

**Public Service Broadcasting  
Multichannel Environment:  
The French Case**

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**PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING IN A  
MULTICHANNEL ENVIRONMENT:  
THE FRENCH CASE**

**Thierry Vedel**

Over the last 20 years, specialists analyzing French broadcasting have all come to the same conclusions. Public broadcasting in France suffers from two structural problems: 1) continual government intervention in its operation, particularly in newscasting; 2) its economic and organizational inefficiency.

These problems appear <sup>for</sup> <sup>as far</sup> at practically the same time as radio and television <sup>ed</sup> <sup>internally</sup> themselves. ~~From its inception,~~ <sup>From its inception,</sup> broadcasting develops first <sup>within</sup>, then as, an administrative system intimately linked to political power. For this reason, to understand the present situation of public broadcasting in France, it is important to study carefully the period from 1920 to 1959, when ~~first~~ <sup>left</sup> radio and then television leave the laboratory and reach <sup>mass</sup> mass-media status. This will be the subject of the first section of this chapter.

The second section will examine the fundamental principles governing the public service model of broadcasting which took shape beginning in 1959, as well as the organizational structure used to implement this model. It will then analyze the crisis this model encountered toward the end of the 1960's and <sup>successful</sup> attempted solutions. Despite numerous efforts at reform (in 1964, 1972, 1974 and 1982) and organizational modifications, the fundamental logic of the public broadcasting service has remained unchanged. [what logic?] <sup>what is the logic?</sup>

After 1982, and especially with the new law on audiovisual communications passed

in September of 1986, a new organization seems to be taking hold within the broadcasting system; France has witnessed the creation of a regulatory body independent of political power, the appearance of private television stations and the development of competition. The third section of this chapter will study the modalities of this evolution and its impact on the social role assigned to radio and television.

The final section will be devoted to the issues facing French public service broadcasting today. The discussion will cover the possible effects of the changes French broadcasting has undergone, especially their effects on the variety and quality of programming. In other words, we will consider the question from the point of view of those for whom, after all, radio and television exist: the listener and the viewer.

Why? Perhaps also the artist? the educator? the politician? (even the advertiser?)

→ I think these comments are very much like Eli

I think you should put the historical section in the past tense.

### I. Historical Background

The history of the PBS in France is essentially the history of broadcasting itself.

From the outset, the State took hold of radio and television and kept private concerns out of this area.

But ? some private

#### *The beginnings of radio and television in France*

Following the first radio broadcast in 1922, public authorities <sup>seek</sup> to regulate the development of this new form of communication. Following a practice observable with numerous other new media (Sera Pool, 1983, pp. 5-6), they apply the regulatory framework for the medium that seems most similar. Thus, in 1923, the state telecommunications monopoly <sup>was</sup> extended to what was then known as the wireless telegraph.

During the next few years, the government allow<sup>ed</sup> experienced amateurs, merchants and local notables to initiate approximately twenty private radio stations. In 1928, the government block<sup>ed</sup> this rise: it ensured the status quo by legalizing the existence of 13 radio stations, but forbid<sup>ding</sup> the creation of new private stations.

Concurrently, the State shores up the public radio network with stations in the form of associations created by the PTT (Post, Telephone and Telegraph Office), which viewed radio as a natural technical extension of the telegraph. In 1933, the institution of a usage tax on receivers allows the PTT to increase the number of its stations.

Thus, French radio in its infancy follows the same scenario as the telephone: after a short non-interventionist period, the State begins to reserve the sole right to develop the medium. This move was made essentially to avoid abandoning radio to the logic of the free market, which the predominant republican and statist thought of the period saw as ~~not beneficial~~ <sup>detrimental</sup> to the public as a whole (Bertho, 1981, p. 385ff).

In the mid-1930's, especially with the Popular Front government (1936), the authorities' interest in radio grows for another reason: the realization of the political role it could play. The Conseil Supérieur de la Radiodiffusion is created in 1935 to coordinate —to control, in fact— the choice of programs. In 1938, all public station news broadcasts are combined into a single program. Then, in July of 1939, public radio, until then a service of the PTT employing 3000 persons, is put under the authority of the President of the Council (head of the parliamentary government): this marks the passage from a period shaped by the discovery of the technical uses of the new medium to one shaped by its political usage.

The first official television broadcast takes place in 1935 under the auspices of the Ministry of Post, Telephone and Telegraph. However, due to the Ministry's inability to go beyond a mere technical mastery of the medium to commercialize the equipment necessary for the reception of broadcasts, television experienced little real development in the years that followed. The war, and the vicissitudes of the Liberation period delayed any meaningful development of television within <sup>France</sup> French society until the early 50's.

#### *From Vichy to the Fifth Republic*

Under the Vichy government (1940-44), radio is in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, the authorities use it extensively as a medium of propaganda. On the other hand, the desire of those officials sometimes referred to as the Vichy technocrats to

cf.  
I'll stop  
correcting the  
tense of the  
verb here  
but I still  
think all  
history should  
be in the past  
tense.

French  
center  
C... ..

modernize the State apparatus brings several innovations. They give the state radio a private-sector-style accounting system, ~~its employees are~~ <sup>employees</sup> recruited by contract and ~~are~~ <sup>made them</sup> no longer civil servants (Queval, Thevenot, pp. 194ff).

<sup>After the</sup> With Liberation, all private radio stations —many of which have collaborated with the German occupation— are eliminated. French radio broadcasting is placed under the authority of the Ministry of Information, receiving its budget from the State. The heads of the new government, formed from the Resistance, have been struck by the Nazis' ideological use of the radio system. By entrusting the State with responsibility for the radio network, they seek to prevent any use which could be harmful to democracy. Furthermore, the three dominant parties (the Communists, Socialists, and Christian-Democrats) tend to see the state's role as extending far beyond mere regulation. They see the state as a force for both social progress and economic development within civil society.

During the Fourth Republic (1946-58), French broadcasting, henceforth known as RTF (Radio-Télévision française), seeks <sup>to</sup> ~~legislation~~ <sup>to</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>define</sup> clearly its mission, its organization and the means at its disposal. Sixteen different bills are presented with this intent, but the political instability of the time prevents their passage. ~~For this same~~ <sup>in fact</sup> reason, not until 1953 does a plan for installing the necessary transmission equipment allow television to begin to have a meaningful role within French society ( ). The number of television sets, then only 24,000, begins increasing exponentially: 500,000 in 1957, 700,000 in 1958 , 1.3 million in 1960, etc.

The post-war period also witnesses a progressive increase in producers' power. Until then, engineers and technicians <sup>had</sup> ~~have~~ <sup>set</sup> ~~and set~~ the standards for the development of television. For example, they impose the 819-line standard —of higher quality, but more costly and less widespread than the 625-line standard (Missica, Wolton, 1983, pp. 25ff). Producers, often partisans of the Left, also ~~have~~ <sup>of programs</sup> high expectations regarding quality. By producing live dramas taken from the classical French repertoire, which meet with great success, they demonstrate their desire for ~~an~~ <sup>with more "cultural" context.</sup> educational television which would raise the level of culture among viewers. This idea

is henceforth thoroughly engrained in the French public broadcasting's conception of its mission and has had a great influence on the operation of public television to this day.

*1. 20/10/1954*

## II. The Public Service Model of Broadcasting (1959-84)

<sup>By</sup> ~~In~~ 1958, France regains political stability and ratifies its new constitution.

