

INTRODUCTION

Postwar Stories

France's Fourth Republic (1946–1958) has an unhappy reputation, and it is not hard to see why.¹ High hopes for a new constitutional order at the Liberation were disappointed. General Charles de Gaulle, who presided over France's postwar Provisional Government, wanted a break with the parliamentary ways of the old Third Republic, favoring instead the creation of a strong, presidentialist regime. The parties of the Left, however, the Socialists and Communists, suspected the general of authoritarian designs and maneuvered to stymie his plans with a double consequence. First, the constitutional overhaul dreamed of by so many résistants never took place. The Fourth Republic, like the Third, would be dominated by parliament. And second, all the political infighting prompted de Gaulle himself to withdraw from public life in January 1946, Gaullist loyalists becoming in subsequent years among the most vocal opponents of the institutions of the new regime.

The Left in turn was fractured by the onset of the Cold War. The Communists had played a role in government coalitions in the early postwar years but were driven out of office in 1947. They too as a result became staunch enemies of the parliamentary status quo. The regime thus found itself beset on all sides, and it became ever more difficult to construct stable parliamentary majorities. Prime ministers now came and went with the same velocity as in the bad old days of the unmourned Third Republic.

The return of prosperity in the fifties buoyed the Fourth Republic for a period but not enough to carry it through the crises of decolo-

nization. No sooner had the Second World War ended than France confronted armed opposition to its imperial rule, first in Indochina, then in Algeria. The Republic managed to extricate itself from Vietnam, but it was never able to muster the political will to deal with the war in Algeria. In 1958, right-wing plotters in North Africa, fearful that civilian authorities back home lacked the determination to protect France's colonial interests, took matters into their own hands, seizing control in Algiers. Elements of the army took the insurrectionists' side, and the metropole in turn came under threat. De Gaulle, ever the providential man, stepped out of retirement. Both the military and a majority in parliament were willing enough to let him take charge, and take charge he did.

De Gaulle liquidated the old Fourth Republic and set about building the presidential regime he had so long imagined, and willy-nilly he got France out of Algeria, setting the nation on a new, post-imperial course. De Gaulle settled the great issues, constitutional and imperial, that the Fourth Republic had not, giving rise to a new political order that has remained more or less intact to the present day. De Gaulle's Fifth Republic has not yet matched the seventy-year life span of the Third, but there is no reason to believe that it will not do so in time.

This story line, appealing though it may be, has at least one major flaw. It may well be that an opportunity was missed at the Liberation to reconstruct France's parliamentary and imperial institutions, but this was not at all the case when it came to the French state's executive apparatus. In the first postwar years, a veritable alphabet soup of agencies and commissions was created, the ensemble designed to relaunch the national economy and provide France's citizenry a degree of social security they had never known before. Successive waves of nationalizations, beginning with coal mines in 1944 and culminating four years later with a rash of takeovers in the sea, air, and rail sectors, brought entire industries—energy, deposit banking, insurance, transport—under state control. In January 1946, just as de Gaulle was leaving office, he created a planning body, the Commissariat-général au Plan, assigning command of the new agency to onetime businessman Jean Monnet. The Commissariat set France on an expansionist course, bringing to the task of economic planning and forecasting a novel

numerical precision thanks to the collaboration of ancillary statistical bodies like the state-run Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) and the private Institut de science économique appliquée. Alongside the new planning machinery grew up a network of welfare institutions. The basic groundwork for what came to be known as the Sécurité sociale was laid in the fall of 1945 in a package of decrees conceived by former résistant turned welfare administrator Pierre Laroque. The postwar French welfare state insured French men and women against the perils of sickness and old age, but more than that, it included a family-allowance scheme among the most generous in Europe. Pronatalists had lobbied hard for a family-oriented welfare state, and they lobbied just as hard (and with equal success) for the creation of a populationist think tank, the Institut national d'études démographiques or INED, which was founded in 1946 under the direction of France's most renowned statistician, Alfred Sauvy. Now, it took manpower—a cadre of trained civil servants competent in technical matters but also equipped to take a view of the whole—to run France's burgeoning executive branch. In the interwar decades, the Ecole libre des sciences politiques, a private public-policy school, had enjoyed a near monopoly on civil-service education. Sciences Po, as it was nicknamed, was semi-nationalized at the Liberation, and to round out the training of would-be public administrators, an altogether new, state-run postgraduate institution was launched in October 1945, the Ecole nationale d'administration. ENA was the brainchild of Michel Debré, a de Gaulle loyalist, and the institution he shepherded into being has come to occupy a near-dominant place in public life. ENA degree holders, schooled in a Keynesian-inflected orthodoxy that touts growth-generating investment over balanced budgets, enjoy a virtual monopoly on access to the highest ranks of the French civil service, the so-called *grands corps*.

