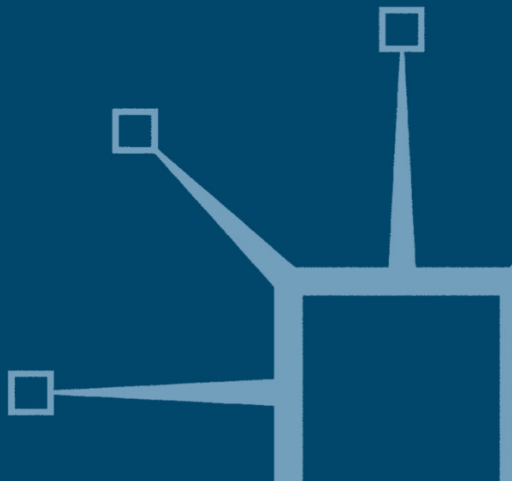


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The Uncertain Foundation

France at the Liberation, 1944–47

Edited by
Andrew Knapp



The Uncertain Foundation

Also by Andrew Knapp

GAULLISM SINCE DE GAULLE (translated as *Le Gaullisme après de Gaulle*)

PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM IN FRANCE

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS IN WESTERN EUROPE (*with Yves Mény*)

THE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS OF FRANCE (*with Vincent Wright*)

The Uncertain Foundation

France at the Liberation, 1944–47

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Andrew Knapp

*Professor of French Politics and Contemporary History
University of Reading*

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Aux artisans de la liberté

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Preface

Vichy, the Occupation, even the Resistance inform France's dark subconscious; if the Liberation era, too, has its dark secrets, it also, more importantly, shaped France's public post-war destiny. This is most clearly true of an economic and social transformation which, though anticipated before 1939, represented a step change against the pre-war system and a model to which the French remained deeply attached after six decades. It is true of the great political forces to emerge from the period, Gaullism and Communism, or of France's ambiguous relationships with the newly-ascendant superpowers. Post-war France was shaped, too, by the frustrations and false starts of the period – by the partial integration of women into politics, by a new constitutional order that so closely resembled the old, by the failure to define a satisfactory relationship with an increasingly restless empire.

So the Liberation era always repays closer inspection. My first encounter with it, as I prepared an undergraduate dissertation in 1975, left a lasting impression – of the fierceness of ideological conflict (and the universal belief that it *mattered*), of the continuing harshness of material conditions, of the resilient capacity of the French to enjoy themselves anyway (I became an early addict of Django Reinhardt). Added to that was Georgette Elgey's talent, still unsurpassed, for bringing the élite politics of the period to life.

An invitation to the Fondation Charles de Gaulle's conference on the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* brought me back to the Liberation in 1997. Its attraction was undiminished, and the gap in the historiography – a deluge of work on the war, a trickle on the years that ensued – even more marked. Could I, as a Fifth Republic specialist, seriously hope to narrow it? It seemed more prudent to recruit a team.

They assembled in Reading for two intensive days in September 2005. That they were able to do so, in the conference which gave birth to this book, was due to financial help from the British Academy (Conference Grant no. BCG40204), the Institut Français du Royaume-Uni, the Society for French Studies, and the Centre for the Advanced Study of French History at the University of Reading.

Money aside, I am extremely grateful to each of the contributors, for their care in producing papers in time for our meeting, and for their patience in transforming them into the chapters that follow. The project has benefited from the advice of Philippe Buton and David Goldey – contributors themselves – and from the comments, during the conference, of able discussants, including Joël Félix, Robert Gildea, Julian Jackson, and Frank Tallett, and after it of anonymous readers. My own contributions were read, with his usual discernment, by Wilfrid Knapp.

But an even greater debt is owed to all those, French and Allies, who paid the price without which the 'dark years' would have been indefinitely prolonged, and the Liberation would have remained the stuff of dreams. It is to them, in all humility, that this volume is dedicated.

Andrew Knapp
Reading, November 2006

Notes on the Contributors

Nicholas Atkin is Professor of Modern European History at the University of Reading. His many publications include *Church and Schools in Vichy France, 1940–1944* (1991); *Pétain* (1997); *The French at War* (2001); *The Forgotten French. Exiles in the British Isles, 1940–1944* (2003), and (with Frank Tallett) *Priests, Prelates and People. A History of European Catholicism since 1750* (2003). He has also edited (with Frank Tallett), *Religion, Society and Politics in France since 1789* (1991); *Catholicism in Britain and France since 1750* (1996), and *The Right in France from the Revolution to Le Pen* (2nd edition, 2003).

Philippe Buton is Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Reims. His publications include *La Joie douloureuse: la Libération de la France* (2004); *Communisme: une utopie en sursis* (2001); *Les lendemains qui déchantent: le Parti communiste français à la Libération*, as well as (edited, with Jean-Marie Guillon and François Bédarida), *Les Pouvoirs en France à la Libération* (1994).

