Table 8.1 1965 presidential election: relation between the vote and television set concentration

<i>Departments</i>	<i>Number of television sets [1965]</i>	<i>electorate [1965]</i>	<i>Television set concentration</i>	<i>“Yes” votes Referendum 1962</i>	<i>Votes for De Gaulle I 1965 round [%]</i>	<i>Decrease in Gaullist notes Between 1962 cand I round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Votes for de Gaulle II round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Increase of Gaullist notes between the I and II round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Votes for Lecanuet I round 1965 [%]</i>
Ain	37,947	206,496	18,3	62,3	43,03	19,27	55,7	12,67	18,37
Aisne	67,840	290,750	23,4	63,3	47,4	15,9	55,82	8,42	14,78
Allier	42,239	244,364	17,3	49,2	36,55	12,65	45,09	8,54	13,03
Basses-Alpes	11,756	62,596	18,7	47,9	35,02	12,88	43,9	8,88	13,38
Hautes-Alpes	7923	57,578	13,7	61,3	42,8	18,5	53,95	11,15	16,26
Alpes-Maritimes	113,736	408,969	27,7	57,7	41,2	16,5	50,48	9,28	11,9
Ardèche	20,594	165,626	12,5	61,2	42,7	18,5	55,42	12,72	16,89
Ardennes	38,550	166,779	22,6	66,7	46,5	20,2	55,34	8,84	14,51
Ariège	13,060	94,742	13,7	41,2	34,2	7	37,49	3,29	7,68
Aube	29,585	153,423	19,2	58,7	43,4	15,3	54,34	10,94	15,86
Aude	29,938	173,977	17,2	40,9	30	10,9	35,09	5,09	10,8
Aveyron	22,677	189,045	12	63,9	42,3	21,6	56,37	14,07	24,03
Belfort	—	—	—	69,9	44,75	25,15	53,53	8,78	15,6
B.-de-Rhone	261,791	750,823	34,4	45,1	35,7	9,4	43,46	7,76	9,61
Calvados	66,208	281,508	23,5	74	48,8	25,2	64,37	15,57	23,83
Central	11,416	110,678	10,3	70,6	49,05	21,55	62,42	13,37	18,38
Charente	30,701	206,323	14,8	59,7	42,1	17,6	53,08	10,98	9,66
Char.-Maritime	49,981	290,591	17,1	60,3	40,6	19,7	51,09	10,49	16,34
Cher	33,986	186,105	18,2	53,8	41,1	12,7	50,13	9,03	12,1
Corrèze	22,713	161,901	14	50	39,5	10,5	45,55	6,05	9,49
Corse	13,987	178,329	7	55,6	56,5	-0,9	59,54	3,04	7,72
Cote-d'Or	44,772	232,752	19,2	62	39,9	22,1	53,07	13,17	19,7
Cotes-du-Nord	44,542	326,726	13,6	69	43,99	25,01	54,8	10,81	17,15

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

<i>Departments</i>	<i>Number of television sets [1965]</i>	<i>Television set concentration</i>	<i>“Yes” votes Referendum 1962</i>	<i>Votes for De Gaulle I 1965 round [%]</i>	<i>Decrease in Gaullist notes Between 1962 cand I round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Votes for de Gaulle II round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Increase of Gaullist notes between the I round e II round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Votes for Lecannet I round 1965 [%]</i>
Creuse	12,214	113,157	52,7	42,58	10,12	47,49	4,91	9,99
Dordogne	33,141	253,060	52	40,07	11,93	46,83	6,76	11,78
Doubs	59,450	284,187	73,6	47,34	26,26	58,46	11,12	15,92
Drome	40,810	195,367	54,2	39,53	14,67	50,71	11,18	14,75
Eure	43,156	213,877	64	43,86	20,14	55,81	11,95	20,38
Eure-et-Loire	28,792	173,875	62,7	45,74	16,96	57,2	11,46	17,54
Finistère	71,682	495,023	74,4	49,58	24,82	63,15	13,57	18,46
Gard	62,412	279,277	48,64	31,55	17,09	39,92	8,37	12,44
Haute-Garonne	90,939	387,132	48	35,93	12,07	42,67	6,74	12,08
Gers	17,703	115,101	44	26,92	17,08	34,75	7,83	17,44
Gironde	124,854	582,038	58	42,3	15,7	51,02	8,72	15,4
Hérault	70,892	324,983	48,7	31,24	17,46	39,92	8,68	12,41
Ille-et-Vilaine	60,727	381,833	77,9	52,25	25,65	67,62	15,37	20,38
Indre	20,491	161,082	51,8	37,5	14,3	46,69	9,19	15,5
Indre-et-Loire	40,788	247,018	59,9	42,08	17,82	53,27	11,19	18,11
Inère	97,333	434,101	55,6	37,49	17,11	48,52	11,03	15,22
Jura	22,453	141,771	64,7	42,73	21,97	55,66	12,93	19,12
Landes	26,759	176,443	59,1	45,04	14,06	53,35	8,31	13,08
Loir-et-Cher	25,318	162,485	58,1	41,53	16,57	53,14	11,61	18,45
Loire	89,381	411,765	60,1	38,63	21,47	53,83	15,2	22,27
Loire-Atlantique	82,483	489,365	71,8	44,45	27,35	60,73	16,28	23,21
Haute-Loire	15,769	138,799	66,5	40,3	26,2	60,43	20,13	26,47
Loiret	46,264	243,096	64,9	46,6	18,3	58,16	11,56	18,09
Lot	12,871	101,088	52,4	39,3	13,1	48,86	9,56	16,68

Lot-et-Garonne	31,144	174,014	17,8	48,4	31,37	17,03	40,56	9,19	16,22
Lozère	5121	54,151	9,4	74,9	51,7	23,2	66,77	15,07	16,11
Maine-et-Loire	46,365	332,078	13,9	75,3	48,9	26,4	67,48	18,58	25,27
Manche	39,870	268,177	14,8	80,4	57,39	23,01	73,3	15,91	21,6
Marne	66,486	258,504	25,6	64,1	44,3	19,8	55,9	11,6	18,12
Haute-Marne	19,424	120,192	16	71,1	52,46	18,64	61,89	9,43	13,38
Mayenne	16,072	152,468	10,5	79,6	49,9	29,7	69,73	19,83	28,17
Meurthe-et-Mos	83,489	369,553	22,6	72,8	48,75	24,05	58,68	9,93	15,78
Meuse	20,607	120,871	17,1	80,3	55,5	24,8	66,6	11,1	17,7
Morbihan	40,285	336,778	11,9	79,2	53,1	26,1	66,47	13,37	18,34
Moselle	118,181	479,367	24,7	86,3	63,2	23,1	71,79	8,59	13,8
Nievre	25,787	156,261	16,5	51,8	32,28	19,52	38,97	6,69	10,31
Nord	415,036	1,317,096	31,6	63,1	48,06	15,04	55,49	7,43	10,85
Oise	68,823	283,395	24,8	61,7	48,47	13,23	57,02	8,55	13,65
Orne	25,454	169,026	15	76,2	51,09	25,11	67,14	16,05	23,63
Pas-de-Calais	227,427	754,447	30,1	59,5	44,75	14,75	50,88	6,13	10
Puy-de-Dome	61,800	315,776	19,4	58,5	40,93	17,57	51,69	10,76	14,23
Basses Pyrénées	55,101	307,350	17,9	66,2	46,04	20,16	59,33	13,29	19,01
Hautes Pyrénées	28,393	139,183	20,4	53,3	36,5	16,8	44,35	7,85	12,54
Pyrénées-orient	33,719	162,867	20,6	50,5	34,76	15,74	42,47	7,71	11,83
Bas-Rhin	71,583	467,801	15,3	88,2	63,66	24,54	79,87	16,21	22,15
Haut-Rhin	59,422	340,279	17,4	86,9	59,1	27,8	74	14,9	23,23
Rhone	180,407	623,063	29	60,3	37,92	22,38	53,41	15,49	21,11
Haute-Saone	16,016	131,843	12,1	69,8	46,21	23,59	54,59	8,38	14,27
Saone-et-Loire	58,439	330,416	17,6	60,1	40,6	19,5	51,27	10,67	16,28
Sarthe	40,124	267,118	15	62,3	42,68	19,52	53,55	10,87	17,49
Savoie	23,083	161,284	14,3	61,6	41,43	20,17	53,92	12,49	17,37
Haute-Savoie	33,420	201,066	16,6	70,9	47,84	23,06	63,52	15,68	19,9
Seine	483,796	1,549,895	31,2	54,5	41,8	12,07	52,51	10,71	14,48
Seine-Maritime	987,964	3,084,398	32	62,2	41,2	21	51,58	10,38	19,28

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

<i>Departments</i>	<i>Number of television sets [1965]</i>	<i>electorate [1965]</i>	<i>Television set concentration</i>	<i>“Yes” votes Referendum 1962</i>	<i>Votes for De Gaulle I 1965 round [%]</i>	<i>Decrease in Gaullist notes Between 1962 cand I round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Votes for de Gaulle II round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Increase of Gaullist notes between the I round e II round 1965 [%]</i>	<i>Votes for Lecannet I round 1965 [%]</i>
Seine-et-Marne	167,914	620,379	27	59.4	45,75	13,65	55,89	10,14	15,75
Seine-et-Oise	82,834	324,024	25,6	54,7	41,34	13,36	51,82	10,48	13,63
Deux-Sèvres	24,824	199,663	12,4	67,3	42,67	24,63	58,38	15,71	22,57
Somme	63,040	296,674	21,2	61,2	46,04	15,16	53,85	7,81	12,24
Tarn	35,495	208,056	17	50	36	14	45,64	9,64	15,54
Tarn-et-Garonne	18,059	111,336	16,2	49,3	34,45	14,85	44,23	9,78	14,59
Var	87,955	313,027	28	49,8	39,32	10,48	47,43	8,11	10,64
Vaucluse	46,160	194,343	23,7	44,6	32,65	11,95	41,64	8,99	12,8
Vendée	25,690	254,350	10,1	77,4	51,53	25,87	71,15	19,62	23,99
Vienne	26,368	206,914	12,7	64,3	43,69	20,61	57,16	13,47	18,43
Haute-Vienne	34,385	226,817	15,1	50,9	36,48	14,42	44,4	7,92	7,39
Vosges	29,692	230,176	12,8	74	52,5	21,5	62,89	10,39	14,9
Yonne	27,567	172,499	15,9	60,4	44,53	15,87	55,19	10,66	16,15

Source: Data are by the author

- b) For the same reason, it is reasonable to imagine that the increase of Gaullist votes between the first and the second round was higher in those departments with high television set ownership. It was, after all, only after the first round that de Gaulle decided to use all the airtime he was allowed and to deploy his well-known talents, which resurfaced unscathed during his television interviews.
- c) Given this, all agreed about the centrist leader's talent for television; hence it can be assumed that the percentage of votes for Lecanuet was higher in those departments with a higher concentration of television sets.

Analysis of the correlation coefficient of the variables⁸⁷ provided results that rather surprisingly contradict the plausibility of the three hypotheses mentioned above, pointing instead to conclusions similar to those found in Rémond and Neuschwander's study on the previous election conducted (Table 8.2).

Generally speaking, no relation can be seen between television set concentration and votes for de Gaulle and for Lecanuet. More particularly, data shows that the reduction of Gaullist votes in the first round, their increase in the second round as well as the number of votes for Lecanuet bear no relation with television set concentration in the 90 French departments. In fact, what emerges is a slight negative relation (-0.21 ; -0.25 ; -0.25). These are not so pronounced as to suggest an inverse relationship between the two variables; even so they decidedly contradict any direct and automatic correlation between candidates' use of television and electoral success.

The conclusion of this study may at first sight appear disappointing. To scholars investigating this field it would certainly have been more rewarding to find data that confirmed an exact and rigorous relation. In this study, though, the only correlation that can be firmly established is between the migration of Gaullist votes to Lecanuet in the first round (in this case the correlation is evident: -0.79) and later the return of these votes to de Gaulle (the correlation here is modest: -0.92).

And yet, as Rémond and Neuschwander, when commenting on the results of their own studies, wrote, "Negative certainties are also useful; the contradiction of enduring prejudices is also important in research work."⁸⁸

The above-mentioned survey shows that in respect of the 1965 presidential election, there is no scientific proof of the conditioning power of

Table 8.2 1965 presidential election: correlation between the vote and television set concentration

	<i>Television set concentration</i>	<i>Decrease of Gaullist votes 1962 – First round 1965</i>	<i>Increase of votes for DE GAULLE First round 1965 – Second round 1965</i>	<i>Votes for LECANUET First round 1965</i>
Television set density	1			
Decrease of Gaullist votes 1962 – First round 1965	-0,21	1		
Increase of Gaullist votes First round 1965 – Second round 1965	-0,25	0,79	1	
Votes for Lecanuet First round 1965	-0,25	0,79	0,92	1

television on people's voting behaviour, and consequently of the electoral benefits for the most telegenic candidate. At the same time, one should not conclude that all those theories about "telecracy" that in the previous years leading to the electoral campaign had filled pages and pages of French newspapers and scientific publications were simply wrong. Facts are not that straightforward and an alternative explanation cannot be found in the elementary and mechanistic mathematical calculation of a correlation. Rather, it should be concluded that claims of television's omnipotence should be put into perspective, and the role of the small screen should be considered within a wider context in which other means of communication also played an important role.

In the aftermath of the election it was generally agreed that the television had played a decisive role in determining the result of the presidential election; at the same time, a few days before the re-election of the General, the Élysée press officer Gilbert Pérol sent him a private communication in which he advised de Gaulle to also pay more attention in future to traditional means of communication, especially the press, which continued to have an important role in achieving political consensus:

While we are waiting for more detailed results [...] what is already clear is that the power of the press on public opinion remains of key importance and that neither radios nor televisions have supplanted it or diminished its role. It is therefore necessary to find a better balance in the way these two means of communication—the ORTF and the press—are used. Up until today it seems that the government has kept the ORTF all for itself—though in the crucial moment of the campaign it has abandoned it to its opponents—the press right from the start was left to the opposition. The government was left without both. Only if we attempt to find a new balance—that is to say a new approach to the problem of the press—will we avoid being faced again with a situation that risked becoming dramatic.⁸⁹

6 THE OUTCOMES OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

There were several implications arising from the 1965 presidential election; the most important of these was that all political parties accepted an institutional process that public opinion had embraced with enthusiasm. A few weeks before the election, a famous representative of the Jean Moulin Club (one of the most critical and lively political organisations during the Gaullist period) wrote that the only “great hope” it had about the electoral campaign was that it would “get the public interested in the great political issues that concern the future of France”.⁹⁰

The high turnout and the interest that public opinion showed in the electoral debate revealed that one of the fears about the after-effects of the style of politics adopted by Gaullism, namely, the “political exile” of the citizens, had in fact not occurred. All political scholars agreed that the direct election of the Head of State had become part of French culture and politics. François Goguel wrote in the *Revue française de science politique* that “the high turn-out on November 19th and December 5th provides proof—along with the universal suffrage—of the legitimisation of the Fifth Republic”.⁹¹ In the periodical *France-Forum*—normally not sympathetic to the General’s positions—René Rémond reconfirmed that the behaviour of the electoral body “has showed that the widely accepted theory of the depoliticisation of our society has no foundation”.⁹² Marcel Prélot noted that the key aspect of the campaign was the behaviour of the General’s opponents: “They, who for a long time had condemned the style of the General, have now emulated it. Indeed, they have developed it with more or less successful results, depending on particular cases.” The vote represented in short “a point of no return; the majority voted in a ‘President who governs’. This is a figure that has now become part of our political tradition.”⁹³

The institutions of the Fifth Republic also seemed to have been unanimously accepted in political circles.⁹⁴ François Mitterrand, who only a year before the election had played the role of the implacable critic of de Gaulle’s “permanent coup d’état”, changed his position and accepted the essential principles of the Constitution (with the exception of articles 11 and 16), and the “monarchical” and personalised idea of the Republic that Gaullism had forged.⁹⁵ Once again television played a key role in making these changes apparent. Particularly significant in this respect was the debate in the media between the two candidates before the second round. After the second round, both the legitimacy of Presidential elections and the need for televised political debate became part of French political life. The SFIO’s and the PCF’s joint support for Mitterrand showed that these parties accepted the rules set by the Fifth Republic and the Gaullist interpretation of the presidential role.⁹⁶

