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Modern and Contemporary France Special Issue - Introduction

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The Fifth Republic at Fifty: The Changing Face of French Politics and Political Economy.

At its inception, a time of great political upheaval in France, it was uncertain whether the new regime would last five years, let alone fifty. The longevity of the regime is due in part to its flexibility and adaptability, which is a theme explored both below and in all of the contributions to this special issue. To set the scene, this will briefly elucidate some of the elements of the constitutional settlement of 1958 which have had an important bearing on its subsequent evolution. The rich and varied texture of French Republicanism makes it in one commentator's eyes at once 'the least precise and most evoked concept in the French political lexicon' (Hayward 2007: 343). The Fifth Republic's institutions and practices bore the imprint of a diverse amalgam of constitutional norms and political practices, each relating to the French Republican tradition; Rousseauian notions of general will, plebiscitary Bonapartism, parliamentarism, Jacobinism, *dirigisme* and Republican notions of universalism and egalitarianism. This special issue explores some of the interesting patterns and dynamics of change and continuity in relation to each of these aspects of the French Republic tradition over the last 50 years. As is fitting on such an anniversary, each contribution will offer a brief historical overview of the issue area and to look at the similarities and differences between the contemporary period and 50 years ago.

The first section of this introduction sets out some of the important elements of the Fifth Republic constitutional settlement. French democratic and Republican traditions were inscribed into the text of the constitution, and also its subsequent interpretation.

In the text, the interplay between general ‘versus’ particular will was transposed into the executive ‘versus’ the legislature. In its interpretation, these aspects are overlain with the additional elements of the interplay of parliamentarism, presidentialism and Bonapartism. The second section relates this constitutional context, and these complex and competing dynamics to the French party system and its evolution.

This volume takes a political economy approach to the analysis of the Fifth Republic at fifty, situating the evolution of political institutions in the context of French state/market relations shaped by the Colbertist tradition. This found expression in post-war France in *dirigisme* – or directive state interventionism in the economy. In order to fully understand how and why the Fifth Republic has followed its particular path of development, it is necessary to understand how French welfare capitalism has evolved over the last 50 years. The third section thus discusses the dynamics of evolution of economic and social policy-making since 1958.

Dirigisme's centralising pathologies align it with another important French political tradition – Jacobinism. The fourth section explores how these economic and social transformations entailed a geographical reorganisation of French capitalism with profound political implications for French centre/periphery relations, and the powerful, centralising Jacobin tradition. Having explored challenges to Jacobin universalism in relation to territory, the final section offers a gendered critique of the Fifth Republic. Shaped by a French Republican built on masculine norms, the 1958 constitution's institutionalisation of universalism and egalitarianism has led to decidedly gender-unequal political practices. Evolving notions of (gender) equality, and attempts to translate these evolving notions into institutions and policies are the final area of significant change over the last 50 years considered in this volume.

The 1958 Constitutional Settlement

The need to overcome the *immobilisme* which characterised the Fourth Republic's discredited *régime des partis* was at the heart of the 1958 constitutional project. Government, it was argued, had to be afforded supremacy over Parliament, and this supremacy was codified in the new constitution. The 1958 constitutional text sets out unambiguously the supremacy of the executive over parliament (Elgie 1996a, 57-59),

with government empowered through a series of 'structural assets' institutionalising its dominance over parliament, and a set of 'constitutional weapons' to be wielded by government in response to particular circumstances (Keeler 1993 : 521).

Sartori identifies the French Fifth Republic as an ideal-typical example of a 'Semi-presidential' regime, a 'bicephalous system whose heads are *unequal* but also *in oscillation* between themselves' – 'the 'first head' is by custom (the conventions of the constitutions ['living' and written] the president, by law (the written text of the constitution) the prime minister, and the oscillations reflect the respective majority status of one over the other.'(1997, 123) For Elgie, at the core of the French Fifth Republic there is a 'finely balanced constitutional dyarchy' (Elgie 1999, 77) where 'a popularly-elected fixed-term president exists alongside a prime minister responsible to parliament.'(2001)

The new constitution was intended by its author Michel Debré, to be a blueprint for British-style Prime Ministerial government (Debré 1981). However, whilst appearing to place the Prime Minister at the centre of the executive process, the French head of State has often been able to exploit *presidential* structural assets and constitutional weapons (Keeler 1993), in concert with the constitution's ambiguity, to dominate the political system. The Algerian crisis, without which there would likely have been no constitutional and political upheaval in 1958, left its imprint on the structure and functioning of the new regime creating a presidential reserved domain in foreign policy, and preservation of the integrity of the French nation (see Howorth 1993). De Gaulle moved quickly to ensure his predominance in these and other policy areas. The ambiguity inherent in the 1958 constitution as to where power lay within the French 'dual executive', successfully exploited by de Gaulle, established presidential precedents which overstepped the constitutional brief. This was achieved to a degree explicitly counter to the professed intentions of the drafters (see Debré 1981). The best example of exploiting constitutional ambiguity is article 5, establishing the President's role as 'arbitrator,' which 'encourages the perception that the president is above the political process but at the same time it can also legitimise almost any intervention that the President might wish to make.'(Elgie 1999, 76) The Fifth Republic underwent rapid and far-reaching Presidentialisation between 1958 and 1962, culminating in the first direct election of the President in 1965.