Emmanuel Cartier is Lecturer in Public Law at the Université de Bourgogne, Dijon. His doctoral thesis in law, *La transition constitutionnelle en France (1940–1945): la reconstruction révolutionnaire d'un ordre juridique républicain*, won the Prix de thèse de l'Assemblée Nationale in 2004, and was published by the Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence in 2005.

Herrick Chapman is Associate Professor of History at New York University. He is the author of *State Capitalism and Working-Class Radicalism in the French Aircraft Industry* (1991), and has edited several works including (with Mark Kesselman and Martin A. Schain) *A Century of Organized Labor in France: a Union Movement for the Twenty-First Century?* (3rd edition, 1998).

Charles Cogan is a Senior Associate Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. He is author of *Oldest Allies, Guarded Friends: the United States and France since 1940* (1994); *Charles de Gaulle: a Brief Biography with Documents* (1996); *The Third Option: the Emancipation of European Defense, 1989–2000* (2001); and *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with La Grande Nation* (2003).

Hilary Footitt is Senior Research Fellow in French at the University of Reading. She is the author of *War and Liberation in France: Living with the Liberators* (2004), and of *Women, Europe and the New Languages of Politics* (2002) and co-author, with John Simmonds, of *France, 1943–1945* (1988).

David Goldey is Emeritus Fellow in Politics at Lincoln College, University of Oxford. He has written numerous articles on French parties and elections

over nearly half a century of visits to the grass roots, and is the co-author, with Philip Williams, of *French Politicians and Elections, 1951–1969* (1971).

Andrew Knapp is Professor of French Politics and Contemporary History at the University of Reading. He is the author of *Le gaullisme après de Gaulle* (1996), and *Parties and the Party System in France* (2004), and co-author (with Yves Mény) of *Government and Politics in Western Europe* (3rd edition, 1998) and (with Vincent Wright) of *The Government and Politics of France* (5th edition, 2006). His published articles include work on international views of the first Gaullist party, the RPF (1947–53), as well as on party politics and local government under the Fifth Republic.

Natalia Naoumova is Senior Lecturer in European History at Lomonossov University, Moscow. Her publications include (in Russian) *The Rassemblement du Peuple Français in the Politics of the Fourth Republic* (1991), and as joint author, *Class Struggle and Party Strife in Fourth-Republic France* (1988) and *Liberalism in France* (2001).

Martin Shipway is Lecturer in French Contemporary History and Politics at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is the author of *The Road to War: France and Vietnam, 1944–1947* (1996) and of *Decolonization and its Impact. A Comparative Approach to the End of Colonial Rule* (2007).

Paul Smith is Associate Professor in French and Francophone Studies at the University of Nottingham. He is author of *Feminism and the Third Republic: Women's Political and Civil Rights in France 1918–1945* (1996) and editor of 'Irreconcilable differences? Centre, periphery and the space between in French history' (*Nottingham French Studies*, 44.1, Spring 2005). His most recent publication is *A History of the French Senate* (2 vols.: 2005–6). A shorter study of the same subject will shortly be published by PalgraveMacmillan.

Olivier Wieviorka is Professor of Contemporary History at the École Normale Supérieure, Cachan. He is author of *Les Orphelins de la République. Destinée des députés et sénateurs français. 1940–1945* (2001); *Une certaine idée de la Résistance: Défense de la France* (1997); *Nous entrerons dans la carrière. De la Résistance à l'exercice du pouvoir* (1994), and, as co-author (with Jean-Pierre Azéma), of *Vichy 1940–1944* (1997), and *Les Libérations de la France* (1993).

List of Abbreviations

ACA	Assembly of Cardinals and Archbishops
ACJF	Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française
AFL	American Federation of Labor
ALP	Action Libérale Populaire
AMGOT	Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories
CDL	Comité de Libération
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail
CFLN	Comité Français de Libération Nationale
CFTC	Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens
CFU	Council of the French Union
CGC	Confédération Générale des Cadres
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNIP	Centre National des Indépendants et des Paysans
CNPF	Conseil National du Patronat Français
CNR	Conseil National de la Résistance
CPL	Comité Parisien de Libération
DRAC	Ligue des Droits des Religieux Anciens Combattants
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDF-GDF	Électricité de France-Gaz de France
FFI	Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur
FNC	Fédération Nationale Catholique
FNOSS	Fédération Nationale des Organismes de la Sécurité Sociale
FO	Force Ouvrière
GPRF	Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française
GRECE	Groupement d'Études et de Recherches sur la Civilisation Européenne
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
INED	Institut National des Études Démographiques
INSEE	Institut National pour la Statistique et des Études Économiques
JAC	Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne
JEC	Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne
JOC	Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne
JR	Jeune République
LOC	Ligue Ouvrière Chrétienne
MLN	Mouvement de Libération Nationale
MLP	Mouvement de Libération du Peuple
MPF	Mouvement Populaire des Familles
MRP	Mouvement Républicain Populaire