The history of the Fourth Republic then was not just a record of failure. The state was reconstructed in the immediate postwar years; it undertook a new set of tasks (management of the economy and provision of comprehensive welfare benefits); and it performed its mission with remarkable effectiveness. ENA, INED, INSEE are still very much a part of the French institutional landscape. Antistatistism

grew in the Anglo-American world in the 1970s and 1980s. There were echoes of this in France but far fainter. The postwar remaking of the state had nurtured French confidence in the capacity of public institutions, and that confidence ran deep enough to slow the liberalizing wave of the Thatcher/Reagan era. From this angle, what de Gaulle accomplished post-1958 was not altogether a new departure but a building upon foundations, and solid foundations at that, that had been laid in the immediate postwar period.

But such a conclusion raises a further set of questions. Granted, the Liberation moment was one of dynamic transformation. But how is this revolution in statecraft to be accounted for and characterized? How is the story of France in the aftermath of the Second World War to be told? It is possible to isolate four major narratives (there are perhaps more), and each has variants that describe, not just the French experience, but experiences elsewhere in the postwar world, in Europe and beyond. The French case then is not just interesting in itself but relevant to more general interpretations of the postwar scene.

To Claude Bourdet, a Resistance veteran and man of the Left, the postwar years had the look of a “restoration,” and it is clear enough what he meant by the term.² In May 1943, the Conseil national de la Résistance (CNR) drafted a “democratic charter” sketching out a reform agenda that promised the “eviction of the great economic and financial castes from the direction of the economy,”³ and for a moment at the Liberation it looked as if this might just come to pass. Local Resistance committees and militant labor pushed hard for a takeover of key enterprises, from mines to utilities, beginning a ground-up process that culminated in 1945–1946 in a series of legislative measures nationalizing huge chunks of the French economy. Nor should it be thought France’s postwar legislators had a hard time stomaching nationalization. The first elections after the war were conducted in October 1945. The largest parties—the Parti communiste français (PCF), the christian-democratic Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP), and the socialist Section française de l’internationale ouvrière (SFIO)—received between them roughly three-quarters of the votes cast, and all three were pledged to the CNR program.

Yet the promise of a post-capitalist France never materialized. Bour-

det himself laid heavy blame on de Gaulle. De Gaulle, as Bourdet saw him, was a man of the establishment, a general who liked command and hierarchy. Resistance experience had moderated de Gaulle's conservative instincts, but once he became head of government, now surrounded by ministers and bureaucrats rather than résistants, he reverted to type. The christian democrats too had a part to play in this drama. The MRP leadership had Resistance experience, but its electorate was more conventionally right-wing, composed of Catholics and conservatives who had nowhere else to turn, the parties of the traditional Right having compromised themselves during the Vichy years. In France's second legislative elections in the summer of 1946, the MRP garnered the most votes, and it proceeded to brake France's leftward turn. Then came the Cold War, which drove the Communists to the margins of public life, splintering the French Left and making possible a politics of capitalist reestablishment. No wonder Bourdet, who had harbored such high hopes for a France made new, wrote in disappointed tones of a France restored.

This story of hopes deceived is one that German historians, in particular German historians of left-wing persuasion, will recognize, for did not events in the German West follow an almost identical pattern? It is not so much that there was a formidable German Resistance, but there were antifascist committees that sprang up in the war's aftermath, composed of sundry leftists and liberals, men of goodwill who wanted a Germany remade. In the West, however, the American and British occupying authorities bypassed the anti-fas as they were called, and the logic of such a choice was simple enough. To Anglo-American military men and administrators, grassroots leftists did not seem the right materials, in either political or practical terms, with which to get a prostrate Germany up and running again. It made more sense to turn to men of substance who had knowledge of government, even if the men in question had Nazi-era records that did not bear close scrutiny. The Anglo-Americans in Germany, like de Gaulle in France, blocked the path to a more revolutionary future.⁴ The onset of the Cold War and concomitant rise of Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) settled the matter. In the immediate postwar years, Christian Democrats had dabbled in

anticapitalist rhetoric, but the party's line had begun to liberalize in the late forties under Adenauer's prodding. The change of heart was formalized at the CDU's Düsseldorf congress in 1949, which made explicit the party's conversion to free-market principles. The cartel capitalism of Wilhelmine days did not come back to be sure (indeed, an anticartel law was passed in 1957), but the new Germany proved itself hospitable to concentrated industry, settling into an "oligopolistic" mode dominated by large firms that operated in circumstances of regulated competition. The new order may not have replicated the past but very much echoed it.

