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For a History of Militant Violence in France. The case of Gaullist Order Services

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Abstract

This article examines the History of Order Services in France after the Second World War, focusing on the Gaullist Order Service. It shows that the RPF is set up at the end of 1947-beginning of 1948, in order to respond to the aggressiveness of the Communist Party, a very professional order service. Its model is paramilitary in terms of its number of staff, a residual presence of weapons, the existence of a clandestine parallel organisation, the over-representation of the military, including active soldiers, and an authoritarian structure and operation. From the early 1960s onwards, there was a paradigm shift in the relationship to militant violence. The Gaullist Order Service adopts a model similar to Police forces', making it more peaceful. There is demilitarization in terms of manpower, circulation of weapons and clandestinity, even if the operation remains verticalized and political surveillance practices persist here and there. The change in context is decisive: the police services have moved from the oppositional framework of the Cold War to a less tense configuration, that of the ruling party's police services, in a calmer international environment. From the end of 1959, the quick decline in militant violence (with the exception of the Algerian Affair) allow to the SAC to confine itself into a dissuasive stance. It did not prevent a critical discourse from growing around the SAC, associating its activities with the ones of a "parapolice", thus accusing the Gaullist power of using big guns in its shadow.

Key words : Gaullism, Gaullism order services, militant violence, political violence, 20's century, France

Introduction

For some years now, political history has been in the throes of upheaval in France. Still very unpopular, this aspect of history has nevertheless managed to arouse the interest of certain researchers who are innovating their approaches. For instance, since 2015, historian François Audigier has succeeded in setting a new trend by focusing on the history of militant violence through order services. These particular militant structures offer the opportunity to study militant violence in a new light - the security services being more exposed to accidentogenics situations -, the political culture of the party to which they are attached to, and the evolution of the relationship to violence of these political parties - the progressive abandonment of their security services for the majority of them in favour of private structures wich demonstrates a radical change in their approach to security and media during meetings. The study of order services can sometimes be very difficult, as political parties do not have the same relationship with the archives according to their own political culture. In this article, we will take a closer look at this through the example of the Gaullist security services (SO) known as the Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF) and the Service d'Action Civique (SAC), that we know better.

Difficulty of access to historical sources

Anyone interested in the Gaullist service from 1947 to 1981 is immediately confronted with the lack of available and accessible sources on the subject. The problem seems paradoxically more awkward for the SAC (although it is a more recent issue) than for the SO of the RPF, to which the Gathering's archives contribute a lot. The archives of the Service d'Action Civique have disappeared. Those relating to the period of the 1960s were taken away by General Secretary René Tiné in 1969 when he was sidelined by the new management. When the person in charge died in 1971, part of these archives were allegedly recovered for personal use by a former member of the SAC close to the deceased, the scammer Charly Lascorz. A Gaullist leader in the SAC in the 1960s, he was eventually expelled from the SAC for his illegal activities.

Black legend has it that he stole very sensitive archives and then hid them in Swiss banks to blackmail Gaullist personalities... On one hand, the SAC is not the only Gaullist organisation which « lost » its archives, the historians of militant Gaullism of the Fifth Republic are confronted with the same problem with the UNR, the UD.Vème, the UDR, the RPR and the CDR (Comités de Défense de la République). On the other hand, the archives in question were probably limited to a file, a few circulars and a letter relating to the practical functioning of the organisation. Because it does not house intellectuals who focus on doctrinal reflection or elected representatives involved in parliamentary debates and government action, but rather the often frustrated « big guns » involved in action in the field, and because it operates on primarily oral communication for reasons of efficiency and discretion, an order service generates few written documents. The archives of the SO of the RPF, whose papers for the period 1949-1952 have been kept, after all, represent only three boxes out of the hundreds that make up the general archives of the Rassemblement at the Charles de Gaulle Foundation... The Jacques Foccart Fund, kept at the National Archives, contains several files concerning the SAC, but the 2008 law on archives and the time limits for consulting them limit the access to them. Several requests for exemption have been refused and the boxes concerning the period 1958-1962 are officially inaccessible because of asbestos removal... It is the same in the public funds paid by the Presidency of the Republic for the period when General de Gaulle was Head of State and in the private funds (Louis Terrenoire, Edgar Pisani or René Capitant) of the National Archives. There are therefore very few primary sources on the SAC until 1968, the situation improving from 1969 onwards, probably because the organisation is more active, more visible (it publishes a monthly eponymous bulletin) and therefore leaves more traces.

