

ABSTRACT FOR THE BUDAPEST CONFERENCE (SOPHIE MASSE) :

FRENCH HISTORIANS UNDER DE GAULLE'S FIFTH REPUBLIC: WRITING HISTORY AND MAKING HISTORY

French historians as intellectuals and citizens of their times (1958-1969)

This contribution studies French historians making history (while writing history), in the 1960s. Their professional sphere and their personal life can't be completely separated. These scholars work in a prevailing political and intellectual atmosphere which is to be studied. Like every citizens, their past, their life and their social environment have impact on their commitments and their work. That's why it seems necessary to make a social history and a political history about intellectuals. Historians are part of them. As such, they are representative of academic behaviours. But they also reproduce professional habits, codes and ethics which are specific to history.

Based on historians' and universities' archives, historians' biographies and autobiographies, and on a written and oral inquiry which gathers yet more than a hundred testimonies, this contribution deals with these issues through the 1960s French politics, trying to analyse the connections between making and writing history.

Did De Gaulle's Republic and these historians have any mutual influence ? Which part did these academics intend to play in society? Did they take position on current events and policies during their teaching or in the media? Did their work reflect a political environment? Were they common citizens or did their historical training play a part in their perceptions and reactions?

First of all, we will specify their political environnement in the 1960s and measure its impact on their work. Then, we will try to describe and classify the types of historians' political commitments at that time. In the last part, this presentation focuses on historians facing three aspects of this French decade : the algerian war, the events of may 1968 and the charismatic figure of general de Gaulle.

I. The historians and the Vth Republic : working in a specific political context and acting in a political sphere

- Writing history in a specific political and intellectual context. Gaullism, Marxism and the Annales school : antagonistic influences.

In the 1960s, the three idols of the historian profession were not anymore individual, politics, and chronology, as Simiand used to denounce. Annales school completely transformed the professional habits and gained a powerful institutionnal position. Fernand Braudel led the main historical laboratory of the VIth section of the « Hautes études » and worked with Camille-Ernest Labrousse (whose chair was at the old Sorbonne) to turn the students to economic and social history.

Marxism (and not communism) was the main intellectual and political influence of the historian profession. There were outstanding links between the marxist worldview and the development of economic and social explanations in history. Many historians also aimed at rebuilding a new left.

Compared with these two new idols (marxism and Annales), gaullism seemed to promote opposite values, as well as an opposite outlook on history : focusing on one man and considering that De Gaulle's role during the second world war and then in 1958 was

determining. De Gaulle's ideas about France and French history relied on heroic actions, though Annales school thought economic and social structures in the long run, neglecting the individual's decision and particularly neglecting politics and political men. When teaching the Mediterranean area in the times of Philippe II, Braudel used to teach his students that they entered the XVIIth century without noticing that Philippe II was dead and that it made no difference. De Gaulle's historical culture was exactly what the Annales school struggled against as early as the beginning XXth century. So in addition to their political disagreement with the president, historians were led by opposite intellectual and professional trends.

- How policies impact historical work :

Concerning De Gaulle's views on universities, most historians denounced the technocratic influence and the government's wish to submit university to an economic rationality. But in a context of state development and increasing numbers of students and teachers, did the gaullian Republic's reforms concerning libraries, laboratories and universities change the work of historians in any way ? That's what Christophe Charle suggests, though it had never been studied precisely¹. The considerable development of the CNRS, (the national research committee) and the new organisation of French research in the 1960s certainly played a part in the vitality of the historical discipline. During this decade, the latter was transformed from a traditional, human sized and small-scaled production into a bigger structure with a small and powerful ruling body. Trying to imitate the « Hautes études » organisation, the CNRS financed collective works and tried to rationalize research, to avoid many groups working on the same subject, and therefore put together several teams dealing with a same geographical area. New laboratories, new computer methods, many publications and temporary positions to write a PhD were financed by the CNRS. Government's perspective joined historians' taste for quantitative history to promote collective research in the 1960s.

- Working as experts ?

