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# From the Gaullist movement to the president's party

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### Introduction

Most major European countries are content with just one major party of the centre-right: Britain's Conservatives, Spain's PPE, Germany's CDU-CSU. France has always had at least two. The electoral cycle of April–June 2002, however, held out the prospect of change by transforming the fortunes of France's centre-right in two ways. A double victory at the presidential and parliamentary elections kept Jacques Chirac in the Elysée and put a large centre-right majority into the National Assembly. Second, most of the hitherto dispersed centre-right family merged into a single formation, the UMP.

Why did this merger happen in 2002, and not sooner? The first part of this chapter will consider what kept the mainstream right *apart* before 2002. The second section will show why the parties had less reason to stay apart by 2002 than they had had five, ten or twenty years earlier. The third will show how a more favourable context was used to advance a concrete merger project, in the approach to and aftermath of the 2002 elections. The conclusion will assess both the UMP's longer-term prospects, and its more general impact on the French party system.

### France's divided right

For most of the Fifth Republic, three things have divided the French right: real differences of ideology and policy; opposed organisational cultures; and the logic of presidential competition. On the other hand, although the right-wing electorate is far from homogeneous, divisions among voters had rather little impact on divisions between the parties – and voter demand was eventually to be important in the genesis of a merged party. René Rémond's classic study divided the contemporary

French right into three *familles spirituelles* which he related to the nineteenth-century claimants to the French throne: legitimists, who rejected *en bloc* the values of the French Revolution (the far right); Bonapartists, standing for strong national plebiscitary leadership, and a 'social' interventionist state (the Gaullists); and Orleanists – Anglophiles who stood for a moderate, socially and economically liberal monarchy supported by local *notables* (the *giscardiens*) (Rémond, 1982).

Despite the imperfections of such an essentialist view of the right's divisions, its proponents would have found empirical support in the policy differences between the Gaullists and the non-Gaullist moderate right in the first two decades of the Fifth Republic. These include, for example, the bitter disputes of the 1960s over French institutions and European integration between Gaullists (and the small group of their *giscardien* allies) on the one hand and the so-called 'centrists' (including Christian democrats and a significant part of the non-Gaullist conservative right) on the other. The Pompidolian succession in 1969 drew some of the passion from these debates. However, fairly clear distinctions within the French right survived into and after the 1970s. Jacques Chirac's relaunched RPR was generally more Eurosceptical, more *dirigiste*, and more authoritarian; the Christian democrat and non-Gaullist right umbrella UDF was altogether less jacobin, more Eurofriendly, and (usually) more 'liberal' on both economic and societal issues; each disputed the centre-right ground with the other (Colombani, 1984). The two sides still, to a degree, marched to different tunes.

Second, minimal party organisation is a tradition on the French right. France is the land, above all, of Duverger's cadre party, the loose, undisciplined, grouping of local *notables* of more or less the same sensibility (Duverger, 1951). For the Gaullists, on the other hand, the strong leader and the chain of command have been operating principles since the Resistance. These principles have, it is true, been imperfectly realised in practice. The first Gaullist party of any substance, the Rassemblement du Peuple Français, was wrecked in 1952 by the incorrigible independence of its *notables*. The Gaullist party of the early Fifth Republic, despite its nationwide organisation and membership, was materially far more dependent on its positions within the state than its leaders cared to admit. Chirac's relaunch of the party as the RPR in 1976 failed to re-establish it as a truly 'mass' party (Schonfeld, 1981).

Nevertheless, there were clear organisational contrasts between the Gaullists' quasi-military structures and nationwide membership and the much looser organisation of the non-Gaullist moderate right – local *notables* for the conservatives, local *notables* plus Catholic associative networks for the Christian democrats. For Gaullists, 'we're a real party, with real activists', as one member said; 'the UDF is a country club'.<sup>1</sup>

UDF *notables*, on the other hand, described the Gaullists' *modus operandi* as *fascisante* (Frémontier, 1984: 180–1).

Lastly, the right was also predictably divided by presidential rivalries under the two-ballot electoral system. First-ballot competition need not damage the chances of second-ballot victory, provided the losing candidate in each camp endorses his better-placed rival for the run-off (which has always happened, though with varying degrees of conviction). The first five presidential elections of the Fifth Republic offered right-wing voters a choice between two credible candidates at the first ballot (Table 8.1). Although the presidential election is in principle a confrontation between individual candidates (rather than parties) and the electorate, candidates need the backing of parties to be successful. A party merger will therefore threaten the interests of any potential candidate who lacks an overwhelming lead within his own camp. This had been the major stumbling block to the first real attempt to confederate the RPR and the UDF, in 1990, in an alliance called the UPF. The organisation of presidential 'primaries' within the UPF, promised for 1995, never materialised because no candidate was prepared to surrender his chances of a first-ballot run (though in the event, the UDF failed to run its own candidate in 1995).