OCM	Organisation Civile et Militaire
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PDP	Parti Démocrate Populaire
PPF	Parti Populaire Français
PRL	Parti Républicain de la Liberté
RATP	Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens
RPF	Rassemblement du Peuple Français
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
SNCF	Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français
STO	Service du Travail Obligatoire
UCP	Union des Chrétiens Progressistes
UDSR	Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance

1

Introduction: France's 'Long' Liberation, 1944–47

Andrew Knapp

France was liberated by force of arms: those of the French Resistance, but also, on an altogether larger scale, by those of the Allies. On 6 June 1944, 156,000 British and American troops landed on five beaches in Normandy. For seven weeks they were largely confined to a narrow coastal belt. But after the 1st US Army broke through at Avranches late in July, German defences in Normandy collapsed in less than three weeks. On 18 August, the internal Resistance, grouped as the Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (FFI), which had harassed German forces across France since June, felt strong enough to launch an insurrection in Paris. Six days later General Leclerc's French Second Armoured Division, which had landed in Normandy on 1 August, led the Allies into the capital. De Gaulle would walk triumphantly down the Champs-Élysées on 26 August. Meanwhile French and American armies landed in southern France on 15 August, secured Marseilles and Grenoble within eight days, and joined northern Allied forces in Dijon on 11 September. Fierce battles remained to be fought in the Vosges, Alsace, and the Ardennes, and a few coastal garrisons held out against the Allies till 9 May 1945; these aside, the end of September saw France's territory freed. Between D-day and late August, over 238,000 Allied soldiers and airmen, as well as several thousand FFI combatants and over 30,000 French civilians, had been killed or wounded or gone missing.¹

The focus of this book is political and social rather than military. But the course of the fighting left its mark in other domains. One was the contrast between experiences of liberation in what Buton has called 'two Frances'.² One France was fought over: Allied armies removed German armies, and death often visited the French in the form of crossfire, or British and American bombs.³ Elsewhere, chiefly in the south and east but also Paris, the FFI and the (often Communist-led) *Comités de Libération* had the impression of having freed their own territory, sometimes after fierce fighting before the occupiers were withdrawn to the main battlefronts. The fact of large swathes of French territory falling directly under the control of local Resistance groups proved one of the main short-term issues in the re-establishment of a French state.

For as well as a victorious military operation the Liberation was a process of régime change and restoration. It was also a social and economic transformation, and a repositioning of France in the world. To get the full measure of these changes, this book covers the 'long' Liberation period as it defined the post-war settlement up to late 1947.⁴ It also examines the varied interpretations given to the Liberation over the six decades that separate us from it.

Régime change

The Third Republic's Parliament signed its own death warrant on 10 July 1940, in the wake of France's catastrophic defeat by Nazi Germany, when it gathered at Vichy to vest full constituent powers in Marshal Pétain, by 569 votes to 80. For followers of General Charles de Gaulle, whose broadcast from London on 18 June had launched the Free French movement, committed to continuing the struggle against Germany from beyond France's frontiers, the Vichy régime was illegal from the start. The question of the regime, therefore, was posed by the clash of these two competing legitimacies.

Endorsed by the British and backed in a sprinkling of French colonies, the Free French mutated from a group of diehards and adventurers into a provisional government in exile. In spring 1943, installed on French territory (liberated by the Allies from Vichy six months earlier) in Algiers, de Gaulle's Comité National Français received the allegiance of France's internal Resistance organisations, represented in the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR), and transformed itself into the Comité Français de la Libération Nationale (CFLN). By November, a Consultative Assembly, drawn from the major pre-war parties and from the internal Resistance, gave the CFLN some trappings of representativeness; on 4 April 1944 de Gaulle brought two Communist leaders into the CFLN; and on 3 June 1944, the CFLN took the title of Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française (GPRF). Yet over the summer of 1944 the contours of the political transition, and of the ensuing regime, were far from clear.

The short term was dominated by three issues. These were the relationship between the GPRF and the Allies (who recognised the GPRF formally only on 23 October 1944); the scope and severity of the purge of collaborators and Vichy officials (the purge, though more wide-ranging than many knew, satisfied almost no one at the time); and the GPRF's ability to impose its authority across France over the FFI and Comités de Libération (the GPRF, with the co-operation of the Communist leadership, disbanded the FFI and other 'people's militias' and held municipal elections in April–May 1945 to re-establish a system of elected local government).

The longer-term issue concerned the Constitution. This was only opened to the people after the end of hostilities and the return of prisoners and deportees, and only resolved 27 months after the liberation of Paris. The process opened on 21 October 1945, when the French were invited both to vote at a double referendum and to elect an Assembly. At the double referendum nearly

three-quarters of the electorate, and 96.4 per cent of those voting, laid the Third Republic to rest by giving the new Assembly the power to draft a new constitution. Half the electorate, and two-thirds of those voting, also agreed to limit the Assembly's powers: its mandate would end after seven months, and the final decision on whether to adopt the constitution it drafted would rest with the people, via a new referendum.