Television <sup>WAS</sup> ~~starts~~ to become <sup>an</sup> a truly mass medium (13% of French households have a television set by 1960) and enters into a learning stage, during which the French gradually become familiar with the "tube" ( ). More importantly, broadcasting is given its first important regulatory statute in 1959. For more than 20 years thereafter, what can be termed the public service model of broadcasting gradually takes shape. The passage of several new statutes concerning public broadcasting (1964, 1972, 1974, 1982) <sup>will</sup> ~~will~~ <sup>led</sup> change its fundamental principles ~~little~~.

little to

### *Fundamental Principles of the Model*

The public service model of broadcasting is based on two essential ideas:

First, radio and television are a public service. ~~In that~~ broadcasting activities respond to fundamental needs of the population and ~~that they~~ satisfy the general interest of the nation, <sup>As such,</sup> they are considered privileged activities. Broadcasting is one expression of an important civil liberty: the right to free expression. It must encourage the public's education and improvement by providing "information, entertainment and culture." It also serves to preserve and hand down the nation's heritage; as then-President Georges Pompidou expressed it in a 1973 press conference, these media are "the voice of France." By this, he meant not only that radio and television should express the views of the government, and thereby those of the nation, but that they should also bear witness to the cultural wealth of the French nation. As the Member of Parliament responsible for the 1974 public broadcasting budget expressed it, "Broadcasting is the common denominator among all Frenchmen, rich or poor, urban or rural, intellectual or laborer." <sup>Source?</sup>

Secondly, given its position, the state is the body most capable of running the

broadcasting system in the public interest. This idea stems from the traditional philosophical and political belief in France that only the State can assure the general interest of all citizens; the regulation of social activities by the free market would only benefit specific interests. Also, the notion of state management of broadcasting develops as a reaction against the supposed disadvantages of a private audiovisual sector. According to this statist conception, private management would present several problems:

a) Only certain areas would be able to receive the broadcasts. Since the costs of installing transmitters to reach certain regions would far outweigh any possible gains from slightly increased listener- or viewership, a private distributor would <sup>presumably</sup> logically avoid giving service to less populous or geographically isolated regions. ~~On the contrary,~~ <sup>however</sup> the State <sup>of France</sup> would ensure that all the French receive its broadcasts: since the State <sup>perceives</sup> conceives its mission in broadcasting <sup>quite</sup> ~~radically~~ differently, in that it places social goals above financial considerations, it ~~would~~ <sup>effect a cross-subsidization on</sup> the cost of transmitting facilities.

b) Private management of the audiovisual sector would have a negative impact on the content of programming. Private companies would essentially seek to increase their advertising income by minimizing expenditures on programs and maximizing their audiences ( ). In the first place, this would prevent the production of certain types of programs (to understand this concern, one must keep in mind the initial period of French television, discussed earlier, where <sup>was placed</sup> a special emphasis on relatively costly, original programming on a high cultural level), while inhibiting the exploration of the medium's latent potentials (experimental television). Secondly, this type of management would look for the "lowest common cultural denominator" among all Frenchmen, instead of favoring programming that is less accessible but also richer in cultural content. Finally, the rules of the advertising market would degrade the quality of programming directly. They would slant the content of programs (for example, when a sponsor applies pressure to take a program contrary to its interests off the air). They would also "pollute" the national culture by spreading commercial values.

In whose opinion?

Can you quote someone here



The French model of public service is highly prescriptive. It is based on the assumption that radio and television should promote a certain conception of culture regardless of the tastes and desires of the public at large. This effort to regulate culture fits in well with <sup>the</sup> Gaullist vision for society. General de Gaulle believed <sup>that</sup> firmly ~~he is~~ <sup>was</sup> charged with restoring France to a position of grandeur, institutionally, economically, as ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> well as culturally. By seeking to realize this historic plan, he is acting upon the deepest desires of the nation, which are but imperfectly expressed in the political market place (where the parties have excessive power) and in the economic market place (where interest groups and foreign concerns dominate).

The Left, likewise, adheres to this type of cultural model. But it must respond to a further question: how to reconcile this effort with a high democratic standard, which the logic of audience ratings expresses fairly well? Given its ideology, the Left must necessarily consider the nation's citizens as responsible adults. The notion of alienation allows it to resolve this contradiction: the bourgeoisie has imparted an ideology which prevents individuals from realizing their own true needs and interests. This notion explains the emphasis placed on television's mission to educate its audience by exposing viewers to a wide variety of programming, as well as the continual demand for democratic control of radio and television.

*Organizational structure and operation*

What form does the public service model actually take in French broadcasting?

From 1959 to 1982, the law defines broadcasting as a State monopoly. This monopoly was long seen as ~~being~~ of a single unit. In fact, it is composed of three separate monopolies which have become more and more distinct ~~as broadcasting's~~ ~~institutions have evolved~~ since 1959.

1) monopoly on radio and television signal transmission. Seen as the key to controlling the audiovisual sector, this monopoly was enforced the most strictly and for the longest period of time until its abolition in 1986. Even "peripheral" radio stations

how does this fit with "common" of P.C.?

rewrite the above

Through contradiction? No! The Government and the people contribute to it.

(see below) were never allowed to install transmitters on French soil or even to use those of the French state. Even when the ~~broadcasting monopoly~~ <sup>was</sup> is abolished in 1982 (see below), the new private local radio stations, like the later private television stations, are required to use the transmission network of the public organization for broadcasting (Télédiffusion de France or TDF).

2) the monopoly on broadcasting was also strictly enforced until 1982 (by this, we mean the assembling of programs for broadcast ~~as an activity separate from their~~ <sup>as opposed to their</sup> production or means of transmission). Although starting in 1972, the law permitted certain exceptions to this monopoly, these were limited to localized and specific cases (for example, a network of televisions within a public exhibition). Then, the State made efforts to create private radio stations beginning in 1976-77 with prosecution. A major exception to this monopoly are the "peripheral radio stations" (so called because they were located just outside of French territory). Two-thirds of the French can receive three major private radio stations (Europe 1, Radio-Télévision-Luxembourg and Radio-Monte-Carlo). It must, however, be said that the State <sup>owns a portion of</sup> provides part of the capital for these stations and controls them totally or partially.

3) A monopoly on production, allowing only PBS personnel to produce television programs was introduced in 1953 and abolished in 1964. Thus, a small private production sector <sup>finally</sup> was allowed to develop to provide programs <sup>for</sup> public television and radio. However, it remained marginal given the preferential status the public stations had to accord the public production sector.

Although radio and television were dependent on the state, legislation did recognize their industrial and commercial character, which distinguished them from other governmental activities. Consequentially, radio and television were not governed directly by the state, but by public organizations. However, their changing official status mattered less than their continuing <sup>ed</sup> dependence on the State. State control <sup>was</sup> is exercised in four important ways:

- 1) station directors are named by the Council of Ministers (until 1982);
- 2) broadcasting depends on the State budget. The supervisory ministry thus

irables

reference

This part does not make sense

owns a portion of

prepares and the parliament approves the amount and uses of its funding (usage tax on receivers and possible grants from the State; from 1968 on, advertising revenue).

3) financial management is controlled by administrative procedures, at first only beforehand, then, starting in 1968, after the funds have been used.

4) decrees establish certain precise guidelines about programs to be offered ( ).

### *The system's dysfunctions*

Almost from the outset, the broadcasting system fails to function as well as had been hoped and is the center of great political debate and criticism. The earliest controversy arises over the political, more precisely the partisan, usage of public broadcasting. This phenomenon is nothing new, as we have seen: the Popular Front and Pierre Mendès-France both made use of radio to gain support for their policies. What distinguishes this new phenomenon is the use of the image, whose power is considered greater, and the increasingly systematic nature of General de Gaulle's use of the broadcast media as instruments of governmental action (Tarle, 1979). Convinced that ~~the~~ all the print media are hostile to him at a time when he must make unpopular decisions, he increases his television appearances (23 official speeches between 1959 and 1962). The Ministry of Information determines the content of news broadcasts (Peyrefitte, 1976). "Gaullism is personal power plus the monopoly of television," said the analysts of the day. The Opposition parties violently denounce this use of radio and television, making it one of the principals centers of controversy over the broadcast media. ~~For~~ <sup>now</sup> politicians are convinced that television has a decisive influence on public opinion, despite studies beginning in 1963 which show the limits of its power (Remond, Newschwander, 1963) ( ).

The second problem to be the subject of endless debates, <sup>is</sup> the economic structure of radio and television. Starting in 1962 with the Diligent parliamentary report, criticism of a wasteful and poorly managed broadcasting system starts to develop. Several explanations ~~are~~ put forth:

1) Union domination forces the adherence to certain rules which make the

production process much more costly and slow the adoption of new technologies (the lightweight video camera, for example).