TABLE 8.1 The moderate right: presidential candidacies and share of votes cast (1965–2002)

Year	Candidate	Gaullists		Non-Gaullist moderate right		
		First-ballot vote (%)	Second-ballot vote (%)	Candidate	First-ballot vote (%)	Second-ballot vote (%)
1965	De Gaulle	44.7	55.2	Lecanuet	15.6	–
1969	Pompidou	44.5	58.2	Poher	23.3	41.8
1974	Chaban-Delmas	15.1	–	Giscard	32.6	50.8
1981	Chirac	18.0	–	d'Estaing		
				Giscard	28.3	48.2
				d'Estaing		
1988	Chirac	19.9	46.0	Barre	16.5	–
1995	Chirac	20.8	52.6	Balladur*	18.6	–
2002	Chirac	19.9	82.2	Bayrou	6.8	–
				Madelin	3.9	–

\* Balladur: Gaullist anti-Chirac candidate supported by most of the UDF

Sources: Lancelot (1998) (for 1965–95), *Le Monde* (for 2002)

It should be noted, however, that while they have always been in competition for the presidency, of its nature a post which only one partner can win, Gaullists and the non-Gaullist moderate right have always been ready to negotiate common candidacies at other levels, and notably for municipal and legislative elections. Here, candidacies

supported by both major components of the moderate right were the exception rather than the rule. Thus in 1973, the Gaullists and the parties making up the UDF presented 522 candidates between them for the 473 seats available in metropolitan France, or 1.1 candidates per seat; in 1978, a year of unusually intense competition between the parties, the figure rose to 1.84 candidates per seat; it fell back, however, to 1.28 in 1981, 1.05 in 1988, 1.13 in 1993, and 1.01 in 1997 (Lancelot, 1998). True, the *total* number of moderate right-wing candidacies was higher than this (2 per seat in 1993, for example) because of the number of right-wing candidates who stood without an official right-wing label – and some of these had the more or less official blessing of the two major right-wing groupings.

But in most seats and at most parliamentary elections, the RPR and the UDF, usually after fierce negotiations at leadership level, joined forces from the first ballot. Similarly, they ran joint lists at municipal elections in some 210 of France's 225 towns of over 30,000 in 1983, 1989 and 1995 as well as 2001 (Martin, 2001: 114, 130, 148, *Le Monde*, 19 January 2001). This was possible because few right-wing voters were very choosy about which right-wing party they supported. Even in the parliamentary elections of 1978, where they had a choice in four out of five constituencies, only 55 per cent of RPR and UDF sympathisers voted in full accordance with their party preference, with between a third and a quarter opting instead for the rival right-wing formation on the basis of candidate preference (Capdevielle *et al.*, 1981: 239).

The parties of France's moderate right were thus separated by their ideological roots, their policy preferences, and their different organisational cultures, as well as by the ambitions of their *présidentiables*. At the same time, the institutional framework, plus the fact that their voters were less partisan than activists or elites, allowed the deployment of different strategies for different types of election: open competition in presidential races, maximum cooperation at parliamentary and municipal contests, as well a mixture of the two for European and regional elections, held on proportional representation. And of course every right-wing government was a coalition of Gaullists and their non-Gaullist partners and rivals.

### France's convergent right

The electoral defeat of 1981 opened a slow and discontinuous process of convergence between the policies and, to some extent, the organisational patterns of the Gaullist and non-Gaullist centre-right. Convergence would not, however, have produced a party merger without the transformation of the conditions of presidential rivalry that took place at the end of the 1990s.

### Convergence: ideology and policy

Policy convergence on France's centre-right after 1981 involved the broad alignment of Gaullist positions on those of non-Gaullist moderate right. To a significant degree, it was the work of Jacques Chirac. But it resulted less from an ideological conversion, or from a grand strategy, than from the instrumental, opportunistic, attitude to policy issues characteristic of the man (Rémond, 1988). In particular, Chirac has sought to minimise policy friction so as to maximise the support of the non-Gaullist right at second ballots of presidential elections. Three episodes highlight this.

In the first place, within three years of 1981, the RPR abandoned much of the *dirigisme* characteristic of Gaullism of the 1960s, as well as the Euroscepticism. Instead, it adopted a panoply of neo-liberal policies (privatisation, deregulation and tax cuts) and agreed to a joint list with the UDF parliamentarian Simone Veil for the 1984 European elections. The common platform signed by the RPR and the UDF in February 1986 confirmed this pro-European neo-liberal shift. Moreover, when the right won the parliamentary elections the following month, Chirac flew in the face of orthodox Gaullist views about presidential primacy by accepting the post of Prime Minister from President Mitterrand – and thus the very un-Gaullist principle of *cohabitation* that went with it.