Finally, the electoral campaign represented a major landmark in the history of Gaullism. On 1 January 1966, in his inaugural speech to the President of the Republic during the traditional ceremony at the Élysée, Alexandre Parodi, the Vice-President of the State Council, remarked that the recent vote in some ways marked “the end of an era”:

This election set out to show whether the old association that for a long time has connected this kind of electoral system with memories of *coup d’états* and of the second French Empire could be overcome [...] The vote has demonstrated that French people do not intend to remain passive when the destiny of France is at stake; they demonstrated that the trust they placed in France, the trust they re-confirmed with their vote, is not the blind trust in one man only, no matter how great and respected. Instead, this trust has been carefully judged, it is a choice that has been reflected on. It is precisely this that shows once again that the French people remain worthy of democracy.⁹⁷

The fact that the General managed to be elected only in the second round showed that, after the resolution of the Algerian crisis, he no longer had the free rein he had in 1958. With the solution to the Algerian question, the Head of State could not afford to remain a mere spectator in the political debate, and survive on the basis of his historical legitimacy. As a matter of fact, for de Gaulle the result was far from satisfying; he saw the second turn as a humiliation. From this moment, remarked Roussel, “de Gaulle is not and will never be the same again. He had to behave like a candidate, to be part of a political party, to rely on a team, a majority. He had to present a program; his myth had disappeared. He had to abandon the realm of mystique to enter the one of politics.”⁹⁸

The way in which de Gaulle was re-elected at the Élysée showed that a significant section of the French electorate wanted a change. Gilbert Pérol two days before the second round sent a brief note to the Élysée expressing his appreciation for de Gaulle's decision to be interviewed by Michel Droit on television. He also noted how the political debate—particularly popular with younger generations—should not be used only at the time of an election:

All French—in particular those who on Sunday will vote for General de Gaulle—expect that the electoral debate that is just drawing to its conclusion is the beginning of a new Fifth Republic, one that begins its second youth. Nobody doubts that the re-election of General de Gaulle alone is enough to guarantee stability and continuity. And at the same time, public opinion also expects some new life to be instilled in the government and a new style to be adopted [...]. Silence once again risks leading to misunderstanding; in particular it may seem an attempt to return—after the success obtained through “contact” and “explanation”—to a politics based on secrets and “distance” that young generations in particular find it hard to understand.⁹⁹

Time would show this advice was in actual fact prophetic. The success of the second round did not manage to conceal the desire for change that was sweeping France. What worried the General most was that analyses of the election¹⁰⁰ showed that the younger generation—citizens under 35 and male voters—had preferred the candidate of the opposition.

NOTES

1. M. Duverger, “L'enjeu des ‘présidentielles’”, in *La vie française*, 23 April 1965, p. 3.
2. In November 1965, an IFOP survey showed that the 78% of eligible voters were in favour of the direct election of the President of the Republic (6% voted against and 16% abstained).
3. R. Cayrol and J-L. Parodi, “Propagandes”, in Aa. Vv., *L'élection présidentielle de décembre 1965*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1970, p. 213.
4. The Fifth Republic did not introduce dramatic changes in communication during the electoral campaign; both the 1958 and the 1962 campaigns were managed directly by political parties and dominated by localism and a general feeling of political scepticism. In the analysis made by the Association française de science politique on the 1958 campaign, Philip Williams and Martin Harrison summarily called the campaigns “anachronistic”; they thought that the “demise” of the “traditional elec-

- toral campaign" was imminent. See P. Williams and M. Harrison, "La campagne pour le référendum et les élections législatives", in Aa. Vv., *Le référendum de septembre et les élections de novembre 1958*, Paris, A. Colin, 1960, pp. 21–59. Four years later, in 1962, Jean Charlot, in his study of the October referendum and the November elections noted the introduction of some new elements: the increasing lack of interest in local public meetings, the tendency towards the nationalisation of propaganda and, above all, the importance of radio and television. J. Charlot, "La tactique et la campagne des partis", in F. Goguel (ed), *Le référendum d'octobre et les élections de novembre 1962*, op. cit., p. 102.
5. Bourdon, *Haute Fidélité. Pouvoir et télévision, 1935–1994*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 355. For a detailed discussion of the development of television as a means of communication in these years see E. Cohen and M.F. Lévy, *La télévision des Trente glorieuses: culture et politique*, Paris, Cnrs Editions, 2007.
 6. M. Lebesque, *La France devant son miroir*, in *L'Express*, 22 November 1962, p. 52.
 7. It is significant that Guy Mollet was the only one on the French left who in 1958 voted in favour of the return to power of the General and agreed to giving him special powers to restore order and draft a new Constitution. Duhamel, *La Gauche et la V^e République*, op. cit., p. 53.
 8. C. Ysmal, "La stratégie des formations politiques devant la perspective de l'élection présidentielle", in Aa. Vv., *L'élection présidentielle de décembre 1965*, op. cit., pp. 31–32.
 9. White, *Comment on fait un président*, op. cit.
 10. G. Marion, *Gaston Defferre*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1989.
 11. 5 CJM 10, note written by the Jean Moulin Club's *Commission for the Presidential Elections*, 17 April 1964.
 12. S. Hurtig, "La Sfió face à la V République. Majorité et minorités", in *Revue française de science politique*, XIV, 3, 1964, pp. 553–554.
 13. Theodore White's book was so influential that Georges Suffert, who during the launch of the Defferre candidacy was the intermediary between the Jean Moulin Club and *L'Express*, used to humorously remark: "Simon Nora is our Schlesinger, Chevillon is Sorensen, Vulpian is Louis Harris and I am Salinger." R. Cayrol, *La nouvelle communication politique*, Paris, Larousse, 1986, p. 60.
 14. CJM 10, note written by the Jean Moulin Club's *Commission for the Presidential Elections*, 19 February 1963.
 15. G. Suffert, *De Defferre à Mitterrand. La campagne présidentielle*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 20.
 16. J. Ferniot, *Monsieur X contre de Gaulle*, *L'Express*, 19 September 1963, p. 10.
 17. D. Dulong, *Moderniser la politique*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1997, p. 255.

18. On the events surrounding the congress see C. Ysmal, *La stratégie des formations politiques*, op. cit., pp. 49–51. In historical accounts of French socialism the Defferre candidacy is only superficially mentioned. See A. Bergounioux and G. Grunberg, *Le long remords du pouvoir. Le Parti socialiste français, 1905–1992*, Paris, Fayard, 1992; C. Estier, *Un combat centenaire, 1905–2005. Histoire des socialistes français*, Paris, Le Cherche-midi, 2005, p. 94.
19. On this see, C. Ysmal, *Defferre parle (18 décembre 1963–25 juin 1965)*, Paris, Fnsfp, 1966.
20. A. Chauveau, “L’homme politique et la télévision”, in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 80, 4, 2003, p. 90.
21. C. Andrieu, *Pour l’amour de la République. Le Club Jean Moulin 1958–1970*, Paris, Fayard, 2002, p. 469.
22. J. Piret, “L’opinion publique et l’élection présidentielle”, in *Revue française de science politique*, XIV, 5, 1964, pp. 943–951.
23. On the Defferre manifesto, see G. Defferre, *Un nouvel horizon: le travail d’une équipe*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965.
24. It is significant that some of the members of the committee that promoted the Defferre candidacy were later involved in the organisation of François Mitterrand’s presidential campaign (e.g. Georges Suffert) or that for Jean Lecanuet (Pierre Fauchon).
25. Besides François Mitterrand (who ran for a group of parties on the left including SFIO, PCF, PSU and the radical party) and Jean Lecanuet (MRP), there were other minor candidates: the right wing lawyer, Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, the liberal Pierre Marcilhacy, and the independent Marcel Barbu.
26. The candidates’ speeches were broadcast at 1 p.m. and at 8.30 p.m. Each candidate had two hours of television time and two hours of radio time distributed in two programmes that lasted 28 minutes each, four programmes of 14 minutes each and one of 8 minutes. L’Inathèque de France keeps several television speeches made by the candidates for the 1965 electoral campaign.
27. The only exception was François Mitterrand who appeared on television on 4 January 1955 when he was interviewed on foreign politics on the programme *Faisons le point*.
28. F. Mitterrand, *Le Coup d’état permanent*, Paris, Plon, 1964.
29. See also R. Schneider, *De Gaulle et Mitterrand: la bataille des deux France*, Paris, Perrin, 2015.
30. INA, Lecanuet collection, 30 November 1965, 7’54”.
31. The then leader of the centre party *Mouvement démocrate* (MoDem), François Bayrou, spoke of his excitement at seeing the face of “his” candidate on television for the first time. See F. Bayrou, “C’était formidable”,

- in O. Duhamel and J-N. Jeanneney, *Présidentielles, les surprises de l'histoire 1965–1995*, Paris, Seuil, 2002, p. 38.
32. C. Delporte, “Image, politique et communication sous la Cinquième République”, in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire*, 72, 4, 2001, p. 111.
 33. P. Daninos, *Cincinnatus, Greta Garbo, de Gaulle...*, *Le Monde*, 4 December 1965, p. 4.
 34. A renowned journalist who was present during the Nixon–Kennedy debate wrote that “one fact was certain: once television became the ‘political battlefield’ candidates were more and more preoccupied with the way they looked rather than the content of their speeches.” D. Cater, *Power in Washington*, New York, Vintage Books, 1964, p. 69.
 35. Lecanuet was given some advice on how to match his tie and shirt: two minutes before a televised speech, Léon Zitrone managed to convince him to change his tie for his secretary’s striped, because in his opinion it wasn’t telegenic enough. M-D. Mistler, *Léon Zitrone: “J’ai servi à quelque chose”*, *L’Aurore*, 25 November 1965, p. 4.
 36. F. Mitterrand, *La paille et le grain*, Paris, Flammarion, 1975, p. 87.
 37. R-G. Schwartzberg, *La campagne présidentielle de 1965*, Paris, Puf, 1967, pp. 77–79.
 38. D. Bahu-Leyser, “De Gaulle et les medias”, in *Espoir*, 66, 1, 1989, p. 47.
 39. The electoral campaign shows that traditional means of propaganda (which according to analysts had become anachronistic or even forgotten), such as posters, leaflets, brochures and newspapers, were not forgotten; on the contrary, they found new life. Far from damaging each other, traditional communication techniques and television techniques reinforced each other and contributed to the personalization of the public debate.
 40. An IFOP survey in Boulogne-Billancourt showed that the answer to the question “What is the most important informational media you have used during the period of the election?” 52% of people interviewed answered “television”, 22% “radio” and 1.11% “the press”. In 1962, these were as follows: radio 23%, television 22%, the press 22%. See AA.VV., *L’élection présidentielle de décembre 1965*, op.cit., p. 149 and Goguel (ed), *Le référendum d’octobre et les élections de novembre 1962*, op. cit., p. 102.
 41. For an account of the role played by political consultants during the presidential campaign, see R. Brizzi, “La campagne présidentielle de 1965 et les conseillers en communication”, in J. Pozzi (ed.), *De l’attachée de presse au conseiller en communication. Pour une histoire politique des communicants*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2018 (forthcoming).
 42. A. Philip, *Leçons d’un scrutin*, *Le Monde*, 9 December 1965, p. 2.
 43. M. Bongrand, personal communication, 1 December 2004.
 44. In the last IFOP survey, in October, before the General decided to present his candidacy, results were not encouraging for the Gaullist party:

- “Pompidou in the first round could get 60% of the General’s votes. This percentage varied according to different variables; percentages were high with the over 50s, managers and freelancers (78%), office workers (65%) people with high or average level of education, people on high income. Percentages were lower with the following groups: farmers (51%) factory workers (55%) peasants (50%) people on low income.” See AN—5AG1/300, IFOP survey, October 1965.
45. Peyrefitte, *C’était de Gaulle*, op. cit., pp. 1201–1202.
 46. Foccart, *Journal de l’Elysée*, I, op. cit., p. 256.
 47. De Gaulle announced his candidacy on 4 November, just 30 days before the first round, when people began to seriously doubt his intentions.
 48. De Gaulle refused to use radio and television. He went on television only on 30 November when he used the 14 minutes allotted to him.
 49. The General’s attitude and the meaning he accorded to these elections is shown by the following sentence taken from his speech on 4 November: “To me—whom you know so well after all we have done together in war and in peace—each man and woman among you will have the opportunity to show their esteem and confidence.” INA, de Gaulle collection, 4 November 1965, 9’30”.
 50. Schwartzberg, *La campagne présidentielle de 1965*, op. cit., pp. 77–78.
 51. Foccart, *Tous les soirs avec de Gaulle*, *Journal de l’Elysée*, I, op. cit., p. 252.
 52. *La campagne a augmenté le nombre des indécis*, *France-Soir*, 28 November 1965, p. 1.
 53. A thorough collection of propaganda material is kept in the *Association nationale pour le soutien de l’action du Général de Gaulle* (AS) in AN—AS/86–87.
 54. *Tixier-Vignancour: un vieil acteur qui aurait dû faire ses adieux depuis longtemps*, *Le Monde*, 6 November 1965, p. 3.
 55. A. Laurens, *Mitterrand: L’éducation nationale est. bien la priorité des priorités*, *Le Monde*, 26 October 1965, p. 7.
 56. *A la télévision: la relève est. assurée*, *Le Monde*, 2 December 1965, p. 3.
 57. Schwartzberg, *La campagne présidentielle de 1965*, op. cit., p. 49.
 58. For an account of the role played by Michel Bongrand, see J. Pozzi, “Le fil d’Ariane des communicants gaullistes, de Michel Bongrand à Thierry Saussez: une histoire de famille?” in J. Pozzi (ed.), *De l’attachée de presse au conseiller en communication*, op. cit.
 59. *Les leaders de l’UNR attaquent les candidats de l’opposition, et principalement M. Lecanuet*, *Le Monde*, 2 December 1965, p. 2.
 60. “In three weeks an unknown professor of philosophy has become a star, like a mushroom that suddenly has sprung up from the French political soil. He himself could not have even imagined that; his friends were surprised, nobody could have imagined it [...]” G. Suffert, *La percée de M. Lecanuet*, *L’Express*, 6 December 1965, p. 41.

61. *Television politics comes to France*, *The Guardian*, 1 December 1965, p. 10.
62. E. Burin des Roziers, private communication, 12 November 2004.
63. Aa.Vv., *L'élection présidentielle de décembre 1965*, op. cit., pp. 190–191.
64. J. Foccart, *Tous les soirs avec de Gaulle*, *Journal de l'Élysée*, I, op. cit., p. 291.
65. Quoted in P. Viansson-Ponté, *Histoire de la république gaullienne*, op. cit., p. 418.
66. According to the Home Ministry, five days before the election, 54% of the electorate was intending to vote for de Gaulle, 24% for Mitterrand and 15% for Lecanuet. But, according to results of IFOP and SOFRES surveys, the possibility that de Gaulle was going to win in the first round was uncertain; according to IFOP, 43% of voters intended to vote for de Gaulle. According to SOFRES 49% of voters would vote for de Gaulle. See *Trois sondages*, *Le Monde*, 5 December 1965, p. 1.
67. Duhamel and J-N. Jeanneney, *Présidentielles, les surprises de l'histoire*, op. cit., pp. 51–52.
68. F. Goguel, "L'Élection Présidentielle Française de Décembre 1965", in *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 16, 2, 1966, p. 236.
69. For a biography, see J. Mousseau, *Chaban-Delmas*, Paris, Perrin, 2000.
70. Schwartzberg, *La campagne présidentielle de 1965*, op. cit., p. 19.
71. J. Fauvet, *Trop d'erreurs*, *Le Monde*, 7 December 1965, p. 1.
72. See E. Burin des Roziers, personal communication, 12 November 2004. Burin des Roziers himself pointed out that, after initial discouragement, de Gaulle rapidly recovered and informed his entourage of his intention to continue on into the second round. This is confirmed in Lacouture's biography of de Gaulle. On 8 December de Gaulle opened the cabinet meeting with a surprising statement: "I was wrong [...] it was I, and myself only, who has confused election with referendum [...] I would lie if I said to the world that it left me indifferent." Then completely spontaneously, he added: "Needless to say that I am still going to run! [...]" During the first round, the French have let off steam, and the second one is the decisive one." J. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 637.
73. AN, 5 AG 1/294, report from the prefect of the Oise department to Georges Galichon, no date.
74. AN, 5 AG 1/294, report from the prefect of the Marne-et-Loire department to Georges Galichon, no date.
75. AN, 5 AG 1/294, report from the prefect of the Rhône-Alpes department to Georges Galichon, 8 December 1965.
76. E. Burin des Roziers, personal communication, 12 November 2004.
77. AN, 5AG1/349, Belline's telegram to General de Gaulle, 21 November 1965.
78. P. Lefranc, private communication, 30 November 2004 and E. Burin des Roziers on 12 November 2004.

