

Impact of the media political structuration on the success of social movements (from 1974 to 1986 in France)

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The analysis of mobilizations is often difficult when the actors' unequal propensity to take part in protest movements is to be accounted for. After an interval of some years a seemingly identical cause will provoke quite different mobilizations. Ecology, a term whose meaning was unknown to a lot of people in the late sixties, has become one of the main « concerns » of public authorities and a lot of militant organizations, without, however, succeeding in provoking mobilizations and an affective commitment as strong as the working class movements could arouse. It has been believed too soon there were always enough dissatisfied people in a society to give birth to protest actions as if any cause well supported by militants could arouse public interest. It seems however that the symbolic constitution of a cause that might spark off the militants' energy is a complex process. So it is important to consider more particularly two phenomena to which political sociology has probably not given attention enough up till now. First the logic of the evolution of the agents' mental representations going from indifference to enthusiasm or inversely – an evolution about which we can't *a priori* say it takes place under the only influence of the enterprises of mobilization whose appearance is itself one of the stages of this process – The second phenomenon concerns the effects of mobilization or demobilization that the journalists provoke by treating a given cause. In this paper we will more particularly insist upon this last point. The analysis of the influence of the media on the development of mobilizations is far from being easy : as a matter of fact it is difficult to convincingly isolate the impact of media from that of other determining factors. The mass media don't represent a collective actor with a will of his own or with much freedom and the effects of their comments on the readers are far from being a simple relationship of « influence » The impact of the articles of every single newspaper is not very important. The written press has at its disposal an audience and an impact less important than those of television news but the latter generally borrow their topics and their points of view from the former. So, to explain the journalistic production and its influence we don't have to consider the media as a whole or every medium taken separately, but we must consider the particular configuration of their rivalry, their common culture and their temporary union. Weak as each medium taken separately may be, the conjunction of the different comments of some media or of all the media will have important effects on the way the social actors will legitimately consider the social world. In this paper we will deal about France and the changes the simultaneous evolution – from nineteen eighty-one onwards – of the Socialist party's political offer and the « left-wing » papers' redactionnal offer will bring about as far as the actors' ability to create mobilization is concerned.

Political configuration and practices of the French Press

Between nineteen fifty-eight (1958) and nineteen eighty (1980) the mass media concerned with the political scene are in France dominated by the logic of opposition between the two factions structuring the electoral political field. In a context of intense electoral and symbolic competition between « left-wing » and « right-wing » politicians, French television, a public monopoly, is closely controlled by the « gaullist » then « giscardien » governments, whereas the opposition press tends to support the candidates and the parties of its political camp. The logic of confrontation between the « right-wing » and the « left-wing » thus tends to force itself upon the media, so that the editors and the journalists have to be in keeping with the specific political line of their paper and this obligation gives birth to a generally strict respect for a partisan discipline and a logical orientation of the political comments. The great differentiation of partisan platforms and the different ways of interpreting political information makes it difficult for a national daily paper dealing with political news not to give, in the mere statement of « facts », a comment which associates the newspaper to a political camp¹ Most editors, far from trying to look neutral, stand up for a precise political tendency. This partisan commitment of the dailies is partly due to the political interest of those who own the means of information and tend to invest in the press to get political influence, but it is also due to the journalists' commitment to political struggles. This segmentation of the press field leads the main journalists to professional trajectories, generally taking place inside their partisan camp. It is then difficult for a « left-wing » reporter or editor to write articles or give an impulsion to a paper in a media considered as being « of the right » and inversely a journalist from a « right-wing » paper can't possibly work for a « left wing » paper. Before nineteen eighty-one (1981) it seldom happens that a left wing paper criticizes one of the leaders of the socialist opposition – except for *l'Humanité* when the Socialist party and the Communist party have a tense relationship – or that a paper known as being « right wing » finds fault with the government's policy. The journalists of each camp tend to double the parties' spokesmen's political work by offering their readers a journalistic interpretation of the political events specific to every one of the main electoral alliances.