Second, Chirac contributed to the 1980s relaunch of European integration by accepting the two key treaties that it embodied. It was the Chirac government that piloted the ratification of the Single European Act through Parliament in December 1986, thus ensuring, against the preferences of Gaullist die-hards, a breach in the national veto for which de Gaulle had opened the 'empty chair' crisis twenty-one years earlier (Favier and Martin-Roland, 1991: 556). It was Chirac himself who, after much hesitation and against the preferences of his own party, chose to support the Maastricht Treaty, and in doing so probably saved its passage at the 1992 referendum, thus ending the link between currency and national sovereignty which de Gaulle had seen as essential (de Gaulle, 1970: 399–400).

The final episode was the 1995 presidential election and its aftermath. The untidy line-up of support behind candidates in 1995 itself signified a blurring of party differences: Chirac was backed by most of the RPR and a minority of the UDF, Balladur by most of the non-Gaullist moderate right and a number of the RPR's national and local elected officials. Chirac's 1995 campaign was a sort of last hurrah for traditional Gaullist values: he beat Balladur to the second ballot by promising to place an absolute priority on reducing joblessness, regardless of the pressures of the global economy and of France's European commitments. But in October 1995 Chirac abandoned his election rhetoric and recommitted France to deficit reduction in line with the Maastricht convergence criteria.

By effectively adopting Balladur's programme, Chirac brought policy convergence to its culmination. Policy convergence on the moderate right did not mean uniformity. Even in the 1990s, there remained substantive policy differences among the elites of the RPR and the UDF over the state and the market, over European integration, over societal questions (sexuality, drugs, policing, or immigration), and on the strategic issue of relations with the FN (Habert, 1991, Ysmal, 1992).

But these differences no longer corresponded very well to party divisions between the Gaullists and the non-Gaullist moderate right. Free market, pro-European right-wingers like Alain Madelin, leader of *Démocratie Libérale* and Nicolas Sarkozy, his RPR partner at the head of the right-wing list for the 1999 European elections, had more in common with each other than with a jacobin Gaullist like Philippe Séguin or with a centrist Christian democrat like François Bayrou. Nor were these differences very much greater than those that agitate a unified conservative party. This was all the truer after the departure of leading Eurosceptics from both parties: Charles Pasqua, Chirac's former loyal lieutenant, left the RPR to run a competing 'sovereignist' list for the 1999 European elections with Philippe de Villiers, who had himself quit the UDF in 1993. They did well in 1999, beating the Sarkozy-Madelin list by 13.1 per cent of the vote to 12.7, but their attempt to found a new Eurosceptic party, the RPF, was a failure.

The crucial element of policy convergence was the effective disappearance, as a package of policies, of Gaullism, the French right's most distinctive element for the previous half-century. Thus Serge Berstein closed his history of Gaullism in 2001 with the assertion that 'Gaullism now belongs to history, and the party that is its last manifestation is nothing but a fraction of the French right, into which it is doubtless destined to merge' (Berstein, 2001: 519).

### Organisational convergence

The organisations of the RPR and the non-Gaullist moderate right converged rather less obviously than their policies. Nevertheless, the contrast of the 1980s between the creaky UDF federation and the well-oiled RPR machine, dedicated to getting Chirac into the Elysée, was far less clear ten years later. The main changes occurred, again, within the RPR. They opened with Chirac's severe defeat at the hands of president Mitterrand by 54 per cent to 46 at the presidential election of 1988. That provoked criticism of the party's authoritarian leadership style, and thence a reform of party statutes which allowed, for the first time, policy differences to be expressed through organised currents. A more or less open challenge to the leadership from Pasqua and Séguin followed at the 1990 Le Bourget congress.

The Maastricht treaty offered a further occasion for dissent: Chirac's

decision to support a Yes vote at the 1992 referendum was personal and he made no attempt to bring his party behind it. Two years later, many of the RPR's elected officials, including 126 deputies or senators, withheld their support for their party leader's presidential candidacy, preferring Balladur. It was only the support of Alain Juppé, Chirac's second-in-command in the RPR, that brought the bulk of the party's cadres behind his candidacy, and probably only Chirac's backers in the UDF such as Alain Madelin or Hervé de Charette that gave Chirac his crucial 700,000-vote first-ballot lead against Balladur.