79. "I am not saying I am perfect, and I do not want to hide my age. I do not claim I know everything or that I am omnipotent." INA, de Gaulle collection, 17 December 1965, 9' 58".
80. AN, 5 AG1/294, report of the Rhône-Alpes department to Georges Galichon, 18 December 1965.
81. On 19 December, in the Rhône-Alpes department de Gaulle got 53.42% of votes against the 46.58% for Mitterrand, confirming the indications given by the prefect.
82. AN, 5 AG1/294, report of the Rhône-Alpes department to Georges Galichon, 18 December 1965.
83. *Le Figaro*, 22 December 1965, p. 1.
84. A. Philip, "Après la campagne présidentielle", in *France-Forum*, 69–70, 1966, p.20.
85. Bourdon, Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle, op. cit., p. 110.
86. Rémond, Neuschwander, *Télévision et comportement politique*, op. cit., pp. 325–347.
87. The Bravais–Pearson correlation coefficient is a measure of linear correlation where independent and dependent variables lose their respective roles and meanings. This correlation is the covariance of two variables divided by the maximum deviation. In the bidimensional case with variables Y and X this coefficient is:

$$r = \frac{\text{Codev}(X,Y)}{\sqrt{\text{Dev}(x)\text{Dev}(y)}}$$

Or:

$$r = \frac{\sum_j x_j y_j - n\bar{x}\bar{y}}{\sqrt{\left(\sum_j x_j^2 - n\bar{x}^2\right)\left(\sum_j y_j^2 - n\bar{y}^2\right)}} = \frac{\sum_j (y_j - \bar{y})(x_j - \bar{x})}{\sqrt{\sum_j (x_j - \bar{x})^2 \sum_j (y_j - \bar{y})^2}}$$

The coefficient has a value between -1 and 1 and has the algebraic sign of the co-deviance.

When $r = +1$ the two lines of regression of Y from X and of X from Y are the same and all the empirical points that represent the units in a Cartesian orthogonal plane with X and Y as the axes are perfectly aligned along the ascending regression line. This situation shows a perfect linear positive dependence.

The same is true for $r = -1$; however, in this case the regression line is descendant and the two variables have a perfect negative linear dependence.

If $r = 0$ the regression lines are perpendicular and their angular coefficients are equal 0; the two variables are linearly independent.

In the case of more than two variables, the correlation matrix is “**R**”. This is a diagonal matrix with “1” on the main diagonal line and with the correlation coefficient everywhere else between the different variables.

88. Rémond, Neuschwander, *Télévision et comportement politique*, op. cit., p. 334.
89. AN, 5 AG 1/294, Gilbert Pérol note to General de Gaulle, 23 December 1965.
90. 1 CJM Claude Neuschwander note dated 13 November 1965.
91. Goguel, *L'élection présidentielle de décembre 1965*, op. cit., p. 243.
92. R. Rémond, “Après la campagne présidentielle”, in *France-Forum*, 69–70, 1966, p. 23.
93. M. Prélôt, “Après la campagne présidentielle”, in *France-Forum*, 69–70, 1966, p. 23.
94. W.R. Nester, *De Gaulle's Legacy: The Art of Power in France's Fifth Republic*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
95. Some years later, Mitterrand publicly softened the position he took in 1958 and wrote: “My vote against the Constitution was a vote against the context and not so much the actual text, which was however far from perfect.” F. Mitterrand, *Ma part de vérité*, Paris, Fayard, 1969, p. 41.
96. Duhamel, *La gauche et la V^e République*, op.cit, p. 260.
97. *La présentation des vœux à l'Élysée*, *Le Monde*, 2 January 1966, p. 16.
98. Roussel, *Charles de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 407.
99. AN, 5 AG 1/294, Gilbert Pérol note to General Gaulle, 17 December 1965.
100. A. Lancelot, “Les résultats de l'élection présidentielle”, in *Projet*, 2, 1966, pp. 159–178.

De Gaulle, Pompidou and May 1968

1 THE FIRE UNDER THE ASHES

On New Year's Eve 1967 Charles de Gaulle broadcast the usual end of year message to the French nation. He quoted some lines from Verlaine that he thought fitted perfectly the situation of the country: "Dear God, is not the life up there, Simple and sweet?"¹ The Head of State did not foresee any imminent dangers in a country that "finally does not know enemies". At last de Gaulle could boast to the French people that yet again in the New Year "while other countries were thrown into disorder, ours will continue to be exemplary in managing its own affairs".²

At that moment the General's predictions sounded plausible. After ten years during which de Gaulle had monopolised power and defeated all his enemies (including politicians, militarys, rebels, terrorists and "Eurocrats") who had tried in vain to stop him, it seemed that he could finally enjoy a few quiet last years at the Élysée. The success of the March 1967 election had not been outstanding, but the Gaullists had retained their majority in the National Assembly. The spring of 1968 also seemed to provide the General with opportunities to restore France to its ancient *grandeur*³: the presidential trip to Romania scheduled for the second week in May was intended to reconfirm France's aristocratic contempt for the logic of the blocs. In the same period, the Prime Minister's visit to Iran and Afghanistan was expected to advance France's petroleum agreements with those countries, a sore point for both Washington and London.⁴

However, in the deeper recesses of French society transformations were under way. Thanks to its new-found prosperity, the France of “the Glorious thirty”⁵ continued the accelerated process of modernisation that had begun in the aftermath of the Second World War. Parallel with the changing demographic situation of France, which was witnessing a dramatic exodus from the rural areas driven by the rapid process of industrialisation and urbanisation, the attitudes of the French, especially its younger generation, were also changing.⁶ The narrow victory of the 1967 general election had provided a glimpse of the gulf that had opened up between public opinion and the General ever since the previous election in the autumn of 1962.⁷ The younger generation especially found it increasingly difficult to understand Gaullist policy priorities, in particular its policies on international affairs. For them the priority was not a foreign policy whose goal was France’s emancipation from the American military influence (which was in actual fact rather fanciful); rather, it was the pursuit of greater freedom and a more dynamic society where individuals could pursue self-realisation. The General could not embrace this vision; a man of the previous century, though sensitive to issues of social justice, he could never give priority to the individual good over the collective one.⁸

The clash between these two increasingly distant worlds that were unable to communicate with each other was to explode in May 1968 with deep repercussions for France’s social order, political establishment and the media. The student revolts and worker’s protests, the crisis of Gaullism and the consequent rebalancing of power between the Élysée and Matignon in addition to the long strike of radio–television journalists who, up to that time, were considered the keepers of Gaullist power caused “telecracy” to falter. These were just some of the events that in May 1968 shook the whole of France. And yet, at the beginning of the spring of 1968, all this seemed unimaginable, even to the General. Bored by what proved to be only the seeming appearance of tranquillity, de Gaulle said to Admiral Flohic, his closer advisor and *aide-de-camp*: “Now that there is nothing difficult or heroic to do, I do not have that much fun any longer.”⁹

2 THE UNIVERSITY UPRISING: THE STUDENTS AND THE RADIO

Our public life nowadays is boring. The French are bored. They take not even the slightest interest (let alone participate) in the world’s convulsions. No present event directly concerns us. Every evening at least three times a

day, television tells us that France is at peace for the first time after almost thirty years and that it has no kind of involvement in any part of the planet. Young people are bored [...]. General de Gaulle is bored [...] If we go on like this, this country could well die of boredom.¹⁰

At the beginning of spring 1968, many commentators would have agreed with Pierre Viansson-Ponté's words. In the light of ensuing events, this quotation is historically significant for its massive underestimation of the deep unrest that was spreading unnoticed among French students.¹¹

A series of incidents in the Faculty of Letters and on the campus at the University of Nanterre marked the beginning of the academic year in the autumn of 1967: rules concerning students' accommodation were criticised, courses and exams were disrupted and the then Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports—François Missoffe—became the target of criticism from a sociology student called Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Viewed individually in isolation these events did not raise or detain the interest of the mass media; viewed as a whole, however, they were the unmistakable signs of much wider dissatisfaction.¹² Discontent also began to spread outside the capital. The small Situationist Group in Strasburg, inspired by the brilliant and paradoxical ideas of Guy Debord, published a prophetic pamphlet entitled *De la misère en milieu étudiant* that provided a description of young people's social malaise and anticipated the anti-authoritarian wind that was going to spread through the protest movement.¹³

One of the things that aggravated the climate of public opinion was the announced plan by the Pompidou government in February 1968 to introduce a selection process for access to university. This reform attempted to find a solution to the vertiginous increase of university students as a result of the post-war increase in the population and the massive expansion of school education across the population. The number of students registering at the university rose from 175,000 in 1958–59 to 508,000 in 1967–68.¹⁴ For his part the General was worried about the high percentage of the dropout rate among university students (about 70%) and the difficulties of reconciling educational opportunities with the needs of employers. Inspired by some readings¹⁵ and pressured by Jacques Narbonne,¹⁶ one of his technical advisors for educational matters, the General began to take an interest in the situation faced by universities. Beginning in 1963 the General had pressed his Ministers of National Education—first Christian Fouchet and later Alain Peyrefitte—to reform the educational sector through the introduction of a more efficient system

for advising high school graduates of their opportunities and a selection process to determine access to university education.¹⁷ His project never saw the light of day due to the more liberal views of Fouchet and in particular of Pompidou who was a respected representative of the “Republic of the Professors”¹⁸ and staunch defender of non-selective access to university.¹⁹ When Alain Peyrefitte succeeded Fouchet in the April of 1967 he was well aware that education was a very delicate issue and that the planned reform was dividing opinion at Matignon and the Élysée. The reform project that he presented to the ministerial cabinet on 24 April 1968 was a watered-down version of the General’s proposals: faculties would be autonomous as far as recruitment was concerned and those candidates that were rejected could, if they wished, have access to vocational schools.²⁰

It was not so much the actual reform that caused division and discontent, as de Gaulle’s increasingly intransigent attitude in dealing with it. The Head of State, though he was aware of tensions among students, showed no intention of modifying a reform that had been postponed for too long²¹: “All my life I have forced people to do things that they did not want to do,”²² de Gaulle said to General Lalande. What the General did not grasp was the fact that this kind of authority was no longer recognised or automatically accepted by the young generations.

The gap between the political establishment and the students became unbridgeable. The centre of the imminent protests was going to be the Sorbonne, though its first actions took place in Nanterre. At the beginning of the autumn of 1967, the first skirmishes culminated just before the Easter holidays with the occupation of the administrative tower on 22 March 1968. Students protested against police repression of demonstrations that had degenerated in violence (in particular the 20 March protest that was organised following the announcement of the beginning of negotiations between American and Vietnamese delegations in Paris during which the head offices of American Express in the centre of Paris were destroyed). On 2 May, amidst continuing protests, the University of Nanterre was closed and the situation became explosive. The following day a demonstration in the courtyard of the main campus at the Sorbonne degenerated into violent clashes with police forces called in by the rector Jean Roche. Disorders spread along the nearby boulevard Saint Michel. The university closed soon afterwards, but incidents continued during the following week.

A series of contradictory messages from the government contributed to worsening a situation that was already compromised. On 8 May 1968 Alain Peyrefitte announced in Parliament that a return to normality in

universities after the incidents of the previous days was imminent: “The aim of the competent university authorities and of the Ministry of Education, as confirmed this morning by the government, has always been to start courses again as soon as possible [...]. I hope this will happen already by tomorrow afternoon.”²³ The following day, the headline in the daily *Combat* read “De Gaulle has surrendered”.²⁴ Indeed, several commentators thought that de Gaulle was expected to begin the American–Vietnamese negotiations, scheduled in Paris for the following week, in a peaceful climate. Certainly the announced reform on participation would have benefitted from a reduction of political strife.

As it was the General’s priorities were completely different. Faced with pressures of the protesters the General showed no inclination to back off, and, on 9 May, just a few hours before the reopening of the Sorbonne, he summoned his ministers to warn them that any concessions to the students would have sounded like a political capitulation. The Élysée’s uncompromising strategy forced Peyrefitte to make an embarrassing U turn. At 8 p.m. on 9 May the Minister of Information issued the following statement: “The Sorbonne will remain closed until order will be restored.” This was interpreted as a provocation and treachery and contributed to exasperating the students, whose resentment exploded the following day. During the night between 10 and 11 May in the Latin Quarter the first “night of the barricades” took place and at the same time the Sorbonne became the symbol of what some defined as the “student commune”.²⁵

The student movement from this moment began to expand and evolve. Far from losing power, it spurred a series of demonstrations and occupations of faculties all around the French capital, leading in a short space of time to the complete paralysis of French universities. After 13 May—a symbolic date in the Gaullist calendar as it marked the tenth anniversary of the Algerian insurrection that brought the General to power—the trade unions decided to prolong indefinitely their 24 hour strike against the “police repression” of the previous days. In the following weeks “gauchistes” groups and militants of the Communist party, students and Confédération générale du travail (CGT) trade unionists stood together against the Gaullist regime and staged a protest that was to paralyse the entire country for weeks. The decline of Parliament, the weakness of intermediate bodies and the absence of credible intermediaries contributed to transform this crisis into a major political event that exposed the person of the President of the Republic to the anger of the protesters.

On the one hand, the protest movements, which at the same time were spreading in the US and several other European countries, were inspired by a new kind of revolution that was independent from (indeed indifferent to) conventional politics; on the other hand, in Paris from 13 May, the refrains of the French protest movement—“De Gaulle to the old people’s home!” “Ten years, enough!” “Adieu de Gaulle, adieu de Gaulle, adieu!”—singled out the President of the Republic as the main target of the protest, galvanising dissent within an otherwise heterogeneous protest movement.

Simultaneously, the social and political crisis spread to the communication sector. Ever since the first demonstrations a new situation in the media arose that became a peculiar feature of the French May. During the May protests, the denunciation of the government’s suffocating control of the media that for years had been a leitmotif of the opposition was appropriated by the student movement. Right at the moment when the protests exploded, the political establishment suddenly found itself at odds with the communication sector, as they regarded the mass media as having played a key role in disseminating and giving voice to protesters.