2) There is a growing predominance of a "civil-servant" model for broadcasting employees. *By this, we mean the* employees' implicate job security and a mood which does little to increase productivity, while favoring strikes.

3) The confining nature of rules of administrative management both slows the production process and requires the use of a large administrative staff.

In fact, this criticism may have purely "imaginary" sources: it has never <sup>been</sup> clearly proven, that public broadcasting is managed less effectively than other public organizations (Missikz, Wolton, 1983, p. 45) nor that a private organization, under the same constraints, would be more economically efficient. What remains certain is that there is a growing budgetary problem, only exacerbated by the political demands a public service model places on broadcasting.

*channel* Radio and television <sup>would to</sup> must continually increase their hours of programming (a second TV station is created in 1964, a third in 1973), even as their financial resources increase at a slower and slower rate. Gradually, the revenue increase from the usage tax on an increasing number of receivers <sup>has</sup> starts to level off. One solution would be to raise the usage tax; however, the public service model envisages a television available to all and Parliament refuses to take such an unpopular action. Likewise in the name of <sup>this policy</sup> television for-all, Parliament devotes a large part of the budget (between 10 and 25% of the entire budget depending on the period) to the installation and operation of a transmission network covering the entire country.

### *Efforts at reform*

Broadcasting's problems increase toward the end of the 1960's and center more and more on questions of programming. The visible gap between political reality in France and the image presented by radio and television reaches its acme, no doubt, during the events of May 1968 when the turmoil in the universities and industry is not covered by televised newscasts until very late in its development. In another area, financial

constraints lead the stations to develop less ambitious and less costly productions. They tend to resort more and more to American series, which are much less expensive than original French productions, or to program a greater number of films. Public broadcasting loses its youthful ambitions, to become a "discount TV" <sup>word?</sup>

Efforts at reform then start to emerge in three principal directions:

1) Intermediary bodies are created between government and television (Bourdon, 1986) and social and political groups are assured a certain access (Chevallier, 1984). The Administrative Council created in 1964 to ensure that television represents all the major political tendencies has no real effect. Starting in 1972, a parliamentary delegation is put into place to oversee the functioning of public broadcasting; however, this remains primarily a place to present differing points of view (Pericard, 1986). Nevertheless, the idea of a "buffer-institution" starts to emerge; this is finally realized in 1982 with the creation of the *Haute Autorité*. It takes somewhat longer for the government to assure social groups access to television; but in 1984, "free expression broadcasts" are inaugurated. Unlike public access on American cable television, these programs are limited to groups recognized as representative, first by public authorities, then by the *Haute Autorité*; one must, however, note that these programs do have a national audience.

2) A certain amount of competition is introduced in the area of news. In 1969, on the initiative of Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas, each station is given an autonomous news team, with its own budget: thus <sup>what is the other?</sup> both channels can cover the same event and, theoretically, present it differently. The Government also indicates that with the creation of the regional Channel Three in 1973 it will introduce greater <sup>(more local)?</sup> decentralization in newscasting.

3) The 1964 decision to eliminate the monopoly on production has an important effect on the financial management of the system. In 1972, a further step is taken with the fusion of technical and production services. This entails both the reduction of producers' power over programming and the appearance of creative teams organized by

genre which allow them to follow a program's preparation more closely. The most important decision, however, is the use of advertising, which starting in 1968 provides additional revenue for public television. This measure contains strict provisions to ensure <sup>is</sup> both that sponsors do not influence programming and that advertising revenue for other media, particularly the print media, is not endangered. Certain types of commercials are forbidden, such as those for large retailers. Limits for advertising are established: an average of 2 minutes per day per channel in 1968, only 10 minutes in 1970. A ceiling is established for the percentage of PBS's revenue which can come from advertising (it is set at 25% by the 1974 law). The stations themselves do not market their advertising time; this is done by a special subsidiary.

Amid this whirlwind of reforms, we need to give special attention to the laws of 1974 and 1982. These are more ambitious in scope: the first law seeks to deal more profoundly with public broadcasting's economic status, the second with its political status.

The law of July 28, 1974 maintains the state monopoly and public nature of the broadcasting service. However, it establishes a functional division within the formerly-monolithic system. The Organisation de <sup>la</sup> Radio-Télévision Française (ORTF) is broken up into seven different companies: a production company (Société Française de Production - SFP); a transmitting company (Télédiffusion de France - TDF); an archival company (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel - INA); and finally four broadcasting companies (three for television: TF1, Antenne 2, FR3; and one for radio: Radio-France). The great innovation is that, in order to bring greater variety and quality of programming, the new broadcasting companies are placed in competition with one another.

However, the law fails to modify the essential workings of the public broadcasting system. It <sup>even</sup> doesn't replace it, as certain analysts have argued, <sup>under</sup> the political rationale it was operating under with an economic one (Blum, 1982).

1) Public television is not privatized. The seven companies created from the former

ORTF are all State companies, whose directors are <sup>still</sup> named by the government and whose budget is passed by parliament.

2) Although the four broadcasting companies are indeed in competition, the public authorities still regulate their relation to the other components <sup>of the PBS:</sup> they must use the transmitting services of TDF and give a minimum number of orders to SFP, with financial arrangements determined by the State. The functional division between production, broadcasting and transmission is thus a mere technical device with little success in reducing the cost of the system.

3) Starting in 1974, a battle for ratings begins among the three television stations, similar to the competition one observes in countries with competing commercial network, but of a substantially different nature. This competition has only a minimal effect on each network's budget. Each station's budget is established by Parliament and only slightly affected (a few percentage points) by the size of its audience. Furthermore, procedures for harmonizing the different channels' programs are put in place, so that stations do not try to steal each others' audience by scheduling the same programs.

How then can we explain the ratings competition the television channels engage in? The directors of the public channels feel their own illegitimacy in two important ways. First, although they are supposed to serve the population as a whole, they are named by the government and are seen as members of a specific party. Second, since they are generally high civil servants with no experience in broadcasting, they are seen as outsiders by the very personnel they must direct. Thus, they see audience ratings with their apparent precision and objectivity as a democratic way to gain recognition ( ).

The 1974 system does little to change broadcasting's dependence on political power. Government influence over newscasting continues, especially over the regional newscasts of FR3—a company whose creation was meant to decentralize the public

system. In fact, Kuhn (1984) sees in the political arrangements for television and radio enacted between 1974 and 1981, the very essence of Giscardian politics: increased presidential power, an effort to destroy the Gaullist state apparatus and the noticeable gap between liberal rhetoric on social relations and conservative actions with regard to structures.

Like their predecessors, when the Socialists gain power, they enact a new reform of the broadcasting sector. A new law is voted and promulgated on July 29, 1982. The true importance of this law is difficult to determine. Some see it as a renewed attempt to reform radio and television continuing in the framework of previous limited or legislative initiatives undertaken in the fifteen years preceding. Others interpret it as a transition to the period of radical transformation of the French audiovisual sector which commences only a few years later.

The 1982 law resembles earlier reforms in that, while modifying the public system, <sup>it</sup> fails to alter the basic functioning of the system. <sup>o</sup>The system's economic structure does not change ( ), and the 7-company structure that resulted from the breakup of the ORTF undergoes no reorganization. In fact, the new law augments the differentiation of functions by creating a new radio broadcasting company for foreign countries and company to market audiovisual works abroad. A <sup>o</sup>provision of the law to <sup>for</sup>give greater autonomy to regional television companies is later scrapped, due to budgetary problems.

On the other hand, one essential innovation is enacted. An *Haute Autorité* is <sup>too strong</sup> created to cut the umbilical cord between political power and the audiovisual sector. Toward this end, it is given two important powers: 1) <sup>to</sup> it names the directors of the public channels, as well as the CEO of the production company; 2) <sup>to</sup> it ensures that the public channels fulfill the missions ascribed to them (thus assuring <sup>hopefully</sup> the independence of each news program).

