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Parties and Democracy in France

Parties Under Presidentialism

Davids. Bell

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DAVID S. BELL

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Acknowledgements

This book is not intended as a detailed study of the history of political parties in the Fifth Republic. Nor is it concerned with the day-to-day activities of French parties in the country or in the Assembly. Nor is it a book of political sociology or organization – though these are mentioned from time to time. It deals with political tactics and with political strategy. It attempts to deal with the questions of what traditions the parties represent, how the parties have adapted to presidentialism, and how the presidency has managed parties. Hence it is primarily a study of the party cultures and of their interactions, but with the added consideration of the personal factor introduced by the presidential race.

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This book is dedicated to Evi, Stanzie and Hugo.

David S. Bell
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AD	*Adhérents directs* (UDF members not belonging to a party)
ALP	*Action libérale populaire*
ARS	*Action républicaine et sociale* (Gaullist loyalists in the Assembly in 1952)
CD	*Centre démocrate* (1966–74)
CDP	*Centre démocrate et progrès* (1969–76)
CDS	*Centre des démocrates sociaux* (1974–95)
CERES	*Centre d'Etudes, de Recherches et d'Education Socialistes*
CFDT	*Confédération Française Democratique du Travail* (Union confederation)
CGC	*Confédération général des cadres*
CGT	*Confédération général du travail* (Communist-run unions)
CIR	*Convention des institutions républicaines*
CNIP	*Centre national des indépendants et Paysans*
CNPF	*Conseil National du Patronat Français*
CRS	*Compagnies Républicains de sécurité*
DC	*Democrazia cristiana* (Italian Christian Democrats)
DOM-TOM	*Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer*
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDF	*Electricité de France*
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
ENA	*Ecole Nationale d'Administration*
EU	European Union
FEN	*Fédération de l'Education Nationale*
FGDS	*Fédération de la gauche démocrate et Socialiste*
FN	*Front National* (Le Pen's party 1972–)
FLN	*Front de Libération Nationale* (Algerian nationalists)
FO	*Force Ouvrière* (Unions)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDF	*Gaz de France*

GRECE	*Groupement de Recherche et d'Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne*
HLM	*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*
IEP	*Institut d'Etudes Politiques*
JAC	*Jeunesse agricole chrétienne*
JEC	*Jeunesse étudiante chrétienne*
JOC	*Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne*
JO	*Journal Officiel* (National Assembly debates)
LDI	*La Droite indépendante* (de Villiers)
LO	*Lutte Ouvrière* (Trotskyist)
MDC	*Mouvement des citoyens*
MDSF	*Mouvement démocrate-socialiste de France* (Ex-Socialists refusing the PCF/PS alliance)
MRG	*Mouvement des Radicaux de gauche* (Left Radicals)
MRP	*Mouvement républicain populaire* (Christian democrats 1944–66)
MSI	*Movimento sociale italiano*
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAS	*Organisation armée secrète*
OECD	Organisation for European Cooperation and Development
PACA	Provence, Alpes, Côte d'Azur (region)
PCF	*Parti communiste français*
PCI	*Partito comunista italiano* (Italian Communist Party)
PDM	*Progrès et démocratie moderne*
PDP	*Parti démocrate populaire*
PDS	*Partito democratico della sinistra* (Italian Socialist Party)
PPDF	*Parti populaire pour la démocratie française*
PRS	*Parti Radical-Socialiste* (formerly MRG)
PS	*Parti socialiste*
PSU	*Parti socialiste unifié*
PTT	*Postes télégraphes téléphones*
RAP	*Rassemblement pour un autre politique* (Séguin's association)
(FN) RI	*(Fédération nationale des) Républicains indépendants*
RMI	*Revenue minimum d'insertion*
RPF	*Rassemblement du peuple français* (Gaullist Party 1947–55)
RPR	*Rassemblement pour la République* ('Neo-Gaullist' Party 1976–)