The restorationist thesis, of course, has not gone unchallenged in recent and even not so recent historiography, though the nature of the challenge comes in several varieties. In the German case, it has been pointed out, the war ended in the destruction of Germany's Junker and military elites, making possible a genuine and unprecedented liberalization of public life. The American presence may have frustrated grassroots antifascism, but it brought with it as well a model of managerial capitalism that, not right away but over time, eroded older, more authoritarian habits of business administration. "Americanization" from this perspective had a salutary impact, helping West Germany to recast itself, to find its path toward a once-elusive democratic stability.⁵

It is possible, of course, to write another, more rueful finale to the Americanization narrative. What was the American model after all? In the 1930s, it was the New Deal, a mix of welfare, antimonopoly, and regulationist measures that hemmed in the free market without ever replacing it. But this model had been scaled back by the end of the war, a process, some historians claim, that was already well under way in the late thirties. The first years of the Roosevelt presidency had witnessed a hesitant economic recovery that sputtered out in 1937–1938, and the renewed downturn created an opening for anti-New Deal forces to regroup. The war itself enhanced the powers of the New Deal state but at the same time obliged New Dealers to negotiate common ground with business interests in pursuit of a military-centered productivism. Big business was back, and after the war it launched a well-funded counteroffensive against New Deal statism

that got a helpful political leg up as the Cold War set in.⁶ The New Deal regime was not washed away in the process, far from it, but it was reoriented along Fordist lines. Government and the corporate sector, the Fordist argument went, had a common interest in market expansion through increased productivity. Produce in quantity; pay a living wage; sell at prices within reach of the average working man: such was the Fordist formula, and in practice it worked wonders, flooding the nation with goods that a now-expanding consumer market snapped up.⁷ This was the America that came to Europe after the war, managerial, productivist, but above all consumerist, and on some accounts it proved an irresistible force.⁸

The Americanization story takes on yet darker hues when applied in the French context. Here, the critical moment is the signing of the Blum-Byrnes accord of 1946. Years of occupation and war left France devastated and impoverished. In 1946, the French government sent a delegation to Washington led by the socialist intellectual Léon Blum to negotiate debt relief and a financial aid package. The US government drove a hard bargain, striking a deal that, some have argued, reduced France to a state of fiscal dependency, and not just fiscal dependency, for the Blum-Byrnes accord included a provision that opened the French market to US films. The coming of the Marshall Plan in 1947 deepened yet further France's reliance on the United States. On this account, the France that emerged from the war was different indeed from what it had been before, but the change was not a welcome one. France was reduced to an economic satellite of the United States, its culture beleaguered by Hollywood films and what was called at the time "coca-colonization."⁹

But it may be that Americanization loomed less large in postwar European history than the coca-colonization story supposes. Take Great Britain as an example. The first postwar elections there in 1945 returned a Labor Party majority for the first time ever, which set to work reconstructing the nation with a socialist zeal. The result was a spate of nationalizations that made public employees of an estimated two million workers. The explosion of the public sector was accompanied by a series of parliamentary bills—the National Health Service Act, the National Insurance Act, the New Towns Act, all passed in

1946—that laid down the basic building blocks of Britain’s welfare state. There would be public health care for the sick and infirm, national pensions for the old, “council housing” for families in need of decent homes.¹⁰ British historians have wrangled about aspects of the welfare story: did welfare-state construction impede Britain’s economic modernization; were the progressive “activators” who built the welfare state out in front of a public much less socialist in orientation?¹¹ But such differences no more than nuance the still-basic plotline, that of Britain’s postwar rebirth as a welfare state.