Thus, a purely textual analysis of the new constitution fails to capture the crucial distinction between constitutional theory and Presidential practice. If the new constitution codified the shift from ‘weak’ to ‘strong’ government, it was President De Gaulle (and *not* Prime Minister Debré) who personified that shift. Ironically, de Gaulle’s most significant extra-constitutional act was to sack Debré in April 1962. Debré’s replacement Pompidou ‘accepted without demur the presidential intervention which Debré had resented as a deviation from the letter of the constitution.’ (Hayward 1993a, 23-5) Hayward has explored two distinct and conflicting interpretations of *arbiter*, “first, an arbitrator of disputes or referee who remains politically neutral and impartial, and secondly an arbiter, whose direct involvement in taking controversial political decisions meant that he would have to be politically accountable.” (1993b, 46 & 48). The finesse achieved by de Gaulle, the self-styled ‘arbitrator above political circumstances,’¹ was to secure the powers associated with the expansive interpretation of that term, and the degree of accountability associated with the minimalist interpretation. The Gaullian reinterpretation of Article 5, explicit in de Gaulle’s Bayeux speech of 1946, and his famous press conference of 1964, transforms the President, in Massot’s phrase, from referee into team captain. (1987; Cogan 1996, 183-6 & 210)

Precedents set by de Gaulle meant Debré’s Prime Ministerial government aspirations remained adrift in the seas of pious wishes for nearly 30 years. Yet the president’s pre-eminence was not structurally determined, but contingent on circumstances. It rested on prevailing political conditions, and interpretative leeway. Duverger’s majority power thesis argues that the structural aspects of presidential power are not the key determining factors. This approach urges us to be alive to the *contingency* involved in the ebb and flow of Fifth Republic presidential power relationships. They vary according to personalities and more importantly to political context, far and away the most significant aspect of this being the nature of the parliamentary majority within the *Assemblée Nationale*. This parliamentary majority, and the nature of the president’s relations with it, was termed by Duverger in 1978 ‘the keystone’ of the regime (1978, 90).

¹ A phrase from de Gaulle’s infamous 1946 *Bayeux* speech, quoted in Cogan (1996, 187)

Thus the evolution of the regime over the last 50 years has not seen the inexorable expansion of presidential dominance. Rather, it has demonstrated the shifting sands on which presidential power is founded. As Duverger prosaically put it, “the French republican monarch might be seen as a Protean King, changing shape and power according to the nature of parliamentary forces” (1974, 188). The nature of the parliamentary majority (single party, balanced or imbalanced coalition, supporting or in conflict with the president) and nature of relations with the presidential party in parliament explains the varying nature and degree of presidential power in the 1970s and 1980s. A string of cohabitations after 1986 saw Debré’s aspirations of Prime Ministerial government partially realised, with the President reduced to a more ceremonial role. Chirac’s victory in 1995 followed by his ill-advised dissolution which ushered in the 5-year cohabitation after 1997, saw French presidential power resources sink to a new low. Indeed, Bell claimed ‘Chirac showed that France could survive without an Executive president’ (2000, 240). Thus it is not presidential dominance, but rather the constitutional interpretive flexibility and the contingency of Fifth Republic power relations which are the key continuities from 1958 to 2008.

The shift to a 5 year term, aligned with the parliamentary term in 2000, and the inversion of electoral calendars ensuring parliamentary elections would follow on the coattails of the presidential election, seemed to suggest a re-presidentialisation of the regime at the dawn of the 21st Century. The extra-ordinary events of 2002 muddied the waters somewhat, but in 2007 all the elements were in place. A dominant, confident, *homme providentiel* of a presidential candidate, with a thoroughly presidentialised and relatively united party behind him, won a resounding presidential victory followed by a sizeable parliamentary majority. After all Sarkozy’s big talk of a radical change in France’s politics, and political economy, which had peppered his campaign, the constitutional scene looked set for words to be translated into deeds.