PR	*Parti républicain*
RS	*Républicains sociaux* (Gaullists)
SAC	*Service d'action civique*
SFIO	*Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*
SONACOTRA	*Société Nationale de Construction pour le Logement des Travailleurs* (public housing for immigrant workers)
SMIC	*Salaire minimum interprofessional de croissance*
SNCF	*Société nationale des chemins de fer français*
UDCA	*Union de défence des commercants et artisans* (Poujadists)
UDF	*Union pour la démocratie française* (Centre parties' alliance 1978–)
UDSR	*Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance*
UPF	*Union pour la France* (RPR-UDF alliance 1993)
URAS	*Union des républicains d'action sociale* (Gaullist Assembly group after 1953)
UNEF	*Union nationale des étudiants de France*
UNR	*Union pour la nouvelle République* (Gaullist Party created in October 1958)
UDR	*Union pour la défense de la République* (Gaullist Party in June 1968)
UDR	*Union des démocrats pour la République* (Gaullist Party 1971–76)
UDT	*Union démocratique du travail* (Left-wing Gaullists joined with UNR for elections in 1962)
UDVe	*Union des démocrates pour la Ve République* (Gaullist Party after January 1968)
UPF	*Union pour la France* (1991–94 attempt to federate the conservative right)
URC	*Union du Rassemblement et du Centre* (UDF/RPR 1988 alliance)
UJP	*Union des jeunes pour le progrès*

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Introduction: Fourth Republic to Fifth Republic: *'aller-retour'*?

In the Fifth Republic, the Presidency became the focus for political competition. This happened because of de Gaulle's occupation and transformation of the office. In the event, de Gaulle produced a change in the structure of party politics, creating a conservative coalition which backed the President and the President's government. De Gaulle's achievement, as might have been expected, brought about a reaction from the opposition which regrouped around François Mitterrand to challenge the Gaullists. Mitterrand's left-wing coalition included the Communist Party and this in turn reinforced conservative solidarity. However, this process of action and reaction only overlaid the fragmented party system of the Fourth Republic and, although for a short period a bi-polar system seemed in the process of creation, multipartyism eventually reasserted itself (in a different pattern to the 1950s). Although 'presidentialism', through the competition for the Elysée, did at first have a simplifying thrust, the process was not without a centripetal impetus, and the 'institutional' factor of the Presidency, it became clear, was not the only force in Fifth Republic France.

This simple bi-polarization, which seemed once to be a 'law' of Fifth Republic politics, was not followed through because of the resistance of the party system. French political outlooks, or 'tendencies', are like streams flowing over a limestone plateau. At times the streams run strongly, only to plunge underground and apparently disappear. They may then emerge in surprising places and flow with unabated strength or weaken into slow-moving tributaries. Le Pen's extreme right is a case in point. Thought defunct in the early 1980s, it re-emerged with unexpected vigour in 1983 and flowed strongly thereafter. It is not possible to be sure of what will survive and what will flow, given the uncertain and changeable conditions of French politics.

This identification of strong-flowing, but submerged, currents is not new. In his ground-breaking *Tableau Politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la Troisième République* (1964), André Siegfried analysed the French political scene and developed a model of enduring political 'tendencies'

which underlay electoral behaviour. In Siegfried's view, the 'tendencies' remained remarkably stable over very long periods despite the (to the outsider) bewildering changes of names of party. Political parties are forced into competition for votes and have to move with the times (which includes institutional changes), but the stability of opinion remained for Siegfried a feature of French politics.

But the underlying French stability has often been remarked on, and it is consistent with the shifting of party alliances and party fortunes (manipulation of the electoral system being one factor). In Siegfried's time, these 'tendencies' included the pro- and anti-Revolutionaries as well as anti-clericals and confessional parties; however, in the Fifth Republic, while still evident, these differences are not as salient as they once were. 'Tendencies' were, however, expressed in different ways at different times and the social structure of politics supported multipartyism: in Raymond Aron's words it was a country which was 'steadfast and changing'.

That the parties in a political system reflect old and well-established beliefs and values representing persistent cleavages and political dispositions, is a feature remarked on in European politics. Stein Rokkan, the first to systematize this observation, proposed that a series of 'spiritual families' developed in Europe over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rokkan's theory, although essentially contested, is useful as an outline of the phases in the creation of a party system (Rokkan 1970: 84). In this 'modernization' theory, the parties are the reflection of the conflicts which emerge in European society as it leaves the eighteenth-century agricultural stage and enters the industrial and nation-building period of the nineteenth century. By the beginning of the 1920s, most of the main cleavages were, so Rokkan argues, in existence. However, there were the exceptions of the Communist parties, which divided the working class after the creation of the Third (Leninist or 'Bolshevik' International), and then the flowering of the ecological movements in the 1970s and 1980s. Rokkan's is a classification which leads to a theoretical ten-party system and, depending on how parties are 'counted' (for example, are tiny marginal parties included?), there were seven parties in France by the second decade of the Fifth Republic. Von Beyme, who adopted Rokkan's classification proposed a ten-fold hierarchy and Duverger (who also uses the term 'spiritual family') suggested that Fourth Republic France had six main groups all separated by key issues (Von Beyme 1985: 17).