3 RADIO’S SECOND WAVE

During the 1968 crisis the radio, and in particular peripheral radio stations such as Europe n°1 and Radio-Luxembourg, which transmitted from just outside the French territory to audiences in France, became key sources of information in France. These stations provided radio with a central role that seemed forever lost in the booming era of television. Radio filled the gap caused both by the restricted television coverage (initially due to government censorship and later by the television journalists’ strikes that began on 25 May) and by the press, where newspaper distribution remained haphazard for weeks due to strikes by postal and railway workers. Live broadcasts of demonstrations were especially successful with the public, particularly those from the Latin Quarter up until the “night of the barricades”. These live broadcasts were made possible by the introduction of radio-telephones that allowed reporters to broadcast live in the street amid disorders; broadcasts up to that point had had to be tape-recorded.²⁶

The immediacy of information offered by the radio contributed significantly in making it the favourite means of communication among young people especially. There were at least three reasons for this success. Firstly, in the attempt to make live recordings more spectacular, the radio, unlike television, included direct interviews with the leaders of the movement,

promoting in this way the personalisation of the movement, as well as spreading their rallying cries. The seminal interview with Daniel Cohn-Bendit on Europe n°1 has rightly entered into the history of the student movement. Secondly, live radio coverage of the Paris demonstrations contributed to spreading the students' revolt to provincial university cities, included those such as Strasburg or Caen, where the tradition of revolt had older roots.²⁷ The journalist Claude Paillat has remarked that in the capital of Alsace, where university occupations were ongoing but not fully crystallised:

It is the radio that functions as a detonator. Reports covering the dramatic night (the night of barricades) in Paris, and the attempted negotiations between the Rector Roche and student leaders are broadcast from the amphitheatre of the university thanks to a radio tuned in to Europe n° 1. Several hundreds of students are listening. At dawn they decide to occupy the premises, and the red flag is raised on the building.²⁸

The third reason that explains why radio represented the most important medium of communication in France during the May events was its extraordinary capacity to involve and mobilise people. Daniel Cohn-Bendit has testified that “a demonstration planned at 3.00 pm after two hours counted 20,000 people, without a single flyer and due solely to the radio. The live broadcast during the ‘night of the barricades’ led to stronger cohesion among all revolutionary forces”.²⁹

André Astoux, who from June 1964 to June 1968 was ORTF Deputy Director General, has commented that the night between 10 and 11 May made history as the “night of the barricades” because it was first of all the “night of transistor radios”.³⁰

Radio broadcast coverage of the student revolts were not only successful in revealing the impotence of the government, but they also contributed to attracting people to demonstrations. Live reports that were accessible to everybody through transistor radios encouraged several young people to join the protesters; attracting those who were curious to know about the student movement, they also made possible a coordination of protesters that would have otherwise been unmanageable. As the authorities directly involved soon realised, this was a phenomenon with far-reaching consequences. The Home Minister Fouchet recalled that when, during in the “night of the barricades”, he was asked by the Superintendent of the Paris police, Maurice Grimaud, to call Louis Joxe—who was Deputy Prime Minister *ad interim* while Pompidou was visiting Afghanistan—he peremptorily told him, “Either in the next twenty minutes radios are silenced, or the regime is going to collapse today.”³¹

The role played by radio was not just to provide information; radio was openly accused by the executive to have helped “generate the events”, by encouraging protesters to join the uprising.³² During the debate that ensued in the National Assembly on 14 May 1968 about the disorder of the previous days, the Prime Minister, Georges Pompidou, at the beginning of his speech, did not hesitate to include radio among the culprits:

I cannot help but draw attention to the role played by the radio—inevitable given these circumstances but still nefarious. Under pretence of informing they have inflamed people’s passions. There is a fine line that separates information and complicity, the attempt to listen to protesters’ motives and the appeal to protest. This line has often been crossed with carelessness.³³

Unpopular with the government because it brought attention to its impotence and confusion and particularly appreciated by young people for communicating the “truth”, the radio was listened to with rapt attention on both sides of the barricades because of its extraordinary ability to give voice to the events. This was confirmed some years later by Christian Fouchet. During a private conversation with the journalist, Michel Droit asked him to explain how he failed to prevent students from erecting barricades in the Latin Quarter between the night of the 10th and 11th of May. His answer was the following: “You might not believe me, but the truth is that I found out through Radio-Luxemburg. Up to that point everyone had informed me about three or four insignificant mini-barricades, while there were at least forty, some of which were decidedly grand.”³⁴

During the frenetic May events radio became the most important mass media in France taking its unexpected revenge over television. Radio showed its exceptional ability to inform and above all it remained the only instrument that was capable of connecting a country that seemed to be quickly and inexorably falling apart.

4 A SHATTERED “TELECRACY”

The birth of the Fifth Republic coincided with the beginning of the massive expansion of television in France. Data showing the number of television sets owned by French people is revealing. In 1958 there were at least one million. From the following year until the 1970s there was a continuous rapid expansion with an increase of between 500,000 and one million of television sets per annum. In 1968 in the whole of France there were

almost 10 million television sets, corresponding to two-thirds of the nation's families. At the same time in which television sales hiked, substantial progress was made with its infrastructure and programming. In 1958 television still operated with one channel that could not be received in outlying and geographically inaccessible areas. In April 1964, for the first time the signal covered the whole of France and a second channel was born. In 1967 colour was introduced, the last novelty of a media that in the space of a few years had conquered French society.

The irresistible rise of the small screen in the 1970s had progressively shadowed the importance of the radio; what had been the great mass media of the war and the years of the reconstruction had now fallen into second place. The prestige of the radio was still high among the young generation³⁵ but was tarnished in the eyes of politicians. Still fascinated by video and under the spell of the advantageous bond between television and the Gaullist regime, journalists became convinced that while the radio in France had had a great past it had no future.³⁶

In the spring of 1968, one of the central issues that was animating the French political debate was the government proposal to introduce commercial advertisements on television channels. The ORTF Director General, Jacques-Bernard Dupont, announced this proposal during the evening news on 9 April 1968 and, without even waiting for the parliamentary debate to begin, he declared its approval. This immediately caused an outcry from the trade unions and the opposition on the Left. The *Fédération de la gauche démocrate et socialiste* (FGDS) presented a motion of censure against Pompidou's government, which was accused of attempting to destroy the public status of the ORTF (which was branded as a "propaganda machine") through the introduction of commercial advertisements, and of damaging the independent press by depriving it of its advertising revenue.³⁷ On 24 April 1968 the result of the parliamentary vote on the censure motion (236 in favour, with only 8 votes missing to reach the absolute majority) was a worrying sign for the executive that on this occasion was met with the opposition not just of the communists and the FGDS, but also of the centrists. Despite this, there was no change of plans: the same evening of the vote, Prime Minister Pompidou announced his decision to introduce advertising in the ORTF "in the following months without any preliminary parliamentary debate".³⁸

While tension grew in the universities, radio and television were once again at the centre of a heated public and political debate. At the beginning of May 1968, various parallel factors contributed to the creation of a

climate of unprecedented heightened tension in the ORTF. On the one hand, journalists backed up by a strong trade union showed increasing frustration about the suffocating control of the government. On the other, the ORTF management offered its total support to the reform plan put forward by the administration (besides the introduction of advertising mentioned above, the creation of a new commercial channel was also highly significant). The situation, already critical, was going to become inflamed when the students entered the scene.

The theory—unanimously accepted for a long time—that sees, on the one hand, radio as keeper of the ideals of free information and, on the other, television silenced under the strict control of the government³⁹ is not wholly true; this binary opposition only partially corresponds to the actual events, which in their details were much more complicated.⁴⁰ In the weeks of the spring of 1968, viewers were given the impression that not much was happening with the French students: the four daily news broadcasts on the two national channels did not mention either the Nanterre events or the incidents in Paris on 22 March.⁴¹

Instead, the ORTF concentrated attention on student protests in neighbouring countries: among these the clashes of Valle Giulia in Rome⁴² and the student protests in Germany, followed by the attempt to assassinate the leader of student movement, Rudi Dutschke, on 11 April in Berlin.⁴³ The apparent peace in French universities between March and April explains the omission from the small screen of some isolated events. However, the situation changed completely when the first incidents at the Sorbonne began in early May.

Television's silence at this point was deemed unacceptable and could not be endured passively by the press and the ORTF journalists. On 10 May, the very evening in which the first barricades were erected in the Latin Quarter, the brewing tensions became incendiary when *Panorama*—a weekly programme of information on channel one—failed to show a report made of interviews of the main actors of these events, including students, professors, the Rector of the Sorbonne, Jean Roche, and Grimaud, the prefect of Paris. The report recorded some days earlier was forbidden by the Ministers of Information and of Education. Amid devastating clashes between students and the police in Paris, the first report programme on French television dealing with the protests shaking the university, which by then had been already ensuing for a week, was cancelled.⁴⁴

During “the night of the barricades”, the first channel showed a repeat of Marivaux's comedy *La Double inconstance*,⁴⁵ the second channel showed the basketball game between France and Czechoslovakia,⁴⁶ followed by a

documentary on river crab fishing in Louisiana.⁴⁷ The contrast between a television under the control of Gaullist power and a radio that was broadcasting directly from the battlefield could not have been more striking. The daily press strongly criticised the government’s censorship. In particular *Le Monde* complained that it was:

scandalous that the weekly reportage of the “main television news in France” [25 million viewers] did not receive authorisation to give even a shred of information right at the moment in which revolts were going on in Paris. We all knew that some television information journalists who wanted to fulfil their duty had prepared a report on the students’ “revolt” [...] Private radios, on the contrary, thanks to their pristine reputation as a means of information [...] provided a tremendous echo of last night’s events.⁴⁸

On 11 May, the day after the incidents in the Latin Quarter, a long report on *Télémedi*⁴⁹—the most popular in the whole month of May—did nothing to redeem the small screen. Neither did it persuade television journalists working at the ORTF (among whom was Pierre Lazareff, an intimate friend of Pompidou) to withdraw an official complaint in which for the first time, after years of unconditioned obedience, journalists expressed:

indignation about the scandalous lack of information at the ORTF ever since the beginning of students protests. We ask the management what kind of “monopoly” can the ORTF still claim for itself given that French people were informed of the latest events only through peripheral radio stations and newspapers [...] We take stock of the incapacity of the director and management of the information sector to resist government pressures, showing in this way an irresponsible attitude. Hence, we [the journalists] think that it is our duty to freely cover recent events and the problems connected to these.⁵⁰

Despite the fact that those responsible for television information strenuously defended the autonomy of television from political power,⁵¹ the bias of information relayed during the first weeks of May could hardly be denied. In the first 15 days of May the news globally dedicated little more than two hours to the students’ protests, one and a half hours were devoted to politicians and academic managers (the Prime Minister, ministers, the police prefect and the Rector of the Sorbonne), 30 minutes to a description of the events and little less than 2 minutes to student leaders.⁵² It is possible that the 11 May complaint and the announcement of the journalist’s general strike on 13 May alarmed the ORTF management and persuaded them to be less intransigent.

The General's departure for his official visit to Romania further contributed in changing the attitude of the television sector towards information. Up to this moment it had been impossible to dedicate space to demonstrations during the news, but henceforth the demonstrations were given some airtime. On 14 May, *Zoom*, the weekly news report on the second channel, was devoted entirely to the student protests: it focused on the clashes of the previous days that were followed by a debate with the main leaders of the movement.⁵³

On 16 May, during prime time—between 8.15 p.m. and 9.00 p.m.—the first channel broadcast a programme entitled *Tribune sur l'Université* in which Daniel Cohn-Bendit⁵⁴ was present. On 17 May, while the evening news was dedicating ten minutes to interviews of student leaders and trade unionists and to the occupation of Renault at Billancourt,⁵⁵ the weekly "Panorama" (which had been censored the previous week) broadcast a long report on French universities, focusing in particular on the occupation of the Sorbonne.⁵⁶

The suffocating political control that had lasted for ten years seemed to suddenly give way and apparently led to a reconciliation between journalists and management, and a more objective relaying of information. The possibility of compromise, however, failed to materialise due to the hard line intervention of the President of the Republic the day after his return to France on 18 June. The General's intransigent position prevented any possibility of mediation and instead led to the beginning of the radio–television journalists' strike on 25 May. This would last until 13 July, making it the longest strike in this period. For 50 days television programmes remained intermittent, guaranteed only by those who did not join the strike and continued to give some kind of broadcast on a crisis in which television itself was playing a primary role.⁵⁷ After ten years of suffocating Gaullist control, for the first time television stopped to follow orders and became progressively useless for the Élysée. This caused both symbolic and actual damage to the President and made it clear to all that France was going through an era of political uncertainty that was destined to end with the rebalancing of power within the political establishment and, in particular, the empowerment of the role of Matignon.

5 DE GAULLE VERSUS POMPIDOU

When the protests began at the beginning of May, the government was evidently unprepared and in disarray. The impression—confirmed by the unfolding of the events in the following weeks—was that the administration

was facing challenges randomly: the Prime Minister was in the Middle East from the 2nd to the 11th of May, the Head of State was in Romania from the 14th to 18th of the same month. Regarding the university reforms, the government was split between those who supported the introduction of an entrance test and those “liberals” hostile to it. Politically the government was divided between de Gaulle’s “hawks” and the “doves” who supported Pompidou’s efforts at mediation.⁵⁸

The latent conflictual relationship between the Élysée and Matignon that previously had gone unnoticed suddenly came to light. To make the whole situation even more muddled was the unprecedented strategy adopted by the General inspired by two principles that he had up to that point ignored: silence and a scrupulous respect for the prerogatives of the Prime Minister. Though pressed by his ministers and allies, de Gaulle repeatedly refused to appear on television to publicly denounce the intolerable actions of the student movement. Quoting a passage from his *Fil de l'épée*, he remarked that “nothing reinforces authority more than silence” and that there was in any case a government whose task is precisely to “face the situation”, adding “the Head of State does not have to be responsible for keeping public order”.⁵⁹

The dramatic “night of the barricades”, mismanaged by ministers Joxe, Peyrefitte and Fouchet while the General was peacefully asleep unaware of what was happening (de Gaulle was informed only the following morning) and Pompidou was in North Afghanistan, revealed for the first time in ten years the void of power in the Fifth Republic. In previous years in moments of crisis the reassuring figure of the General had been there to shore up the morale of the French people. This time, the Head of State, probably underestimating the gravity of the events, decided to keep a low profile and refused to get involved. The following day an editorial in *Le Monde* remarked that it is “incomprehensible that since Monday [...] all that has come from the government are ambiguous and vaguely reassuring messages, but no action. In the tragic night of the second Friday of May [May 10th] a word from the government would have in all probability prevented another bloody confrontation.”⁶⁰

The early return of the Prime Minister from Afghanistan on 11 May was going to mark a clear change in the tactics adopted by the government and, more importantly, an unprecedented rebalance of power of the executive. During a cabinet meeting Pompidou very firmly⁶¹ announced his intention to go on television and tell the nation that it was the government’s intention to reach “a complete and swift pacification”. This included the unconditioned reopening of the Sorbonne the following

Monday. Pompidou's approach disavowed completely de Gaulle's stance on the matter both in its form (that is to say, the choice to go on television to appeal to the nation) and in its substance (the attempt to make peace with the student movement, which contrasted completely with de Gaulle's silence and total intransigence). Faced with the opposition of some ministers worried about the drift between the Élysée and Matignon and the impression of weakness the government might convey should it be seen as capitulating to the student movement, Pompidou retorted, "we cannot hesitate. If we opt for a conditional clemency the psychological effect will be ruined."⁶² To Louis Joxe who asked him if he did not fear that his decision to reopen the Sorbonne clashed with the Élysée's determination on the matter, the Prime Minister answered abruptly to everyone's surprise: "The General does not exist any longer. De Gaulle has died. He counts for nothing."⁶³

This was clearly an exaggeration, so much so that the Prime Minister immediately after this meeting went to the Élysée to outline the plan he had just discussed with his ministers. And yet, Pompidou's answer was symptomatic of a sudden rupture in the unconditional obedience he had shown to the General over the past 30 years. It also marked a change in the usual functioning of the government during the Fifth Republic; shaped during the difficult years of the Algerian crisis, this had always revolved around the dogma of the infallibility of the President. The meeting between the Head of State and the Prime Minister was a very brief one: "As the Prime Minister later recounted [...] the President immediately agreed to my plan."⁶⁴ This is undoubtedly one of the unsolved mysteries of May 1968. It is hardly plausible that the General peacefully agreed to give up the position he had adopted. Though the hypothesis of the Élysée's "joyous capitulation"⁶⁵ is hardly credible and though subsequent interpretations of what happened have varied,⁶⁶ what is certain is that on that particular occasion de Gaulle was persuaded to take a step back and allow the Prime Minister freedom of action.⁶⁷

At the end of his meeting with the General, Pompidou immediately went to rue Cognacq-Jay, where the ORTF studios were, to record a televised speech. His short but trenchant speech was broadcast on the evening news at 11 p.m. the same day and the following day on the 1 p.m. news: "I have decided that the Sorbonne will be re-opened on Monday [...] On Monday, the Court of Appeal will pronounce its verdict on the requests of some students to be released (*from custody*). These decisions are inspired by a deep sympathy towards students."⁶⁸

Reactions to the Prime Minister's speech were decidedly positive.⁶⁹ France seemed to find encouragement in the words of Pompidou, and his idea to start a dialogue with students was received favourably by a public still shaken by the terrible incidents of the previous days. As Jean-Raymond Tournoux, who at the time was Head of the political column of the weekly *Paris-Match*, noted, after the uncertainties caused by the puzzling power vacuum, the nation finally "is given the impression that there is a leader, a Statesman that has the situation firmly under control".⁷⁰

After his return from Afghanistan, and in particular after his televised speech to the nation on 11 May, Pompidou—who was renamed by *Canard enchaîné* "the healed from Kabul"—became the sole protagonist on the political scene. All the power of the executive branch of the government was concentrated on himself. The other ministers—as Christian Fouchet has also remarked⁷¹—were effectively downgraded to mere secretaries of their respective ministries. In the following weeks Pompidou, assisted by only his young assistants Michel Jobert and Edouard Balladur, completely monopolised power.⁷² During the whole period of the crisis, until the end of June, Matignon was destined to become the government's operative centre and symbol of power. The Prime Minister became the person around which the political establishment was reorganised after its momentary lack of direction; for leaders of the trade unions and the student movement Pompidou was the sole person to discuss their demands with.⁷³

De Gaulle's departure for an official visit to Romania on the morning of 14 May, immediately after the general strike that paralysed the whole of France, facilitated the new-found legitimacy of Pompidou's political role. With de Gaulle out of the country, Pompidou remained alone to lead the country right at the moment in which the workers' protests grew even stronger than the student movement. A series of wildcat strikes were declared, leaving the country more and more unstable. Protests raged not only in the streets, but also in Parliament where the opposition was emboldened by the sudden vacillation of the government. Amid the aggravation of the crisis, three different and overlapping levels of the protest caused a further aggravation of events: the student protests, the workers protests and political unrest, in which rapidly emerged the figures of François Mitterrand and Pierre Mendès France.⁷⁴

On the afternoon of 14 May, during the debate on the previous days' protests at the National Assembly, it was Mitterrand who vigorously denounced the shortcomings of the administration during a period of unprecedented social unrest: "Who is responsible for the country in these

last days? [...] We do not know where responsibility lies. We do not even know any longer who is responsible for the ministerial team! [...] Illustrious Prime Minister, where is the authority of the State?"⁷⁵ Pompidou's reply to members of Parliament was both brilliant and enigmatic.⁷⁶ His real reply, however, was addressed to the public through television screens. In his televised speech, Pompidou attempted to reassure French people that despite the fact that the President remained silent and invisible, the executive was not decamping, but was essentially embodied in the figure of the Prime Minister.