In fact, however, despite sincere efforts to ensure independence, the *Haute Autorité* <sup>can</sup> fails to fulfill this aspect of its mission. Not only does the government continue to



influence the naming of public station <sup>channel</sup> directors —in at least one case, the *Haute Autorité* gives in to this pressure almost publically ( ); the *Haute Autorité* also fails to prevent the government from influencing directly each channel's team of journalists. Two factors help explain this failure. First, we must consider how the *Haute Autorité* is appointed: its nine members are designated three each by the Presidents of the Republic, the Senate and the National Assembly. The political nature of this body is further encouraged by the partisan loyalties of some of its members. A second factor, doubtless more important, lies in the *Haute Autorité's* lack of power over the financial aspects of each channel's operation. Since each station's director must negotiate <sup>their</sup> his company's budget directly with the government, how could he fail to respond to suggestions or requests by the Government?

Although it does not modify the basic nature of the public broadcasting system, the 1982 law <sup>did</sup> ~~does bring~~ the seeds <sup>contained</sup> of a new <sup>form of organization in the</sup> audiovisual sector. The law is not only another reform of French broadcasting, but the first legislative effort to consider the communications sector as a whole, taking into account the probable and possible developments of new communication technologies (videotex, cable television, satellites). Most importantly, the 1982 law <sup>ed</sup> contains one profoundly innovative provision: the abolition of the State monopoly on broadcasting, ~~which could fundamentally change the~~ nature of the system. But, not until 1984 <sup>would</sup> will this provision be applied to television, and <sup>eventually</sup> finally clear the way for a reorganization of the French audiovisual sector.

### *Crises and consensus*

~~In a certain~~ sense, French public broadcasting has been in a continual state of crisis since its inception, a permanent crisis which becomes more apparent at certain moments (1965: strike by producers; 1968: strike by all employees with over 200 laid off; 1973-74: violent polemics over newscasting).

Most of the reforms adopted have simply been absorbed<sup>b</sup> within the existing structure of the system without really changing its operation or correcting its dysfunctions. There has been a noticeable gap between the theoretical effect of decisions made and the manner in which they were actually put into effect. To cite but one example, the 1974 law provided that the number of orders stations had to place with the public production company should decrease regularly. This provision was never put into force. Efforts at reform have been unable to overcome either vested interests, often finding support in the ideology of public service, or the organizational and cultural rigidity familiar to sociologists (Crozier, Friedberg, 1977).

In fact, the reforms undertaken couldn't really change the broadcasting system, since they failed to attack its foundation. As Bourdon notes quite correctly<sup>10</sup> (1986), beneath the surface of violent polemics, French broadcasting has always known a profound ~~but~~ (unavowed) consensus over its public service model. There has been consensus, in the first place, over the principals<sup>els</sup> which should <sup>govern</sup> organize the broadcasting system. As we indicated above, the Left and the Right have the same conception of the political and cultural role of television. The different professional groups associated with this medium have also maintained consensus. Producers have always defended this model which gives them elevated duties and leaves others to deal with the marketing of culture (Flichy, 1980). The print media, a powerful pressure group in France, have long been quite satisfied with the division of labor<sup>insider</sup> instituted between themselves and the broadcast media. Its regional monopoly on news has been maintained and its advertising revenue protected. The movie industry has also recognized the benefits of a system that puts little emphasis on the entertainment aspect of television while trying to develop a truly original televisual genre. This ~~great~~ consensus has limited the search for answers to the many problems facing radio and television, since any answer had to conform to the existing public service model. However, the eighties have witnessed a new questioning of the validity of this public service model; therefore, we must now examine the causes and modalities of this process, as well as its possible consequences.

### III. The Appearance of a New Organization (1984- )

Upon their arrival in power in May of 1981, the Socialists begin to apply their own left-wing version of the public service model: they maintain the State's role and the idea of a public service, but with greater democracy, greater social communication (i.e. more access to communication media for social groups) and greater decentralization. The legalization of private local radio stations in November of 1981 is a striking example of this new orientation. The Socialists respect the aspirations of different social groups, manifest in the creation of numerous local radio stations despite their earlier illegality, and attempt to promote radio stations that are both cultural (by requiring stations to be run by associations and outlawing advertizing) and truly local in nature (by limiting the power of their transmitters) (Vedel, 1987).

Beyond this, however, there are few changes. Despite the creation of the *Haute Autorité*, governmental pressures still influence the audiovisual sector (Chevallier, 1985). For two years, the abolition of the broadcasting monopoly is only put into effect with regard to local private radio stations. The Ministry of Communications indicates on several occasions that there will be no authorization for private television stations; this attitude stems quite possibly from a fear on the Socialists' part of allowing the development of political avenues of expression in competition with the public stations.

Nevertheless, an evolution of thought is underway within the Socialist government, as well as in the political and intellectual milieu as a whole. Progressively, French leaders modify their perception of the role of media in society and of the principles which should direct communications policy, as well as their understanding of the issues which

influence the communications sector. For the Socialists, who now must actually manage the sector, start to realize the difficulties inherent in such an undertaking.

*An Adaptation to present realities*

Four important evolutions in this period influence the conception and organization of the PBS.

1) Realization of technological innovations

Technical progress in communications allows both new forms of communication (Direct-Broadcast Satellites [DBS], for example) and greater access to the existing technology (miniaturizing and lowered costs of receivers, for example). Until the beginning of the 1980's, public authorities in France had thought of television and audiovisual programs in general only in terms of a mass broadcast television system.

Thus, the need to situate broadcast television in relationship to cable television did not arise in France (Vedel, 1984, b):

a) unlike in the United States, in France cable television did not develop naturally as a means to transmit broadcast television stations. In France, the broadcast transmission network covered fairly rapidly the entire country, which is, after all, much smaller than the United States.

b) France remained untouched by the second phase of cable's development when in the early 70's other countries saw cable networks begin to distribute their own programs instead of merely re-transmitting broadcast programs.

In 1975 the government stopped cable television in order both to protect the print media and public television and to block new avenues of political expression.

In the early 80's, the situation begins to change. For essentially industrial reasons, France launches a DBS program in 1978 and then in 1982 a program to install cable TV (Vedel, 1986). The government can no longer avoid considering an increase in the number of channels, nor confronting growing doubts about the role of public television and present sources of audiovisual programs ( ).

But, it is primarily the importance of foreign direct-broadcast satellites that changes the Socialists' perception. This phenomenon has an almost traumatic effect on the Government which fears not only the creation of additional channels, but primarily a threat to its ability to regulate the national media – a principle which, in the name of national and cultural independence, had always guided French communications policy.

## 2) A new understanding of communications activities (in the broad sense)

Until 1980, communications activities are conceived of almost exclusively in cultural, social and political terms. One communicates to exchange ideas, transmit a cultural heritage, or effect a political influence. In 1982, the Minister of Culture introduces the notion of cultural industry, juxtaposing two terms previously considered irreconcilable in France. When the expression was used previously, it was with a critical, even pejorative intent, in the spirit of the Frankfurt School: critics denigrated the subordination of culture to capitalism, the destruction of creative genius by the market place, the transformation of cultural goods into merchandise (in the Marxist sense) (Flichy, 1980; Manelard, Piemme, 1980). Politicians and intellectuals alike avoided considering communications activities as economic acts: they were aware of this facet, but preferred to emphasize other aspects of communication. What they now begin to realize is the role that communications can take in developing the economy during a period of recession. "This is one sector which has seen steady growth in the midst of industrial recession," declares the Minister of Culture in 1983, echoing in his own way the theme of the information age ( ). This new perspective on communications contributes to another development: radio and television's problems are no longer seen merely on a national level, but on an international one. One good barometer of this evolution in thinking is the type of research requested by different government offices. When the videotex plan begins in 1978, the emphasis is on social experimentation (in other words: what's it good for?) and local studies. When the cable plan is launched in 1982, priority is given to market studies (who'll buy it?) and understanding the strategies of the major communications companies with international markets.