And in the domain of welfare-state construction, the French would do the British one better. France had its own nationalizations, and as we have seen, it boasted a national health and pension scheme as well. But France had something that the British did not, the *Commissariat-général au Plan*.¹² To be sure, Britain had planist aspirations that found expression in the Town and Country Planning Act of 1944, but town planning was a local and not a national affair. It shaped the landscape but not the economy. In the domain of national, economic planning, the French were pioneers, and the French pioneer par excellence was, of course, the CGP’s founding father Jean Monnet.

This is a story then told not in American but in European accents; it is the story of planning and welfare-state construction; and in many versions (though not all), it comes with an upbeat, social democratic ending. From this angle, the postwar era and, indeed, the decades that followed appear less a restorationist debacle or an Americanist triumph than a “social democratic moment” that embarked postwar Europe on a new and progressive course.¹³

But was socialism in fact the big story in the postwar West? Laroque was a career bureaucrat, Monnet a businessman turned public administration mover and shaker. Neither was a party man, let alone a card-carrying member of the SFIO. If they were the heroes of the postwar era, then the postwar era was about state institution-building as carried out by the state’s own servants. This line of argument suggests a fourth rebirth-of-Europe narrative, centered not on restoration, America, or the forward march of labor but on the rise of technocracy.

In the case of France, this is an old theme, albeit one that has gotten a number of interesting rewrites in recent historiography. The

old narrative went more or less as follows. Interwar France, led or, better, misled by incompetent politicians and parliamentarians, had slid into decadence. What more convincing proof than the ignominious defeat of 1940 and the subsequent humiliations of the Occupation? But at the Liberation, a new cadre of administrators—men like Laroque and Monnet, Debré and Sauvy—took charge. The institutional initiatives they launched and the energy and policy-making ambitions they brought to their work bootstrapped a backward, small-minded France out of its Malthusian past and launched it on a course of unprecedented economic and demographic growth. The question of the plan, Monnet had argued in 1946, was a question of modernization or decadence. In choosing the plan, the French had opted for a progressive, expansionist future shaped by Monnet and his technocratic heirs, the future graduates of ENA.

It will be noted how absent politics are from this account, but of course that is the whole point. Once expertise trumped parliamentary bickering, once the competent took over from the politicians, that is when France got its house in order. Recent versions of the technocracy story, however, have attempted to read the politics back in. In October 1945, de Gaulle set up the Commissariat à l'Énergie atomique (CEA), a state agency to oversee the development of atomic resources, whether for civilian or military purposes. Raoul Dautry, who had compiled a distinguished record of state service in the 1930s first as director of the national railways and then in 1939–1940 as minister of armaments, was named the CEA's first administrator-general. Nominated CEA high commissioner (in effect Dautry's right-hand man) was Frédéric Joliot-Curie. Now, Joliot-Curie was a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and a Resistance veteran, but he was also a Communist. The coming of the Cold War did not lead to his immediate ouster; that was to come in 1950, consequent on the scientist's opposition to construction of a nuclear device. Dautry died in 1951 and was replaced by Pierre Guillaumat, like his predecessor an engineer and graduate of the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique. Guillaumat's tenure in office witnessed a further weeding out of communist personnel in the CEA's employ. Weapons-grade plutonium was in due course produced at CEA atomic reactors (France would get the bomb

in 1958). And on the matter of labor relations, the CEA proved itself a not so willing interlocutor. As one historian has put it, the Commissariat “did not welcome labor unions” at its reactor sites, refusing militants “entry” to certain military plants altogether until the early 1960s.¹⁴

Technocracy in a word may present itself as above politics, but technocratic experts in practice do not like power sharing with labor unions, and they like Communists even less. Historians who want to make explicit the politics lurking behind the neutral-sounding “technocracy” have cast about for an alternative label. The term “technocorporatism” has been proposed. It grows out of a study of *Electricité de France* (EDF), France’s state-run electrical power industry. Liberation authorities created the EDF after the war by nationalizing most of France’s power-generating firms. Unions were a force to contend with at the new entity, but it was run at the top by technocratic men who, over time, reasserted the prerogatives of expertise. Pierre Massé is pointed to here as the main culprit, a polytechnicien and mathematical economist who became EDF president in the midsixties after a stint running the *Commissariat-général au Plan*. Massé was no union buster but a self-styled “man of action” who believed in profit maximization, and Massé’s ambition, according to one historian, was to create a corporate culture to match, with experts on top, labor below, and both bound by an agreed-upon commitment to principles of competence and productivity. Hence the phrase “technocorporatism.”¹⁵