On 16 May, just five days after the last of several television appearances, Pompidou resorted to the small screen once again to address the country with a speech that was improvised and hurriedly pieced together.⁷⁷ He first pointed out that the executive had accepted all the main demands made by students; then he emphasised that this had been the result of the Prime Minister's personal decision. With a calm and firm tone,⁷⁸ he continued by stating that further violence was not going to be tolerated and that it was the duty of the government to make sure that order was not threatened: "It is the duty of the government to defend the Republic. And the government will defend it. [...] The government will do its duty, it is asking for some help from you."⁷⁹ The emotional impact of the Prime Minister's speech, which was reminiscent of the formula "I will do my duty" used by de Gaulle in the 25 January 1960 television speech during the Algiers barricades, was forceful. The newspapers generally praised Pompidou's ability to reconcile qualities of firmness and openness, to provide credibility to the government after a period of uncertainties. The leaders of the movement also expressed a cautious appreciation of Matignon.⁸⁰

The General on his return from Bucharest on the evening of 18 May began to disrupt these plans and revealed the discordant voices of those in power. He immediately called to the Élysée those "that were responsible to keep the order"—that is to say Georges Pompidou, the Minister of Information Georges Gorse, the Minister of Armed Forces Pierre Messmer, the Home Minister Christian Fouchet and the prefect of Paris Maurice Grimaud. The General was enraged by the economic paralysis and the semi-insurrectional state of the country and greeted them with a tempestuous volley of insults. With "implacable hypocrisy", forgetting completely that he had been in Romania for the last five days, forgetting also that that the week prior his departure he had himself shown his inability to control events, he thundered:

In five days, ten years of struggle against inefficiency have been lost. In five days, we have gone back to the worst day of junk politics! In these last six years [*since Pompidou was appointed Prime Minister NA*] we have done nothing, we have been able to anticipate nothing, we have been content to live by the day. Ah, it will be fun when I will not be here any longer!⁸¹

He proceeded to curtly accuse all those present of the disastrous situation, pointing out the actions necessary to remedy it: “This situation has lasted long enough. This is a farce, it is anarchy, it cannot be tolerated. It must end. I have decided: we must re-gain control of the Odéon tonight, of the Sorbonne tomorrow and the ORTF immediately.”⁸² The General left little doubt about the order of his priorities that reflected the central role he gave to the small screen. Turning to Gorse, he laconically pointed out the task that awaited him, revealing, however, that he had underestimated the gravity of events: “Take control of ORTF. Get rid of the protesters and all will be solved.”⁸³ Gorse was told precisely what he had to say to journalists to describe the General’s state of mind: “Yes to the reform, no to the farce!”⁸⁴ Fouchet was accused of being excessively shy and of having allowed “chaos to spread all over”.⁸⁵ Obviously the main culprit was Pompidou, implicitly accused of being responsible for what happened while de Gaulle was away. His attempts to explain that the soft line he adopted managed to break the vicious circle of “provocation–repression–solidarity” in a context in which students and workers’ protests found sympathy among the public were all in vain.⁸⁶ De Gaulle was firm in his decision to restore order; he announced his intention to “end the occupation of the Sorbonne”⁸⁷ and pointed to a new direction of the administration, which he summed with the statement “Playtime is over!”⁸⁸

For Pompidou to evacuate and close the Sorbonne in the midst of demonstrations would have meant to repudiate the dialogue he had started with the protesters, and, most importantly, would have marked a point of no return to the unfolding of what was an unpredictable and dramatic scenario. Grimaud and Fouchet agreed with Pompidou and took upon themselves the responsibility of trying to intervene with the General to avert the use of violence.

Differences of opinion in the political establishment couldn’t have been more pronounced. The power axis between Matignon and the Élysée was in crisis and the precise division of tasks among the members of the executive failed to hide the climate of tension between the two. While Pompidou was busy organising negotiations that were going to start in Grenelle, the

General was preparing a television speech to be broadcast on 24 May, which was intended to restore his dialogue with the nation. Meanwhile, on Thursday, 23 May, he called an urgent cabinet meeting in the attempt to regain control over the ministers of the government. The exceptional character of this meeting was evident not just by the unusual circumstances in which it took place, or by the time (it was customary to fix these meetings on Wednesdays in the morning), but by the disruption of the usual routine. During the Gaullist presidency these meetings became a constant ritual: all the ministers always sat in the same place (Malraux was on the right of the General, Debré on the left) and they spoke only if it was required by the agenda. On this occasion the General asked all ministers to express their opinion on the possibility of mentioning a referendum on participation to be held by the end of June. In almost ten years in his time at the *Élysée de Gaulle* had done that only once, after the Evian agreements, when Debré was still prime minister.

The ministers of the Pompidou government had never seen such a thing and were profoundly shocked to see that the President suddenly appeared less self-confident.⁸⁹ The Prime Minister was sure that if the Sorbonne did not reopen on 11 May, the demonstrations organised for the 13 May strike would end tragically. He thought that the General was no longer able to manage the crisis. On the eve of the 24 May speech there were few who still believed in the magical effect of Gaullist rhetoric and the General's thaumaturgical power. The figure of Pompidou now overshadowed the General.

6 DE GAULLE'S TELEVISUAL DEATH AND RADIO RESURRECTION

On 24 May at 8.00 p.m. when de Gaulle appeared on French television screens to announce the referendum, it was immediately clear to his supporters that their fears were well-founded and that the President's speech on this occasion would not have had the desired effect on a country that, as had been the case in all the critical moments of the past decade of the Fifth Republic, was once again gathered around the small screen. The General appeared old and tired; during the speech he never referred to the violence and the wild cat strikes that had shaken the whole country; the impression he made was that he was unable to understand—let alone master—the situation. For the first time, in a moment a crisis, with the

country confused and disoriented, de Gaulle's charismatic leadership no longer seemed to be pointing the right way, but bowing to the necessity to obtain popular consensus.⁹⁰

The magic of the Gaullist verb seemed suddenly to vanish. "France listens, but France does not quiver"—remarked Raymond Tournoux—"eyes remain dry. The country is not touched to its soul. Charisma does not enter the French homes any longer."⁹¹ "I have missed the point," the General admitted sadly to the members of his entourage who gathered at the Élysée as soon as the recording was complete.⁹² "Those who loved the General had a broken heart," recalled Olivier Guichard, evoking the negative effect produced by the speech of the General.⁹³ The television that for ten years had been the General's faithful ally on this occasion became a double-edged sword and contributed to refocus attention on the violent events. The night between 24 and 25 May saw the most violent clashes in the whole month. For the first time, these took place outside the perimeter of the Latin Quarter and extended into the well-off quarters on the *rive droite*.⁹⁴ These violent episodes provoked consternation in the General and had the effect of persuading a considerable amount of the conservative bourgeoisie that the Head of State was no longer a bastion of hope for a country profoundly shaken by insurrections.⁹⁵ De Gaulle's untimely idea to relaunch the reform on participation in the midst of the crisis did not help matters. French people began to look elsewhere for a figure able to re-establish order and the authority of the State. Everyone's eyes were now on Maitignon.

It was television that assisted Pompidou's ascendance. While on the one hand there was a tired and insecure President contemplating the failure of his televised speech, on the other there was a calm but firm Prime Minister facing cameras with reassuring naturalness. On 24 May he announced to journalists the imminent commencement of the Grenelle negotiations.⁹⁶ The following day he praised the "exemplary action" of the police the previous night when, as he put it, demonstrators "several of whom do not belong to student groups" attempted to "start a civil war".⁹⁷

The different impact produced by the televised speeches of Pompidou and de Gaulle was not merely a question of appearance; rather, it reflected political differences that with the complicity of the small screen were destined to become more and more marked in the following days.⁹⁸

From this moment, the General fell in a deep state of depression that became all too apparent to his closest allies. Though he was still at the Élysée in person, Gaullists knew that all hopes now rested with the Prime

Minister. In any case, his decision to start negotiations with the trade unions seemed to provide a more viable solution to the crisis than the referendum proposed by the General.⁹⁹ Negotiations were extremely delicate; Pompidou's choice to involve Georges Séguy, leader of the CGT, as the chosen interlocutor, was instrumental to its success. On the morning of Monday, 27 May, at 7.30 a.m., Pompidou called a television press conference; looking exhausted he announced that "after thirty hours of uninterrupted negotiations", government, trade unions and business associations had reached an agreement. Though this would entail "exceptional financial and budgetary measures" the executive approved it, taking into consideration the "extraordinary seriousness of the present crisis".¹⁰⁰ However, less than two hours after this agreement, workers gathered in the Renault factory at Billancourt and, catching everyone off guard, refused the terms of the agreement, unanimously voting to continue the strike. Radio and television news broadcasts were simultaneously reporting that an agreement between the trade unions and the government had been reached, and also that workers had rejected the agreement and consequently that the strike continued. For a deeply shaken public opinion, the negotiations during the weekend had represented the last hope to return to normality; workers' rejection of the agreement provided further confirmation that the situation had definitively tumbled out of control.

The next two days reconfirmed the gravity of a crisis that was no longer just social but also political. On 28 May François Mitterrand—then leader of the FGDS—spoke in front of 500 journalists gathered at the Hotel Continental in Rue de Rivoli. With a grave voice he lamented that "in France since May 3rd 1968, the State has ceased to exist [...] all French people know that the government is unable to solve the crisis it has created". He continued by proposing the creation of a "provisional government" that would remain in power until "General de Gaulle's departure" and a presidential election had taken place. He then officially announced that he would stand for election for President of the Republic. His speech was far from successful, due in part to the malicious ORTF presentation.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, it put on the table a real political alternative at a time when the government was badly destabilised.

The following day, the crisis reached its apex; on 29 May de Gaulle suddenly disappeared. The presidential entourage and the administration panicked when they discovered that the President, contrary to what he had said, was not taking the day off in Colombey, but had left for Baden-Baden, where he met General Massu, Commander of the French army in

Germany. The reasons for this meeting are still shrouded in mystery, and direct witnesses have so far provided contradictory accounts of it.¹⁰² According to Massu, Pompidou, Foccart and Messmer, the General had a nervous breakdown and thought of abandoning Paris with his family and retiring from public life. It was Massu (according to his own detailed account)¹⁰³ who was responsible for restoring his morale. Pompidou has confirmed Massu's story.¹⁰⁴ But members of de Gaulle's family and the majority of scholars, among them, Lacouture, Viansson-Ponté and Goguel, have provided an alternative interpretation of his intentions. According to them, the General would have used one of the military stratagems he had described in his early writings, in which he emphasised the importance of "the effect of surprise, the old queen of the [military] art".¹⁰⁵ The aim of such a sudden and mysterious departure would have been to refocus the attention of the French people onto himself. If on 24 May, the General's tarnished image did not move the French, the General's sudden disappearance on 29 May would have caused a general consternation.

What is certain is that the General's sudden visit to Baden-Baden had the effect of drawing everybody's attention on him and provided renewed speculation about the actions of the Head of State. Reassured and cheered after his meeting with Massu, de Gaulle returned to Paris on 30 May at 12.30 p.m. and planned a day that was going to be crucial: at 2.30 p.m. he would see Pompidou, just before a cabinet meeting arranged for 3 p.m. At 4.30 p.m. he would address the nation with a radio speech (spurring the cameras, regardless of the insistence of Gorse, the Minister of Information).¹⁰⁶ At 6 p.m. on the Champs-Élysées a demonstration organised as a show of support for Gaullism was to take place, led by the General's faithful allies Foccart and Lefranc.¹⁰⁷ The meeting between de Gaulle and Pompidou—who soon realised "that he was in front of the great de Gaulle again"¹⁰⁸—was short but crucial: the Head of State firmly refused Pompidou's resignation¹⁰⁹; in turn Pompidou convinced the General of the urgent need to dissolve the National Assembly and call for early elections.

Though the General seemed reassured and ready to act once more, the situation seemed completely compromised. The mood of the Gaullists remained very low. Jacques Vendroux, in the morning of 30 May, wrote on his diary: "The majority of our friends in Parliament are in a dreadful state of prostration. Defeatism is at its highest."¹¹⁰ The events of 28 and 29 May shattered the certainties even of the youngest Gaullists, who always maintained a blind faith in the exceptional abilities of the General.¹¹¹

On 30 May *Le Monde's* editorial, entitled *Tomorrow's tandem* (an allusion to the two leaders of the Left opposition, Mitterrand and Mendès France), set the tone for the editorials of the main newspapers. André Astoux, ORTF Deputy Director General, talked of his emotional reaction in finding an "Élysée in a state of panic" while visiting the General's office.¹¹²

In the meantime, de Gaulle was preparing to address the nation through the radio. Television was going to broadcast only the sound of his "legendary voice",¹¹³ accompanied by a still image of de Gaulle on screen. The reasons why on 30 May the General preferred to use radio rather than the small screen turned on three considerations. The first is connected with the historical legitimacy of the General; by using the radio de Gaulle intended to re-evoke the famous appeal to Resistance that he had made on 18 June 1940 from the London Studios of the BBC. De Gaulle firmly believed that resorting to the radio, the same means of communication he had used almost 30 years earlier while the country was facing another crisis, would have made his appeal as effective as the one of 18 June. Another reason was practical; a radio message could be more rapidly recorded and was less likely to be interrupted by the ORTF strikers. This desire for urgency was based on the need to have finished the speech before the Gaullist demonstration in the Champs-Élysées. A third reason concerned communication; afternoon viewing figures for the television were lower in comparison with those for radio listeners. Moreover, television produced passive viewers and a passive attitude was not the effect that de Gaulle wanted to achieve with his speech. He intended to send a call to arms to the nation.¹¹⁴

At 4.30 p.m. de Gaulle started his appeal to the nation. Unlike his speech the week before, which, as he himself admitted was mediocre, on this occasion the magical spell of the Gaullist word returned and played a fundamental role in resolving a crisis that had been dragging for a whole month. De Gaulle's voice was solemn and firm; during the four and half minutes of his speech he seemed to have regained his strength and authority:

Men and women of France. As the holder of the legitimacy of the nation and of the Republic [...] I have made my resolutions. In the present circumstances, I will not step down. I have a mandate from the people, and I will fulfil it. I will not change the Prime Minister, whose value, soundness and capacity merit the tribute of all. [...] I am today dissolving the National Assembly. I have offered the country a referendum. [...] I perceive that the

present situation is a material obstacle to that process going ahead. For this reason, I am postponing the date of the referendum. As for the general elections, these will be held within the period provided for under the constitution, unless there is an intention to gag the entire French people and prevent them from expressing their views. [...] Should this situation of violence be maintained, therefore, I will be obliged in order to maintain the Republic to adopt different methods, in accordance with the constitution, other than an immediate vote by the country [...].¹¹⁵

This message was far more forceful than the 24 May one, so much so that it can be interpreted as a show of strength. The speech oozes rage at every turn; it is full of presidential authority. Its markers of personalisation are higher than in his 29 January 1960 speech, the one that had caused Algiers barricades to tumble down (see Table 6.1). A series of peremptory statements barely contain de Gaulle's rage and firmly prefigure the decisions taken by the Élysée: his determination to stay in power because of the mandate of the French people, his decision to keep the Prime Minister and dissolve Parliament, to call general elections followed by the referendum. It concludes with an unmistakable threat: if the general strike was not called off and the elections were stopped, article 16, which bestows full powers to the President, would inevitably be used. The impact of the speech was powerful and immediate. All understood that de Gaulle had declared "that playtime was over".¹¹⁶

The voice of the General echoed everywhere: from the opened windows of French homes, and automobile radios, to small transistor radios. His speech was listened to by students crowding the alleys of the Latin Quarter and by members of Parliament in their houses. De Gaulle performed his miracle once again. "He is Zeus," whispered Grimaud, full of admiration; Gaullist members of Parliament gathered at Colbert Hall and sang *La Marseillaise* to celebrate the General's rediscovered brilliance.¹¹⁷

Transistor radios "took their revenge on the night of the barricades".¹¹⁸ The speech of the President of the Republic had a decisive effect in galvanising the silent Parliament majority, who took courage and decided to show their support for the Head of State. Up to the end of the speech Gaullist leaders had expressed scepticism about the impact of the demonstration that had been planned for immediately after the speech. Some of them had even expressed reservations about the location, fearing that Place de la Concorde was too big and the visual impact of a small crowd in a huge space would have been counterproductive. Minutes after the end of

the General's speech their fears vanished: a sea of people flooded into Place de la Concorde and the Champs-Élysées and it seemed that the years of the Liberation of Paris in August 1944 had returned. Gaullists claimed that one million people participated in the demonstration, and though according to more accurate estimates it was half a million, this demonstration was by far the most crowded and important of the whole month of May.