The symbolical struggles for establishing a critical diagnosis on the social and economic situation – the causes of an increasing unemployment and inflation as soon as 1974, the social disparities, the possibility of a different economic policy, of a diagnosis on the reality of a communist or sovietic threat – well, these struggles, which partly condition the credibility of an alternative policy are fought by the opposition press as well as by the left-wing leaders. Up

1. Erving Goffman, *Les cadres de l'expérience*, Paris, Minuit, 1991 et W. Gamson et A. Modigliani, « Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power : a Constructionist Approach », *American journal of sociology*, vol. 95, 1, juillet 1989, p. 1-37.

till the beginning of the eighties in the national press, the journalist's and the militant's situations are very close and an editor may seem to side with a partisan camp without being professionally discredited because such an involvement in political struggles may even constitute the condition to practice his job. A clear-cut distinction between a « journalistic » activity and a « political » activity prevents us from understanding the relationship between the journalists and the politicians before nineteen eighty-one and, to a lesser extent, after nineteen eighty-one. If we tend to underestimate the part played by strictly political logics when journalistic work and militant activity are concerned, in most of the national written or audio-visual press, it's because we are in a political configuration in which a journalist's part and a party's spokesman's part are more clearly separate and in which a greater euphemization of the partisan orientation of the journalistic comments is required.

The readers are fond of the journalists' commitment. This can be partly explained by an increasing political antagonism and a stronger feeling of belonging to a group, especially from the Algerian war to May nineteen sixty-eight while the fifth Republic was being settled. A presidential system and elections on a majority basis, added to a lack of alternate governments as soon as nineteen fifty-eight – a situation quite different from that of the fourth Republic – have partly modified the political field and have increased the chance of belonging to an electoral camp according to a logic of opposition towards the government in office. Between nineteen seventy-two and nineteen eighty-one, the progression of the new Socialist party and the increasing probability of alternate governments intensify the differentiation of the political offers and strengthen the feeling of belonging to a group for the people who are most interested in electoral discourses. The Common Platform signed by the Socialist party and the Communist party plans to nationalize the banks and some of the main industrial groups and thus presents people with a « choice of society », an alternative for the « capitalist » economy. Beyond their differences, the political officials of the majority and the opposition all agree to consider the electors are facing a « choice of society » : the opposition declares it wants to break from « capitalism » and a way of governing benefiting only to the « wealthy classes » whereas the government accuses the Left of planning a radical transformation of the economic system and claims that the joint victory of the Socialist and Communist parties would endanger public freedom as in the Eastern countries. This is not mere rethoric heard in electoral campaigns : the whole political class pretends to believe that such a victory would provoke the complete change of French society.

The opposition's political personnel who champion the radical political offer of the Common Platform relies on the support of staunch electors and the press from the left which, by criticising the opponents' policy, is a great help to the political and economic alternative options of the left wing. The main opposition parties' radical political offer helps maintain the readers' radical opinions. These readers help the opposition papers to stay in the left wing and these very papers make the left-wing parties' political offer credible by taking part in the

symbolical struggles against the right-wing political personnel and newspapers. To create and maintain such an ideologic and partisan system requires a lot of work : the political frontier between the « majority » and the « left wing » has to be carefully defined : a left-wing point of view both critical and credible, on society and economy, has to be defined too, especially because the government's personnel may always appear as being endowed with natural legitimacy. We must however stress the fact that if the left-wing political personnel are between nineteen sixty-eight (1968) and ninety eighty-one (1981) likely to get some newspapers' help about its radical political choice, it's for two reasons. First, because the French opposition press at the time enjoys economic prosperity, which allows its journalists to express their partisan opinions ; secondly because the most important papers are financially run in such a way that the journalists are never under the direct authority of an owner able to force his political views on them.