On the same day, the people chose their Deputies, and confirmed a swing to the Left already seen at that spring's municipal elections. The Parti Communiste Français (PCF) added ten points to its pre-war score and topped the poll with 26.2 per cent of the vote, overtaking its Socialist ally and rival, the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO), which won 23.4 per cent. With 305 seats between them, these two parties held an overall majority in the new Assembly. At the same time much of the Catholic vote (and nearly 24 per cent of the overall popular vote) went to the Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP), the new Christian Democratic party, which boasted a Resistance pedigree for many of its leaders and a willingness to embrace both the Republic and social measures. The chief losers of the process were the main governing parties of the Third Republic, the conservative groups and the Radicals, with under a quarter of the vote, and just 96 Deputies, between them.

Throughout this process de Gaulle, still at the head of the GPRF, had remained aloof from party politics, and had not organised his considerable, but dispersed, following. Although the new Assembly unanimously confirmed him as head of the GPRF on 13 November 1945, he had no single bloc of loyalists under his control, found it increasingly difficult to work with political parties newly legitimised by the voters, and resigned on 20 January 1946. His expectation of a quick return to power, on his own terms, was frustrated. Instead, de Gaulle was succeeded by the Socialist Félix Gouin, supported by a 'tripartite' coalition of Communists, Socialists, and MRP. But these three parties failed to agree on the first task before them: the first draft Constitution, which vested political power in France in a single-chamber Assembly, was supported by Communists and Socialists only. That made the referendum of 5 May 1946 the cleanest Left-Right confrontation that France would see in three decades.⁵ But the lack of checks and balances in the Left's first draft, alarming to anyone who feared the PCF, helped ensure its rejection by 53 per cent of the voters; the narrow Communist-Socialist parliamentary majority was not confirmed in the country. At the ensuing elections, to a second constituent Assembly, the MRP emerged briefly as the leading party with 28.2 per cent of the vote to the Communists' 25.9 per cent.

The MRP had presented itself as the party of 'fidelity' to de Gaulle, to the ideals of the Resistance, and to a certain Catholic-inspired vision of social and economic reform. But it was also the refuge for a conservative electorate that had rallied to Pétain and was much less reform-minded than the party leadership. De Gaulle, in any case, had no wish to tie himself to the MRP or any single party. The constitutional issue caused a final separation between them.

At Bayeux on 16 June 1946, de Gaulle had called for strong executive leadership and set out the bases of the future constitution of 1958. The MRP leaders, attached to French republican traditions of parliamentary supremacy and reluctant to break with their coalition partners, rejected de Gaulle's arguments. The second draft constitution was chiefly the MRP's. It included a second chamber but not a strong executive and therefore resembled the constitutional laws of the Third Republic. What the voters had consigned to the history books in October 1945, however, they were prepared to endorse, wearily and in a modified form, at the referendum of 13 October 1946. The second draft was approved by 53.5 per cent of those voting – or just 36.2 per cent of the electorate, against 31.3 per cent who voted No and 32.6 per cent who abstained or spoiled their ballots. This was enough to secure adoption, if not adherence. The first National Assembly of the new Fourth Republic was duly elected on 10 November 1946 (Socialist support declined below 18 per cent of the vote, the Communists reached their all-time peak level of support with 28.2 per cent, and the MRP fell back to 25.9 per cent); elections to the upper house followed in December; and the final piece of the new regime fell into place when the Socialist Vincent Auriol was elected President of the Republic on 16 January 1947.

Tripartisme survived the elections by less than six months. Colonial policy (with the start of insurrections in Madagascar and Indochina) and incomes policy (with growing working-class resistance to wage restraint) both set the PCF against its coalition partners. Early in May, the Socialist Prime Minister Paul Ramadier manoeuvred the Communists into voting against the government on a confidence motion, and then dismissed the PCF ministers from his cabinet (their Belgian and Italian counterparts were removed from government that same spring). Philip Williams refers to 5 May 1947 as 'the most important date in the history of the Fourth Republic' because it ensured – despite the PCF's efforts to destabilise the country through strikes later in the year – that France would not go the way of Czechoslovakia.⁶ France's Communists remained out of office for 34 years. With their departure, the constitutional transition closed and the Fourth Republic settled down to its characteristic routine: a succession of more or less short-lived governments drawn from what became known as the 'Third Force' – from the ranks of Socialists, MRP, Radicals and conservatives (whose support in parliament was now needed to replace that of the Communists), prey to their own divisions and to the slings and arrows of far Left and far Right.

Regime change and constitutional law

Four chapters cover different aspects of the process of regime change. That the outcome was so similar to the Third Republic was, as Emmanuel Cartier shows, partly the result of the constraints within which the constitutional debate had been carried on since the 1930s. The French political tradition associated strong executives – the most direct remedy to the Third Republic's instability – with the Empires that had buried the first two Republics. Vichy

had only confirmed this association with authoritarianism. De Gaulle's Bayeux constitution therefore stood little chance of winning the support either of a big party or a majority in the country.