Before returning to Duverger's classification, it could be noted for the record that the ten 'spiritual families' which Rokkan found developed as France modernized. Those which have been identified were:

1 Liberals (Radical Party)
2 Conservatives (Royalists and others)

3 Workers' parties (socialists – SFIO/PS)
4 Agrarian parties (mainly Scandinavian)
5 Regional parties (small and marginal – Corsican nationalists, Alsace regionalists)
6 Christian parties (MRP, CDS)
7 Communist parties (PCF)
8 Extreme right (National Front)
9 Protest parties (Poujadism)
10 Ecology movement (*Verts, Génération écologie*, etc.)

Without going into the strengths and weaknesses of the schema, it is worth noting that the argument by Rokkan and Lipset was that because the cleavages were developed historically, the party systems of Europe tended to reflect these divisions in a sort of crystallized condition (most countries' systems reflecting the cleavages of the 1920s). However, no system, noted the authors, would show all of these political cleavages and the theoretical 'ten-party system' was nowhere a reality.

Moving away from Rokkan and Lipset, an adaptation of Duverger's six-fold set of 'spiritual families' (which sets the same cleavages in a French context) is also a useful vantage point for the French discussion although as a classification it is 'much oversimplified'. This classification produces: the Communists and Socialists on the left, the Christian democrats and 'liberals' in the centre and the conservatives/Gaullists and extreme right on the right (Duverger 1954: 232). It is a classification which (somewhat) replicates René Rémond's classical three-fold division of the French right into Orléanist, Bonapartist and Legitimist.

Duverger's analysis of the Fourth Republic was that there was a fragmentation resulting from the 'noncoincidences of the main cleavages [issue-oriented in his view] in opinion' with the result that their combinations produced a multi-party division (Duverger 1954: 234). As Duverger describes it, the political spectrum was potentially divisible along a number of lines: East vs. West, clerical vs. anti-clerical, freedom vs. state planning, and so on. Under the Fourth Republic there were more lines of issue cleavage than Duverger allows and some (like decolonization or Europe) were in the event fatal to coalition cohesion. With General de Gaulle's return to power the overlap of these many antitheses was reduced. Initially, the defining cleavage became 'for or against de Gaulle' and at the outset most were in support of the new president. However, when the Algerian war ended, the General's coalition was pared down: first the 'ultras', the colonial die-hards were ejected, then the turns of Gaullist policy in an increasingly neutralist, anti-American and anti-European direction shed some of the centre parties. De Gaulle occupied the main ground on the conservative right and in this way the centre or extreme right had to vote for the Gaullists (to keep the Communists out). In 1965,

Mitterrand's support reflected this initial reluctance to rally to the General by centrists (and by the right's Jean-Louis Tixier Vignancour) and extended beyond the left as such.

However, by the end of the first decade of the new Republic, the main line of cleavage, still based on the Presidency, had become left/right and replicated Goguel's division of the political into the 'party of order' and the party of movement. That meant that Duverger's *'eternal marais'* of the centre had been split into left and right centre with the main part going to the conservative right along with those fragments of the left who could not accept an alliance with the PCF. In the 1970s, this was the basis of the rivalry between Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand. It did not, however, last as the principal line of division. When Mitterrand won the Elysée in 1981, it was at the expense of a divided right.

By 1983, the division of the right into Gaullists and non-Gaullists had been complicated by the re-emergence of the *Front National* and the left itself was dividing the Socialists and Communists as the left-wing alliance fell apart. This time the left/right cleavage persisted as the dominant political division and the *Front National* placed itself on the right. This self-positioning came even though the FN was contemptuous of the conservative parties and because its principal ambition was to be taken as a radical component of the mainstream. A new cleavage was introduced around the *Front National* based on immigration (hard versus soft line) and then, in the early 1990s, the issue of Europe became a cleavage cutting across alliances as it had in the past. As a result, the party system of the Fifth Republic looked in the mid-1990s, with schisms in the coalitions both between parties and internally, more fragmented than it has done in its forty-year history. By 1997 and, without returning to the Fourth Republic multipartyism and centre domination, it had a pre-presidential look about it.