The pre-1988 symbiosis between Chirac and his party had therefore been badly damaged by 1995. Nor did Chirac's presidential victory put the clock back; quite the contrary. Heads of state and government tend in any case to try and reduce their dependence on party and to appeal to a wider electorate. This tendency is reinforced in France, where one of the founding myths of the Fifth Republic is of the president 'above parties' (Bell, 2000: 7). It was further accentuated by the division between *chiraquiens* and *balladuriens* which continued, thanks in part to Chirac's own miscalculations, to poison the RPR well after May 1995 (Otteneimer, 1996: 137–8). But if 1995 had left durable traces, the split between Chirac and the RPR was consummated by the trauma of the right's defeat at the 1997 parliamentary elections, which the President himself had provoked by an ill-judged snap dissolution of the National Assembly (Knapp, 1999). The 1997 defeat almost lost Chirac control of his party: the loyal Juppé, who had combined the posts of Prime Minister and RPR President since 1995, was removed from the former post by the voters and from the latter by an unholy alliance of Sarkozy and Séguin, which left Séguin as effective party leader.

Chirac was never, it is true, without some supporters in the RPR. One of them, Jean-Louis Debré, was elected to the key post of parliamentary group president in September 1997; and a message from Chirac received a twelve-minute standing ovation at the February 1998 party congress, much to Séguin's embarrassment (Hecht and Mandonnet, 1998: 40–9). And the RPR still differed from the UDF in having a more or less nationwide organisation. But as an instrument for the reconquest of power, the RPR was infinitely less reliable for Chirac than it had been a decade earlier. It was of uncertain loyalty; it was divided; it was unpopular, with negative poll ratings outnumbering positive ones by roughly 2:1, thanks in part to an association of the RPR with corruption for which Chirac's own performance as mayor of Paris before 1995 had been very largely responsible;<sup>2</sup> it was organisationally weakened (membership fell from over 142,000 in the late 1980s to under 100,000 by 1999, and activism had much diminished in intensity).

In short, the RPR had converged, though only partially, onto the ramshackle UDF model. Chirac could do little to reinforce it; on the

contrary, he was obliged to undermine Séguin even if it meant weakening the RPR – a task completed by April 1999, when a series of provocations led the ever-susceptible Séguin to resign his party posts (Séguin's successor, Michèle Alliot-Marie, elected party president in December 1999, was not Chirac's first choice, but nor was she an open threat). With the RPR an inadequate base for the reconquest of power, the only alternative was to draw *chiraquiens* from both the RPR and the non-Gaullist moderate right into a cross-party network. That network would become the UMP.

### The changed dynamics of presidential competition

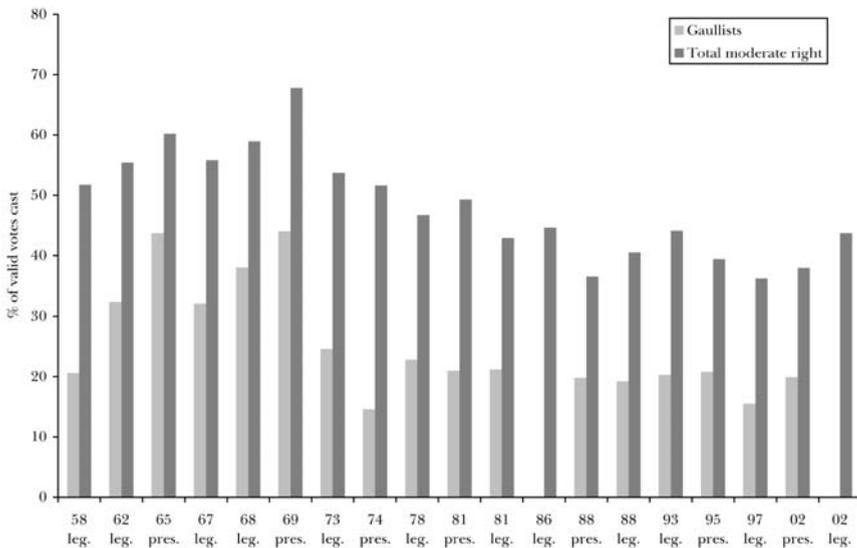
The French voter has been kind to presidents who have suffered reverses in parliamentary elections. François Mitterrand's standing with the public recovered briskly when he appointed right-wing governments of cohabitation after the elections of 1986 and 1993. Chirac, too, was quickly forgiven. Having plumbed the depths of unpopularity, in tandem with his prime minister Juppé, throughout the year 1996, he was already enjoying a modest rehabilitation by December 1997, just six months after the election defeat. A year later, assisted no doubt by his skilful use of the role of genial host at the 1998 World Cup, which France won, his ratings had returned, more or less, to a positive balance. The French found him warm, competent, tolerant and energetic, even if neither sincere nor modest (Witkowski, 2001). Though not enough to guarantee Chirac a second term, the recovery did restore the position as a credible contender which he had temporarily lost with the fiasco of the 1997 dissolution.