The structure of French papers' capital

The original characteristic of the French newspapers is that they were born by expelling, at the Liberation, former pre-war papers ; this was carried on by groups generally coming from the Resistance. Belonging to groups who had fought against the right-wing collaborators and had taken over quite cheaply the premises and the printing material, the new press is more « of the left » and less dependant on the financial powers than the pre-war press often controlled by conservative industrials². If low resources and a lack of know-how will be progressively fatal to a great number of papers in the seventies, the structure of the capital of a number of dailies – especially of some newspapers considered as left-wing – will still evade the strict economic logic. The most important French daily (by its circulation and its prestige) *Le Monde*, is run by its journalists and its society of editors and constitutes a sort of self-managed enterprise, at least as far as the editorial line is concerned. *Le Canard enchainé* (the muzzled duck) helped by high circulation and a great excess budget is also run by its own journalists. To these two papers we must add some other recent papers who are profiting by the prosperity of the opposition press. Until nineteen eighty-one the only press enterprises which succeeded in finding a gap in the competitive press area were left-wing papers.

In nineteen seventy-three extreme left-wing militants, stemming from the maoist movement, founded *Libération*, a daily paper in which the journalists will keep the majority of shares and where the main decisions were taken in the journalists' general meetings. In nineteen seventy-seven, Claude Perdiel, who owned *Le Nouvel Observateur* but didn't run it, founded *Le Matin de Paris*, a daily paper where the journalists were allowed to influence the political line : after

2. Marc Martin, *Médias et journalistes de la République*, Paris, Editions Odile Jacob, 1997, p. 291-293 et Albert (P.), Charlet (L.), Ranc (R.) et Terrou (F), *Histoire générale de la presse française*, Paris, PUF, 1972, t. 4.

hiring a journalist from the right-wing paper *Le Figaro*, Claude Perdriel had to face a strike of the editorial staff who refused to work with a right-wing journalist coming from *Le Figaro*. In spite of the progression of Robert Hersant's press group (right-wing) in the seventies, especially in the provincial papers, the structure of the capital of the French press gives it a great independence from economic interests and from enterprises likely to invest money in the press. The left-wing journalists of the French press in the seventies were not in conflict with owners who could have less favourably viewed a radical editorial line.

The journalists' political creed and comments on social movements

In a configuration of intense political struggle between the government and the left-wing, the opposition press is obliged to be critical of the government and is obliged to support all the social movements opposing the government's policy³. From nineteen sixty-eight (1968) to nineteen eighty-one (1981) a lot of social sectors went through antigovernment movements. The sector of National Education : the secondary schools' movement against the Debré Law in nineteen seventy-three, and their strikes in nineteen seventy-six against Haby's reform ; in nineteen seventy-nine the universities struggled against Mrs Saunié-Saité's reform ; the industrial sector : strike at Lip's, strikes in shipbuilding yards, in iron and steel firms in Lorraine⁴ ; and various other non-salarial sectors – antinuclear demonstrations in Creys-Malville, antiracist demonstrations when more and more foreigners are expelled, antifacist demonstrations of the extreme left-wing – Well, all these sectors experienced very important social movements, in which organisations of militants with an intense affective relationship with the left, contested the « gaullist » then « giscardien » government. These social movements generally got the support of all the parties « of the left », from the Communist party – chiefly when the organisations linked with this party took part in the movements – to the Socialist party who tended to publicly support all the social movements who opposed the government. They also got the support of the leftist press because of the journalists' own beliefs (they worked for a paper partly because their political convictions were in keeping with the editorial line of that paper), and because of the pressure put on them by the political personnel and their readers who all wanted the opposition's victory. Well, of course, we should study more closely the way the journalists dealt with the description of currents « events » and more particularly the opinion and comments revealed by the mere description of these « events ». Let's say only that if the opposition papers didn't criticize openly the protest

³ The political personnel of the opposition fight too, to maintain their critical attitude. The characteristics of the readership often linked with the left wing and who buy a paper because they want to be reassured about its opposition to the government, compel the journalist to strictly respect the logics of opposition between the right and the left wings. Louis Pinto, *L'intelligence en action : le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, Métailié, 1984.

⁴ Christian de Montlibert, *Crise économique et conflits sociaux*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1989.

movements, even the most violent ones⁵, and, on the contrary, questioned the government's policy, they implicitly appeared to view them favourably.