Yet even with all the aces up his sleeve, Sarkozy has, one year on, not been able to deliver the kind of transformation he promised. There have been, as Levy charts in this volume, some achievements on pension reform, and labour market reform of lay-off procedures and simplified work contracts. However the new president frittered away political capital through hyper-activity and vocal interventionism in

innumerable policy fields. His highly mediatised personal life and erratic behaviour has conveyed none of the gravitas expected of a French head of state. His opinion poll ratings plummeted accordingly. Meanwhile, he has invested much in ill-judged initiatives like the Mediterranean Union. Most importantly, however, Sarkozy has systematically neglected to nurture and sustain good relations with the UMP, and the parliamentary forces which are his crucial power base. Sarkozy's government of all the talents inevitably overlooked many a party loyalist's hopes of higher office, and put many noses out of joint within the UMP. The new president's often dismissive treatment of 'his' party (and members of his government including the Prime Minister), combined with his plunging popularity, meant that the first year of the Sarkozy's presidency demonstrates the protean nature of political power under the Fifth Republic identified by Duverger. Scarcely a year after his supposedly regime-changing sweep to power, his mismanagement and poor judgement have taken the wind out of the sails of what threatened to be a re-presidentialised Fifth Republic. Naysayers and decline theorists (Bavarez 2003; Smith 2004) have, it seems, further grounds for their dark mutterings about France's ungovernability.

Personal Power and the 'Partified' Regime: De Gaulle and 'Popular monarchy'

Michel Debré interpreted de Gaulle's role as a 'Republican monarch' representing the French people as a whole. De Gaulle, too, referred to 'his' regime as a 'popular monarchy' (Hayward 1993a, 22) and 'regarded himself as the mediator between the people and France, a task for which [de Gaulle felt] parliamentary party leaders were unfit.' (Hayward 1993a, 14). There was a very *personal* dimension of his power, rooted in his war legacy. This personal relationship with the French citizenry illustrated his 'Bonapartist' interpretation of popular support. This must be understood in the context of a Rousseauian branch of French Republican discourse which distrusts intermediaries (parties), preferring a direct engagement with the citizenry to discern the (general) will of the people. Bonapartism is characterised by Hoffman as 'the confiscation of power by a charismatic figure through plebiscites that both paid homage to and manipulated the principle of popular sovereignty.' (Hoffman 1991, 44) De Gaulle's view was less critical, and he cherished and vaunted his direct link to the citizenry. This explains his penchant for referenda which he regarded as plebiscites on

his own presidency,² and the 1962 reform (discussed below),³ and indeed his campaign in the 1965 presidential election. Although by no means a dominant strand of Republicanism (discredited by Louis Bonaparte's totalitarian usurping of power after the previous direct election in the 18th Brumaire), Bonapartism was nevertheless a resource upon which de Gaulle drew with consummate skill. De Gaulle clearly saw himself as 'spokesperson for and the incarnation of the general will' (Elgie 1996b 67-8).

Although all his successors as French president attempted to emulate the personal and direct link to the French people, this dimension of presidential power was partially undermined as the semi-presidential Fifth Republic regime became progressively 'partified'. This at first glance seems wholly counter to the General's vision, given de Gaulle's public disdain for political parties, and his assiduous construction of his political legitimacy without any reference to party. Yet paradoxically, for all his disdain for parties, de Gaulle was reliant upon his *Union pour la Nouvelle République* (UNR) power base for support, and without a *presidential majority* in the Assemblée – orchestrated and structured by the UNR, his position would have been greatly weakened. Indeed, the public image of aloofness from party was almost certainly an exaggeration of reality, since no successful politician can ignore their power base. De Gaulle is perhaps best described as a 'surreptitiously partisan statesman' (Hayward 1993b).

The France of the Fifth Republic, just as that of the Fourth and Third, remained in important ways a parliamentary democracy structured by party politics. The party-based democratic traditions built up during the previous two republics were not overthrown overnight, even if party now co-existed with other powerful countervailing political forces both personal, in the form of de Gaulle, and institutional in the form of the semi-presidential regime. Thus the legacy for de Gaulle's successors as leaders of both government and opposition in France was complex – an empowered presidency (with attendant personalised power dimensions)

² These also hinged on the political cleavage within the electorate between the 'new' and 'old' Republics in France which the *Cartel des non* had failed to mobilise effectively in opposition to the key 1962 referendum on direct presidential election.

³ The more direct reason for his enthusiasm for referenda in the 1958-1962 period was as a means of by-passing a hostile legislature.

grafted on to what was still a parliamentary regime where parties remained crucial to both presidential election campaigns, and the exercise of presidential power.