Written testimonies

Published testimonies of former activists or sympathisers are rare and most often consist of texts that are often poor in content (descriptive and chronologically confused memoirs) or dubious: suspicious pleadings of former barbouzes seeking rehabilitation, the "firebrands" of purified members exaggerating the excesses of their former organisation. For example, the work of Patrice Chairoff (alias Dominique Calzi), *B for Barbouzes*, which was a great success when it came out in 1975, cannot be used without taking great care. Written in prison by a former nationalist militant who was expelled from the police force (he was then serving a sentence for fraud), the book is a collection of errors, gossip, fantasies and lies. The left of the 1960s and the Giscardian right played for a time the relays of this anti-Gaullist indictment which is however not without interest for the study of the black legend of the service of Gaullist order to which it has greatly contributed. The unpublished testimonies are very difficult to obtain and often prove disappointing. Even if the subject is still within the chronological limits of the history of the present time, many former actors have disappeared starting with the national leaders (colonel Rémy, Dominique Ponchardier, colonel Carré, Pierre Billotte, Paul Comiti, Jacques Le Meignen, René Tiné...). Charles Pasqua granted us an interview but he keeps silent on sensitive points and is satisfied in the confirmation of the already known main lines of the organization. Other former Gaullists such as André Fanton and Jacques Godfrain have given us their memories, but their words remain limited to the SAC of the '60s. In the case of the Gaullist service in the 1960s, researchers most often tried refusals, even after guaranteeing the anonymity of witnesses. The weight of memory, the black legend of the SAC as well, and its very real excesses put former activists on the defensive, even if they were not concerned by these excesses. Not wishing to be publicly associated with an organisation whose memory is tainted by political-criminal affairs, most of them remain silent, especially when they still have professional or political responsibilities. For the same reason, or out of disinterest for a group considered subordinate, the organization is never mentioned in their testimonies and memoirs by the great figures of Gaullism such as Georges Pompidou, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Michel Debré, Pierre Messmer, Jean Charbonnel, René Capitant, Yves Guéna, Edmond Michelet, Robert Poujade, Louis Vallon, etc.

Police, judicial and media sources

The police and judicial sources are equally disappointing. The 2008 law, which prohibits access to police sources without any special exemption, makes it impossible to access most police investigations and investigation files relating to cases involving the Gaullist service in the 1960s and 1970s. According to some researchers, this legislative constraint leaves few regrets because, as established by the parliamentary commission of inquiry, the Renseignements généraux during the Gallic years did not investigate the Gaullist service. However, this position is questionable because, during our research, we found on the contrary, that the government keeps a fairly close watch on its own militants.

Perhaps in order to be able to fight more effectively against its « black sheep » in case of scandal... The SO of the RPF, an opposition party to the regime of the Fourth Republic, on the other hand, has aroused the interest of the police services and the national archives contain several reports of the General Intelligence on the subject. Nothing on the other hand on the side of the Prefecture of Police of Paris for the period 1947-1954, which seems surprising. Perhaps it has more information for the subsequent period, but since we have not obtained authorization to view their funds, we cannot say. The press and the media more generally offer only a limited alternative. The INA (audio and video archives) archives contain little or nothing about the SAC. Newspapers and magazines are certainly interested in the Gaullist service, as shown by the voluminous press file on the SAC at the press service of the IEP - institute of political science - in Paris, 9/10ths of which, however, concern the Auriol affair, but almost always at the expense of the Gaullist organisation. The articles insist in a caricatured way on a recruitment on the margins and on the violent slips supposed to validate a political-moral indictment on these « fascinating » organisations. The very functioning of these militant apparatuses in terms of procedures and protocols, the role of these formations within their political family and the value system that underlies them, are not taken into account. Under the Fifth Republic, it is especially from 1968 onwards that the press became interested in the SAC, even if before then (at the end of the Algerian war) the nationalist press and the *Canard Enchaîné* began to feed the black legend about the *barbouzes* and parallel police forces.

Direct and parallel sources not always so rare

This documentary poverty, which must be questioned since it partly refers to the sensitive nature of the organisation and a culture of secrecy which limit the production of written material, is not without consequences. It obliges the historian to focus on the few available sources (RPF archives for the SO du Rassemblement, report of the parliamentary commission of inquiry on the SAC in the case of the Service d'Action Civique) and to get around the lack of archives by using documents and testimonies of sometimes questionable reliability. Working on the Gaullist service means managing a quantitative and qualitative problem in terms of sources, and giving up the official « beautiful archive », well-organised and generally accessible "beautiful archives".