What transformed Chirac's limited recovery into a dominant position on the right was the break-up of the UDF federation, as recounted in Chapter 7 of this volume. Lacking strong presidential rivals from this quarter, Chirac had established himself by 2000 as the only right-wing candidate capable of a presidential victory; not since 1965 had the right been so dominated by a single presidential candidate (see Table 8.1). Moreover, after April 2001, when Parliament voted to hold the presidential election first and the legislative elections second (ironically, against the President's opposition), it was clear that the former would condition the latter, and thus that a right-wing presidential victory, which could only be a Chirac victory, would materially assist a right-wing parliamentary win. For that reason, Chirac would henceforth find a critical mass of parliamentarians, not just in the RPR but also on the non-Gaullist moderate right, ready to support him from the first ballot. In other words, the newly asymmetrical terms of presidential competition on the right removed a crucial obstacle to a party merger.

### Party convergence and voters

The Maastricht referendum of September 1992 was perhaps the last occasion when a major distinction was discernible between electorates of

FIGURE 8.1 Votes for Gaullists and for all moderate right-wing parties at parliamentary elections (1958–2002)



Sources: Calculated from Lancelot, 1998 (for 1958–97), and *Le Monde* (for 2002)

Note: figures for Gaullists are not available for 1986, an election held in proportional representation at which RPR and UDF ran joint lists for most seats, and for 2002, when RPR candidates ran under the UMP label (UMP 34.2 per cent, UDF 4.2 per cent, other right 4.45 per cent)

the Gaullist and the non-Gaullist moderate right: RPR supporters voted by 2:1 against the treaty, while UDF supporters backed it by 3:2 (Duhamel and Grunberg, 1992). By the decade's end, though differences between supporters of the two parties had not disappeared altogether, they were slight (Ysmal, 2000: 152–3). And, in any case, most moderate right-wing voters had long since decided that their differences did not justify continued party division: as early as 1989, a SOFRES poll indicated that 71 per cent of both RPR and UDF sympathisers wanted 'a single right-wing party with several currents' (Bourlanges, 1990: 49). They readily saw the moderate right's divisions as having contributed to the long-term drop in its share of the vote after the mid-1970s (Figure 8.1), and especially to the defeats of 1981 and 1988; the third defeat, in 1997, would give the Socialists a further five years in government, bringing their total to 15 of the 21 years after 1981, compared with the right's 6 and further exasperating the right-wing electorate.

By the turn of the century, existing party labels actually put off many

right-wing voters. The monthly SOFRES polls showed negative opinions of the RPR and the UDF outnumbering positive ones by about 3 to 2 between 2000 and 2002. And moderate right-wing voters were increasingly attracted to 'various right' candidates with no specific party label. Thus in the 970 cantons where they ran in the cantonal elections of 1994 and 2001, 'various right' candidates led right-wing party candidates by 27.6 per cent against 21.5 per cent in 1994, and by 32.3 per cent against 15.3 per cent in 2001 (Chiche and Reynié, 2002). Again, in cantonal by-elections during 2001, the official right-wing parties actually lost 15 out of the 56 seats at stake to 'various right' candidates. In other words, even in a year when the right as a whole was regaining public confidence, the *parties* of the right remained unpopular. Similarly, the right's provincial gains at the municipal elections of 2001, in Roanne, Toulon, Chartres or Tarbes, Rouen, La Seyne, Drancy or Blois, were primarily achieved by candidates who stressed their closeness to *le terrain*, not their party label.

Thus few of the reasons that had kept the RPR and the non-Gaullist moderate right apart still applied at the turn of the century. The ideological and policy gap had been bridged; the organisational contrast had narrowed; presidential competition was no longer a real obstacle; and the voters were receptive. But the existing parties did not melt away. The president's party was the fruit of a project undertaken outside of, even against, the leaders of all three established parties of the moderate right.

### The genesis of the president's party

The projects of a united right-wing party and that of a *chiraquien* grouping were not necessarily identical. A *chiraquien* grouping, Bernard Pons's Association des Amis de Jacques Chirac, had existed since 1995. Its role was to create a network of support for Chirac's eventual re-election outside party structures, comparable to the association which had initially managed de Gaulle's 1965 campaign. With the loss of a solid party base for President Chirac after the defeat of 1997, Pons's association, and its anniversary banquets in celebration of Chirac's election, acquired renewed importance as a *chiraquien* rallying-point. But Pons, a Gaullist of the older generation and former RPR secretary-general, never saw the association as a vehicle for dissolving the RPR into a larger right-wing grouping. On the other hand, a project of a united right-wing confederation, called the Alliance, launched in May 1998 by Séguin and Léotard, was still-born because it was obviously non- or even anti-*chiraquien*. The President had not been consulted about it, and so opposed it, albeit discreetly; the loyal Debré, at the head of the RPR deputies, would have nothing to do with it; the Alliance had died by the year's end.