Yet there were innovative aspects to the transition process too. Some arose from the complex legal arguments that the GPRF developed to uphold its own legitimacy, to establish Vichy's illegality, and, crucially, to preclude a simple return to the *status quo ante* of the Third Republic. For de Gaulle, it was essential to give voters the final say on the constitution via a referendum. As the tool used by the two Napoleons to legitimate their rule, the referendum was opposed by the consultative assembly, the parties, and the press – but imposed by de Gaulle and the GPRF in August 1944, and finally accepted by the electorate as compatible with the Republic. This reflected a wider post-war aspiration to establish a reformed republican regime, more stable and reflecting the 'economic and social democracy' evoked in the charter of the Conseil National de la Résistance. Despite its limitations, it was the Fourth Republic constitution which first incorporated a 'bill of rights' including the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen; which established a form, albeit very constrained, of judicial review; which gave the *Président du Conseil* a clear leading role within the government; and which established that motions of censure against the government could only be passed by an absolute majority of all Deputies. Although the caution of the constitution-makers and the constraints of the party system prevented any real exploitation of these features under the Fourth Republic, they set out important markers for its successor.

The upper house

The constitution of the Fourth Republic differed from the rejected first draft chiefly by its inclusion of an upper legislative house. The Left's unicameral model of 1946 had been inspired by an ideal, inherited from 1789, of government by a popularly-elected Assembly; by the Senate's record of obstruction of left-wing governments before 1940; and probably, in the case of the PCF, by its promise of a quick route to power. The Centre and Right opposed it because they were attached to a 'chamber of second thoughts' rooted in the good sense of France's mayors and local councillors, and fearful of an all-powerful Communist-dominated single chamber. But as Paul Smith observes, the defeat of the unicameral model at the May 1946 referendum, after the rejection of the Third Republic at that of October 1945, raised difficult questions about the powers and electoral base of any future upper house, and about its relationship to France's colonies, whose aspiration for representation in post-war France had been recognised, in the first draft, in the form of a Council of the French Union.

It fell to the prime minister from June 1946, the MRP's leader Georges Bidault, to try to steer a middle line. Out of respect for the majority vote at the May referendum (and his own party's conservative voters) there would be an upper house. But to satisfy his Communist and Socialist coalition partners, it

would be denied the title of Senate (in favour of the more neutral Council of the Republic), as well as all but the most basic powers, and any French Union role. At this point, as Smith notes, the French Union stepped in. Its spokesman, Gaston Monnerville, the Constituent Assembly member for French Guiana, forced Bidault to concede the inclusion of its representatives in a stronger upper house. Once elected president of the Council of the Republic in 1947, Monnerville carved as much power as he could for it from the unpromising material of the new constitution. A neglected constitution-maker of the Liberation era, Monnerville presided over the upper house long enough to see a decade of confrontation with de Gaulle after 1958.

Regime change and party system change

Like the process of regime change, the renewal of the party system was, as David Goldey observes, less dramatic than expected. The major novelties of the immediate post-war elections were the reinforcement of the PCF, the arrival of the MRP, and the weakening of the Radicals and the Right. To these would be added, in April 1947, the launch by de Gaulle of the Rassemblement du Peuple Français, and its spectacular success in winning 40 per cent of the vote in France's cities – and control over many of them – at that October's municipal elections. That result aroused expectations of the General's imminent return and another change of constitution. But the Fourth Republic survived another decade against permanent challenges from far Left and far Right. The average longevity of its governments – about six months – resembled the pre-war pattern. So did some of the governments. In September 1948 a pre-war Radical Agriculture Minister, Henri Queuille, formed what proved to be the Fourth Republic's second-longest ministry.

Continuity also marked the way in which grass-roots politics was carried on. Third-Republic politics had been centred on local notables focused on the narrow interests of their *arrondissements*, or single-member constituencies. At the Liberation, however, a consensus emerged against the *arrondissement* as an electoral district, and in favour of proportional representation. This, it was hoped, would distance politics from the parish pump and promote truly national political debate between structured and disciplined parties. It would also limit the risk of a majority system amplifying a big swing to one party (for example, the Communists). And indeed, the parties of *tripartisme* were, or tried to be, different in kind from the loose collections of notables who had run the Third Republic. They boasted a mass membership: 355,000 in 1946 for the SFIO, over 800,000 for the PCF, and 80,000 even for the MRP, against a mere 20,000 for the Radicals and fewer for the Right (until the arrival of the RPF, whose members probably numbered 400,000). But all of these figures would drop after 1947. Moreover, the hundred or so multi-member constituencies designed under the new electoral system (most of them corresponding to a *département*) remained small enough to be close to local interests. France's economic and social regression under the Occupation, which briefly produced

a nation *more* rural than in 1940, was also reflected in a pattern of rural over-representation that failed to keep pace with rapid post-war urbanisation. Parish pump politics continued to thrive, and every party but the PCF was factionalised. It was the notables who destroyed de Gaulle's RPF by flouting the discipline it sought to impose: in May 1953 the General disowned his creation and withdrew from politics, keeping most of his political credit intact for his return to power five years later.