### 3) The recognition of the public<sup>as</sup> an actor in the audiovisual sector's evolution

For decades now, French radio and television policy has been thought of, organized and implemented according to prescriptive models, not based on the tastes of the French public or publics. Gradually leaders realized that the public is not a formless, passive mass, but a body which has wants, desires and perhaps, after all, a certain autonomy. The blossoming of local radio stations clearly played a role in this realization. During the 70's, restrictive legislation and coercive power could not prevent the creation of dozens of "bootleg" radio stations. The Socialist government, which had after all legalized local radio stations, discovers in turn the public's new autonomy when they try to impose their conception of local radio: hundreds of thousands of young people demonstrate in the streets in 1985 to protest this "infringement on the right to free expression"

When radio and television were still novel technologies in France, they could take advantage of the public's wonderment. These stunning technical innovations could homogenize and "anesthetize" their audience. But, as these technologies became more and more commonplace, new, ever more varied needs develop<sup>ed</sup> (Prat, 1986). Regulating the audiovisual sector without taking these needs into account quickly becomes impossible. Consider, for example, the tax placed on VCRs, which not only was highly unpopular, but which thousands of Frenchmen managed to avoid paying altogether. Thus, new guidelines are introduced, based in the simplest terms on the need for more programs utilized in a greater variety of ways.

*Yet, this leaves an open question :* how to regulate social demand, whether solely by the market place or by the intervention of public authorities through new procedures (Vedel, 1984, u).

### 4) The role of the state brought into question

In 1981, the left-wing government is elected on a platform of breaking with capitalism. But in less than two years, its social plans change considerably. Economic difficulties lead the Socialists to question the role of the State and to place renewed

emphasis on private enterprise. The State is no longer necessarily seen as the best agent for social progress because of its rigidity. Private enterprise is now seen as a place of social vitality with room for innovation, not merely as a profit-making machine thriving on exploitation. In 1984, the President of the Republic says French society needs to acquire a mixed economy where the private and public sectors will become complementary sectors supporting one another, perhaps even merging within a third sector. This new plan reflects considerations which have engaged a large segment of the Left for several years now in an effort to redefine the role of the State after the failure of the welfare-state and the Keynesian economics (Rosanvallon, 1981).

#### *A Turning Point in 1984-85*

This ideological evolution will modify the perception of the issues and allow problems to be framed in novel ways and different solutions to be envisaged. Beginning in 1984, the Socialist government strives primarily to respond to demand for more programs within a context of technological changes, competition and the new international nature of communications, while still maintaining its high cultural standards and encouraging the economic growth of the communications sector. With its present structure, however, the public system is <sup>seen as</sup> unable to respond to this demand.

What solutions can be foreseen?

a) One could increase the revenue available for public radio and television to allow them to take on more ambitious objectives. But, this solution poses several difficulties. The government would need to raise the usage tax, something which most politicians refuse to do; or it could progressively open the floodgates of advertising revenue. But by doing this, the nature of the system itself as a public service would be brought into question. In any case, increasing the funds available for the public system would not necessarily have the desired effects given the dysfunctions and sluggishness of the system itself.

b) Without increasing the revenue available, public radio and television could

provide more programs by cutting the costs of their programs, the only budget item the stations really control. This could be effected by reducing the number of major productions and taking advantage of the international market with its multitude of low-priced American programs. But it is feared that this solution will bring a reduction in the quality of programs.

c) A third solution had previously been unthinkable, given the mental framework of government leaders: allow the private sector to fulfill the growing demand for more programs while maintaining a public sector which would ensure high-quality programming. This is the solution adopted.

In 1984-85, new initiatives are undertaken leading to the creation of new private stations. A fourth station, Canal-Plus, is created in November of 1984. The initial plan is for a cultural station providing access for different social groups (educational and social organizations), but it finally starts broadcasting as a coded, pay channel, whose programming centers on movies and sports. Although the idea of pay television seems elitist in the French context, the Socialists justify this option in two ways: 1) this protects the new channel from dependence on advertising (this decision occurs in a period when past ways of thinking have not been completely abandoned). 2) French industry must master the technologies of coded broadcasting, a domain rich in economic potential ( ). Then in 1985, the State allows the creation of a fifth station, entrusted to a Franco-Italian communications group, with programming centering on game shows, series and initially movies, as well as a sixth station offering contemporary music programs aimed at the young. These two channels will be completely dependent upon advertising for their revenue.

*Under description*

What considerations underlie these decisions?

a) The government seeks first to offer a wider range of programs by creating more thematic or targeted stations alongside the generalist public stations--in other words, it seeks to respond either to specific tastes, or to the general needs of a particular group of the population at large.



b) It seeks to encourage the development of international communications groups, capable not only of providing French viewers with programs, but also of exporting these programs. Among the demands placed on the private stations is a provision requiring them to produce and present more and more French programs ( ). This economic necessity is no doubt the reason for entrusting the fifth channel to Berlusconi, whose financial resources and professionalism, accompanied by a European cultural rhetoric, soon incited the Socialist decision-makers.

too  
hope  
economists

c) The government seeks to give new life to the public system by creating rivalry. It is hoped that entrusting the new stations to private managers will force the public stations to rationalize their management and to take the public's needs more into account. The idea, thus, is to reform the public system from the outside, not from the inside.

d) At the same time, the Socialists want to protect the public broadcasting for the unique contribution it can make, given its mission, its longstanding tradition and its public financing. They hope that by rapidly creating three private stations, two of which will be wholly financed by advertizing ( ), they will be able to put an end to the calls for privatizing the public service voiced by the opposition starting in 1984. Their theory in this instance is that the advertizing market in France is too weak to support <sup>more than</sup> three or four advertizing-financed stations.

### *The end of the public service model?*

Thus beginning in 1984 the Socialists' goal is to modernize the broadcasting system while maintaining a public service. The right-wing parties, which regain power in the March 1986 elections, will effect even greater modifications of the audiovisual sector.

A new law on audiovisual communications passes parliament and is promulgated on September 30, 1986. This law brings two major changes to the existing system:

1) Audiovisual communication is no longer defined as a public service. Up until 1986, the understanding of the notion of public service had undergone numerous evolutions. First, it had taken on broader meaning as the public stations were given more numerous and more precise duties ( ). Then, starting in 1984, the notion starts to

take on a more restricted sense. It is not abandoned, since the new private stations are seen as suppliers of the public service, but the demands placed upon become much less important. For example, the requirement of equality among all television viewers is abandoned when the fifth and sixth channels are allowed not to provide their programs to all Frenchmen ( ).

The 1986 law goes much further in that it brings into question the very idea of a public service broadcasting. During the debates over the 1982 law, one Socialist deputy expressed the view that all the communications sector is a public service; the only difference between the broadcast and the print media is that in the first case, the State itself provides the public service, whereas in the second case, private companies are entrusted with this mission. According to the legislators of 1986, communications services are not, by nature, a public service. Radio and television do, of course, have educational and cultural functions. But this doesn't mean they must necessarily be considered a public service. Numerous other sectors such as movies and sports play a distinct cultural and social part in society, the new majority points out, without being considered public services.

2) The Right does not recognize the legitimacy of State intervention in the audiovisual sector. Under the twin influences of the ideological radicalization born of their experience in the opposition and the rejuvenation of their membership ( ), the Right has abandoned its Gaullist conception of the audiovisual media as an integral part of the State apparatus. "What principle gives the State any right to take charge of broadcasting television and radio programs?" asks François Léotard, the new Minister of Communications. Ten years ago such a question would have seemed out of place; but today, concerns about the State's proper role are so great that it can be raised without provoking violent criticism. The new communications policy is primarily ideological: the government is implementing its theory of the free-market in which the State's role is merely that of a regulator. Partisans of the State's withdrawal are rarely motivated by critical analyses of the period during which the State dominated. One of the few experts to have made this type of analysis is Fréchet (1986), now adviser for Communications

to the Prime Minister. He emphasizes that, due to the State's domination, private enterprise has been barred from the rapidly developing broadcasting sector, while the private press and movie companies have depended heavily on the government assistance for their survival. He feels this situation has prevented France from developing communications groups capable of competing in the international marketplace. The total income of the largest French communications group barely surpasses the advertising budget of a major American film company.