The May crisis can also be seen as a war of images: Jean-François Sirinelli has described the crowd gathering in Place de la Concorde as a tidal wave that drowned the events of the previous days and erased them forever.¹¹⁹ In the evening of 30 May, the television news showed images of this huge demonstration for a whole four minutes, thus highlighting the visual impact of the event. There was no commentary because of the journalists' strike and so all that could be heard were the sounds from the streets, the slogans of the crowd that for a whole month had remained silent. They made their way into everyone's home to inform people that the French May was over.¹²⁰

NOTES

1. INA, de Gaulle collection, 31 December 1967, 16'10".
2. *Ibidem*.
3. For a more detailed study on this see P.G. Cerny, *Une politique de grandeur. Aspects idéologiques de la politique extérieure de De Gaulle*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986; M. Vaïsse, *La Grandeur. Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle, 1958–1969*, Paris, Fayard, 1998.
4. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., pp. 664–665.
5. J. Fourastié, *Les Trente Glorieuses ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975*, Paris, Fayard, 1979.
6. For a more detailed study of the development of mass society in France and its effects on the collective imaginary, in particular in relation to the younger generation see J-P. Rioux and J-F. Sirinelli (eds), *Histoire culturelle de la France*, IV, *Le temps des masses*, Paris, Seuil, 1998. For a comparative study on this see H. Hamon and P. Rotman, *Génération*, 2 vols., Paris, Seuil, 2008.
7. In 1962, the power relation between presidential Gaullism and parliamentary Gaullism began to be transformed. On this see Charlot, *Le phénomène gaulliste*, op. cit., pp. 44–52.
8. Roussel, *Charles de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 851.
9. F. Flohic, *Souvenirs d'outre-Gaulle*, Paris, Plon, 1979, p. 172.
10. P. Vianson-Ponté, *Quand la France s'ennuie...*, *Le Monde*, 15 March 1968, p. 1.

11. In his memoirs Pompidou (unanimously considered the key figure during the May crisis) remarked on the student revolt: "I admit I did not guess at the time what was going to happen." G. Pompidou, *Pour rétablir une vérité*, Paris, Flammarion, 1982, p. 179.
12. J.F. Sirinelli, *Mai 68. L'événement Janus*, Paris, Fayard, 2008.
13. L. Joffrin, *Mai 68. Une histoire du mouvement*, Paris, Seuil, 2008, p. 49.
14. At the beginning of the academic year 1968–69, the Faculty of Letters in Nanterre had more than 5000 new registrations. A. Prost, *Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France*, IV, Paris, Nouvelle Librairie française, 1982, p. 265.
15. One of the studies that caught the attention of the General was L. Cros, *L'explosion scolaire*, Paris, Tournon, 1961.
16. This event is also recorded in J. Narbonne, *De Gaulle et l'éducation. Une rencontre manquée*, Paris, Denoël, 1994.
17. J-R. Tournoux, *Le mois de mai du Général*, Paris, Plon, 1969, pp. 43–48.
18. This expression is taken from A. Thibaudet, *La République des Professeurs*, Paris, Hachette, 2006, which has provided a critical historical analysis of the role of teachers, as a social group in comparison with other groups such as lawyers. On this see G. Le Béguec, *La République des avocats*, Paris, A. Colin, 2003.
19. In the spring of 1967, Georges Pompidou told Alain Peyrefitte, the new Minister of Public Education, that he was against any policy initiative aimed at planning university education: "I am a liberal [...]. I will not imprison the young French [...]. The State already intervenes in a number of issues, it should not intervene in students' decision about their education!" See Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 1.604.
20. Guichard, *De Gaulle face aux crises*, op. cit., pp. 360–361.
21. Various witnesses have provided confirmation that in 1968 the General started worrying about the climate of unrest that was spreading across French universities. Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, the Minister of Social Affairs at the time, recalled a particularly telling anecdote about this. During a cabinet meeting in February 1968 Jeanneney mentioned the protests of young people happening in various Western countries and, addressing the Head of State, he said: "If we consider the problems caused by students which several foreign countries—the US, England and Germany—have had to face, France is a peaceful haven. I think it is mostly your doing." "Yes, it may well be as you say, answered de Gaulle, but don't delude yourself into thinking that it will last." J-M. Jeanneney, *Une mémoire républicaine*, Paris, Seuil, 1997, pp. 233–234.
22. Roussel, *Charles de Gaulle*, op. cit., p. 854.
23. A. Peyrefitte, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, du mercredi 8 mai 1968*, p. 1.609.

24. *Combat*, 9 May 1968, p. 1.
25. J-F. Sirinelli, *Les Vingt Décisives. Le passé proche de notre avenir, 1965–1985*, Paris, Fayard, 2007, p. 93.
26. M. Martin, “Radio et TV dans la crise de mai 68”, in *Espoir*, 66, 1989, p. 80.
27. A-J. Tudesq, *La radio, les manifestations, le pouvoir*, in *Comité d’histoire de la télévision, Mai 68 à l’ORTF*, Paris, La Documentation française, 1987, p. 143.
28. C. Paillat, *Archives secrètes 1968–1969. Les coulisses d’une année terrible*, Paris, Denoël, 1969.
29. D. Cohn-Bendit, *Le gauchisme, remède à la maladie sénile du communisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, p. 75.
30. A. Astoux, *Ondes de choc: de mai 1968 à l’Ortf aux radios pirates de 1978*, Paris, Plon, 1978, p. 39.
31. C. Fouchet, *Mémoires d’hier et de demain. Au service du Général de Gaulle*, Paris, Plon, 1971, p. 244.
32. Aa. Vv., *Mai 68*, Paris, La Documentation française, 1988, p. 46.
33. G. Pompidou, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mardi 14 mai 1968*, p. 1.770.
34. M. Droit, *Les feux du crépuscule. Journal 1968-1969-1970*, Paris, Plon, 1977, p. 182.
35. Radio was young people’s favourite kind of mass media, because they could listen to it in the privacy of their bedrooms, while television forced them into a collective viewing context (and in a hierarchical society, this meant the head of the family was in charge). A survey of young people between 15 and 20, conducted in November 1966, showed that 81% of those interviewed listened to the radio at least three times a week. It is important to note the percentage of radio’s audience did not vary significantly between those who had a television at home (77%) and those who did not (87%). Of those interviewed who were aged between 19 and 20 years old, 60% had their own personal radio. A-J. Tudesq, “La radio, les manifestations, le pouvoir”, in *Comité d’histoire de la télévision, Mai 68 à l’ORTF*, Paris, La Documentation française, 1987, p. 139.
36. M. Martin, “Radio et TV dans la crise de mai 68”, op. cit., p. 75.
37. J-P. Filiu, *Mai 68 à l’ORTF. Une radio-télévision en résistance*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2008, p. 46.
38. From 1 October 1968, commercial advertisements were going to be introduced on the ORTF.
39. Television had been defined as the media that had the most decisive influence on the May events; see P. Breton, “Zoom change le jeu, 1966–68”, in J-N. Jeanneney and M. Sauvage (eds), *Télévision nouvelle mémoire. Les magazines de grands reportages*, Paris, Seuil/INA, 1982.

40. The historical account this paragraph illustrates is based on the detailed study by M-F. Lévy and M. Zancarini-Fournel, “La légende de l’écran noir: l’information à la télévision en mai-juin 1968”, in *Réseaux*, 90, 1998, pp. 95–118. This study in its turn draws on J-P. Filiu’s pioneering ideas about the May events. See Filiu’s conference paper at the IEP in Paris *La crise de l’Ortf en mai-juillet 1968*, later published with a few additions on the occasion of the celebrations of the Fortieth anniversary of the French May. J-P. Filiu, *Mai 68 à l’ORTF*, op. cit.. These studies have been combined with the author’s data taken from the INA archives; in particular, reference has been made to the Director of Programme’s reports and relevant audiovisual material.
41. These three television news programmes were broadcast on the first channel: *Télémidi* at 1 p.m., *Télésoir* at 8 p.m. and *Télénuît* at 11 p.m. The second channel had only one news programme—*Tg, 24 heures Actualités*—at 7.40 p.m.
42. The news on the first and second ORTF channels dedicated 15 minutes in total to the clashes at Valle Giulia between the 1st and 4th of March 1968. On 5 March a report in *Actualité française* was dedicated to the Italian student movements.
43. The attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke and the explosion of student protests in West Berlin, Frankfurt and Munich attracted more attention than the Italian student protests. Between the 11th and the 19th of May, French television dedicated a total of almost an hour to these events. On 19 May 1968 the weekly programme “Panorama”, broadcast on channel one, dedicated a lot of space to the German student movement. INA, *L’Allemagne de Rudi le rouge, Panorama*, 14’58”.
44. “Panorama” dedicated a long report on the Vietnam negotiations in Paris entitled “Paris, Peace, Capital”. INA, *Paris, capitale de la paix, Panorama*, 10 May 1968, 44’12”.
45. INA, *La double inconstance*, 10 May 1968, 1h54’30”.
46. INA, *Basketball: France-Tchécoslovaquie*, 10 May 1968, 1h42’26”.
47. This document is not in the INA audiovisual archives and is not mentioned in the Director of Programmes report. The broadcast of this documentary is, however, mentioned in Astoux, *Ondes de choc*; op. cit., p. 45.
48. C.D., *Censure à “Panorama”*, *Le Monde*, 12 May 1968, p. 2.
49. *Télémidi* on 11 May was watched by 34.1% of viewers (approximately 6 percentage points higher than the average figure for that month, which was 27.9%). M-F. Lévy and M. Zancarini-Fournel, *La légende de l’écran noir*, op. cit., pp. 101–103.
50. *Dans la presse et sur les ondes*, *Le Monde*, 15 May 1968, p. 7.
51. E. Sablier, personal communication, 10 November 2004. According to Sablier between 3 and 12 May television covered “the days of the barricades”

- for 4 hours and 42 minutes, but this is not confirmed by the data we have gathered. Sablier, *La télé du Général*, op. cit., pp. 136–137.
52. Lévy and Zancarini-Fournel, *La légende de l'écran noir*, op. cit., pp. 101–103.
 53. André Fanton (Gaullist member of Parliament), David Rousset (social Gaullist) Jean Capelle (ex-Vice-Chancellor of Nanterre), Pierre Juquin (communist member of Parliament) and Olivier Castro, Alain Geismar and Jacques Sauvageot (leaders of the student movement) took part in this debate. INA, *La révolte des étudiants*, Zoom, 14 May 1968, 1h38'33".
 54. Essentially this was a debate between well-known press journalists (which included, among others, Léon Zitrone and Jean Ferniot) and the main leaders of the university movement (Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Alain Geismar, Jacques Sauvageot). INA, *Tribune sur l'Université*, Télésoir, 16 May 1968, 47'07".
 55. INA, *Télésoir*, 17 May 1968, 31'52".
 56. This programme recounted how events developed during the last days of the protest through the voices of well-known and not so well-known leaders of the protests juxtaposed with a series of reports relayed from the Sorbonne and the Odéon theatre during the student occupations. INA, *Et maintenant*, «Panorama», 17 May 1968, 1h19'04'.
 57. Sirinelli, *Mai 68*, op. cit., pp. 216–219.
 58. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 670.
 59. A. de Boissieu, *Pour servir le Général, 1946–70*, Paris, Plon, 1982, p. 176.
 60. J. Fauvet, *Responsabilités*, *Le Monde*, 12 May 1968, p. 1.
 61. "He appeared calm and relaxed as usual, self-confident with a slightly mocking air. Though he was tired after the long journey, [...] he gave the impression of being strong and youthful, despite his white hair." E. Ballardur, *L'arbre de mai*, Paris, Plon, 1998, p. 74.
 62. Tournoux, *Le mois de mai du Général*, op. cit., p. 76.
 63. E. Roussel, *Georges Pompidou 1911–1974*, Paris, Perrin, 2004, p. 227.
 64. G. Pompidou, *Pour rétablir une vérité*, op. cit., p. 184.
 65. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 676.
 66. Jacques Vendroux, the General's nephew, said that after his meeting with Pompidou on 11 May, de Gaulle told him "I did not agree with him and I told him as much. But it is a decision that is in regard to his sphere of competence, not mine." J. Vendroux, *Ces grandes années que j'ai vécues...*, Paris, Plon, 1975, p. 324. According to André Malraux the General would have told Pompidou: "It is your turn to play. If you win that is good. France will win with you. If you lose, too bad for you." P. Alexandre, *Le duel de Gaulle-Pompidou*, Paris, Grasset, 1970, p. 221.
 67. Guichard, *De Gaulle face aux crises*, op. cit., p. 375.
 68. INA, Pompidou collection, 11 May 1968, 2'23".

69. Even in the student movement, Pompidou's declarations were received with a cautious optimism, although students criticised the belatedness of his intervention. See, e.g., the radio interview given by Alain Geismar to *France Inter* in the INA archives. INA, *Les premières réactions à la déclaration du Premier Ministre*, 12 May 1968, 11'41.
70. Tournoux, *Le mois de mai du Général*, op. cit., p. 77.
71. C. Fouchet talking about Pompidou's return said: "As far as I am concerned, the May 1968 story ends here." Fouchet, *Mémoires d'hier et de demain. Au service du Général*, op. cit., p. 255.
72. For an account of these events from Pompidou's close allays who stood by him during the whole crisis, see E. Ballardur, *L'arbre de mai*, op. cit.; M. Jobert, *Mémoires d'avenir*, Paris, Grasset, 1974; Id., *L'Autre regard*, Paris, Grasset, 1976.
73. Roussel, *Georges Pompidou*, op. cit., pp. 230–231.
74. Quagliariello, *De Gaulle e il gollismo*, op. cit., p. 628.
75. F. Mitterrand, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mardi 14 mai 1968*, p. 1.774.
76. Pompidou's answer to Mitterrand's accusation was ambiguous and is open to different interpretations; his remark, "It is not me that embodies violence! It is not me that embodies intolerance!" could in fact refer to the protesters, or to the President of the Republic. G. Pompidou, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Séance du mardi 14 mai 1968*, p. 1.776.
77. The report of the Director of Programmes for channel one in the INA archives provides confirmation that the Prime Minister appeared on television and made an "unexpected statement that was recorded around 9.25 pm". Viewers were given news of Pompidou's speech soon after the 8 p.m. news. The speech was short and recorded only a few minutes before it went on air at around 9.25 p.m. It was broadcast at 9.34 p.m., causing disruption to the programme's schedule. INA, *Rapport du chef de chaîne*, 16 May 1968.
78. "I have given the university back to its professors and students, I have reached out to them [...], I have freed the protesters who were in prison, I have granted an amnesty." INA, Pompidou collection, 16 May 1968, 2'04".
79. *Ibidem*.
80. The following day an editorial in *Le Monde* expressed appreciation of Pompidou's speech: "The speech apparently has had the effect of discouraging some of the leaders of the student movement from occupying the O.R.T.F., or staging protests in front of their premises." P. Viansson-Ponté, *Le premier ministre a voulu donner un coup d'arrêt*, *Le Monde*, 18 May 1968, p. 1.

81. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 681.
82. M. Grimaud, *En mai, fais ce qu'il te plaît*, Paris, Stock, 1977, p. 324.
83. Astoux, *Ondes de choc*, op. cit., p. 111.
84. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 682.
85. P. Vianson-Ponté, *Histoire de la République gaullienne*, op. cit., p. 613.
86. A IFOP survey dated 17 May showed that in the Paris area, 60% of those interviewed were on the whole in favour of student protests and 55% agreed with students' criticism of society. See Guichard, *De Gaulle face aux crises*, op. cit., p. 381.
87. A reconstruction of this meeting can be found in M. Grimaud, *En mai, fais ce qu'il te plaît*, op. cit., p. 209.
88. Alexandre, *Le duel de Gaulle-Pompidou*, op. cit., p. 224.
89. Reactions to the General's behaviour during the 23 May cabinet are recorded in M. Debré, *Entretiens avec le général de Gaulle 1961–69*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1993, pp. 105–106.
90. "For thirty years, on several occasions, I had no choice but to lead the country, and face my destiny [...]. I am ready to do it again. But this time—especially this time—I need the French people to tell me what they want." INA, de Gaulle collection, 24 October 1968, 6'10".
91. Tournoux, *Le mois de mai du Général*, op. cit., pp. 145–146.
92. Guichard, *De Gaulle face aux crises*, op. cit., p. 389.
93. Quoted in Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, p. 687.
94. Recalling "a night of protests that were incredible for expansion, violence and length", Maurice Grimaud wrote that between the nights of the 24th and 25th of May "for the first time, I had the sensation that the police could barely keep order without resorting to extreme measures." M. Grimaud, "Mai 68, vingt ans après. L'état face à la crise", in *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 1, 1988, p. 71.
95. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, p. 687.
96. INA, Pompidou collection, 25 May 1968, 4'46".
97. INA, Pompidou collection, 25 May 1968, 4'46".
98. J-F. Sirinelli, *Mai 68*, op. cit., p. 264.
99. G. Quagliariello, *De Gaulle e il gollismo*, op. cit., p. 632.
100. INA, de Gaulle collection, 27 May 1968, 10'26".
101. Television images of this press conference focused mainly on the room decor or the audience rather than the speaker. Moreover, Mitterrand was constantly shot from below contributing in this way to endow him with an arrogant demeanour. INA, Mitterrand collection, 28 May 1968, 7'03".
102. An illustration of the main interpretations of the 29 May 1968 events is provided in Joffrin, *Mai 68*, op. cit., pp. 338–343; Quagliariello, *De Gaulle e il gollismo*, op. cit., pp. 638–652.
103. J. Massu, *Baden 68*, Paris, Plon, 1983.

104. Pompidou, *Pour rétablir*, cit., op. p. 126.
105. De Gaulle, *Vers l'armée de métier*, op. cit., p. 156.
106. Viansson-Ponté, *Histoire de la république gaullienne*, op. cit., p. 641.
107. The General's entourage convinced him to bring forward his speech; this was initially scheduled from 8 p.m. to 4.30 p.m., in the hope that the speech would convince people to join the demonstration scheduled for 6 p.m. See P. Lefranc, personal communication, 30 November 2004. Details of this event are in P. Lefranc, *Avec de Gaulle. 25 ans avec le général de Gaulle*, Paris, Plon, 1989, p. 359.
108. Pompidou, *Pour rétablir une vérité*, op. cit., p. 197.
109. C. Mauriac, *Les espaces imaginaires*, Paris, Grasset, 1975, p. 264.
110. Quoted in Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 717.
111. F. Audigier, "Le malaise des jeunes gaullistes en Mai 68", in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 70, 2001, p. 84.
112. "The Élysée inside appears almost deserted. A handful of guards I come across give the impression that they are waiting for an invasion. The porters, usually stiff, as imposed by etiquette, are gesticulating in the corridors [...]. The Chief of Staff, Xavier de La Chevalerie, seems more preoccupied with preparations for removing dossiers than welcoming us." Astoux, *Ondes de choc*, op. cit., p. 185.
113. L. Joffrin, *Mai 68*, op. cit, pp. 352–353.
114. Guichard, *De Gaulle face aux crises*, op. cit., p. 417.
115. INA, de Gaulle collection, 30 May 1968, 4'29".
116. L. Joffrin, *Mai 68*, op. cit, pp. 352–353.
117. Quoted in Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 718.
118. Astoux, *Ondes de choc*, op. cit., p. 189.
119. Sirinelli, *Mai 68*, op. cit., p. 291.
120. INA, *Télésoir*, 30 May 1968, 4'19".

Epilogue. The General Departs the Political Scene

On Saturday, 1 June 1968, the day after Pompidou had formed the new government that would see the country through the upcoming election, the news opened with images of long car queues on the French motorways; French people were taking a break during the weekend of Pentecost.¹ Petrol stations had opened after weeks of forced closure caused by the strike, and the French could use their cars once again. These images suggested that the country was returning to normality. The crisis of the previous days was put in perspective; French people seemed far keener to go on holiday than start a revolution. These images could also be interpreted as providing confirmation of de Gaulle's theory, according to which the May movement was nothing but a "farce".²

On Monday, 3 June, the electoral campaign began and work resumed in several sectors that had previously been brought to a halt by the strike. Even the last few sceptics had to admit that the period of social conflict had ended and given way to the resumption of normal political debate. The main issue was the growing conflictual relationship between the Head of State and the Prime Minister, who was determined to play a central role in the approaching general election. On 4 June, the day after the Prime Minister's television speech that opened the electoral campaign, de Gaulle complained to Foccart: "I don't know what Pompidou is doing, I don't know what game he is playing at, this is outrageous. Pompidou has spoken on television and has not even mentioned my name! As if I did not exist."³ In actual fact both the General and Pompidou

knew that the Prime Minister's mandate was going to be over after the vote, and both agreed on Maurice-Couve de Murville—a faithful ally of de Gaulle at the Quai d'Orsay for ten uninterrupted years—as a possible successor.⁴

In the evening of 7 June it was the turn of the Head of State to appear on television. This time it was not only his voice that was recorded but he actually appeared on video to continue the dialogue with the French people that he had recommenced on 30 May after a period of silence. As before the second turn of the 1965 presidential election, the General went on air for an interview with the journalist Michel Droit. The rhetoric he used to draw attention to his historical achievements and to celebrate the unmatched virtues of a politics of “participation”—the only possible answer to the evils of “generalised mechanisation”, to the distortions of a “ruthless” capitalism and the “totalitarianism” of communism—sounded rather passé after the 1968 events. And yet, the General managed to reassure French people that the situation was once again under control.⁵ But for the majority of moderate public opinion, the return to normality was indelibly associated with the figure of the Prime Minister, who had faced the crisis until the crucial, but, nevertheless, belated, resurrection of the Head of State. In the following days draconian measures were put in place: in Paris and smaller cities all demonstrations were forbidden, the administration invoked the 1936 law that allowed the President to ban private militias and accordingly dissolved “gauchistes” groups. These were mainly symbolic measures as the last bastions of the revolt had already been vanquished without the use of force. Strikes and occupations were over: on 14 June the Odéon Theatre was evacuated, on the 16th it was the turn of *La Sorbonne*. Times were favourable for the parliamentary majority: the slow but steady return to normality had contributed to restore its credibility. On the political front, the refusal of the communists to run together with the FDGS put UDR Gaullist candidates in a good position for the first round. Moreover, the presidential grace granted to members of the OAS (including General Salan) was key in getting some far Right sympathisers into the majority party.

The days of 23 and 24 June were a triumph for the Gaullists that exceeded even their most optimistic expectations. The UDR received nearly 40% of the vote (despite the fact that the centre group of the party led by Giscard D'Estaing ran on its own and won 61 seats) and a clear majority of 293 seats of a total of 487. In all French constitutional history there had never been such a powerful political group in the National

Assembly. Pompidou, who after managing the May crisis had led the electoral campaign, appeared to all the real protagonist of this success. The General could hardly have ignored this when the time came to choose the members of the new executive. Both de Gaulle and Pompidou knew that their collaboration was over and agreed on the appointment of a new Prime Minister. Although they shared the same short-term objectives, they disagreed about the medium and long term. For de Gaulle the change of Prime Minister was meant to reinstate the central role of the President, erasing the possibility of a two-headed executive that many believed was inevitable after the May events. For Pompidou, on the other hand, leaving his role as Prime Minister was a strategic move to accelerate change at the *Élysée*, confident that he was the most likely candidate for the role after de Gaulle's departure.

After the second round of election, the Head of State announced his decision to ask for Pompidou's resignation—a Prime Minister that only a month beforehand he had praised for his “value, soundness and capacity”.⁶ His decision was met with general bewilderment. Pompidou's place was going to be taken by Maurice-Couve de Murville who during the May crisis had been one of the fiercest critics of the Prime Minister's decisions. Embittered but secretly triumphant, Pompidou was being kept “in reserve” for *Élysée*. His own “desert crossing” was going to be shorter than the General's when he had been forced to leave the political scene in January 1946.⁷

The General intended to remain at the *Élysée* finally free from an antagonistic Prime Minister. The nomination of one of his men at Matignon was going to provide him with a quiet conclusion to his time as Head of State. As the General saw it, participation and decentralisation were the reforms that were going to mark the end of his legendary career. However, the risky combination of socio-economic and political changes in a referendum that included the long-awaited reform on administrative organisation of the regions conceived by Jean-Marcel Jeanneney and a reform of the Senate that was to include representatives of the professional sectors met with growing opposition from the autumn of 1968. Regional devolution represented a break of the tradition of the centralisation of the State and many, even in the majority, feared it would increase bureaucracy. The reform of the Senate also raised doubts among Gaullists who were worried it would diminish their local power—on which they had traditionally based most of their success—and weaken their connections with important local figures.

The independents, led by Giscard d'Estaing, who made no mystery of his ambitions for the Élysée, criticised the economic and financial reforms; supporters of Pompidou (who at this point was relegated to the role of MP of Cantal) emphasised that the integrity and dynamism of the ex-Prime Minister made a change of guard at the Élysée a viable and safe option.⁸

More and more isolated after the success of June 1968 that had, however, provided a glimpse of his political decline, and determined to drag a conservative party still shaken by the earthquake of the previous May, on to the path of change, the General faced the 27 April 1969 referendum alone. The result, not surprising even for de Gaulle who, nevertheless, had remained unwavering, was a “no” to the presidential reforms (with 53.18% votes against).

At 11.30 p.m. on Sunday, 27 April, de Gaulle ordered the General Secretary of the Élysée, Bernard Tricot, to announce his resignation to the *Agence France Presse*. The news was transcribed on the main French Press Agency at 11 minutes past midnight the following day. On Monday, 28 April, news number 001 comprised a mere two lines: “Flash from the Élysée. General de Gaulle communicates: ‘I cease to exercise my functions as President of the Republic. This decision will take effect today at midday’.”

This laconic message marked the end of the political career of the General. No allowance for reconsideration was left; his decision was final: the General was leaving the French and international political scene after 30 years. He would retire to Colombey and live amid the silence of the Boisserie. He was going to conclude the writing of his memoirs. The exit from politics swiftly ushered him into history, but some last matters still had to be taken care of. François Mauriac wrote in his *Bloc Notes*: “His glory tragically condemns him to finally come face to face with himself.”⁹

NOTES

1. INA, *Télémedi*, 1 June 1968, 29'12".
2. Sirinelli, *Mai 68*, op. cit., pp. 306–307.
3. J. Foccart, *Journal de l'Élysée*, II, *Le Général en mai (1968–69)*, Paris, Fayard/Jeune Afrique, pp. 169–170.
4. Maurice-Couve de Murville was Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1 June 1958 to 31 May 1968. He enjoyed the complete trust of the General. On this see M. Vaïsse, *La Grandeur. La politique extérieure du général de Gaulle*, op. cit., 1998.

5. C. de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, V, *Verse le terme. Janvier 1966–Avril 1969*, Paris, Plon, 1970, pp. 294–310.
6. INA, de Gaulle collection, 30 May 1968, 4'29".
7. Joffrin, *Mai 68*, op. cit., p. 365.
8. J-P. Rioux, *De Gaulle. La France à vif*, Paris, Liana Levi, 2000, pp. 163–164.
9. F. Mauriac, *D'un bloc-notes à l'autre, 1952–1969*, Paris, Bartillat, 2004. For a recent study on Gaullist myth and its development, see S. Hazareesingh, *Le mythe gaullien*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010.

Conclusion: The Origins of “Telecracy”? Some Final Reflections

Since de Gaulle’s return to power in June 1958, the increasingly important role of radio and television was the focus of a heated debate; the Fifth Republic was accused of having exercised a suffocating monopoly on the audiovisual system. Though this can hardly be denied, it is important to note that this monopoly had strong roots in the past. Since 1944, the absolute monopoly of the State over radio and television had been enshrined in law. Moreover, this monopoly had been the traditional practice adopted by the government since the end of the Second World War, more precisely ever since Gaston Defferre, Secretary of State for Information under Félix Gouin’s administration (January–June 1946), reorganised the radiophonic system. This was deprived of its own statute and put under the control of the executive.¹ As noted in earlier chapters, in 1947 de Gaulle had been ostracised from the media by Prime Minister Ramadier, a ban which continued for the following 21 governments until he returned to power. During the Fourth Republic, despite political instability, French radio was known as “the most disciplined radio in Europe”.² Later, following the political victory of the republicans and Guy Mollet’s instatement as Prime Minister at Matignon in 1956, the continuation of the Algerian crisis and the disastrous Suez campaign led to stricter political control over television and the press. Though, the press was not directly subjected to the control of the State, there were attempts to “domesticate” it through sanctions and confiscations.³ In this context, the theory according to which the Fifth

Republic marks the beginning of the subjugation of the media to political power appears to be a myth without sound historical foundations.

The return to power of General de Gaulle coincided with a spectacular development of the small screen in France. As highlighted in the central chapters of this study, the real change introduced by the Fifth Republic was not the systematic control of television, but rather the way the President of the Republic used it. Until de Gaulle’s presidency, television was overlooked by politicians. It was precisely during the Gaullist period that it rapidly became an indispensable tool for the Gaullist establishment, one through which de Gaulle managed to create a direct channel to the nation. He regarded this as an essential element for the legitimization of his political power. His 76 television appearances between June 1958 and April 1969 were not just aimed at achieving consensus; rather, they were an attempt to redefine the distinction between public space and the presidential role at a key moment in which the development of the media was fast contributing to the transformation of that political space. This would explain why the General’s appearances on television became rarer and rarer after 1963, right at the moment in which the small screen had become more and more popular in French households and when casting a vote had become a frequent event (presidential elections took place in 1965, general elections in 1967 and 1968 and the referendum in 1969). In other words, the development of the means of mass communication coincided with the Gaullist project of transforming a fleeting event founded on a direct relation between the charismatic Head of State and his citizens into a new political system. From this perspective, television does not so much appear to be a political weapon for electoral ends, but rather an attribute of presidential power that provides a legitimised and stable political system. The merging together of politics and media during the 11 years of the “Gaullist era” can be understood as having a series of stages and pivotal moments.