The Fifth Republic and Presidentialised Party System

As the dust settled after the regime-changing events of 1958, de Gaulle needed to institutionalise his personal power, and legitimise it in a manner which his indirectly elected head of state status under the 1958 constitution did not. In November 1962, he proposed (unconstitutionally) a referendum on constitutional change to make the President directly elected by universal suffrage, thus giving the President an enhanced national mandate and a degree of legitimacy to challenge the National Assembly. This, as Grunberg explores in his contribution to this volume, was to have a profound impact on the nature of the French party system. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many party leaders at the time believed Fifth Republic to be a flash in the pan Gaullist interregnum, soon to be superseded by a reversion to parliamentary coalitional government (Wilson 1988: 508). The *Cartel des Non* exercise of 1962, the protest of all parties bar the Gaullists (and Giscard's *Républicains Indépendants*) in favour of a parliamentary regime against de Gaulle's move to install direct presidential elections, was a clash between the new and old republics. Its approach entailed the Fourth Republic's 'third force' logic - of parliamentary coalition forming between centrist and left parties. The outcome was straw in the wind of growing presidentialisation of the new Republic.

The 1962 parliamentary elections were a 'watershed event' in the Fifth Republic and the French party system. (Ysmal 1998, 14) De Gaulle's dissolution of the hostile Assembly, and asking the electorate for *both* a yes vote in the referendum *and* a vote for a parliamentary candidate who would form part of a '*presidential majority*' was a masterstroke. The rout of the *cartel des non* installed the UNR as dominant party 'at the service' of de Gaulle's 'plebiscitary monarchy'. (Duhamel & Grunberg 2001, 533) precipitated a revolution in the French parliamentary and party systems. The referendum was, a 'battering ram' (Goldey, quoted in Avril 1995, 56) to break the party system of the Fourth Republic. The French Party system underwent a thorough 'presidentialisation' in the decade following the 1962 referendum. Its impact was felt on party structures, the logic and direction of party competition, on the relationship

between president and parliamentary groups, and even the source of democratic legitimacy under the Fifth Republic.

The linking of presidential and parliamentary majorities was crucial to the evolution of the Fifth Republic party system, and a corollary of the re-interpretation of the relationship between the two heads of the French executive discussed above. The presidential majority cast the mould for future relations between President and Prime Minister. From 1962 until cohabitation in 1986, the construction of a majority in the second round of the presidential election, and the linking of those presidential electors with a majority in the *Assemblée Nationale*, the result of a construction of a coalition of support for the President became the name of the game (Avril 1988). This saw the birth of a French constitutional convention which Charlot describes as ‘the principle of presidential initiative’ (1983: 28) which subordinates the party to president in policy formation, policy selection, and electoral campaigning. The President’s electoral campaign platform became the blueprint for the subsequent government programme. This ensured a thorough presidentialisation of the French party system, and an end to the discredited *regime des partis* of the fourth republic, a point De Gaulle himself reiterated in his 1965 Presidential election campaign in presenting himself as ‘a head of state not beholden to a party’ (Avril, 1995, 48).

It is difficult to over-state the centrality of presidentialisation to party system change under the Fifth Republic. As Gaffney puts it, ‘as an organising principle of French political life the presidential elections are of crucial significance’. The presidency represents both ‘the ultimate prize sought by France’s major politicians’ and an ‘organising principle ... not only of political life generally, but of the parties themselves.’ (Gaffney 1988, 3, 4 & 7) In similar vein, Parodi does not exaggerate in stating that presidentialism structures political time and space under the French Fifth Republic. (Parodi 1997, 294-5) French Presidential elections structure French ‘political time’ by remaining the key defining ‘moment’ in French politics (every 7 years from 1958, then every 5 years from 2002). This provides the key time horizon for political strategy in France, it is against that cycle that strategies for all other elections must be interpreted. Presidentialism also structures the space of party competition in Fifth Republic France. Parodi identifies changing institutional logics of the Fifth Republic, specifically a ‘multiplication of binary constraints’ which include

not just the presidential and legislative second rounds, but also rules governing the motion of censure. (1997, 293) The two-way presidential run-off as the key political site of competition within the Fifth Republic, acting in concert with the use of the single-member majoritarian dual-ballot legislative electoral system, and finally the responsibility of Government before an (admittedly much weakened) parliament were conducive to a reconstitution of the party system along presidentialised and bipolar lines.

The *scrutin uninominale à deux tours*, presidential and legislative electoral system was specifically designed to preclude the perceived systemic weaknesses of the fourth Republic. The threshold for access to the second ballot,⁴ whilst by no means precluding multi-partyism, did favour the formation of majorities by larger parties. The significant change was not the number of parties in the system, but the nature of party competition. Whilst the new electoral arrangements permitted the mutation from what Sartori called ‘polarised pluralism’ to bi-polar pluralism,⁵ they did not determine the change. The Third Republic, which had used a similar electoral system between 1871 and 1940, had not had a bipolar party system. (Hoffman 1991, 46) To adequately explain the change, we must also consider the unambiguous centrality of the presidential election to politics under de Gaulle’s Republic, and the impact on the party system of Gaullism.