Rokkan's schema helps explain the persistence of the traditions and the deep-seated nature of the cleavages. However, and to bring in the presidential perspective, a further step needs to be taken. There are issues in French politics which cut across 'tendencies' and these can be used by the politicians to divide the opposition as well as to keep a coalition together. There are many examples of such issues. They include the Communist/Marxist and anti-market outlook of the left against the free market Western stance of the post-de Gaulle right. There are other issues (less clear-cut) which are more intricate in their patterns, like European integration and immigration. Competition and collaboration over policy and political issues are a part of the French system as in any Western society. In the Fifth Republic, this competition took on a personal dimension. This was made more possible by the relatively weak organization and the local basis of support for

politicians and was a part of the system before the Fifth Republic. Presidentialism became a two-edged affair.

Presidential politics at the outset had a polarizing effect steadily dividing the system into two coalitions. However, this soon gave way to a fragmentation as personalities manoeuvred for position as presidential candidates or within the presidential (or challenging) coalition. There soon emerged a premium on the politics which could express issues or points of view (ideological perspectives) suitable for a presidential campaign. Thus there is a personal aspect to the politics of the Fifth Republic, which give it an additional dimension beyond the mechanical or bureaucratic expression of sectional interests and the continuation of the *'familles spirituelles'*.

In order to untangle the varied effects of these factors in the Fifth Republic, a survey of the main political forces is necessary and this will enable a rather more detailed appreciation of the cross-cutting patterns of the parties. It is not an uninterrupted narrative nor a simple case of 'presidentialization'. There are underlying trends and persistent detours with no preordained pattern. There is not, unfortunately for the purposes of classification, a uniform set of effects and factors influencing the system, nor is there a clear destination. Nothing in the Fifth Republic, other than the action of its political elite, guarantees 'de Gaulle's Republic' against the 'ferments of dispersion'.

There are two sections to this book and the procedure is as follows. In the first the overall evolution of the Fifth Republic's party system are analysed. In the second part the different *'familles spirituelles'* are examined as to how they relate to the presidential competition. Because France is a 'presidential system', the personalities are important but there is a discussion of the cleavage patterns which lie behind the varied divisions caused by the presidential contenders. These personal divergencies are different in each party and are not uniform across the system as a whole. In the second section, therefore, the procedure will be to start with the conservative, 'mainstream' or orthodox right, then the *Front National*, before moving to the left. Conservatives include the neo-Gaullist RPR, the Christian democratic *Force démocrate*, the free-market *Démocratie libéral* and the remnants of the old Radical Party. Gaullism, as the principal presidential party of the Fifth Republic, starts this review and they are followed by the parties of the UDF coalition (*Force démocrate*, then *Démocratie libéral* and the Radicals). A chapter on the *Front National* concludes the part on the French right. There follows a discussion of the left starting with the Communists and a chapter on the Socialists and then a short conclusion.

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1 The Impact of the Presidency

De Gaulle's contempt for the political parties and the wranglings of the party leaderships is well known and the Fifth Republic was intended to introduce politics of a new sort – a complete break with the intermediaries and a direct line to the voters. In his Bayeux speech of 1946 which set out de Gaulle's constitutional ambitions, the General depicted a head of state who is 'placed above parties' and from whom executive power would emanate (M. Harrison 1969: 28). Yet in more than one way the regime intended to displace political parties from centre stage has been dependent both on them and on a party system responding to the focus on presidential power. As a political system, the Fifth Republic can only be understood through the currents represented, political party competition and the interplay of parties and of coalitions with the presidency.

In other words, the Fifth Republic is, in its way, a *'régime des partis'*. While it is true that the instability and the revolving door of government change which were to the discredit of the Fourth Republic were ended by de Gaulle (with a stability which contrasted with the previous Republic), the history of the political power of the presidency is a history of the political parties. Not the least of the ironies of the Fifth Republic is that the regime intended to sideline parties has given them the central place: far from being eliminated the parties became key to the Fifth Republic and crucial to its development. For example, the success of the Gaullist party itself has been the backbone of the politics of the conservative right since the regime's foundation and de Gaulle himself was responsible for two of the most successful political parties in French history.