The first stage includes the four years from 1958 to 1962. During this period, television provided the General with the means to realise his desire to directly address the French people in a moment of deep crisis. This led to the creation of new forms of public space dominated by a single voice and embodied by the figure of the Head of State.

As aforementioned, his television speeches and press conferences were publicised and their broadcast followed by a large audience; the issues de Gaulle spoke about met with approval or criticism but, regardless, they were the focus of public life. This new personalisation of the political

system produced two important consequences. The first was political and led to a Constitution that greatly increased the President’s powers; the General’s frequent use of television undoubtedly played a part in widening the field of action of the Head of State, precisely because of the direct channel he had to the people. In customary political practice, direct contact with people is realised through the mechanism of a referendum; this allowed de Gaulle to short-circuit not just the Parliament, but also the Prime Minister. As has been noted in Chap. 6, Michel Debré, who strongly disagreed with the General on the Algerian issue and the interpretation of the presidential prerogatives enshrined in the Constitution, indicated that the Head of State used his television speeches to define the main lines of national policies. This personalisation of office also had an impact on the collective imagination of the French public and provides a powerful testimony of the changes introduced by the Fifth Republic: the instability and power vacuum that had characterised the Fourth Republic had given way to a political system in which one man alone was responsible for the actions of the nation. The speeches and press conferences broadcast in the solemn atmosphere of the Élysée provided a poignant image of the Head of State as the embodiment of power. Threats of a vacuum of power were swept away thanks to de Gaulle, who could be trusted with taking responsibility of the nation. As de Gaulle wrote in his *Memoirs*:

There is a simple fact that, along with the letter of the constitution, everyone—myself included—must consider. Whatever the interpretation one gives to this or that article, the attention of the French people is concentrated on de Gaulle. It is to him they look in the expectation he will find a solution to their problems. It is in him they trust, it is him they blame.⁴

The year 1962 represents a turning point in the development of the relation between politics and the media, for two reasons. Firstly, the introduction of the election of the Head of State by popular vote had the effect of legitimising the direct connection between de Gaulle and the French people, which, from 1958 onwards, he had been patiently building through his television appearances. After the unhappy experience of 1946, de Gaulle was all too aware of the limits of charisma as an agency for transformation; hence his decision to consolidate a new political order through reform of the Constitution that would have made it difficult to return to the political practices of the Third and Fourth Republic. The introduction of direct elections of the Head of State brought about a sudden decrease of the

General's speeches from 11 in 1962 to 3 in 1963⁵ (while the frequency of press conferences mainly aimed at the international audience remained the same). Secondly, the end of the Algerian War marked the return to normal political dialogue and thus the beginning of a gradual process of the delegitimation of the figure of the General. The personalisation of power that the Head of State had achieved thanks to the small screen was the object of fierce criticism. If, as part of the exceptional powers granted to the Head of State during the Algerian crisis, this monopoly had been tolerated for four years, afterwards, with the return to normality, it was deemed incompatible with republican principles. The General's claim to embody public space through a domination of the televisual media could not continue in a context in which political debate started to re-emerge.⁶ These years are marked by a paradox: criticism of Gaullist domination of the small screen was at its highest right at the time in which the Head of State's appearances on television became less frequent and the Minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte, approved changes in media policies that effectively put an end to the government monopoly. Neither the distance that de Gaulle took from the small screen nor the heated criticism of the opposition and those intellectuals that saw “telecracy” as a threat to democracy could erode the central role played by television. Moreover, the heated debate about the subjugation of television to the government remained marginal because it unfolded in the press, traditionally the means of intellectual public engagement par excellence ever since the Dreyfus Affair,⁷ but now ceasing to be the centre of cultural and political life.⁸ On the eve of the first universal suffrage election of the President of the Republic, the progressively marginal role of the press and the increasingly central one played by television did not escape the attention of the leaders of the opposition, who would exploit the possibilities of the small screen to personalise the election. From this perspective the years between 1962 and 1965 represented a period in which the opposition parties, from an initial suicidal prejudice towards television, began to show interest in this means of communication and demanded to use it.

The 1965 presidential election represents the third stage of the development of the relation between media and politics. During these elections television became the most important media. The personalisation of the campaign encouraged by the small screen, the adoption of more modern communication strategies of the candidates and the introduction of the principle of equal access to television facilitated the emergence of political figures unknown to the majority of the French people. It was essentially

television that made it possible for Jean Lecanuet—the centrist candidate, someone barely known to the general public—to get 15.57% of votes at the first round, forcing de Gaulle to enter into a second electoral round. Though, there is no proof of a direct correlation between the small screen and the result of the elections, de Gaulle’s change of tactics in the second round provides evidence that television had by this point become an essential political tool. As remarked on in Chap. 8, while in the first round de Gaulle ignored television, in the second one he decided that it was necessary to appear on the small screen as often as he was allowed and employed a new format of being interviewed on television by a journalist. During this election the high turnout (84.5%) represented popular approval of the direct election by universal suffrage of the Head of State and the most eloquent proof yet that the personalisation of power brought into being by the Gaullist monopoly of television had not resulted in suppressing political debate within the country. The 1965 campaign also marked the opposition’s final and definitive acceptance of the structure of the Fifth Republic and Gaullist ideas about the presidency.⁹ Proof of this came in the televised debate between de Gaulle and Mitterrand before the second round (though this was not as yet a face-to-face debate). The second round of the campaign demonstrated that the presidential election had become part of the French political system and marked the beginning of the normalisation of televised political debate. This caused a crucial development in the way television was used during the electoral campaign. “Something ‘irreversible’ has happened [...] French people have taken a month’s holiday and it is likely they will not be content to return to the insipid routine of previous years,”¹⁰ noted the *Nouvel Observateur* the day after the election. What this comment meant was that the appearance on television of the leaders of the opposition parties and the lively debate that this had started made a return to a government monopoly of television impossible. Equal access to the small screen and the rigorous objectivity of television news had become an essential part of the democratic regime.

These crucial changes affected the General’s relationship with the small screen. His appearances became very rare (in 1966 he made only one televised speech) and, as has been noted by some of his closest supporters, he was to progressively exchange his role of protagonist actor for that of becoming a viewer.¹¹ At the same time in which de Gaulle was leaving the small screen behind, this began to welcome his rivals on to its stage. After decades of strict monopoly, television timidly started to engage with opposition parties, and a new kind of broadcast genre, the televised debate,

became increasingly popular. *Face-à-face* was the title of the programme that introduced this new genre. Inspired by the American *Meet the Press*, it hosted a debate between a leading politician and a group of journalists or, more occasionally, one of his opponents. It went on air on channel one at 8.30 p.m. and was immediately a great success. In the space of a few weeks, it hosted the Socialist Guy Mollet, the ex-presidential candidate of the Left François Mitterrand, the Communist leader Waldeck-Rochet, the Liberal-independent Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and the Prime Minister Georges Pompidou. That the presenter of this programme was Jean Farran, a Gaullist who treated members of the government and the opposition very differently,¹² does not diminish the impact of this programme. Another new television programme of this period, entitled *Zoom* and broadcast on the second channel, focused on controversial social problems such as drugs, prostitution, racism, sexual education, marginalisation and so on. This programme often displayed an intransigent attitude towards political power (as, e.g., when it showed the son of Willy Brandt showing off an iron cross, despite complaints from Quai d'Orsay). *Zoom* managed to survive "playing hide-and seek with censorship".¹³ This timid liberalisation was not the expression of a new political order, but still depended on the "clemency of the 'Prince' who after the 1965 presidential elections was persuaded to become more magnanimous".¹⁴

The final stage of the development of the relationship of televisual media and politics is characterised by the crucial change in communication that occurred in 1968. Jean-François Sirinelli has noted that May 1968 can be defined as "the first French crisis in the era of the media".¹⁵ What he is referring to here is not so much the simultaneity of information and the events narrated (made possible by the use of radio-telephone), or the process of the amplification of news, but, rather, it concerns the very relationship between reality and communication. From this time onwards, it was information that created the event. For example, broadcasts from the Latin Quarter were not limited to narration, but contributed to amplify the event and its effects, with important ramifications that were immediately perceived by all those involved.¹⁶ May 1968 represents the first moment of an era in which sounds and images become an integral part of the collective mentality; they ushered the media into a new dimension that was unavoidable if one wanted to become part of history.¹⁷

At the same time, the French May also provides confirmation of the rise of media legitimacy alongside traditional representative legitimacy. Though media legitimacy is informal, it is of crucial importance in the

balance of power and in providing information about that balance of power to the public. The media's role in relaying events is not limited to showing live the clashes in the squares or broadcasting the declarations of the protagonists on television and radio, but brings to light issues that remained up to this point hidden, such as, e.g., the dynamic of decision-making of those in power and the rivalries that existed within the political establishment. This revelatory effect of the media resulted in important repercussions because the key political conflict of these years concerned the two most important figures in the political establishment of the Fifth Republic: the Head of State and the Prime Minister. At this point the power of television was such that it could determine the rise or fall of political personalities, whose alternating fortunes largely depended on their ability to make use of the small screen.

For the previous ten years, television had been the faithful ally of the General; now during the dramatic events of May 1968 it became a double-edged sword—in one respect, it showed a Head of State whose charisma was fading away, unable to stop violence; in another it aided the rise of the Prime Minister Georges Pompidou. These two different images the television projected of de Gaulle and Pompidou illustrated and amplified the political contrast between the two. On French television screens the Prime Minister appeared firm, calm and at ease in front of cameras; to the public he appeared the only one capable of re-establishing the authority of the State in a dramatic context that had suddenly revealed a void of power. The events of 1968 and the way they were treated by the media created a decisive moment in the history of Gaullism, causing irreparable damage to the General's leadership. During the tumultuous history of the last 30 years, de Gaulle had always appeared to be the one who could dominate events and lead the nation. On this occasion, on the contrary, the General seemed to be unable to take control of events and instead of promoting a process of pacifying the situation he merely aggravated it. If previously the General had always seemed in his element in the midst of adversity, he now looked for the first time uncertain, undecided and hesitating between asserting firm command and being tempted to desert. Television cameras showed a political leader whose legitimation was put into doubt by a young generation who did not feel they owed him anything,¹⁸ and by an ambitious Prime Minister that seemed more able to control the events than the Head of State. Under the merciless gaze of the cameras, the old age of the General signified less his historical legitimacy than his inadequacy to manage the crisis. The old "General at the helm" seemed for the first time at the mercy of events.¹⁹

De Gaulle’s prodigious radio speech on 30 May that caused hundreds of thousands of Parisians to support a huge pro-government demonstration and brought about the electoral triumph at the end of June could not hide the fact that the General had lost some of his lustre and that none of the problems that caused the May crisis had been resolved. The post-68 Gaullism was a “survival Gaullism” and, due the ascendance of the Prime Minister, ceased to be connected with its founder. Remarking on the May events, Pompidou himself admitted that television played a central role in his rise to power:

Despite all (*his successes*), the General’s prestige was tarnished. Radio and television played a part in this. They were responsible for amplifying the crisis and while they themselves had not created this crisis, they had undoubtedly contributed to aggravating it. I was thrust into the spotlight. I tried to avoid to taking advantage of this [...] at the same time I was the one who during the May days was addressing the nation, was talking to the Assembly, and to politicians and trade unionists. For the general public I was the one who had managed the crisis. The General was “absent”.²⁰

Television had a crucial role in forging and normalising the direct channel between the leader and the people. Far from being linked to the Man of the 18th of June, in the following years this was destined to become an attribute of French political life and presidential power. In this perspective the May 1968 crisis represented a crucial moment in the history of the relationship between media and politics that goes far beyond the announcement under the eye of camera of a change of guard at the Élysée. If the events of May 1968 made it possible for the institutions of the Fifth Republic to outlive its founder,²¹ they also marked the moment in which the legitimacy of television was manifested in all its power. Television was destined to become one of the main factors of political conditioning in contemporary democracies.

NOTES

1. Martin, *Radio et TV dans la crise de mai 1968*, op. cit., pp. 76–77.
2. Montaldo, *Dossier O.R.T.F. 1944–1974. Tous coupables*, op. cit., p. 74.
3. De Bussière, Méadel and Ulmann-Mauriat (eds), *Radios et télévision au temps des ‘événements d’Algérie’, 1954–1962*, op. cit.
4. De Gaulle, *Mémoires d’espoir*, I, op. cit., p. 284.

5. Interestingly, almost two-thirds of de Gaulle's televised speeches between 1958 and 1969 are concentrated in the four years following his return to power (31 speeches between 1958 and 1962). In the following six years it is noticeable he used television far less frequently (22 speeches between January 1963 and April 1969).
6. J-P. Esquenazi, *Télévision et démocratie. Le politique à la télévision française, 1958–1990*, Paris, Puf, 1999, p. 56.
7. C. Charle, *Naissance des 'intellectuels', 1880–1900*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1990; for a comparative study see Id., *Les intellectuels en Europe au XIX^e siècle. Essai d'histoire comparée*, Paris, Seuil, 2001. For a study of intellectual power in France with special reference to 'the three ages', its dissemination and contribution in shaping public opinion, see R. Debray, *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France*, Paris, Ramsay, 1979.
8. Sirinelli, *Les vingt Décisives, 1965–1985*, op. cit., pp. 79–81.
9. After the election, the law scholar Marcel Prélôt noted its historical significance: "After condemning the style of the General, the [opposition parties] adopted it and in some cases even more or less successfully developed this style [...]. For this reason, December 19th not only marks an important political event, but also the most significant constitutional event since 1877. It represents a point of no return. The vast majority of voters have cast a vote in favour of the 'President that governs'. This figure has now entered into our political traditions." M. Prélôt, "Après la campagne présidentielle", in *France-Forum*, 69–70, 1966, p. 23.
10. C. Angeli, *Les nuits de la TV, Nouvel Observateur*, 15 December 1965, p. 9.
11. See E. Burin des Rozières, private communication, 12 November 2004. Rozières' statement is also confirmed by Jean Lacouture, one of the main biographers of the General, who remarked that since 1966 de Gaulle began to spend "more and more time with family in front of television". Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 643.
12. D'Almeida and Delporte, *Histoire des médias en France*, op. cit., pp. 195–196.
13. P. Breton, "Zoom change le jeu 1966–1968", in J-N. Jeanneney and M. Sauvage, *Les magazines de grand reportage*, Paris, INA/Seuil, 1982, p. 71.
14. Pierre Viansson-Ponté, a respected political commentator who was often very critical of the General, admitted that "since the Presidential elections, something seems to be changing, slowly, amid a thousand problems. Some minor isolated audacities, show that as far as television is concerned, people have realised they have exaggerated [...]. Complaints about abuses by the Head of State are certainly rarer." P. Viansson-Ponté, "Vingt ans d'information politique", in *La Nef*, 5, 1966, p. 52.

15. Sirinelli, *Les vingt Décisives, 1965–1985*, op. cit., pp. 110–111.
16. In this respect, the Paris prefect Grimaud has provided confirmation of the increased difficulties in maintaining public order. It is significant that after the initial clashes the authorities decided to forbid the use of radio-telephones in the vicinity of demonstrations. Grimaud, *En mai, fais ce qui te plaît*, op. cit.
17. Sirinelli, *Les vingt Décisives, 1965–1985*, op. cit., p. 111.
18. Recent historiographical interpretations have shown that the dominant feeling among student protesters towards de Gaulle was not so much hostility, but indifference. Protesters did not challenge de Gaulle's glorious past, or the fact that he had been at the centre of national life for the last 30 years. At the same time, for young people who had grown up in a consumer society, there was no particular reason to admire him. Unlike their parents and grandparents, they had no direct memories of the Man of the 18th of June, or of the Man that brought peace in Algeria. Sirinelli, *Mai 68*, op. cit., pp. 257–291.
19. Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, III, op. cit., p. 664.
20. Pompidou, *Pour rétablir une vérité*, op. cit., pp. 202–203.
21. A very important factor in the failure of the 27 April 1969 referendum that led to de Gaulle retiring from political life was Pompidou's unofficial declaration on 17 January 1969: "If de Gaulle retires, I would put myself forward to take his place [...]. I do not think this is now a mystery for anyone." This declaration simplified the task of choosing the candidates. Guichard, *De Gaulle face aux crises*, op. cit., p. 424.

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