The strategy of key actors (notably de Gaulle, Pompidou and Mitterrand) shaped France’s new bipolar political landscape in the decade after the 1962 presidential election referendum. The contours and features of this new landscape remained recognisable throughout the subsequent evolutions of the Fifth Republic. De Gaulle sought a much reduced role for parties, to be (he hoped) eclipsed by the Presidency. However, his successors recognised the constraints and opportunities presented by the new Republics’ competing institutional logics (Elgie 1996b). Pompidou (between 1962 and 1969) and Mitterrand (between 1971 and 1974) actively orchestrated a reconstruction of the core of the French party system – along presidentialised bipolar

⁴ Set at 5% of those voting in 1958, revised to 10% of the registered electorate in 1966, which was in turn raised to 12.5% of the registered electorate in 1976. Given increasing levels of abstention, this use of proportion of the *registered* electorate becomes an ever higher bar to overcome.

⁵ In 1958, only 20% of second round contests were straight fights. By 1981 that proportion was 96.6%. (Bell & Criddle 1988 : 23)

lines. Pompidou sought to consolidate the presidential majority in parliament by establishing stable alliances between the Gaullist party and other parties and traditions of the French mainstream Right. His aim was to gradually replace the pro- & anti- the new republic cleavage (which had characterised the *cartel des non* of 1962) with a Left/Right ideological cleavage which is deeply embedded in French political traditions. As Avril notes, the centre had been transformed from the centre of power within the political system, into an asset which ‘mainstream’ (and not anti-system) left and right bid for in a bipolar competition oriented towards the *alternance* of majorities (1995, 47).

Mitterrand, for his part, sought to construct a presidential majority which could lay claim to a parliamentary majority, which required the major parties of the Left to embrace presidentialism. These two engaged in ‘at once a presidentialisation of parties, and a ‘partisanisation’ of the regime, seeking an accommodation between the parliamentary majority and the presidential majority, the first implying seeking stable partisan governmental alliances, and the latter the ‘appropriation’ of the presidential election by the major parties.’ (Duhamel & Grunberg 2001, 534)

Just as the nature and degree of presidential power has evolved over fifty years, so too has the precise configuration of the party system. After twenty years, 1978’s *quadrille bipolaire* indicated a balance of political forces. In recent years, the prospect of bipolar presidentialised France developing two party politics has been mooted as a possible evolution (Grunberg & Haegel, 2007). This is in part (Grunberg argues below) as a result of the shift to a five year term and the inversion of the electoral calendar. Yet the emergent two-party political scene in contemporary France is distinctly unbalanced. Gone is the unstable equilibrium between left and right which facilitated the regular swing of the political pendulum from left to right between 1978 and 2002. Fragmentation and decline across the spectrum of the French left leave the Socialists with little prospect of constructing a governing majority out of beleaguered, marginalised allies. Meanwhile, the Socialists themselves last won the presidency 20 years ago, with the only successful presidential candidate they have ever found in 50 years. Thus the balance between partisan forces in 2008 resembles to a degree those of 1958, with a pre-eminent, perhaps unassailable mainstream Right (and the Left awaiting the next Mitterrand?).

The Fifth Republic and Political Economy

This special issue situates the changing political institutions and traditions of Fifth Republic France in relation to France's evolving political economy. The contributions by Levy, Palier, Le Galès and Murray each chart the changing state/society relations, public policy packages, and political economic conditions since. This is because analysing how successive French governments have sought to deliver policies to realise Republican and/or Jacobin notions of *dirigisme*, universalism and egalitarianism over the last 50 years is revealing of very significant shifts in France's political economy. Appreciating these transformations is essential to a full appreciation of 'the Fifth Republic at Fifty'.

Thus the Fiftieth anniversary of the Fifth Republic invites a retrospective which brings to light shifts in French state/market relations. That said, the onset of the Fifth Republic itself was not as significant a break in state/market relations or economic policy as in other aspects of French politics and institutions. The institutions of indicative economic planning, established by Monnet and others in the wake of liberation, had been functioning relatively effectively in the 1950s, and continued to do so into the 1960s. Both the *dirigiste* policy apparatus and the French welfare state, established under the predecessor regime, continued to shape French political and social conditions, while the same elites in planning ministries were still pulling the levers of economic policy-making.