Fifth Republic politics was a reaction against the instability and shifting Fourth Republic. Sartori has described the fragmented politics of the French Fourth Republic as 'polarised pluralism', meaning a system in which the fragmented centre parties were attacked from opposite ends of the spectrum simultaneously by anti-system parties (Sartori 1966: 137–76).

Over its short life, the Fourth Republic was progressively weakened

by highly ideological and 'irresponsible' oppositions (refusing to identify with the system). It was an enfeebled Republic, ultimately unable to withstand a series of hammer blows, the last of which, the Algerian war, brought it down. Under the Fourth Republic, the *'mal-aimée'*, multi-party politics got a bad name: it was written off by its detractors as a 'partyocracy'.

Party System Evolution

Fourth Republic politics were conditioned by France's position at the Liberation, the Cold War and the challenge from the Gaullist movement. After the Second World War, France had started in consensual mode under de Gaulle, the Fourth Republic had continued this with the so-called 'Tripartite' governments of the *Parti communiste français* (PCF), the socialist *Section française de l'internationale ouvrière* (SFIO) and the Christian democratic *Mouvement républicain populaire* (MRP) (Letamendia *et al.* 1987; Mayeur 1986; Irving 1973). At the Liberation there had been both Christian democratic and Socialist-led governments and the Communist Secretary General Maurice Thorez had been a deputy prime minister. This harmony came to an end in 1947 when both de Gaulle and the Communists moved into opposition to the regime. At the start of the Cold War with the Communist-orchestrated strike waves which started in Marseilles in November 1947, the Communist Party placed itself in a ghetto of its own making attacking the 'bourgeois' regime, Marshall Aid and French participation in the Atlantic Alliance. From 1947 onwards, the massive, efficiently organized and well-funded Communist Party which had polled 28 per cent in October 1946, was a determined opponent of the 'Republican parties' of the centre. Its 'ghettoization' had been sought by its leaders who had been pilloried for its 'parliamentary cretinism' (insufficient vigour in its attacks on the 'imperialists') at the founding meeting of the Kominform in Szklarska-Poreba in September 1947. Its commitment to the Soviet Union meant that it was an unacceptable partner to mainstream parties even after its hostility to the 'bourgeois Republic' had abated (Mortimer 1984: 361ff.; McInnes 1979).

Supported as it was by weak and divided coalitions, the Fourth Republic was not expected to be able to face down the challenge from the Communists which, in the winter of 1947–48, came close to an insurrectional general strike (Graham 1993, 1994; Charlot 1983; Purtschet 1965). In April 1947, the newly established Gaullist movement of the *Rassemblement du peuple français* (RPF) was the stage for a conservative 'catch-all' strategy and the Gaullists had immediate and astonishing success in the local elections of 1947. De Gaulle's success deprived the centre of support at a crucial juncture but he was unable

to take power (general elections were not due). Instead, de Gaulle undermined the centre and conservative parties and deprived conservatives of an important resource and of authority just when it was most needed: at a time when the Fourth Republic's legitimacy (never solid) was itself in question.

Gaullism's inability to progress introduced a paradox familiar from the nineteenth century: a disaffected aristocracy. Social classes which elsewhere in Europe were the prop to the regime in France found themselves in opposition. Mainstream politicians from the centre and left regarded the threat from the Gaullists almost as fearfully as the onslaught from the Communists. However, de Gaulle's movement stayed within the bounds of legality and refused to adventure into the realms of the *coup de force* and, unable to capitalize on its municipal success, its high tide of support ebbed. In 1951, the RPF polled well (21.6 per cent of the vote) and got 120 deputies elected but the threat had been beaten off. In effect, the supporters of the Fourth Republic had managed to present a front to the voters in 1951 and had been successful in keeping a majority. De Gaulle, suspicious of the loyalty of the elected deputies and despairing of making headway against the Fourth Republic, dissolved the RPF party in 1953 (Pierce 1954; Neumann 1953).