What sources can be used? Firstly, concerning the SO of the RPF, the main source remains the three boxes of archives of the Gathering devoted to the service of order and freely available for consultation at the Charles de Gaulle Foundation. They essentially contain circulars and correspondence exchanged between headquarters and regional and departmental officials. The majority of the documents relate to the central period 1949-1952 only, which leaves in the shade the 1947-1948 introductory episode, which was the most intense in terms of militant violence. Other information on the security service can be found in RPF archive boxes devoted to the organisation of the Rassemblement, the governing bodies and the departmental groupings (notably those of the Bouches-du-Rhône, Alpes-Maritimes, Rhône, Hérault, Isère, Nord and Seine). Some of the private archives of the Charles de Gaulle Foundation are useful, such as the Alfred Sambon collection (one of the first leaders of the SO in 1947). An internal view is offered by the unique testimony of one of its members, René Serre, a major figure of the famous « flying brigade », who published his memoirs in 1954, *Croisade à coup de poing*. We can also examine the RPF weekly newspaper, *Le Rassemblement*, for the period 1948-1951. The memoirs of many former RPF officials contain information on the place, role and image of the security apparatus within the Rassemblement. The testimonies collected by the Charles de Gaulle Foundation on the RPF from former national and regional leaders were published by the *Nouveau Monde* in 2005 in a very rich collection. The outside view on the SO of the RPF is provided by consulting three major daily newspapers (*Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *L'Humanité*), which over the period 1947-1952 (and especially 1947-1949), 1958, 1967-1973, contain numerous articles on the Gaullist/communist confrontations. Parliamentary debates in the Assembly, particularly during the incidents in Grenoble in September 1948 and then during the legislative campaign of 1950/1951, show the extent to which these blunders were used by the Third Force parties and also by the Communist Party to discredit the Rally. Vincent Auriol's *Journal du septennat* and the investigations of the *Sûreté* (available at the Archives nationales de France), present the point of view of the government and its security services on the SO of the RPF.

Concerning the SAC, the main source remains the report of the commission of inquiry on the activities of the Service d'Action Civique. This committee, whose constitution the Communist group in the Assembly called for after the Auriol massacre, was chaired by the Socialist Alain Hautecoeur and began its hearings in January 1982.

At the end of 46 sittings allowing 99 witnesses to be heard (SAC leaders and activists, former senior officials of the Ministry of the Interior, trade unionists, journalists and politicians), the commission produced a voluminous report accompanied by various documents like minutes of the hearings, notes from the central RG directorate of the Ministry of the Interior and the RG directorate of the Police Prefecture, SAC circulars and newspapers, etc. The report was submitted to the President of the National Assembly on 17 June 1982 and contributed largely to the dissolution of the police force on 3 August 1982. As not all the hearings were included in the published report, in 2018 we were able to access certain unpublished testimonies by consulting the archives of the National Assembly's commission of inquiry in the archives of the National Assembly. Others remain secret for the time being, but their declassification is planned for the 2030s. In addition to the fact that some documents are not accessible because they concern state security or the protection of private life, the report of this commission, which does not include right-wing parliamentarians (to protest against the excessively political orientation of the debates), is marked by a rather blatant bias which makes it difficult to use.

It is therefore necessary to cross-reference this document with other sources. Jacques Foccart evokes the SAC in his *Journal de l'Élysée* during part of his years of service as secretary for African and Malagasy affairs of General de Gaulle then of Georges Pompidou (1965-1974). This journal, published in several volumes, is the fruit of the transcription of the notes recorded each evening for ten years by the presidential adviser. But the order service remains little mentioned in terms of African policy and the monitoring of French internal policy.

The unofficial boss of the SAC is content with laconic remarks on his meetings with the leaders of the security service or with soothing words to put an end to the rumors. In doing so, he feeds them in spite of himself ... The same regrets about the two volumes of his interviews with journalist Philippe Gaillard who, if they have the merit of covering the period 1958-1965 neglected by the *Journal de l'Élysée*, provide little information on the history of Gaullist service. Certain archives relating to Gaullist militant organizations or to Gaullist figures contain scattered elements on the SAC. This is the case of the archives of the National Association for Loyalty to General de Gaulle available for consultation at the National Archives of France or the Michel Debré and Jean-Marcel Jeanneney fonds at the Centre d'Histoire de Science Po. But in most cases (except for the National Archives of France), the documents are few, of unequal value and often relate to the period after May 68. The order service has indeed distributed a small eponymous bulletin in 1960-1961 and searchable at the BDIC of Nanterre but these are a few numbers printed on both sides on a bad paper, and whose irregular publication ends at the end of 1961. It does not resume concretely until 1969 and ends in 1981 - with numbers more and more fragmented in the late 1970s.