Traditions of state direction of, and intervention in, economic activity in France have a long heritage, traceable at least as far back as Jean-Baptiste Colbert, minister under Louis XIV between 1661 and 1683. *Dirigisme* is rooted in state traditions and policy practices of directive interventionism in the economy. After the revolution, such interventionism became harnessed to Jacobinism and Republican ideals, integral to the development of France's 'one and indivisible Republic'. The post-war *dirigiste* mode of state–economy relations was ably captured by Shonfield (1969). He identified, at the core of the French model, state-led, active economic and industrial interventionism, with the *dirigiste* state using its key agencies to steer the nation's economic development (Shonfield 1969: ch. 5, see also Levy's contribution to this

volume). This was predicated upon a set of coordinating and steering mechanisms including price, credit and exchange controls. Norms of *tutelle* (or hands-on supervision) by state actors over key (public and private) industries provided the necessary direction. These involved ‘an intricate network of commitments on the part of private firms... all in return for favours from the state... [and] the habit of the exercise of power by public officials over the private sector of the economy’ (Shonfield 1969: 86 and 128). The final element was state orchestration of industrial finance through the plan.

Whilst 1958-59 could not be described as ‘business as normal’, nevertheless the technocratic, elitist approach to planning gave French *dirigiste* economic governance a degree of insulation from the political turmoil and seismic constitutional events of 1958. Later, from the late 1970s onwards, the reverse became true. Charting the evolution of French *dirigisme* highlights how the political economy within which Fifth Republic institutions are embedded has undergone a profound transformation, whilst the political institutions and constitutional regime have enjoyed a degree of stability. Palier, Levy and Le Galès explore the episodic but at times seismic changes in the French political economy which have unfolded under the Fifth Republic, and in particular over the last 25 years. Much of this transformation was driven through by the political leaders and the stable parliamentary majorities those Fifth Republic institutions delivered. By the end of the 1990s, as both Levy and Le Galès note, the purchase which directive state intervention had over a wide range of economic, social and territorial policy areas had diminished substantially compared to 1958. One of the more important evolutions under Fifth Republic France is that the long-established French state traditions of *dirigisme* are in retreat.

In the 1970s, dysfunctionalities of *dirigisme* (see Levy) acted in concert with an economic conjuncture to herald the end of the *trente glorieuses* of strong and steady French economic growth. This, along with wider global and European changes in political economy and ideology, caused a paradigm shift toward neo-liberal economic management in the 1980s. Privatisation, budgetary austerity, German-style sound anti-inflationary economic management became the watchwords of French economic rectitude. This new approach generated higher unemployment with significant social costs, and Levy charts how the French ‘social anaesthesia’ state re-organised social

policy in an attempt to manage these. Yet this new logic of social policy proved very costly, and thus difficult to reconcile to the new economic orthodoxy. Levy and Palier both analyse the changing logics underpinning both the French welfare state and economic intervention under the latter day Fifth Republic. From a 'Keynesianism' tool of macro-economic management (wherein Palier identifies an alignment of social and economic policy rationales), the French welfare state became seen as cause of a fiscal crisis of the state, burden on employers and perceived impediment to economic competitiveness. Attempts to increase governmental influence over the French welfare state were partly because of the increasing costs.

The picture of retreat from *dirigisme* is an uneven one. Contrary to statist and *dirigiste* tendencies within the wider French political economy, the French state was not in control of the formation or indeed management of welfare provision for much of the post-war era, as Palier points out. Here, the social partners were at the helm. In the contemporary period, Palier explores how the state became increasingly concerned with managing the financial costs of French welfare provision in the context of high long-term unemployment. Over the course of the Fifth Republic, and particularly from the 1970s onwards, *dirigiste* state managers sought to appropriate power over welfare reform, and excise social partners from decisions.

Yet these *dirigiste* impulses struggle with the byzantine complexity of the institutions and programmes of French welfare provision, and the enduring role of the French social partners. The challenges facing welfare reformers became all the more clear with the 1995 *mouvement sociale* which increased the political salience and sensitivity of welfare retrenchment still further. Within contemporary welfare reform, there are some small signs of evolution towards an activation oriented refocusing of employment-centred social policy. Yet both Levy and Palier note that significant policy shifts in social policy and the French welfare state will only succeed if governing strategies take account of the complexities and the range of actors involved.

The combination of retrenchment pressures, and the pathologies of a forbiddingly fragmented system whose coverage is generous in places but very patchy, mean that the Republican ideal of equality is poorly served by the institutions and programmes

of French welfare provision. The retrenchment phase of French welfare provision from the 1980s onwards has if anything exacerbated this problem, and seen a trend increase in inequality. The reach of French *dirigiste* welfare state reformers, it seems, exceeds their grasp, with welfare state reform and retrenchment proving an extremely difficult public policy goal to achieve. Welfare state reform which adheres to Republican principles of equality is a still more remote prospect. Reform has culminated, according to Palier, in a distinctly inegalitarian ‘dualisation’ of the system (separating those with sufficient contribution histories to benefit from generous social insurance from those on means tested residual benefits), underpinned by a creeping ‘logic of individualisation and privatisation of social protection’.