The first sketch of a united right-wing party that was also *chiraquien* was set out in a note to Chirac from a young UDF Deputy, Renaud Dutreil, in May 1999. Dutreil had supported the idea of a merged party even before winning election to his Aisne constituency in 1994 (Dutreil, 1993). His memorandum recommended that the Association des Amis de Jacques Chirac should provide a meeting-point for those who 'within each party of the right, sought to head off inopportune adventures' (in other words, to sabotage competing presidential candidacies). Further, Dutreil argued that an essential second stage would be 'the concentration of opposition Deputies into a single movement, depriving the other parties of financial means and of a parliamentary platform'.<sup>3</sup> The novelty was in this focus on the material organisation of a new party. Half of all state funding for French parties is allocated on the basis of the number of their parliamentarians, which in turn depends on the ticket on which they choose to run for election. Within the National Assembly, debating time and committee places are allocated on the basis of parliamentary groups. Dutreil argued that if only a critical mass of parliamentary candidates could be persuaded to accept a single right-wing ticket and join a single group, then these institutional arrangements would ensure the discipline needed to create a new party; and, crucially, that the new party would not be a vague federation of existing ones, but would entail their dissolution or asphyxiation.

Chirac took over a year to react, approvingly but privately, to the Dutreil memo. In the meantime, his own interventions with the right-wing parties were hopelessly counter-productive. Chirac had sought a single right-wing list for the 1999 European elections; instead there were three, and they attracted just 35 per cent of the vote between them. He promoted the candidacy of Jean-Pierre Delevoye for the presidency of the RPR, and was rewarded, in December 1999, with the election of Michèle Alliot-Marie. Thereafter Chirac's interventions in the structures of the right passed through the discreet intermediary of Jérôme Monod, who joined the Elysée staff in June 2000.

Monod, who had known Chirac since 1963 and had run his *cabinet* at Matignon from 1975 to 1976 and the RPR (as secretary-general) from 1976 to 1978, had then spent nearly a quarter-century at the head of Lyonnaise des Eaux-Dumez. Monod's mission was to renew contacts with the right-wing elite at all levels. He could do this more readily than Chirac himself, or than other Elysée advisers, because he was both familiar with the parties of the right (from his past, and also possibly because Lyonnaise-Dumez had provided extensive legal and illegal funding to parties) and remote from recent party conflicts. With rank-and-file parliamentarians of all three parties of the moderate right, Monod embarked on a gruelling round of lunches aimed at clinching first-ballot support for Chirac in 2002. At a higher level, he brought together a cross-party

group of four former ministers to consider themes for the future Chirac campaign: they were Dominique Perben (RPR) deputy-mayor of Chalon-sur-Saône; the European Commissioner Michel Barnier (RPR); Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the DL president of the Poitou-Charentes regional council, and Jacques Barrot, the UDF deputy and president of the Haute-Loire *département* council. Other former ministers, such as Antoine Rufenacht, mayor of Le Havre, and François Fillon, the *séguiniste* president of the Pays de la Loire regional council, joined the group from the summer of 2001.

At the same time Monod established relations with Dutreil, who, with two other young deputies, Dominique Bussereau (UDF) and Hervé Gaymard (RPR), produced an initial text for a joint 'Alternance 2002' grouping in January 2001. Finally, Monod renewed his links with Juppé (whom he had brought into the Matignon staff in 1976). The mayor of Bordeaux and former premier, only half-rehabilitated within the RPR after the debacle of 1997 but still enjoying the President's support, became a strong supporter of Alternance 2002 as well as a frequent presidential visitor. These preliminaries over, Alternance 2002 was relaunched as the Union en Mouvement (with Dutreil as president, Bussereau as treasurer, and Gaymard as secretary-general) on 4 April 2001, at the Paris Mutualité before 1,500 national and local elected officials of the right. The timing was auspicious: the right had just done unexpectedly well at the municipal elections. And the UEM appeared to respond to four requirements: the wishes of right-wing voters, the growing impatience of many right-wing deputies with existing party structures, the need for a loose structure to accommodate *chiraquiens* from the UDF and DL, and the need for a base for Juppé's return to national politics (Cathala and Prédall, 2002: 167–8).