In a political configuration in which the government had the monopoly of televised information, the part played by the opposition press was essential for the leftist enterprises. This press was a means to impose, in front of the governmental point of view, an explanation of the events nearer the opposition's partisan interest. When the left-wing journalists explained and positively commented the Communist and Socialist parties' political offer, they symbolically confirmed that offer. With the economic experts and the intellectuals, the Socialist party could mobilize, they constituted one of the poles of the symbolic system of legitimation of the « radical » propositions of the « Left Union ». They represented an « external » guarantee to the seemingly marxist economic choices coming from the « Programme Commun » (the Common Platform); they gave credit to a platform the government's majority pretended to consider as impracticable and likely to lead to the « collectivization » of economy. When the moderate opposition press and parties blamed the right-wing political personnel, they tended to legitimate all the criticism towards the government. So, the opposition press gave the « tone » for the criticism the electors that were the closest to the left, could aim at the majority. The more radical the socialist Party and the opposition newspapers were, when they called into question the government's policy, the more the Communist party and the extreme left groups were urged to maintain the radicality gap separating them from the Socialist party. All the opposition parties favoured « the race for radicality » and the left-wing parties' platforms made faithfulness to the Common Platform their criterion of judgement. The « radical » stand taken by every left-wing group justified and reinforced their opponents' legitimate radicality. We may even say that the very debates these parties had – on the extent of nationalizations, on how an enterprise can be self-managed, on the part played by planned economy – helped establish the verisimilitude of the left-wing platforms and legitimate the radical opposition to the right-wing. Thus, the critical tone of the opposition press favoured the diffusion and reproduction of an anti-establishment culture and organized the opposition : this left-wing culture then shared by a number of actors playing an important part in the launching of social movements, constituted the leading frame for the opposition to the right wing. The opposition press objectively coordinated left-wing militants and sympathizers in front of audiovisual media firmly controlled by the government. So the left-wing papers mobilized militants, reinforced beliefs, contested the information given by the TV news, circulated the opponents' political offer, and thus constituted a relay essential to opposition movements. At last the left-wing press informed and announced events :

5.If we suppose the most violent demonstrations are those newspapers find hard to support, an analysis of the journalistic comments after the demonstration of the miners in Lorraine after the « restructuring » of the steel industry, well, this analysis could all the more allow us to reason about all the opposition movements.

demonstrations, strikes, petitions, etc., going far beyond the restricted readership of the parties' bulletins.

The Decline of mobilizations after 1981

The years after 1981 are marked by a decline in numbers and importance of the left-wing mobilizations in France. Several phenomena can explain that. First the new government's action was doubtless far less likely to shock the left-wing militant organizations and cause reactions, than the previous government. It was also likely that the increase of unemployment from nineteen seventy-four would gradually lessen the trade unions' possibilities to organize movements. The workers of the private sector feared social « plans » more and more and redundancy as a reprisal for taking part in strikes. This fear of unemployment, rather weak in 1974 and 1978, when the workers had not felt the economic and social change yet, progressively hit all the salaried classes, even the managerial staff. The increase of unemployment also allowed the employers to get rid of the trade unions' members and their leaders more easily, (there are few French firms where the trade-unions have a monopoly on the hiring of workers)⁶. This elimination of groups of activists undermined the unions' traditional claims in the sixties and seventies. Thus, from 1981 to 1985 we could witness a drop in the number of important mobilizations in the sectors where we could find activists close to the left-wing trade-unions or non-salaried groups of activists⁷, except, may be, for the movements organized by SOS-Racism, which can be considered as a reaction against the extreme right-wing's progress. The only important mobilizations were demonstrations against governmental plans led by activists' networks close to the opposition : such as the law and medical students' movements in 1983 and the great demonstration against the reform of the laws concerning private education in 1984.