Regime change, purges, and the political élite

Continuity in political processes did not entail continuity of politicians. As Olivier Wieviorka shows, the Liberation saw a wide-ranging replacement of the French political élite. The first step in this was a very untidy purge of collaborators and others linked to Vichy. The summary executions of summer 1944, numbering about 5,000 (in addition to some 2,500 before this period) gave way to more careful judicial proceedings as the state was re-established.⁷ The process still varied greatly between regions, satisfied few, and was widely believed to have punished the small fry but spared the powerful. This reproach was less than justified. Some 350,000 people were investigated for collaboration. Retribution ranged from the death penalty (carried out in 1,502 cases) to 'national indignity' and loss of civil rights, or sacking for civil servants. Within the political élite, the turnover caused by this *épuration* was compounded both by an extensive weeding-out by political parties of Right and Left and by the leftward shift of France's post-war political representation. The political agenda, too, underwent a sea-change, away from Third-Republic disputes long out of season and towards social and economic issues.

Yet the scope of the political *renewal* was limited. The much hoped-for 'party of the Resistance', the Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance (UDSR) turned out to be a tiny, though strategically placed, group of notables. The MRP, though a new party able that mobilised Catholic former *résistants*, was led by élites of the pre-war Christian Democratic Parti Démocrate Populaire and, as we have noted, attracted disoriented right-wing voters (Communists took to calling it the *Machine à Ramasser les Pétainistes*). Among Socialists and Communists, established pre-war activists won promotion more readily than the 'new men' of the Resistance. Even the Left's electoral 'landslides' could be seen as optical illusions, depending on where the MRP – of ambiguous leanings, as we have seen – is placed. And despite the *épuration*, men who had served under Vichy were by no means disqualified by the voters.

Gendering regime change?

Long neglected in the historiography, the role of women in the Occupation and Liberation periods has been much researched in recent years. By 1932, women's suffrage existed in nineteen democracies, but not in France. The Chamber of Deputies passed four votes in its favour between the wars, only to be frustrated by the Senate, on the pretext (especially dear to the Radicals)

that women were too susceptible to clerical influence. Ironically, it was Vichy that opened the door a chink by allowing women onto municipal councils.⁸ The (considerable) activities of French women in the Resistance were, to say the least, under-appreciated: just six women, against 1,030 men, were made *Compagnons de la Libération*. By contrast, women accused of 'horizontal collaboration' with Germans were held up to the scorn of their communities, with as many as 20,000 having their heads shaven at the Liberation.⁹ At least the Resistance record of women, and above all the Radicals' relative marginalisation within the CFLN, led to a consensus between the parties and de Gaulle in favour of female suffrage.¹⁰ This was granted, with the Consultative Assembly's support, by the CFLN on 21 April 1944, and first exercised in 1945 at the municipal elections of April–May, and at the parliamentary elections and double referendum of October.

This was a modest foothold in French politics that has left feminist historians understandably underwhelmed. Even the small proportion of women in the National Assembly of November 1946 – 6.48 per cent – was not equalled for another four decades. Women as politicians were largely confined to education and the family; women as citizens were denied full civil rights until the 1960s. Yet as Hilary Footitt argues, it would be misleading to limit analyses of French women at the Liberation to this 'discourse of failure'. Her case studies of three French women Deputies, one from each of the three parties of *tripartisme*, show the variety of women's political engagement in the Assembly, from the pursuit of a liberal equality agenda, through to addressing women's rights at work, and mainstreaming so-called 'women's' issues like food and children. In the long liberation of women, this post war period tells us a great deal about how we might represent the relationship of women with political power in France, directing our attention to the political hinterland from which women politicians came, the diversity of their political commitments, and the breadth of the political spaces they occupied.

The results of regime change occupied much of political France for over two years, but disappointed many. The Fourth Republic resembled the Third, and its defects were clear within months. But the provisional regime was important in itself. For over a year, until November 1945, the GPRF governed France by decree, unimpeded by serious checks from the Consultative Assembly; for another year it had only the single-chamber Constituent Assemblies to worry about. This freedom was used to effect wide-ranging social and economic reforms.

A society transformed?