In 1953, a new threat to the centre parties emerged in the form of the seemingly marginal organization of the *Union de défence des commerçants et des artisans* (the UDCA or 'Poujadist movement') (Hoffmann 1956; Borne 1977; Lipsedge 1956). Led by Pierre Poujade, a shopkeeper from rural St. Céré, and starting as a tax protest, the UDCA caught a rising tide of discontent stoked by threatening social change, disillusion after the French Army's capitulation in the Indo-China war and the beginnings of the Algerian crisis. Poujade's opposition to Prime Minister Mendès was ostensibly on behalf of *'le menu peuple'*, but its main thrust took the form of an anti-Semitic and anti-Parliamentary rhetoric which left no doubt as to where, on the political spectrum, the movement stood. Poujadism, like Gaullism, peaked at the wrong point of the electoral cycle but it did poll 2,600,000 votes in the election of January 1956 and 53 deputies were elected and the Poujadist movement entered the Assembly. Poujadism helped to discredit the Fourth Republic, though the UDCA leadership proved startlingly inadequate and the movement soon dissipated (Williams 1970: Ch. 6).

With the parties from both political extremes represented in the Assembly, reaching a plateau of around two hundred (approximately one-third) deputies, and the centre steadily weakening, the maintenance of government support became increasingly difficult. Although they were polar opposites, the extreme parties had a common interest in undermining and (if possible) overthrowing the Fourth Republic and on occasion they found policies which they could combine to reject.

Thus the proposal for a European Defence Community was defeated by the combined votes of the Gaullists and Communists, leading to the fall of the Mendès France government (the most effective in the Fourth Republic) (Aron and Lerner 1957). As the 1950s progressed and as the crisis in Algeria deteriorated, it became increasingly difficult to find majorities for positive measures but easier to find combinations to prevent action: this was '*immobilisme*'. In other words, the difficulties of the Fourth Republic lay in the conjuncture and in the comportment of rival political forces, made worse by the radical phase of the Cold War and de Gaulle's own hostility (Irving 1975: 33, 140).

Those parties which formed the main pro-Fourth Republic bulwark were the SFIO and the MRP along with the Radicals and minorities such as the *Union démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance* (UDSR). Despite its loss of votes from 23.4 per cent to 15.2 per cent over the period the SFIO contingent still numbered 99 deputies in 1956 (Pierce 1957; Duverger *et al.* 1957). It provided much of the ministerial personnel of the Fourth Republic (apart from the conservative interlude from 1950–53) and six of its 25 Prime Ministers. Like other parties, the SFIO was subject to splits over the main questions and ultimately the Algerian crisis provoked a schism when the leadership stepped up the war. It was also continuously vulnerable to Communist pressure and was pulled away from its 'natural' reformist vocation by the fear (as its leader Léon Blum put it) 'qu'en dira-t-on' (Communiste).

MRP, which participated in every Fourth Republic government but two, was the system's other main prop. At the Liberation it was expected that MRP would dominate the conservative right in the way that Gaullism later came to do. MRP was not a confessional party and was business friendly, although it preferred a Keynesian intervention to *laissez-faire* and had a strong social policy on the family, the welfare state and the social security system. It did not, of course, take its politics from the Church, but it had a moral side to its policies which led it to promote marriage laws and religious education, and to close the *maisons tolerées*. MRP also strongly supported European institutions and the first steps in European integration: the Christian Democrats provided political heavyweights such as Robert Schuman and the community of Christian Democrats reached across Europe to, for example, De Gasperi and Adenauer (Einaudi and Goguel 1952; Fogarty 1957). None of the Fourth Republic's social and economic policy was a subject of profound disagreement between the MRP and the SFIO, both of which shared the same post-war consensus, but the religious issue, though less acute in the Fourth Republic than in the Third, did divide them. MRP itself was split by decolonization and by the question of what attitude to take to de Gaulle. Although the biggest party to emerge from the elections of June 1946, by 1956 MRP had fallen to 11.1 per cent and 84 seats.

By 1956, the profoundly rural and small town-based Radical Party also polled respectably. It was a party which had seemed so wedded to the Third Republic and the great clashes of Church and state that it could hardly survive it (de Tarr 1993; Allen 1960; Laponce 1958; Schlesinger 1958). But the Radical Party, which never had much ideological or organizational coherence, had been torn by the ante-bellum issues of appeasement and social reform and had switched bewilderingly between left and right. Much the same left/right confusion for Radicals existed after the Liberation, and the attempt by Mendès France in the mid-1950s to turn the old party into a dynamic and modernizing institution almost broke it despite the promise of success if the experiment went ahead. Mendès France had hoped to capitalize on his popularity as prime minister in 1954 by turning the Radicals into a mass membership and reforming party to rival the SFIO but foundered on the resistance of the conservative notables and the lack of organization. But by a deft readjustment of alliances for electoral purposes and the consolidation of agreements with other small forces (and the UDSR), it managed to put about seventy deputies into the Assembly in the first legislature of the Fourth Republic (their affiliation was not always clear). Many of the principal figures in the Fourth Republic were Radical Party deputies and they were the ever-present ballast in all governing coalitions and all Fourth Republic Cabinets.