Few historians claimed to be « experts » in the newspapers in the 1960s and sometimes gave short explanations for the television news. But most of those who regularly wrote articles in newspapers ment to express themselves on current events and to take political positions in order to denounce something as enlightened citizens, but not as experts who would « neutrally » explain a fact thanks to his knowledge. Nevertheless, a great figure of the expert can be mentioned: the historian who commented election results, with the permanent wish no to let his opinions appear in his analysis. In the 1960s, René Rémond was assuming this role on television and Jacques Ozouf in a leftwing and popular newspaper, the « Observateur ».

Historians involved in a political party or who assumed responsibilities in the trade-unions were a lot more common. They were members but also experts in various committees. Generally, they participated in debates concerning the education problems and not about their research in particular. As far as parties are concerned, we will study two examples : François-Georges Dreyfus, who took an active part in the gaullist policy regarding universities and Antoine Prost, who was both attending the meetings of the Club Jean Moulin, a leftwing think tank, and representing the trade SGEN in the committee in charge of drawing up the education reforms for the socialist Gaston Deffere in 1965. A third example shows how difficult it is to separate the working field and the political field. Yves Person, a breton historian of Africa was deeply involved in a struggle for regional languages inspired both by

¹ Christophe Charle, « Être historien en France, une nouvelle profession ? », in *L'Histoire et le métier d'historien en France, 1945-1995*, Paris, MSH, 1995

his knowledge of Africa and by his own experience in Brittany. He used to be an expert for the new socialist Party on that issue in the early 1970s.

Did any historian participate directly to the gaullian policy making ? Very few, as the vast majority of historians were supporting the left. Two men occupied very different positions : François-Georges Dreyfus, Professor in Strasbourg University, who was a member of the so called leftwing gaullists and Charles Morazé, one of the prominent figures of the « Hautes études », who had several contacts with de Gaulle and who was an adviser of the ministry of education Christian Fouchet. A former historian is closed to general de Gaulle in 1958: Jacques Soustelle, well-known for his activism in the OAS against the algerian independance after 1962.

For many historians, the great political man was above all Pierre Mendès France, a few had personal contacts with him and many wrote him at least once. But these relations cannot be called expertise, they were political support and intellectual talks.

II. Commitments of the Sixties : from newspapers' editorials to activism

- The intellectual engagement :

Inherited from the Dreyfus Affair, and reinforced by Sartre, claiming intellectuals' responsibility after the second world war (in the *Temps modernes*, n°1, 1945), the intellectual engagement seemed a necessity for many historians who signed petitions, wrote editorials or books to support or to denounce different policies and matters.

Both intellectual fight during the algerian war and petitions signed by intellectuals have already been studied. They underline the role of an historian of the ancient Grece, who since became a symbol of this intellectual engagement: Pierre Vidal-Naquet. He and a bunch of historians very closed to him (Madeleine Reberioux and Jean-Pierre Vernant principally, both belonging to the communist party until the end of the 1960s), had also signed manifestos about the Vietnam war, about the Grece dictatorship or about the lack of democracy inside the French communist party.

Some historians chosed to support causes which were linked –even tinily- with their research : the africanist Yves Person about the Biafra or Maxime Rodinson, the pro palestinian jewish historian of the islamic civilisation, about Israel or about the Algerian independance. Some other historians expressed a political position on the current events of history, as citizens who used the authority they may inspire to influence the public opinon. Let's mention few intellectuals' support to De Gaulle's foreign policy, even if they disagree about other aspects of his policy. Few historians became journalists,giving their perception of events and society in daily or in weekly newspapers. We will distinguish the different types of medias which spread their political views and which implied a different self-perception, as well as a different analysis.

Is the historian a specific intellectual in acting as described before ? In a way, certainly not: petitions gather intellectuals of many professions who share a same feeling and the french tradition of engaged intellectuals encompasses writers, scientists, artists... But, when expressing a personal view, in individual articles and books, the historian sometimes intended to apply an historical method to the current events. Three cases will illustrate this remark in three different ways: Pierre Vidal-Naquet in his book about the Audin Affair, François Furet as a journalist at *France Observateur*, Antoine Prost as a member of the trade union SGEN.