But the arrival of the left affected the activists' mobilizations in another way. The Communist and Socialist parties had been in the opposition for a long time, thus urging the members or a number of militant organizations to have important links – even affective links – with the left-wing parties. To be « of the left » was then a political attitude which gave the opposition's activists and electors a social identity. The progressist activism was then aimed at the right-wing government but it worked too in favour of causes (antiracism, trade-unions, feminism, ecology, the homosexuals' rights) that were not considered separable from a global political commitment. The left parties' political work helped to identify and symbolically mix up all the possible opponents to the activists' organizations : the « wealthy classes », the governing party, and more generally all actors holding social power. The incentive to militant action often comes

6. Dominique Andolfato, Dominique Labbé, *La CGT. Organisation et audience depuis 1945*, Paris, La Découverte, 1997.

7. Olivier Fillieule, *Stratégies de la rue. Les manifestations en France*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1997 et Jan Willem Duyvendak, *Le poids du politique. Nouveaux mouvements sociaux en France*, Paris, L'Hamattan, 1994

from this opposition to the right-wing as well as to people of note and employers. The very idea to have to fight for a cause against the left was then difficult to admit for a number of activists who thought they were « of the left ». As soon as 1981, the Left, who had represented the opposition for twenty years, was « caught off its guard » by the alternative government's change of mind and the « harsh measures » it advocated. When the Socialist party gave up its left-wing beliefs and its marxist-orientated claims and adopted a seemingly liberal speech that the left-wingers associated with the Right, the progressist activists felt confused for quite a long time. Before 1981 the « radical » platform adopted by the Left helped by its committees of experts, protected the left-wing sympathizers' traditional political convictions but when the Left gave up its political offer, the sympathizers' creed in a possible change of the social order through political or unionist activities, began to decrease gradually. The political actors who supported the traditional left-wing values had changed into governmental actors with quite different views and restricted the progressist activists' hope of altering the social order through militancy. The social value of the anti-establishment protest suddenly grew weaker⁸. The number of political activists decreased and their expansion was impossible. Before 1981 the youth at least were likely to consider themselves « of the left », in conflict with the governing Right but after 1981, secondary school pupils and students became more and more indifferent to the partisan distinctions and the political militancy in the universities began to decline. The declining belief in social and political struggles directly influenced the fighting spirit of the social movements and their probable appearance. Yet, if the ideological breaking off provoked by the evolution of the Socialist party's personnel's political offer was the cause of the relative demobilization of some of their people who had become militants owing to May sixty-eight enthusiasm and the necessity of opposing a right-wing government, this change in political speech couldn't have had such effects without the approval the left-wing press gave this ideological *aggiornamento*. As a matter of fact, the former left-wing opposition press, by helping make the Socialist party's new speech credible, caused the « of the left » sympathizers to feel the necessity of giving up the traditional political configurations.

Decline of the left-wing French press audience and evolution of its editorial line after 1981

The similar structure of the political field and the field of political information, quite steady when governments don't alternate, was deeply changed by President François Mitterrand's election. This alternation modified the journalist's work in the opposition press. Before 1981 the journalists had to criticize the government but after they were quite ill at ease when they

8. Léon Festinger, *A theory of cognitive dissonance*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1957 et Festinger (L.), Riecken (H. W.) et Schachter (S.), *When prophecy fails. An account of a modern group that predicted the destruction of the world*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1956, [traduction française sous le titre *L'échec d'une prophétie. Psychologie sociale d'un groupe de fidèles qui prédisaient la fin du monde*, Paris, PUF, 1993]

had to agree with the new political power. But as well as the institutional change, the decline of the left-wing papers' circulation was at the origin of the changes of their editorial lines. After Pierre Mauroy was appointed Prime Minister, the sales of the papers opposing the new government tended to increase whereas the sales of the papers supporting it decreased (see tableau I)⁹ *Le Monde* saw its paid national circulation drop between 1981 and 1984 from three hundred and fifty thousand (350 000) to two hundred and eighty thousand (280 000) daily copies and *Le Matin de Paris* lost one third of its sales. Among the left-wing papers, only *Libération* which was just changing its public image of « fringe » paper by writing like *Le Monde* and *Le Matin de Paris*, got more readers and didn't lose a lot of them. This evolution was true for only some thousands of readers or so but within a few months *Le Monde* and *Le Matin de Paris* went under the break-even point. These papers gave a political explanation : if the number of people buying papers most favourable to the Socialist party decreased whereas the opposition right-wing papers increased their sales, it's because these left-wing readers criticized the support given to the new government and even the loyalty to the traditional themes of the French Left¹⁰. Whatever the actual causes of that slump in sales for the left-wing papers might have been, their managers were urged to change their editorial line to make their public image appear less left-biased.