Usually allied with the Radicals for electoral purposes was the UDSR. This was another loose collection of personalities (mainly Resistance figures) who rejected the embrace of the main political parties; the UDSR was so undemanding that quite a few politicians were in its ranks at one time or another (Malraux, Soustelle and other Gaullists, for example, as well as progressive Catholics). Under its conservative leader, the former Finance Minister René Pleven, it leaned to the right and to the Gaullists. But even while the UDSR in the Assembly was conservative, its organization came increasingly under the control of Mitterrand and his supporters and it had close links with the left-leaning deputies from colonial Africa. UDSR was, however, like the Radicals in its ability to manoeuvre its centre position and it flourished by exploiting its brokering skills (Duhamel 1995).

On the centre right, the main conservative force was the *Centre national des indépendants et paysans* (CNIP) which was yet another decentralized association of rural and business notables (Boivin-Champeaux 1949; Anderson 1973; Williams 1964: Ch. 11; Smith 1965). CNIP had been organized by the conservative Senator Roger Duchet as an umbrella group to maximize the conservative vote (it absorbed the *Parti républicain de la liberté*). Duchet probably saved the conservative right from extinction and he was vindicated when the CNIP Assembly leader Antoine Pinay became prime minister in 1952 (Campbell 1953; Guillaume 1984). Pinay's success also helped wed the CNIP to the

Fourth Republic because he showed that, contrary to what many in the CNIP imagined, it was possible for a conservative (or 'moderate' as they styled themselves) government to come to power. Pinay's government was one of the few governments of the Fourth Republic which was popular and was, with the radical Mendès France government, one of the two which left a positive impression. Pinay was credited with the mastery of inflation and the re-establishment of sound public finances; as a result he was projected into the front rank of conservative politicians where he remained until well into the Fifth Republic.

However, the CNIP's essentially local basis meant that the cohesion of the group, although it improved over the 1950s, was never good. Historic and personality differences, exacerbated by the problems of decolonization, produced splits along several dimensions into factions marked out by mutual antipathy – the party was bitterly divided by the Algerian crisis. CNIP leaders had no hold on deputies who would be returned by the local voters against the leadership and it was also challenged by Gaullism and then by Poujadism. It also had a troubled relationship with the rural 'peasant' component of the formation and this led to grumbling discontent and a breakaway by a former Minister of Agriculture Paul Antier. Yet the Assembly membership grew over the lifetime of the Fourth Republic from seventy or so to about a hundred after 1953 (when they were joined by some deputies from the Gaullist *Action républicaine et sociale*).

These disparate political parties were forced to stand together but found their task becoming impossible. All they had in common was that they supported the Fourth Republic, but they ranged from the far left to the far right. Governments had to find their backing from this very small number of available votes (around 250 or so for most of the 1950s), but wide spectrum of views. Issues as diverse as decolonization, economic reform, the revival of Germany and rearmament, and Europe could intrude to split the governments' coalitions at any time and almost without warning. In this situation, the SFIO was pulled to the right to support the centrist governments and to keep the Fourth Republic intact, while their main ally the Christian Democratic MRP had its electoral base undermined by conservatives and by Gaullists.

A situation also developed in which the governing coalitions became overly reliant on one or two parties, giving the impression of a carousel: whatever happened at the polls, the same politicians returned to the same ministries. Another paradox of the Fourth Republic was the rapid turnover in governments, coupled with stability in key posts (such as Foreign Affairs and the Interior). In these circumstances, the alternative coalitions (which excluded the extremes) would focus on the Radicals and the UDSR and would form only within the centre-left or centre-right ideological space – the wings were not acceptable partners. By

the same token the anti-system parties – the excluded – could not be brought into government and they refused to become tainted by implication in the work of the Republic. In the Fourth Republic, the anti-system parties had little incentive to behave as 'loyal oppositions' and were free to promote illusory solutions – or to make unscrupulous attacks – because there was no possibility of their being put to the test and asked to implement solutions. Even worse could occur: when the Gaullist RPF was dissolved and its deputies did join governments, they did so to bring down the system or to block policies. As Sartori noted, the Fourth Republic's poles were 'poles apart' and the distance between them covered the maximum spread of opinion (Sartori 1976: 135ff). This was the position when de Gaulle was invited to return to power in 1958.