At the same time, the clear threat that the UEM posed to the three parties of the moderate right, the RPR, the UDF and DL, as well as its early identification as a Juppé vehicle, provoked resistance not only from outside the Gaullist ranks – Madelin was dismissive, Bayrou solidly opposed – but from most of the RPR leadership too. Balladur, Séguin and the RPR president of the Senate, Christian Poncelet, stayed away from the Mutualité. Debré and Sarkozy turned up, but chiefly in order to voice their misgivings. As late as December 2001, at the RPR's silver jubilee celebrations, not just Séguin but most of the RPR leadership, including Michèle Alliot-Marie and even habitual Chirac loyalists like Debré, Pons or François Baroin, queued up to declaim variations on the theme that 'the RPR does not want to die'.<sup>4</sup>

The RPR jubilee, however, was the last open act of Gaullist resistance; in the new year, Chirac's continued ascendancy in the polls, and the approach of the presidential elections, secured silence from Alliot-Marie and her colleagues. Sarkozy became a cautious supporter of the project; Douste-Blazy, meanwhile, was instrumental in securing the goodwill of

many UDF parliamentarians. Madelin never attempted to impose a line on his DL deputies, almost all of whom rallied to the UEM project. Thus by the time of the second launch of the UEM, at Toulouse in February 2002, the only clear voice of opposition came from François Bayrou. Delegates were invited to support the right-wing candidate of their choice at the first round, so long as they rallied to Chirac for the run-off – entailing a clear (and realistic) assumption that the first round would eliminate Bayrou and Madelin.

If pressing for the creation of a fully-fledged party before the presidential elections would have been premature, the results of the first ballot of the presidential election might have been calculated to hasten the birth of the president's party. That it was Le Pen, not Jospin, who reached the run-off practically ensured Chirac's re-election. At the same time Le Pen's high first-round score (16.9 per cent) indicated both to the press and to Chirac's campaign team that at the parliamentary elections, the far right could be the arbiter of the second-round contest in over 300 constituencies, with the clear potential to lose the election for the right through three-cornered second-round races.<sup>5</sup> That calculation, however false – it exaggerated the far right's second-ballot presence by a factor of ten – alarmed most sitting right-wing deputies sufficiently for them to seek protection under the UEM's broad cross-party umbrella. The price of that protection was spelled out when the UEM was relaunched, again, as the UMP on 23 April 2002, two days after the first ballot – a single UMP candidate, a single National Assembly group and participation in the eventual founding congress.

For Gaullist candidates, the UMP ticket entailed a further constraint: for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, they fought a parliamentary election behind a non-Gaullist campaign leader, Raffarin, whom Chirac had made premier on 6 May and who figured prominently on all UMP campaign material. But discipline brought its rewards: the June elections gave the UMP over one-third of the first-ballot votes and 369 out of 577 Deputies, compared to just 4.2 per cent and 22 seats for the rump of Bayrou's UDF, the only organised part of the right to stay out of the new grouping. The first stage in the construction of the president's party had succeeded beyond all expectations.

## Conclusion: prospects for the presidential party

Juppé's ambition, to make the UMP 'a modern party, expressing different currents of thought, open to society', like the CDU-CSU, or the PPE, or Britain's Conservatives, or even France's Socialists in their heyday, benefited from an exceptionally favourable context in June 2002. The UMP's assets in the aftermath of the June 2002 parliamentary election

victory were fivefold. First, it possessed a merged party leadership: a single parliamentary group chaired by Jacques Barrot of the UDF; a 50-member Founders' Council dating from the UEM period, which had elected a president (Juppé), a vice-president (Jean-Claude Gaudin, the DL mayor of Marseilles), a secretary-general (Douste-Blazy); and a carefully balanced executive committee of 31 members, of whom 15 came from the RPR, 9 from the UDF, and 7 from DL (15 of the 31 were also members of the government).

Second, the June elections had won the UMP an undeniable legitimacy as France's majority party; it was only the third party in the history of the Fifth Republic to command an overall National Assembly majority. Third, it responded to voter demand; the UMP on its own won as good a share of the vote in 2002 as the RPR and UDF had won together in 1997. The UMP electorate, though somewhat skewed to conservative categories (with 46 per cent of the farmers' vote and 50 per cent of the over-70-year-olds) was not outrageously so: its support among blue-collar workers was 26 per cent, among white-collar staff 30 per cent (higher than the Socialists), among the under-25-year-olds 23 per cent. And it attracted 16 per cent of Le Pen's voters from 21 April, as well as 26 per cent of Jean-Pierre Chevènement's and between 12 and 14 per cent of voters who had supported the Trotskyist candidates Laguiller and Besancenot.<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, the UMP had the President's full backing; there was now no question of Chirac attempting to distance himself from the party he had helped call into being weeks before. Finally, having survived the parliamentary campaign period on a shoestring, with activists and money borrowed from component parties, the UMP could now look forward to an annual income from the state of nearly EURO 30 m. or some 45 per cent of all public funding distributed to parties, over the 2002-7 legislature, plus inherited assets from the RPR and PR. To the extent that finance was the key to success, as Dutreil had argued, this was a political as well as a merely material advantage.