Jack Hayward has elsewhere exposed numerous hypocrisies, inconsistencies, and anachronisms within France’s Republican tradition and in particular its egalitarian dimension. For him, France’s ‘indivisible’ republic is but a ‘superimposition of a spurious unity on an empirical plurality’ (2007: 67), wherein ‘nominal equality is contradicted by a multitude of increasing inequalities’ (2007: 372). Both Palier and Levy find evidence to support this case, especially since the 1970s, with inegalitarian tendencies intensified within welfare state provision and social policy as the Fifth Republic has evolved.

Centre Periphery Relations under the Fifth Republic – Jacobinism in check?

The changing politics of centre periphery relations in France can only be adequately understood in the light of this changing French political economy. The political economic transformations brought about by 30 years of glorious post-war growth, followed by a retreat from *dirigisme* and a fiscal crisis of the state increasing financial pressures on public policy have, Le Galès argues in this volume, altered the economic and political geography of France. Whilst successive revolutions, constitutional monarchies, empires and republics have left their mark on that political geography, one enduring and powerful centralising force within French political culture ever since 1789 has been Jacobinism.

The 1958 settlement re-enforced such Jacobin centralising tendencies, and indeed Michel Debré was a personification of them. De Gaulle viewed local interests with a

similar suspicion to parties as impediments to (his) realisation of the general will. Thus with the onset of the Fifth Republic there was no major rupture in the territorial organisation of French political life and power relations to match the dramatic transformations of presidentialisation in the political regime and party system. The centralisers' goal in the early Fifth Republic, as Le Galès charts, was a modernisation of French society and economy using familiar Jacobin, centralised means. Yet in empowering (centrally controlled) regional economic coordination in 1959, the Jacobins began (perhaps unwittingly) to unleash some decentralising tendencies.

In the context of strong economic growth, a *dirigiste* elite acting in concert with large firms worked to transform local economies. Le Galès maps out the geographical and territorial re-organisations of French capitalism which accompanied the post-war economic modernisation (entailing a shift from small-scale economic activity to maturation of French Fordism). Paradoxically, this territorial reorganisation and modernisation of French capitalism, orchestrated by centralising Parisian *dirigiste* state and corporate managers, sowed the seeds of decentralisation. The transformation of French economic geography (orchestrated by the Jacobin French State in Paris) generated the impetus (felt first in the labour market, and later in democratic politics) for subsequent decentralisation. DATAR's building up of cities such as Rennes, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Montpellier, Nice, Grenoble, Strasbourg in the 1960s created new centres of economic activity. In time, these became sources of political power, advancing demands for greater autonomy. A combination of the spirit 1968, and the aftershocks of the 1970s economic crisis being felt in these new regional economic centres of activity (or, increasingly, inactivity) ended the Jacobin elite-driven geographical organisation of French capitalism.

The Fifth Republic's political institutions facilitated resistance (notably from the Senate) which staved off decentralising change, yet those institutions themselves were evolving, and their ability to resist was under threat. As Grunberg notes in this volume, in the 1960s and 1970s the French party system was changing.

Presidentialisation and nationalisation of French party politics challenged the old conservative localism, and with the changing party system came a shift in the realms of the possible for decentralisation. Just as these cities and their economic geography were changing, a new Socialist politics of the local was emerging. The 1977

municipal elections thus had implications both the rise of the French Socialist Party, and the possibilities of political decentralisation under the Fifth Republic. The likes of Defferre and Mauroy were challenging centralised industrial restructuring. Here they found common cause with Rocard and the 'Second Left' proclaiming decentralised politics of 'autogestion' in opposition to centralising technocratic Gaullism (and the monolithic French State).

The hesitant, anachronistic, decentralisation which followed in the 1980s did little to simplify the multi-levelled French polity. Rather than apportioning powers rationally, the reforms merely added new bodies to the existing patchwork of local bodies, causing further duplication and overlapping of competencies. The boundaries of local government were not rationalised, nor were the number of units reduced.⁶ This overlaying of new levels of governance without removing or rationalising any of the others, nor indeed clarifying hierarchical relations between them, was also a costly exercise. From modest beginnings, the budgets and resources of these new regional bodies grew incrementally. Aided by Europeanisation (which saw the empowering regions and cities), and the creation of inter-communal structures, gradually these new local political and regional structures gained resources and capabilities. A second wave of decentralisation, this time by the Right in 2004, further undermined Jacobinism, yet *still* there was no rationalisation of French multi-levelled governance.