The new government seeks to reduce State intervention in social and economic activities, especially in sectors like communications where freedom of expression is at stake. Thus, the privatization of the public sector is high on their agenda. But they also hope to modify the role of the state as regulator. Although they still see a role for the government and Parliament in providing general guidance and rules for the communications sector, the implementation of these guidelines should be entrusted to a body separate from the State. A new principle replaces the old imperative of public service: competition. They feel that by restoring the "normal conditions of economic necessity" they will guarantee freedom of expression and assure the economic growth of the audiovisual sector.

#### *The present situation of the audiovisual sector in France*

First, the public sector has been reduced. Initially, the Right planned to privatize the two main public stations, TF1 and Antenne2. But this raised both practical and political difficulties. The government needed to find buyers and to overcome the French public's attachment to the existing model, while avoiding possible conflict with unions and the political opposition. In the end, they decided to privatize only TF1. The choice of TF1 rather than Antenne2 was obviously discussed. One of the most convincing justifications for privatizing TF1 was its budgetary deficit, which would allow the government to demonstrate the possibilities of private management. The government was also criticized for its decision to privatize a public station, rather than to create a new private one. Critics asked why the private sector did not use the funds

devoted to buying TF1 to increase creative efforts in the audiovisual sector. Two explanations were given: no more channels are available to reach a large audience ( ); an equilibrium needs to be established immediately between the private and public sectors, so that each can benefit fully from the other. In addition, the revenue from the sale of TF1 will likely be reinjected into the audiovisual sector.

The privatization of TF1, an operation made difficult by the lack of any precedent: French or other, will take place after a public competition between buyers. The field will consist of groups under French control, demonstrating sufficient technical and financial resources. The buyer will only hold 50% of the capital, the rest being divided between employees (10%) and small shareholders (following the Thatcher model). The preponderant criterion will be the buyer's cultural plans.

Another indication of the reduction of the public sector is the modification of the status of the public production company (SFP). This organization will now be subject to the same rules as private-sector companies: i.e. it will no longer depend on the State for its funding. The State will, nevertheless, retain a majority of the capital.

Although the reduction of the public sector has clear symbolic and emotional impact, it remains somewhat limited. There is, for instance, no change for radio. The government considers the legalization of private local radio stations in 1982 and the removal of State capital from the "peripheral" radio stations at the end of 1985 sufficient ( ). We should note also that the State maintains control of the principal audiovisual production company, despite its private management, as well as the principal transmitting company (TDF). Finally, the conception of radio and television as the "voice of France" persists with the maintenance of a company providing radio abroad (a situation not unique to France) and the broadcasting company for the overseas departments -- areas which would especially profit from greater autonomy in newscasting.

The second important point to note in the development of a new audiovisual system is the creation of a Commission Nationale de la Communication et des Libertés (CNCL).

which takes the place of the *Haute Autorité*. This commission is given fairly broad powers of three different sorts:

1) Like the *Haute Autorité*, the CNCL names the directors of the public broadcasting sector.

2) It controls private radio and television companies' entry into the broadcasting system: it assigns broadcast frequencies (for a period of 10 years) as well as <sup>it will be</sup> authorizing the use of cable networks. In exercising this function, it must assure pluralism in communications by preventing certain companies from amassing too much influence. The provisions of the law are extremely complex. They place limits on the potential audience of any particular company (the ceiling varies depending on the medium) and seek to prevent monopolies on the local level.

3) It establishes precise regulations for companies' operation and sees to their enforcement. Both private and public companies are subject to certain obligations, the general nature, but not the precise modalities of which, are determined by the State. These obligations relate primarily the conditions of the production of works broadcasted by the company (a ceiling is established), conditions for advertizing and film works, and requirements for certain specific programs. In addition, the public companies are placed under special obligations (e. g. minimum hours of broadcast during strikes, transmission of governmental announcements—see below). The role of the CNCL is to detail these conditions and to interpret them according to the type of service offered. It can impose all or part of the following rules: minimum length of <sup>original min.</sup> program; minimum time devoted to the transmission of original French works; minimum amount of cultural and educational programming.

Finally, during a transitional period, the CNCL is charged with organizing the sale of TF1 to the private sector and reassigning Channels 5 and 6 to different owners.

Thus, CNCL will become an important actor in the French audiovisual sector, which according to the new law will now be subject to the rules of competition. It is given wide powers to interpret the law, the exercise of which will influence the future organization of the private broadcasting sector, and thus the public sector also. This new

commission should soon employ 200 persons and will eventually employ 500, and has a budget of 250 million francs (ca. \$38 million) in 1987. By way of comparison, the *Haute Autorité* had a budget of 20 million francs (ca. \$3 million) and 30 employees. The American FCC is openly taken as a model for this new commission.

Third point: the new audiovisual system should work towards greater specialization, linked to the introduction of increased competition. The idea of functional specialization is not new, since it was introduced in the 1974 law (see above). This law sought to separate broadcasting activities from those of production so that broadcasters could take advantage of the best programs at the lowest price. But the regulation of relations between broadcasting companies and the public production company hindered this specialization.

A provision of the new law provides that each station will be able to rely on the producers of its choice. The SFP will thus be in an actual situation of competition where it will have to obtain its revenue by finding clients in the national and international markets. Nevertheless, for a period of two years, the SFP will still be assured a minimum number of orders from the public sector and TF1.

The different private channels can likewise use the transmitting company of their choice or transmit their own programs. Thus, TDF loses its monopoly. But in the short term, few competitors will challenge TDF, except perhaps the Direction Générale des Télécommunications (DGT), a branch of the PTT.

We should, however, take note of a certain retrogression in this process of specialization: France-Média International, created in 1982 to market public programs abroad, is abandoned. The government felt that this company was not performing adequately and that the best marketer of programs was the broadcaster itself.

The implementation of these new principles poses several problems. These will be examined in the following section where we will consider the possible consequences of the new system on broadcasting.

ISSUES

What problems does the implementation of a new system of broadcasting present? Will this new system put an end to government pressures on broadcast journalism? What will be the effects on programming with the advent of competition between the private and public sectors?

→  
Is the new system economically viable?



The first problem in question is the capacity of the advertising market to guarantee financing for the system, more specifically for the private channels.

Two remarks can be made concerning this subject:

1-France is a country where, in proportion to other industrialized countries, still little is invested in advertising. In 1985, advertising investment totaled 27 billion french francs, which in relation to the GNP represents:

*but why?*

0.70% in France

compared to 0.83% in West Germany

1.35% in Great Britain

1.55% in the USA

(Source: Institut de Recherche et d'Etude Publicitaire, Paris, 1985)

2-Television in France, again compared to other industrialized countries, is a little utilized outlet for advertising. In 1985, total television advertising rose to 4.6 billion francs, which represents the following percentage of all media advertising:

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- 18% in France
- compared to 23% in the USA
- 31% in Great Britain
- 47% in Italy

(Source: IREP, 1985)

This situation is explained by the restrictions on advertising revenue that the public channels were able to use (25% of total PBS revenues) ( ). A second factor played an equally important role: a certain number of areas in the economy were not allowed to advertise on television, particularly publishing houses, retailers, tourist-trade businesses and temporary employment agencies.

According to official estimates (Bredin, 1985), the increase in available advertising space on television, due to the privatization of TF1 and the appearance of private channels, could yield between 700 million and 1 billion francs. The opening up of television advertising to those areas that until



now have been forbidden from using it, could in time yield between 1 and 1.7 billion francs a year. Moreover it is possible to increase the television advertising rates whose cost per thousand viewers is presently 20% to 30% lower than the market would allow. In total taking into account the entire growth of the advertising market in France, television should enjoy an "ad" market grossing about 8 billion francs annually in a few years.

The PBS budget for 1987 forecasts approximately 2 billion francs from ad revenues. There will therefore be nearly 4 to 5 billion francs available to private channels in the next two to three years. It is already known that the budget for TFI will be in the order of 2.5 billion francs and that on a total budget of about 1.8 billion francs Canal Plus will earn about 200 million from advertising (the rest coming from subscriptions). The other two private channels, 5 and 6, should earn 1.5 to 2 billion francs.