1958: The New System

De Gaulle's return to power changed the party system. He made a new constitution and a new Republic a condition of his return, but the institutional structure was not the major innovation. What changed was that the Gaullists, who had polled 40 per cent in 1947, were now inside supporting the structure and not outside contesting its legitimacy. This reconciled the conservative right (though not the extreme right) to the Republic and with the entry of the Gaullists into the regime, the French political system itself ceased to be an object of contention. De Gaulle's mastery of the politics also meant that the Algerian war was not available for exploitation by mass opposition. On the extreme left, there was also a development: Khrushchev's 'peaceful coexistence' had meant that the French Communist Party was looking for allies in local and parliamentary elections to get it out of its self-imposed isolation (Fejtö 1967; Rice 1973). By the Fifth Republic, adopting a policy of détente, and after a judicious switch on some issues, the Communists had become potential players in the political game and had muted their anti-system rhetoric. Hence, with the diminution of the intensity of the Cold War in Europe and the cooling of ideological passions, the Communist Party was not the pariah it once was – it was still, however, a problem for its potential allies.

French society itself had changed under the Fourth Republic. Industry was modernizing fast and the stubborn, conservative (and inefficient) peasantry was moving off the land into the developing occupations (Marceau 1978; Carré 1972). Hence the old rural and small-town France was in the process of change as the peasantry created by the Great Revolution began to disappear. It was beginning to look as if the problems which had wracked the Fourth Republic, from German political and economic revival, to economic growth and decolonization

were in the process of solution. De Gaulle's Republic entered existence on the back of the most impressive economic growth in French history and did not have to face the same challenges from the outside world. But there remained the Algerian crisis (Horne 1977; Droz and Lever 1982).

Algeria was administered as an integral part of the French Republic, but in effect the settler population led a privileged existence in a quasi-apartheid regime which was kept in place by French military power. A few commentators pointed out that the outcome was bound to be independence for a country which would then be run by its indigenous majority but the settler problem made the Algerian insurgency particularly intractable. Politicians of the Fourth Republic, unable themselves to see the solution, had progressively devolved powers to the Army to the extent that, by 1958, the authorities in Paris had lost control. De Gaulle's takeover was, for the Fourth Republic politicians, the last possibility of retaining civilian control over the Republic in an insurrectional situation, one in which the legitimacy of the Republic had all but evaporated. In 1958, de Gaulle was formally returned to power, but had to restore the authority of government and return the troops to barracks in Algeria.

Yet it was de Gaulle's ability to reshape the party system and the creation of a new political party which crystallized the situation. Although the Gaullist party had been formally stood down in 1953, the network and its expertise had been carefully maintained (Guichard 1980). De Gaulle had an experienced team ready (led by Pompidou, who had been on the RPF Executive) and was therefore able to devolve party organization to other people. In 1947, this non-political stance had not been possible, but in 1958 it enabled de Gaulle to present the Presidency as above party intrigues. De Gaulle, who took elaborate care to appear aloof from party managers, was in fact dependent on their work and could interfere in the day-to-day running of the UNR, looking at details of its nominations, organization and so on, in a way which would have done credit to any local party boss (Foccart 1998). Of course, the UNR Gaullist party was the principal prop of the government and of the President. No matter: it was the impression that counted, and the impression was of a figure free from any party involvement.

Although in the first Assembly of the Fifth Republic, the UNR group of 199 (in a legislature of 552) proved reliable during the Algerian war, the 'whipper-in' for the Presidential majority was the continuing crisis. With the end of the Algerian crisis came the end of the near-consensus and national unity around the figure of the President (bolstered by the use of three referendums of 1958, 1961 and 1962). Once the crisis was resolved, de Gaulle became, inevitably, the head of one section of French politics (the conservative right) and it only remained for de Gaulle to