At the same time, four elements helped to cast doubt on the UMP's prospects. First, despite the June victory, the moderate right's electoral support was merely at the upper end of its post-1978 trend (Figure 8.1). It was less than half a percentage point above the level at which the right had crashed to defeat in the 1981 parliamentary elections, and fully ten points lower than the worst pre-1974 result. Second, despite the merged leadership, and the opening of the UMP to new membership applications, the UMP was not yet a party. Its founding congress – a fourth launch – was scheduled for October 2002. Moreover, the fusion of two quite dissimilar organisations presented real difficulties, especially at local level. If the RPR's superior activist base were given its full weight in the new party, it ran the risk of being perceived as an 'RPR mark 2',

with attendant consequences for its image. However, to downplay the asset represented by the Gaullists' nationwide organisation would demobilise their activists and turn the UMP into something close to a cadre party, reinforcing the original sin of the French right. A third danger was that the old party divisions would fossilise within the UMP, turning it into a holding company rather than a real party and preventing the emergence of currents based more on real policy issues rather than on superseded party loyalties. The careful dosage of leaders from different parties in the UMP's provisional organisation indicated the continuing force of such party loyalties among the UMP's elites in this initial period. Closely linked to this issue of party 'currents' was that of party cultures: the culture of intra-party policy debate, essential to Juppé's ideal for the UMP's development, was largely alien to the Gaullists who still provided the UMP's big battalions.

Finally, the conditions of presidential competition, which had favoured the UMP's emergence, changed on the night of Chirac's election because presidential competition henceforth focuses on the succession to Chirac, who will be 74 in April 2007. The UMP contains three *présidentiables*, at least on their own estimation: Raffarin, Juppé and Sarkozy; Bayrou is a rival on the outside. One challenge for the new party, therefore, will be to canalise and control these rivalries, possibly establishing an intra-party primary process. That, however, would run directly against the Gaullist myth of the president, a man above parties who presents himself directly to the nation.

The UMP's possible impact on the party system can be considered at three levels. In the first place, it is unlikely to make a radical difference to the choices available to right-wing voters. The broad pattern established in the 1980s and 1990s of untidy right-wing unity, with the RPR and the UDF running joint candidates most, but not all of the time, and facing dissidents here and there, is likely to be perpetuated. The 2004 European elections, for example, could readily see a UMP list competing with a Bayrou list. Second, however, the UMP's success could be expected to reinforce existing tendencies towards bipolarity. The party system of Fifth Republic France has been characterised by a fine balance between the dynamics of fragmentation and bipolarity (Knapp and Wright, 2001: 264–5), and the electoral cycle of 2002 was an excellent illustration of this. Fragmentation was expressed in a presidential first round that saw sixteen candidates competing, extremes of right and left picking up a third of the vote, and the candidate of the far right beating the Socialist to the run-off.

The June parliamentary elections, on the other hand, were fundamentally bipolar with, crucially, each mainstream coalition dominated by a single partner, the Socialists on the left and the UMP on the right. The UMP's success would perpetuate this single-party dominance in each

camp. A final dimension to the UMP's impact depends on its ability to fulfil Juppé's ambition and resolve the difficulties outlined above. A party of the moderate right that is capable of managing the inevitable competition between its *présidentiables*, and of canalising intra-party conflict into useful policy debate, would gain considerably in credibility by comparison with the right's record in the recent past. It could even contribute to reducing the widespread disenchantment with politics among French voters. Probably the UMP's leaders would settle for a less grandiose goal, but one that has become the unattainable Holy Grail of French party politics since 1981: the re-election of an incumbent governing coalition.

## Notes

- 1 RPR activists quoted in *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 2 December 1986.
- 2 The figures were worse than those for the Communists: the monthly SOFRES poll in the *Figaro-Magazine* (7 November 1998) showed that a mere 27 per cent of respondents had a 'good opinion' of the UDF and 31 per cent for the RPR, compared with 37 per cent for the PCF. Poor opinions ran at 60 per cent (UDF), 58 per cent (RPR), against 50 per cent (PCF).
- 3 *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 20 February 2002.
- 4 *Le Monde*, 30 November and 15 December 2001.
- 5 *Le Monde*, 24 April 2002.
- 6 IPSOS-France2 survey, [www.ipsos.fr/CanalIpsos/poll/7571.asp](http://www.ipsos.fr/CanalIpsos/poll/7571.asp).