Therefore in the short-run, the system <sup>seems to be</sup> viable and should allow for the operation of the envisioned private channels with *good* programming if one estimates that the part of the private channel's budget allocated to programming is between 65% and 70%. But in the longer run little extra revenue can be expected from advertising. the ad market is not infinitely extendable: new media appear such as videotex (with more than 2 million terminals) or private local radio stations. Finally,

to reduce the printed press' share of the ad market would elicit great difficulties for that medium. It will therefore be difficult in France to go beyond 3 or 4 private channels, if, at least, one wants television that does not offer low-quality programs (gameshows, low-priced TV series bought on the international market, etc.). In particular, to create local television that offers truly original programming as had been envisioned in 1985, seems especially difficult without looking toward other means of financing such as subsidies from local authorities or contributions from viewers.

Perhaps a certain economic niche exists for the PBS channels.

They will have two advantages:

-much lower broadcasting costs; the rent for a channel of TDF1 should run about 60 million francs versus 450 million for carrying TF1 or A2 signals.

-a potentially large international audience (about 100 million people) that can attract new announcers. ?

If the new system is economically viable on the whole, the financial stability of the public channels may come into question.

The national public broadcasting companies (A2, FR3 and Radio-France, principally) may have a two-fold problem of financing and of costs. Tax on TV sets is a financial resource that will hardly expand. Hostility toward its increase is commonplace among parliamentarians and in the

immediate future its *rate* will even be lessened since the public sector is reduced. The long term problem which arises is the legitimacy of this type of financing in an environment of private and apparently free TV. Many of the French have never well understood or accepted why they must pay a tax on their TV set, independent of "consumption" of programs. For several years, the return on the tax has been poor; it is estimated that between 300 and 700 million francs will not be paid this year because<sup>2</sup> of delinquent payers and pirating users. Will this phenomenon grow along with private TV that doesn't ask for anything? And it will be difficult to form a defense. From a legal standpoint, verifying ownership of TV sets in private homes poses a problem. From an economic standpoint the cost of organizing a system of verification and payment almost equals whatever losses that would be recuperated.

Advertising constitutes an even less inexhaustable source of revenue for the public channels than for the private ones. If the ad market becomes saturated, then public TV would not be as well situated for attracting announcers as would private TV. Public TV cannot run commercials during films, which represents guaranteed exposure for the announcers. Moreover, it is likely that most of private television will be run by multi-media groups that will be able to offer packages of ad space in several media (TV, radio, print) *at special rates.*

Cost-control by the public channels will depend upon their programming strategy in relation to that of the private sector (see below). If they engage in a ratings race, they run the risk of experiencing spiralling costs: higher figures to attract the most popular TV personalities (as is done in Italy), in order to assure the broadcast of a sporting event or *of popular* foreign TV series. This tendency already exists within PES *but* the competition with private channels could exacerbate it.

#### The French capacity in audiovisual production

One of the great objectives of the new system is to strengthen the system of French audiovisual production in the perspective of an internationalized ~~communications~~ market.

As indicated above, in order to realize this objective it was decided to put the public production company <sup>(SFP)</sup> in a competitive situation. The system of obligatory orders placed by the channels to the SFP <sup>is</sup> to disappear after a transition period. It is hoped that the SFP will both rationalize its management and since it will no longer produce exclusively for the national channels, will open up to the needs of the international market.

Will the SFP be able to survive in these new conditions? For many years it has experienced financial difficulties (according to estimations, about 100 francs in deficit on a budget of 1.4 billion). The challenge is to succeed in modernizing the SFP while preserving the production apparatus

that is unique to France. One often forgets that the financial status of the SFP poorly translates its real social utility: the permanent availability of an apparatus (sets, <sup>stages.</sup> costumes, etc.) that is accessible to private companies; the maintaining of a highly qualified permanent staff while the private companies pass the cost of temporary underemployment of their personnel to unemployment insurance and therefore to the collectivity; and finally the efforts toward research and perfecting technics.

Moreover, *much* is expected <sup>from</sup> that the channels will be prohibited from producing their own shows (with the exception of newscasts or informational programs). That would allow the production companies to fill their role to the fullest: to find the necessary financing, conceive projects and assemble the talent; then to market their creations.

This presents a two-fold problem:

-alongside a somewhat inefficient SFP, the private production companies constitute a fragile sector (about six permanent companies), which has done substantial subcontracting for the SFP and which seems poorly equipped to operate on an international level.

-as long as the private sector of French production is not truly competitive -a situation that should take at least a few years to reverse- the possibility arises that the channels, being free to contract with the producer of their choice, are

going to look primarily towards foreign markets. The presence of foreign stockholders in the operation of the private channels may well increase this possibility.

The public authorities have understood this weakness and this danger. That is why liberalizing schemes are accompanied by more interventionist measures. On one hand, the public or the private channels will have to broadcast a certain quota of original productions in French. On the other hand, different mechanisms of financial support are put into place to help French production companies such as specialized finance companies offering fiscal advantages, a state-run system of guaranteed loans and grants allowing producers to prefinance their projects. In fact the public authorities are confronted with a real dilemma here: to either defend a certain conception of French culture that the francophone market no longer allows to be appreciated economically; or have France put itself in the international arena undoubtedly at the price of a rather radical modification of what is a French audiovisual program, that is, less and less the vector of a pure culture, more and more a culturally hybrid product.

The new broadcasting system and the news:

The conditions of televised news have greatly improved in France in the past thirty years. The creation of the Haute Autorité was an important step in spite of persistent government pressures which, henceforth, are done in a "professionalized" fashion (Cayrol, 1986). Today many journalists believe that an additional step in the liberalization of newsreporting could be reached with the advent of competition from private channels. It is difficult to predict how the new system, born from the 1986 law, is going to function but one can already attempt to consider its possible effects on televised news.

1- PBS <sup>and</sup> news programming

Firstly it must be noted that in the immediate future a single public televised newscast will be available in prime-time (8pm-10pm) on A2. Until now FR3 only broadcasted a brief bulletin at 7pm and a more complete newscast at the end of the evening *mainly* *for* management level professionals. The principal risk therefore is to have all the political pressures concentrate on the program shown by A2 which because of its status as public channel will be expected to set the standard for neutral and objective news. And since the law imposes an obligation of plurality on the public programming companies, this standard will be even more

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expected. Certainly in the case of TF1 which for the short term will be the sole provider of a widely watched televised newscast, the obligation will be equivalent.

But in the case of the other private channels the CNCL will be able to adapt the rule to the particular situation of each channel. For example, the CNCL might decide that the plurality rule can be relaxed for the 5th channel because that channel does not broadcast over the entire territory and that the "true" plurality is guaranteed by the public channels.

A second factor may influence the type of newscasts that the public channels are going to offer. The public channels are the only ones obliged to broadcast official statements of the President of the Republic and of the government, and the responses of parliamentary parties given to them by right since 1982. Moreover they must transmit certain parliamentary debates (but not in prime-time) under the control of the Parliament and reserve time for certain political groups, unions or professional organizations. One can imagine that the private channels will follow and broadcast a statement by the President of the Republic. But the treatment may be different: the private channel can for example select excerpts from the speech, inserting reactions alongside them. The same message can therefore have a different allure: institutional for the public channel, more lively for the private ones.



On the contrary, a public channel can have certain advantages in the matter of news. Televised news is expensive (6500 francs per minute in 1985) and it is often considered less efficient? in terms of ratings than other types of programming. Because making a profit is not one of their objectives and to the extent that the creation of private channels does not lead them into a ratings race (see below), French public channels can be more inclined to program newsmagazines and special editions of news programs. Besides it is this type of programming that has already built the reputation of French public TV and constitutes a sort of culture that is rooted in public organisms. *phases*

A final positive element that can emerge from the competition with the private sector is linked to the pursuit of the scoop. Often teams of journalists from the public channels were incapable of covering certain events or of fully exploiting sources on account of management's administrative rules that they had to respect (for example, limitations of the length of time that technicians could work, complicated procedures for obtaining funds, the necessity of justifying the use of projects funds to the public accountants instead and not for whatever results these funds might engender). Pressure stemming from more quickly operational teams of private journalists could lead to more elasticity on the part of management in the public channels.