- a militant history or a history written by activists ?

Many historians born during the interwar period were committed historians in the leftwing parties and very few in the rightwing ones. This commitment began generally with a student group after the war, like young leftwing catholics in the JEC (catholic student youth). Does-it

mean that this generation has written a militant history ? Certainly not. Their political commitment suited perfectly well with Annales school's and Labrousse's economic and social history, but it also led to strengthen particular topics and issues. Choosing a working field is generally connected with personal concerns and emotions. French historians of the 1960s often worked on a subject which was linked either with a political outlook or with personal feelings (religious feelings or personal dramas most of the times). Therefore, we can draw a political map of the historical fields, even if exceptions occurred. But the choice of a subject because of political or personal concerns doesn't imply a biased or a one-sided treatment. All depends how the historians deal with them. It certainly strikes the focus on particular issues. Besides, methods are not « neutral ». They can overestimate phenomena or lie on worldviews that rise to the surface of historians' works. We will study the links between the 1960s' historical research and the political debates of the time, including a reflection on the quantitative method and on three main topics of the 1960s : democratisation, social history of the XXth century and colonial issues.

- Different types of commitments :

French historians of the 1960s' were sometimes members or supporters of parties. Most of the interwar generation was attracted by the PSU, which was a socialist party but which clearly refused the Algerian policy of the main socialist party SFIO. But we will also mention the minority: French communist historians (even if many historians left the French Communist Party before 1960), the different socialist branches, from Trotskyists to François Mitterrand's emerging CIR, the Gaullists, and the rightwing historians supporting the traditional right or the extreme right through the OAS for example.

More than their political opinions, we will study their activism, which we can classify in four groups : intellectual activism (writing petitions, editorials, articles and books, publishing political texts...), mass political campaigning (selling political newspapers, distributing leaflets, going to meetings and demonstrations...), violent activism (fighting with police or rival groups, terrorism against the state...), and scientific activism (writing committed works in order to participate to a political struggle). Very few historians considered their work as another medium to criticise or to support political ideas. But it could happen, concerning modern history for example, at a time of extreme tension.

III. Connections between the current events and the intellectual activity

- The impact of the Algerian war both on the political awakening of a generation and on the historical science.

- Writing history and making history in May 1968 :

Politics invaded university and became unescapable in May 1968. Afterwards, it stressed different behaviours which found expression in the professional sphere : running away from a leftist atmosphere, radicalising the historical and political debates on each side, suggesting new topics or new approaches.

We will study the historians' behaviours in May 1968 and wonder if we can specify a particular portrait compared with other intellectuals.

- Conscious and unconscious feelings about De Gaulle :

Historians, as any other citizens, have to face irrational feelings which don't fit with their rational arguments, neither with their current concerns. Most historians felt far from the

gaullian ideology and supported the leftwing parties which wanted to overthrow his regime. But like many other citizens, part of them were seduced by the great man. In the 1950s already, Lucien Febvre was concluding an account on De Gaulle's *Mémoires* with the feeling that historians never really faced the « de Gaulle problem ». We will give few examples of these unsettled feelings.

History and politics are linked very closely. A selection of facts and explanations is not a neutral operation. Studing history is also considered as a good training to envisage a political career. But the historian and the politician face two different targets and two temporalities. Political action is immediate and political speech is often voluntarily oversimplified. Historians on the contrary have to moderate, to introduce light and shade, to feel empathy with the men they study... professional habits which can seem incompatible with a political commitment. Nevertheless historians of the Sixties were, roughly speaking, a committed generation of intellectuals as well as brilliant renovators of historical science. They could conciliate the two activities, probably thanks to the professional codes built in the XIXth century and rebuilt by Bloch and Febvre. They inherited from the Annales founders this demanding necessity to be an active citizen while writing history with the same rigour.