If the human cost to France of the Second World War was less than that of the First – some 400,000 deaths against 1,300,000 – the material damage was greater.¹¹ Most of the French, especially in the cities, were ill-housed and hungry in the Liberation years, and cold, thanks to fuel shortages, in winter. In towns,

food was even lower than in Britain: in August 1947, the daily bread ration was cut to 200 grammes, below its level under the Occupation. One home in twenty had been destroyed, one in five seriously damaged; France's housing crisis, perceptible from the pre-war years, would last a generation. Less of everything was being produced: in 1945, food production was at 61 per cent of pre-war levels, industrial production at 50 per cent.¹² What was produced could not readily be transported; only one railway locomotive in six, two-fifths of French rolling-stock, and less than half of the rail network were working; most of France's ports and merchant fleet were destroyed. Without the tough currency reform suggested by Economics Minister Pierre Mendès France but refused by de Gaulle, the franc lost two-thirds of its purchasing power between 1944 and 1947. By 1948, three successive devaluations had cut its rate against the dollar by 80 per cent compared to ten years earlier.¹³ In a still rural country, rationing failed to ensure 'fair shares for all', and the black market thrived. A worker's purchasing power in 1944 was some 60 per cent of its (hardly princely) pre-war level; it rose to perhaps 85 per cent a year later, but had returned to 60 per cent by May 1947.¹⁴ Milward cites France and Belgium as the only two West European countries where real wages were clearly falling in the course of 1947.¹⁵ Meanwhile, in a ravaged Europe, few wanted either to buy the luxury items that France had traditionally sold abroad, or to visit France as tourists. Exports in 1945 had fallen by 90 per cent against 1938. That meant that over the Liberation period, France could only pay for between one-third and two-thirds of even a much reduced volume of imports. The resulting balance of payments deficit could only be covered by American loans.

Enter the state – and the workers

Yet it was in these unpromising conditions that French couples embarked on a thirty-year baby-boom (the first signs of which can be dated to 1943) while French governments – crucial players in a capital-starved country – undertook vast reforms. In a little more than three years, nationalisations covered the energy sector (coal, electricity, and gas), air, sea and rail transport plus the Paris metro and buses, the aircraft industry, France's biggest car maker, the five biggest banks and most of the insurance sector. At the same time de Gaulle's provisional government, through its *ordonnance* of 4 October 1945, laid the foundations of a modern social security system, and three months later, on 3 January 1946, created Jean Monnet's Planning Commissariat. As Herrick Chapman argues, this panoply of measures did not represent a 'year zero'. Each had been imagined by reformers and revolutionaries in the inter-war years; state intervention in the economy had already been extended in the First World War, in the 1930s, and under Vichy. Yet the contrast remains striking between the timidity of the political record and the scope of the social and economic reforms. They were facilitated by a consensus extending through the three parties of *tripartisme* to the left wing of the Radicals, and (crucially) de Gaulle.

But the consensus, Chapman notes, was always an ambiguous one. Disagreements – new in the Liberation years, familiar over the next four decades – soon surfaced over the extent of nationalisations; over their purpose (punishment of collaborators, economic modernisation, or ‘economic and social democracy’); and, especially, over the respective roles in running nationalised firms of their managers, the workforce, parliament, and the supervising ministries. The answers as they developed in practice were, as Chapman shows, varied and untidy. Meanwhile a newly confident breed of senior civil servants, who would graduate, from 1946, from the new *École Nationale d’Administration*, prepared to give nationalisations a modernising thrust: the practice of *pantouflage*, of switching between senior positions in the Industry or Finance ministries to top posts in nationalised firms, was rapidly established.

Worries about Communism, which as we have seen played a role in the constitutional debate, were seldom far from negotiations over industrial democracy. Senior PCF members such as Benoît Frachon had come to dominate the main trade union confederation, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), which claimed some 3.8 million members – about three times as many as all other unions combined – in 1945. Under the benevolent eye of Communist ministers, the CGT made strongholds out of the new *comités d’entreprise* in industries such as EDF, aviation, or Renault, securing monopoly positions and opportunities to place and pay full-time union officials. From the point of view of industrial recovery, this could be a positive development as long as the PCF was in government, calling for industrial peace to win the ‘battle of production’, even at the cost of wage restraint, in order to show its responsibility and indispensability within the governing coalition. But the PCF could only back austerity among its core working-class supporters for so long. It was the outbreak of a strike at Renault in April 1947, against all attempts by the CGT to rein it in, that finally broke the dam, forced the Communist leadership into tardy backing of the workers, and offered the opportunity for Ramadier to remove them from government. Within six months the PCF would be backing a series of quasi-insurrectionary strikes in public-sector firms across France, which themselves would lead to the split of the CGT. The removal of the Communists from government was followed by what Chapman compares to the post-revolutionary Thermidor period after 1794: months and years of reaction in which gains of the Liberation years, notably in the area of industrial democracy, were rolled back.

Yet the transformations wrought in the French economy were too great to be simply reversed. The resulting ‘settlement’ was more unstable in some respects than those reached at the same period in Britain or West Germany. The continuing existence of a nationalised sector, whose boundaries remained roughly the same till the 1980s, was accepted. So were other forms of state intervention in the economy such as the Plan or price controls. So, even after 1947, were the CGT’s strongholds, which helped it remain France’s strongest union over

half a century. On the other hand the whole area of industrial relations, workplace control and industrial democracy remained unsettled, unpredictable and confrontational, and re-emerged to drive the legendary strike wave of May 1968.