Hybrid terms like technocorporatism are not unknown in other historiographies. One critic of mainline British historiography has argued that the real postwar story was not so much welfare-state construction as “technonationalism,” the continuity of Great Britain’s long-standing resolve to maintain its status as a “warfare state.” Britain’s military buildup in the late thirties escalated during the war, and once the war was over the military effort did not flag. Nor was it just that spending levels remained high. The state was unwavering in its commitment to enlisting science and technology in the enterprise. The Labor Party had a majority in parliament, but an expanding military-industrial complex stayed in place alongside: a network of arsenals, laboratories, research-and-design facilities, some state run, oth-

ers privately owned but state funded, which was overseen by a phalanx of procurement officers, military men, and senior civil servants.¹⁶

The British warfare state may be a fine example of technonationalism at work, but there is a better one still, though it will be necessary to leave the shores of Europe to find it: that of Japan. The Japanese state, since the Meiji restoration, had pledged itself to freeing the nation from dependence on foreign knowledge and invention, to that end borrowing and domesticating Western technological design on a grand scale. In the interwar decades, such technonationalism took an ever more militarist turn, Japanese manufacturers like Toyota, Nissan, and Isuzu devoting themselves wholesale to vehicle production for the armed services.¹⁷ After the 1945 surrender, the structural relations among Japan's major players—state, science, and industry—did not alter much, technonationalism remaining the order of the day. What changed was that Japan's political economy was now converted to purposes of civilian production, though at critical junctures, the Korean War for example, Japanese industry could be put to work turning out war-related matériel, in this instance to supply the US military effort.¹⁸

There is no shortage of ways then to think about the postwar years and about postwar France more particularly. But which way or mix of ways makes the most sense? That is the task the present volume means to take on, but with an added twist or two. In German history, the year 1945 is often presented as a caesura, a *Stunde null* or zero hour. What came after was all new, bearing little resemblance to a past that had been razed by wartime violence. The story recounted here, by contrast, will begin in the 1930s and encompass the war years. From this angle, the Liberation moment does not stand alone facing toward the future but comes at the end of a longer history, representing a denouement as much as a fresh start.¹⁹

This approach allows a battery of critical issues to be addressed. There is first of all the "Vichy before Vichy" question, although how it gets posed is not always the same. It is possible to ask just how much the troubled thirties prepared the way for Vichy, incubating a vision and cadre of personnel that would come into their own under Pétain.

At stake from this perspective is just how much Vichy itself was integrated into the stream of French history, whether it was an isolated, exceptional phenomenon or one rooted in often long-standing traditions of French public life. But it is also possible to put the question another way, asking just how much the authoritarian policies of the Vichy regime were anticipated by an authoritarian turn in the policies of a declining Third Republic. This problematic worries less about Vichy and its place in French national history than about flaws in the republican tradition itself—flaws that may still be at work in France's present-day Fifth Republic.²⁰

There is an obvious correlative to the *Vichy avant Vichy* question, and that is the question of 1944 itself: just how much did preceding events prepare the way for what was accomplished (or not) at the Liberation? On the one hand, this means asking how the Resistance thought about the postwar order and then in the event set about bringing its plans to realization.²¹ The Liberation authorities, however, were not dealing with a tabula rasa but with the remains of an outgoing, discredited regime, Vichy. Was Vichy erased, its institutions, policies, and personnel wiped away, or were there holdovers? In a word, was there a *Vichy après Vichy*?²² Once again, depending on how the issue is cut into, the interpretive emphasis shifts. Was the France born of the war a Resistance creation, with all the heroic resonances such a distinguished pedigree evokes, or was its ancestry more mottled with varying doses of Vichy admixtures?

But, of course, a long-term perspective may cast doubt on just how critical specific dates were in the first place, whether 1940 or 1944. Perhaps there were continuities that spanned the moments of rupture, secular trends that might have been inflected this way or that by events but whose fundamental direction was not altered for all that. This is a claim sometimes made about France's obsession with birth-rates and the family, which from the late nineteenth century through the 1960s seems to have been an unbudgeable feature of French political culture.²³

Historians of Japan have coined the phrase "transwar" to describe the period 1930 to 1950.²⁴ The usefulness of the idea in the French context is evident, raising as it does the question of just what differ-

ence major regime changes—in this instance, from democracy to dictatorship and then back to democracy again—made. But there are dangers in such a perspective as well, for it might well create an interpretive bias in favor of continuity, collapsing oppositions—between republican and Vichyite, *résistant* and collaborator—that were of capital importance to the men and women of the era. The transwar approach has its advantages, but it also poses a serious risk of erasing moral boundaries that were drawn in sacrifice and blood.