Tableau I : Evolution of the paid circulation of newspapers in France between 1981 and 1996¹¹.

Year	1981(1)	1984(2)	1985(2)	1986(3)	1991(1)	1994(4)	1996(3)
<i>Le Figaro</i>	308.000	338.000	367.000	414.000	392.000	374.000	349.000
<i>France Soir</i>	380.000	356.000	348.000	325.000	217.000	186.000	162.000
<i>Le Parisien</i>	329.000	321.000	342.000	347.000	379.000	427.000	457.000
<i>Le Monde</i>	349.000	279.000	265.000	284.000	323.000	344.000	325.000
<i>Libération</i>	48.000	105.000	123.000	150.000	166.000	170.000	151.000
<i>Le Matin de Paris</i>	185.000*	120.000	80.000	-	-	-	-
<i>L'Humanité</i>	122.000	97.000	91.000		67.000		
<i>La Croix</i>	108.000**	130.000	100.000		100.000		

* diffusion 1980, ** Diffusion 1982, source Bayard.

9. After 1981 the regular fall of the sales of *France Soir*, a rather right-wing paper was provoked by the fall of the circulation of popular dailies which were in competition with television *France Soir* et *Le Parisien* together went from one million seven hundred thousand (1 700 000) daily copies in 1967 down to seven hundred thousand (700 000) copies in 1980. If *France Soir* didn't benefit by the presence of a new government it was doubtless because the readers who bought popular papers were less linked to the newspaper's political line than those who read quality papers.

10. According to André laurens (who ran *Le Monde*) some of our readers questioned the contents of *Le Monde* because it seemed to be too close to the government. « We are losing among young people and upper socio-professional classes, where our readers are to be found (September 1982) ».

11. (1) columns 1981 et 1991 source OJD, from Françoise Berger, *Journaux... op. cit.*, p. 409. (2) columns 1984 et 1985 source OJD from Jacques Doléans, *La fin d'un monde*, Paris, Samuel Tastet éditeur, 1988, p. 316. (3) source DSH et OJD *Le Parisien* 2 juin 1997. (4) source OJD *Libération* 7 janvier 1996. See too Patrick Eveno, *Le Monde...., op. cit.*, p. 481, 482 et 513. According to those who study these papers and to the type of circulation (paid. « France », total. etc.), we must take into account their global evolution and their rough estimate only. We give these numbers of average daily circulation but they are liable to vary.

The evolution of the public debates and the conditions of profitability for the left-wing press will thus give rise to a change of the editorial lines according to two elements. On the one hand the main left-wing newspapers modified their ideological trends not to contradict the government's political offer but also to appear less « political »; on the other hand they tried to keep their distance from a government they thought they were too closely associated to.

Between 1981 and 1985 the new government with its ideological evolution, didn't have to fight against journalists wishing to stand up for the former left-wing ideas. As a matter of fact the left-wing papers were, before 1981, partly compelled, because they belonged to the progressists' camp, to publicly stand by the opposition parties and their nearly « marxist » platform. *Le Nouvel Observateur* had already started taking its distance from the strategy of alliance between the Socialist party and the Communists; yet, during the electoral campaign the paper had to support the left-wing candidates in spite of all¹² *Le Matin de Paris* and *Le Monde* also supported the socialist and communist alliance for nearly cultural reasons : because of their natural opposition to Giscard's government or the gaullist government and not because of they adhered to the opposition's economic platform. After 1981 the obligation of electoral support was less important and the journalists close to the new majority could more easily criticize the new government's social and economic actions which sometimes directly came from the 1972 Common Platform. When the new government began to disappoint the elector's hope, the left-wing papers started questioning the very political principles the left-wing parties had been claiming to draw from for decades (nationalizations, economic plans, opposition to market economy, etc..). If we wanted to explain why the newspapers which supported the left-wing « dogmas », as *Le Nouvel Observateur's* journalists named them, gave up doing this, we should make a detailed analysis of the internal process in every newspaper. We may however think that (if we take *Liberation* as an example) those who ran these papers did provoke the giving up of beliefs founded on the new liberal speech the Socialist party progressively adopted between 1983 and 1985. This evolution took place in spite of some journalists basically linked with the Left. On the one hand, the journalists who were promoted accepted that new political line (like Laurent Joffrin and Pierre Briçon in *Libération* as soon as 1981), on the other hand, we can imagine these journalists were ready to give up the radical speech of the left-wing opposition.