The Church turns Left

A remarkable feature of the Liberation, which it had in common with May 1968, was the manner in which hitherto deeply conservative institutions could take on a leftish hue, albeit temporarily. This could be said of France's Catholic Church, whose hierarchy, with a handful of honourable exceptions, emerged from the Occupation with little credit. Too many bishops had not merely worked with Vichy out of obligation but identified with its values; too few protested, and too quietly, at the regime's violence, especially towards Jews. But neither the hierarchy nor the Vatican undertook more than the most token *épuration*; (though the cardinal-archbishop of Paris, most closely identified with Vichy, resigned under pressure from de Gaulle). No apology for the Church's 'silence' over the persecution of Jews came until 1997. If the Catholics' wartime record had been limited to this, it might have done lasting damage to the Church.

In fact, as Nicholas Atkin points out, the Liberation period was one of effervescence within the Church, thanks in no small measure to the decent behaviour of many grass-roots Catholics under the Occupation. Lay Catholics had been active in most of the Resistance networks; trade unionists of the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens (CFTC) had taken part in the big strikes of the Nord, and their leaders joined the CGT on the Conseil National de la Résistance; monks, nuns, priests, and lay Catholics had all protected Jews. As France's bishops lost confidence and authority at the Liberation, many of the same grass-roots Church members reached out to touch French society in all its diversity, often building on pre-war Catholic Action movements for students, workers, and farmers. But the Catholics of the Liberation went further. The MRP, formed without consulting either the hierarchy or the Vatican, chose the Marxist parties for allies. A strong Catholic press reinforced the confidence of the laity. Open Catholic belief was no longer *mal vu* for a senior civil servant. Among the clergy, the most adventurous became worker-priests. Above all, Catholics demonstrated an unaccustomed acceptance, born of the Resistance, of a pluralistic society.

The Church's Liberation years came to a more or less abrupt end in 1947. With the PCF once more designated as a public enemy in France as in Italy, reaching out to left-wing constituencies could appear naïve or positively dangerous. The hierarchy and the Vatican steadily reasserted their control over laity and priests alike. The worker-priests' movement was banned altogether. By the early 1950s the Church was again looking more inwards, to its own institutional concerns, than outwards to the society around it. But the 'liberal moment' would find its echo after the Second Vatican Council in 1962.

While the process of regime change came to a natural close in 1946–47, as the French voted unenthusiastically for the new constitution, the economic and social changes associated with the Liberation met their ‘Thermidor’, as Chapman calls it, in part for external reasons. These were linked to events beyond France’s borders.

Beyond the *métropole*: France in the world

The politics of France’s Liberation era were played out in a rapidly-changing international context, within which France’s position was both unprecedented and ambiguous. It was unprecedented in that France, like Britain, suddenly had to learn to live in the second rank in a world dominated by the new super-powers. It was ambiguous because France’s decline was masked by trappings appropriate to a great and victorious nation – a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, an occupation zone in Germany, and a more or less intact empire.

Imperial ambiguities

Intact, but badly shaken. For French colonial administrators, hostilities between Vichy and de Gaulle had entailed an obvious conflict of loyalties. For nationalists, meanwhile, the débâcle of 1940 broke the myth of the colonists’ invincibility. But the French were even less inclined than the British to liquidate their empire, as vital now for continued great-power status as it had seemed indispensable during Germany’s wartime occupation of mainland France.

Martin Shipway’s chapter outlines France’s postwar hopes for empire as they took shape at the Brazzaville conference early in 1944. Brazzaville went down as a landmark of liberal colonialism. De Gaulle’s opening speech called for ‘structural reforms’ within the empire, and insisted that colonial ‘progress’ should enable the colonised peoples ‘to take part in running their own affairs’.¹⁶ But they would do so within the ‘French community’; even Commonwealth-style self-government was ruled out by the conference. This was, after all, a meeting of colonial administrators, not colonised peoples. Within the Corps Colonial, liberals coexisted with former Vichyites (few of whom were purged), while Gaullism did not necessarily equate with reformism. Moreover, the colonial administration proper did not include Algeria, a part of ‘France’ run from the Interior Ministry, or Morocco and Tunisia, technically protectorates and dependent on the Foreign Ministry; Indochina, meanwhile remained loyal to Vichy and was unrepresented at Brazzaville. Perhaps it was unsurprising, then, that deliberations there tended to the abstract and the general.

Within months of the liberation of metropolitan France, the generalities of Brazzaville were confronted with alarming realities on almost every watch of the Empire. In Algeria, riots in Sétif on 8 May 1945, and above all the police and settler repression that followed, left between 8,000 and 20,000 Moslem