The decentralisation which followed from the 1980s onwards is arguably the biggest change in France's constitutional arrangements over the lifetime of the Fifth Republic. It has certainly challenged and transformed French political culture and eroded the centrality of Jacobinism. That the partial decline of Jacobinism has accompanied the partial decline of *dirigisme* is no accident. Both are part of a change in the nature of the French state/society relations and politics. Decentralisation reduces the purchase of Parisian elites over the evolution of French capitalism. Meanwhile, the costs of four co-existing levels of sub-national governance, in the context of budgetary pressures and deteriorating public finances, reduces governmental room to manoeuvre. As a result, the French State's *dirigiste* and Jacobin control of the French territory and economy is much reduced in 2008 compared with 1958.

⁶ France still has in excess of 36, 000 communes, 26, 000 of which have a population of less than 700 (Ashford 1990: 57) indeed, some communes have no population at all.

French Universalism and the Fifth Republic

France's 'one and indivisible' Republic, and Jacobin notions of universalism and egalitarianism are increasingly at odds with a differentiated territorial reality. There is a similar gap between rhetoric and reality in relation to gender politics under the Fifth Republic. The French Republican tradition combines commitments to universalism and egalitarianism, both of which were written into and therefore preserved by the 1958 constitutional settlement which founded the Fifth Republic. However, in the last 50 years, the politicisation of the gender dimensions of equality has exposed the sham of that universalism and egalitarianism, and brought into the political limelight the inequitable consequences of France's 'one and indivisible republic'. As Murray notes in this volume, French Republicanism has at its heart a 'universalist tradition built on masculine norms'. The attendant refusal to acknowledge sexual difference has been a significant source of enduring gender inequality.

Gender *égalité* was largely absent from the political agenda in 1958, so how it is understood and defended within French politics today represents a huge shift. Yet the fact that gender (in)equality has become politicised in recent decades has not yet transformed how French Republican egalitarianism finds expression in the political practices of the Fifth Republic. Murray identifies how the egalitarian and universalist cloak of French Republicanism masks enduring male dominance and structural gender bias within representative politics in France. Thus attempts to advance female representation through quotas fell foul of the Constitutional Council, protecting a 'gender-blind' universalist notion of equality whose real world effects in French political life have been anything but equitable in gender terms. Murray demonstrates how 'formal equality of citizens in the constitution' reinforces 'continuing inequality for women in practice'.

Furthermore, beyond the realms of formal politics, increasing focus on the place of women within society, economy and the workplace has brought new understandings of what constitutes political, social and economic equality. Pre-existing patriarchal norms surrounding the gendered division of labour, and their institutionalisation within the French welfare state, meant that the *citoyennes* of Fifth Republic France

have been denied social and economic and political equality. The French welfare state, supposedly an institutional realisation of the Republican commitment to equality, is in fact built upon a male breadwinner model which has perpetuated and perhaps even exacerbated gender inequality under the Fifth Republic.

Not until the Giscard Presidency, and then the election of the Socialists in 1981, did the patriarchal nature of the Fifth Republic constitutional settlement come under real pressure to reform. With the 'parity movement' in the 1990s, that pressure for reform began to bear fruit. Yet to circumvent the barrier of Republican universalism, the parity reform was forced to rely on some rather flimsy arguments about a natural divide between the two sexes which left many feminist campaigners feeling uncomfortable. Resistance to genuine gender egalitarianism has been strong, as the limited effectiveness of the parity law demonstrates. The male forces of conservatism, cloaked in the traditions and values of the Republic, are likely to succeed to protecting many of the highest echelons of French political power as male bastions for some time yet. This is an ongoing struggle within French political life. Advancements in women's representation are halting, and often contingent upon the '*fait du prince*' with male favour (ministerial office) being bestowed on selected women, whilst aggregate levels of female representation continue to flounder.

For these and other reasons, French feminism's relation with the French state remains uneasy. The patriarchal nature of the French state still leaves its footprints in areas such as childcare provision. Equal pay and employment rights, first legislated in the 1970s and bolstered in the 1980s, have been slow to feed through into the real experiences of French women in the workplace. A partial gendering of French Republican universalism, as a result of the parity laws, is perhaps the most significant shift in recent times. However, without a profound challenge to dominant elements of the French fifth Republic to date such as presidentialism and a majoritarian electoral system, a genuinely gender-equal political regime in France remains a distant prospect.

Thus the Fifth Republic is fascinating political phenomenon both because of the extraordinary circumstances in which it came into being, and also because of the complex combination of French political and constitutional traditions it contained,

embodied, and sought anachronistically to reconcile. This volume explores how these aspects of French political culture have evolved under the 50 years of the French fifth Republic. The contributions to this special issue explore the dynamics of change and continuity in relation to these aspects of the French Republic tradition, and their expression in French political practice, over the last 50 years, culminating in assessment of their place within contemporary French politics and political institutions.

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