A second twist: transwar histories of France have been done before, though they tend to zero in on a particular sphere of state activity, the management of the economy, say, or financial policy. The net will be cast wider in this volume. The institutional creativity of the Liberation years was quite remarkable, encompassing not just planning and social security but many other domains as well: statistical science, demographic and family policy, the education of elites—and the list might be extended yet further. All these subjects will be taken up in the pages that follow.

But more than that: the issue of cultural policy and institution making will also come in for treatment. Mention cultural policy, and it is not so much the Liberation as 1936 and 1959 that come to mind. Léon Blum's Popular Front government is still memorialized as a moment of cultural adventure when a socialist-leaning state encouraged an upwelling of youthful and antifascist expression in a dizzying variety of media.²⁵ As for 1959, it marks the founding of France's first *Ministère des Affaires culturelles*, a cabinet-level portfolio assigned the task of making France's cultural patrimony available to as wide a swath of the citizenry as possible. That post was occupied for an eventful decade by one of the nation's intellectual luminaries, André Malraux, whose flair for publicity and self-dramatization were well suited to the job.²⁶ But a handful of scholars have made a plea for the equal importance of the postwar period.²⁷ The late forties, after all, witnessed the state-sponsored creation of five new regional theaters. Radio was nationalized. And in the film industry, the parastatal *Centre national de la cinématographie* (still operating today) was set up to help organize and fund movie production, a crucial development to the survival of a French cinema.

The mid-to-late forties mattered when it came to cultural institutions, but mattered in what way? For the men and women of the era, it seemed that they were started on something unprecedented. The Third Republic had been *laissez-faire* to the point of negligence in cultural matters. Vichy had been reactionary and traditionalist. But now, in the postwar years, an opportunity for a new beginning had arisen. A reconstructed state might place culture, once a preserve of the lettered few, at the disposal of the general public, democratizing “the best that has been thought and said” in the service of popular uplift.

Looking at cultural policy in the long run and side by side with economic and administrative policy will do two things. First, it will complicate the narrative of cultural renewal.²⁸ The men and women of 1944 thought they were starting anew, but they were not; they owed something to the past, and it was not just to the Popular Front that they were indebted but to Vichy itself. Second, it will suggest the ways in which economic and cultural reconstruction were connected. The nation’s rebirth out of the ashes of the war entailed not just a modernization of productive life but a cultural reawakening, the one like the other intended to serve a common purpose, the reassertion of France’s presence in the world. Indeed, rebirth of a nation might have been a suitable title for the present volume, were it not that the phrase has such unhappy connotations in the American context. The breadth of the reconstruction process gave the French an energizing shot of national purpose whose effects would not dissipate for decades.

It is a truism about the French that they are a statist people. Alexis de Tocqueville said it long ago, and because he had generous things to say about the United States, Americans are disposed to believe him, and not just Americans. The French too think of themselves in these terms, and they can cite an illustrious list of state builders, from Jean-Baptiste Colbert of old regime days to Napoleon Bonaparte, to prove the point. It remains a near reflex in France to label any centralizing gesture Jacobin. Yet how much does this old saw about the Jacobinical French conceal? Would any of the state builders of the Liberation era have embraced the label Jacobin (let alone Colbertist or Bonapartist)? Not many. No, the post-1944 project was some-

thing original, though what descriptive label to affix to it remains to be worked out. In any event, what happened then was not just one more expression of an eternal French statism. Indeed, the state builders saw themselves as pioneers who were taking the nation in a fresh direction, correcting the political defects of preceding regimes, the Third Republic above all. There was a good deal of mystification in such a self-presentation, as will be seen, but there was enough truth in it to sustain the point that the rise of the state in France was not an inevitable, linear process. Rather, state building unfolded in punctuated bursts, each conditioned by the historical moment in which it occurred.²⁹ The postwar period was one such state-building moment, and attention has to be paid to the political alignments, conjunctural rather than permanent, that made it possible.