## 2- Private channels <sup>and</sup> news programming

The important point here is to know what is going to be the attitude of the owner of the channel in regards to broadcast journalism. There are no guidelines in this domain. The ownership of capital does not always mean the control of content. Certain owners invest in a newspaper or television company as they would in any other sector in the economy in hopes of earning profits and leave the editorial responsibilities to the professional. Other owners, on the contrary, consider their newspaper or television station as an outlet for personal expression, concern themselves closely with the messages broadcasted, and choose their principal journalists.

It is still too early to know which case will be applied by the future owners of TF1 which for sometime will be the only private channel offering genuine news-oriented programs ( ). Among those seeking to buy TF1 there is the Hersant group whose rightist political orientation is clear and overt. This group played an important role in the last electoral campaign by systematically supporting the candidates that went on to form the present majority of the right ( ) in its numerous dailies and on its local radio stations. That law which privatizes TF1 stipulates that the choice of the operator must be made while taking into account the necessity of assuring plurality in the news, and moreover avoiding the creation of dominant companies

- ① Rest of the world.
- ② French private media.

. The

potential degree of plurality offered by private television therefore will depend upon the CNCL which is in charge of selecting the operator of TFl.

For what will follow and on a more general level, the CNCL possess limited means for acting on how private channels inform viewers. Its moral power which comes from public recommendations, directly opposes the legitimate right of all owners to manage his property as he sees fit. The law of 1986 specifies that the rights of journalists from public channels are independent of their opinions, beliefs, or political or religious affiliation. Such protection does not exist for the private channels. The only means of real action available to the CNCL for correcting a situation where the news is overtly slanted will be the non-renewal of the private channel's license.

Advertising revenue, upon which the private channels will depend entirely, *may* have a real influence on televised news. On the context: the desire for maximum viewers may lead to emphasizing a certain political centrism and to dispelling points of view that are two extreme; *also,* the pressures of announcers on the context are always something about which to be concerned.

What is at risk of most likely changing is the form. It is not yet known if news <sup>on private TV</sup> would be interrupted by commercials. But whatever the case, the managing of time on a private channel will undoubtedly be different from that of the public

*Correct*

channels which until now has been rather lax. Interviewing and debating styles could be modified. On the French public channels journalists rarely interrupt a statement that is too long, and if they do so they will elicit a protest from the person who is speaking. On a private channel, the need to broadcast commercials could make this type of interruption, as well as the constraint of the time clock, admissible.

#### News and growing media

Beyond the private or public management of channels the new French broadcasting system hardly comes close to the ideal model of print journalism where plurality in the news is favored by the *number of papers*. France did go from 3 channels to 6 but the growth in channels did not translate into a proportional growth of newscasts, for reporting the news is costly. Thus Canal plus only broadcasts brief bulletins plus a weekly newsmagazine. So far Channel 5 does not have a news program even though one is *planned*. Along the same lines, local private radio stations generally devote only a limited amount of time to news. The development of some 20 decentralized radio stations created by public radio seems to have been interrupted both for economic and political reasons. The new audiovisual scene will realistically change little about the situation of local news reporting in France, which remains subjected to a quasi-monopoly of regional dailies except if the public sector decides to act in this domain (see *infra*).

Only the take-off of videotex for the moment presents other possibilities of expression in the French audiovisual system. Contrary to foreign systems, the French videotex system known as Teletel, is in effect becoming a mass-medium (Vedel, 1987). It allows practically anyone to broadcast messages destined for all the subscribers on the telephone and moreover to organize interactive communication (direct debates, question-answer sessions, etc.). Political parties, unions and large organizations are discovering the potential of this *medium*. More than conventional television or cable and its

public access, videotex can be for France an element in the transformation of *political communication*.

The respective roles of the public and private sectors

Generally two models *are* envisioned

1- In the first one, public sector programming is defined as the negative of private sector programming. That is, public television produces all that private TV is neither obliged or willing to do.

-Firstly public TV fulfills the public service mission that the State imposes upon it: transmission of political ~~communiqués~~, on air access for political groups or unions, consumer affairs and religious programming, obligatory broadcasts of performances from the Comedie francaise, etc.. Here public TV is no more than a common carrier and not a true ~~master~~ of program content.

-Public TV could *also* be a TV of research and innovation, programming educational or cultural shows that private TV would not run because they receive low ratings. What will be important for this type of public television will not be to maximize the ratings of each program, but to do so comprehensively over a longer period of time. It will be about successively reaching small audiences which, as a whole, represent the spectrum of viewers and not one audience that is always the same, representing only one part of the population even if it constitutes a majority. In other words,

public television ~~would~~ satisfy the public by satisfying *many different* publics.

Depending on how these two functions are articulated and realized this model can be called the cultural ghetto model or the TV reference model or television of value standards.

2- The second model is a model in which the public channels accept the criterion of maximum rating as fundamental to their legitimacy and define programming from the example of private channels. As Guillou notes (1986), emphasis would then be placed on fiction; , entertainment shows and gameshows; one would witness higher prices in order to obtain the most popular programs and personalities; the funds would be *allocated* proportionally to the expected audience . This model of competition already existed in a premature stage within the PBS. The privatization of TP<sup>would</sup> only change the status of one of the competitors but not the relations with the other

channel, A2. The problem that would be faced if this model came into fruition would be the reaction of viewers and that of members of parliament and the government. The first group might not accept giving to pay for public channels that are not at all distinguishable from private ones. The second group would be worried that public TV, in order to keep a large audience, would neglect the objectives that are imposed upon it.

The realization of these models and the evolution towards possibly a third model will depend on a number of factors among which the most prominent are:

-Institutional constraints.

Public and private channels will be subjected to programming obligations. Here the CNCL can play an important role in assuring that the constraints on the public sector are not inordinately burdensome in relation to the public sector. It could <sup>help in</sup> forming a complementary rapport rather than favor an unbalance system inevitably leading the public sector into a cultural ghetto.

-The strategic choices of the public sector leaders

Taking into account the constraints imposed upon them, the leaders of public channels still have a margin of freedom. The method of financing the public sector protects them from having to seek only high ratings. It is up to them to reconcile the demands of the audience and those of the culture. Establishing

program schedules that cater to the public at large during prime-time and to portions of the public at other times is only a simplistic *and unfair* way to reach this synthesis (why must one go to bed late because one does not share the tastes of the majority)?

One of the advantages of the public sector, as Neuschwander and others point out (1986), is having at its disposal an apparatus covering the entire territory and a special trust in the french regions. There is surely a card to be played here: that of local and regional news reporting which may expand to service and educational programs; and that of exploiting local cultural wealth on a national level.

#### -The evolution of the audiovisual system

It is necessary to integrate the possible evolution of the audiovisual system which will create both new restrictions and new opportunities. The appearance of the DBS channels, the development of cable can *result* in a growing number of specialized channels (thematic or for targeted audiences). The public channels should position themselves in relation to this new reality which could quarter them in an institutional ghetto unless they prepare for this evolution. Guillou (1986) notes that the public sector could fulfill the role of impetus and coordination for creating a complement to the channels geared towards a specific audience. It could put into place <sup>high</sup> quality



co-productions that will be appreciated in different media over a rather long period of time; what the public sector can undoubtedly do better than can the private sector because it is not obligated to look for short term profits.

-The behavior of viewers

This is without a doubt an important variable and not only in terms of ratings, but also in terms of the expectations and habits of consumerism. Nearly thirty years of public TV probably has not left French viewers immune. They are certainly attached to specific types of programming. The relative failure of the 5th channel is interesting in the respect that one cannot change television overnight. The French may get used to movies being interrupted by commercials or to the proliferation of American-style gameshows, but that will take time. And in the short term, the tastes of viewers as they have been formed by long dealings with public TV, will constitute a restrictive element for the possibilities of changing televised programs. In the same manner, employees of TV companies are marked specific professional habits and values.

By selling TF1 to private concerns one is not only selling walls and equipment that can be used in any way. One also cedes a business culture that cannot be quickly changed and a wealth of potential viewers that are <sup>attached</sup> to a certain idea of television *is*.

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