This process of « neutralization » of the editorial line of the left-wing papers was favoured by a change in their financial system. The economic difficulties caused by a decrease of their circulation made some newspapers disappear (like *Le Matin de Paris*), or open their capital to financial groups (like *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Le Provençal*). A partly unsophisticated press existed in the sixties and seventies when the journalists were free because they didn't have to take into account the importance of their sales – always increasing – or the owners' political

12. Louis Pinto. L'intelligence en action : *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, Métailié, 1984

tendencies ; then press enterprises were substituted to these papers and by opening their capital they lost part of their independence. The financial groups who bought part of the capital of *Le Monde* or *Libération* or *Le Point* and *L'Express* didn't earn much money : their prospective benefit was quite reduced¹³, but they invested money to get political influence. Even if the owners rarely took part in the daily editorial work of the papers we may think they decided however on their principal orientation by choosing the chief editors (Laurent Joffrin for *Libération* and Jacques Lesourne for *Le Monde*¹⁴). The left-wing papers depending now on economical groups, it seems impossible for one of them to go back to the editorial line which was that of the whole left-wing camp before 1981 : nationalization of the banks and the main industrial groups, more rights for the salaried workers in firms, etc...

When the topics discussed between the left and the right changed, the journalists had then to report about debates quite different from those existing when the left was in the opposition : they couldn't write any longer about the extension of nationalizations, the role of economic planification, or the « reduction of inequalities » while the opposition and the majority fought about the « modernization of France », the « firms' competitiveness » or about the issues of « immigration » and « insecurity ». The change in the causes of disagreement between the two camps compelled the papers to write according to the shift of the credibility point peculiar to the political discussion. Everything went on as if the impossibility the government had to reduce increasing unemployment and the feeling of failure it aroused, led to the discredit of the left-wing party's traditional speech. Some left-wing papers criticized the militants' organizations which followed the left-wing traditional ideas. The journalistic coverage of the trade unions' struggles became quite different. Before, the papers generally underlined that the salaried claims were quite justified and the « managers » were considered as « tycoons » ; as soon as 1983 on the contrary, there were criticisms of the « corporatism » and « archaism » of the trade unions' claims. The Socialist party officially turned to « liberalism » and thus weakened the opposition to the right-wing economic speech of before 1981. The left-wing papers often celebrated the « firms » and the « managers » from 1983 onward and years before this would have been criticized by all the left-wing actors. At the same time, the Socialist party's currents that still were for the Left's former opinions were considered as « obsolete » too. On the contrary, those who adopted the new liberal speech with enthusiasm, were positively judged with such adjectives as « modern », « pragmatic ». We should analyze the evolution of opinions the journalists could give about some socialist officials such as Laurent Fabius or Pierre Bérégovoy on the one hand, Jean-Pierre Chevènement or Jean Poperen on the

13. Pierre Péan et Christophe Nick, *TF1. Un pouvoir*, Paris, Fayard, 1997.

14. When a man (who was not a journalist) was hired as "manager" to be at the head of *Le Monde*, he was rejected by the journalists and the exterior shareholders had to allow a journalist to run the paper. They however didn't give the journalists the right to run the paper themselves.

other hand. The men were close to one another in 1981 since they all were « socialists » but soon their public images differed because of the journalists' comments about the opposite opinions they expressed. The left-wing papers tried to « re-centre » their editorial line to accompany the Socialist party's majority's ideological « *aggiornamento* ». Moreover they tried to keep a symbolical distance from the socialist Party and thus could freely criticize the political actors who still had left-wing « obsolete » ideas.

Before 1981 the opposition press, by taking part in all the left-wing actors' critical efforts, supported the anti-establishment mobilizations. On the contrary, by overstating the Socialist party's new political offer, the left wing newspapers discouraged the militants and caused the left-wing movements to decline after 1981. The Socialist party's new speech could have been called into question but the governmental experts' and the progressist newspapers' journalists' joint comments could not. Before, the papers ensured the militants their political activities were well-founded; after 1983 they tended, on the contrary, to convince them that the Left's « economic realism » – which strangely looked like Raymond Barre's « austerity » – constituted the most progressive policy allowed by the present state of the economy; besides they persuaded them that the financial balance of the firms and the country would consequently be endangered by their claims. This process of « neutralization » of the editorial tendencies of the former opposition press helped to give substance to the idea of an inescapable left-wing ideological evolution because of « economic restricting forces ». The sudden, simultaneous and convergent modification of the opinions of actors coming from different social backgrounds – politicians, journalists, intellectuals – helped to change the actors' political beliefs; the actors who were the most attached to the left changed all the more because the hopes they had founded on the opposition until 1980 and the actual « Great Change » brought about by the socialist governments were miles apart. To a split-up view of the political struggles where every electoral alliance represented a « choice of society » we could find a more peaceful view of the social reality where political parties had more or less similar ideas about economic management which were no longer able to give birth to emotional political commitment¹⁵.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of anthropology, Frazer compared similar elements in the myths and customs of different peoples. That split-up vision of cultural elements which were similar in appearance only gave the reader the illusion of a unicity of the human phenomena – anthropophagy, matriarchy, etc – which existed only if these cultural elements were dissociated from the

15. In the eighties there were less and less « social movements » because people felt they could no longer change the society by collective struggles and because emotional commitment was decreasing.

customs that alone could give them some meaning. Structural anthropology has put an end to false parallels and deceiving similarities. So in the analysis of the mobilizations we should beware of a fragmented approach of the social process. Do the demonstrations in France and Switzerland belong to the same type of phenomena ? These two countries have a common historical and political tradition, so we generally answer affirmatively : we take it for granted that a demonstration, as a social event, has the same meaning in nearby countries. Yet, the different political outlines of both countries, with democracy and alternating governments for one and democratic consensus for the other, could make us think that these seemingly most simple political practices as demonstrations are, have a radically different meaning and logic in each country. Whereas in France the important social movements have a partisan meaning (the Right against the Left) and whereas the French militants' motivations can't be dissociated from their political commitment, in Switzerland, they rather seem to be countercultural and even, in a way, anti-establishment demonstrations, since they always demonstrate against the same government or the same institutional system. The logic of taking part, political identities, the way of seeing social reality, the militants' way of considering economy, the logic of the production of the journalistic comments, a lot of factors quite important to explain the forms taken by militant demonstrations, can be structurally different from one country to another. It happened quite late in France in comparison with neighbouring European countries and, maybe because of its late appearance, assumed a particularly sudden character. In other countries marked by a strong working-class movement and a marxist tradition, we could also find processes similar to those we have described. The phenomenon, known as « decline of ideologies », reveals both the increased scarcity of traditionally left-wing actors and the weakening of the actors' tendency to give it credit ; this phenomenon is far from constituting an independant historical process coming from an unknown-by-all collective « consciousness »; as a matter of fact, it appears to be the result of ordinary political games. Thus it seems that the electoral competition between political parties has a determining impact on the interpreting frames of social reality the actors can use. This is due to the oppositions created by these political enterprises, to their ability to enrol activists, to the intellectual production they provoke, to the mass media they mobilize, to the flow of money they bring in, to the various interests they coordinate, and to the social energy their antagonism can arouse.