If the published testimonies are of limited value (most deal with the period after 1968), some remain usable with caution. This is the case of the work by Roger Abens, *La nuit du pouvoir ou le 24 mai manqué*, which describes the atmosphere prevailing at the headquarters of the SAC, rue de Solférino, in May 68. The unpublished accounts of the SAC are particularly difficult to obtain from former activists and officials. The most precious testimony that François Audigier was able to obtain was that of Patrick Le Meignen, son of Jacques Le Meignen, former head of SO of the RPF in Haute-Savoie, member of the SAC national office in 1967, then secretary general in 1968 -1969 and disappeared in 1987. He was able to consult his father's private archives, containing notably reports on the role of the SAC in the preparation of the presidential campaign of 1965 and the legislative elections of 1967 (security of the Pompidou/Mendès France debate in Grenoble). For our part, the most precious testimony was undoubtedly that of André Fanton. Secretary of State attached to the Ministry of Defense from 1969 to 1972, he also fought within the SAC and spoke with great frankness during our interview. If the Institut Georges Pompidou collected numerous recorded testimonies of former Gaullist figures, these relate very little to the SAC and militant violence and then generally relate to the 68s. On the context of militant violence from the years 1947-1981, we have exhaustively counted three dailies (*Le Monde*, *L'Humanité* and *Le Figaro*), which regularly report slippages during meetings and poster campaigns, especially during periods of electoral campaign (referendum and presidential, legislative and municipal elections). The Gaullist daily, *La Nation*, however never tackles this question.

This archival distress raises the question of the status of the source and the actors in these obscure margins of political history linked to militant violence, spaces dominated by characters who can be considered mediocre in comparison with the personnel that historians are used to come across in the archives of the leading bodies of parties and parliamentary groups.

Should certain sources be rejected on the pretext that they are not “serious” enough to be taken into account? Should we forget certain activists on the grounds that their physical commitment, however intense, is not worthy of recognition? Politics is also lived in the street and the gesture counts there as much as the verb. A too elitist and intellectualist approach would risk excluding from the analysis the « rombiers » (according to the obsolete but speaking expression of Dominique Ponchardier) from the service of order, this « pedestrian » of political history [Audigier, 2018] on which we do not know not much and that we often prefer to ignore. On the state of mind of the people of the SO of the RPF, their relationship to the underground and to activism, the weight of the heritage of the Resistance and the role of the Gaullist networks in the infiltration of the official security services in May 1958, one of the best sources remains a popular period novel written from a good source: *Le Gorille en Révolution* by Dominique Ponchardier. A text that a political historian is not inclined to use and that he does not manipulate elsewhere without a certain reluctance ... Just like the memories of the boxer René Serre, *Croisade à coup de poing*, where the author relates with a complacency which can make uncomfortable the least confrontation with the « separatists » at the time of the Rally of the French People. However, provided that they are placed in their context and questioned by crossing historical and anthropological grids in a « bottom-up » approach, these « vulgar » sources have a lot to tell us about these phenomena at the margins that shed light on major developments. political and socio-cultural. Perhaps more than more traditional archives but which do not capture these realities by an effect of censorship or self-censorship.

Finally, and this is not the least of its merits, any reflection on militant violence and its partisan management by the police, forces us to reconsider in a broader way, the concept of source and actor in political history. It is in these few pages that we have approached the question of the difficulty of access to sources on order services in France from the case that we know best, namely that of the Gaullist order services of second twentieth century.

A politico-cultural approach of order services: the example of François Audigier's latest works

If the researcher manages to access despite the difficulties of accessing sufficient sources on the security services, it will then be possible for him to carry out a historical study, both political AND cultural, of this special organization. The study of a security service is only relevant if it leaves the narrow functional framework of this small particular training, to understand more generally what is at stake through this security device in terms of political culture and reaction to a socio-cultural environment. In the absence of this conceptual widening, the study of the SO risks being limited to the evocation, certainly pleasant but still quite limited, of virile clashes between rough militants. The reflection must therefore be part of a general approach to the phenomenon of political violence which itself sheds light on the methods of political action and the socio-cultural developments in a country for a given period. In this respect, what can we learn from the evolution of the Gaullist service between 1947 and 1968 on the Gaullist current, the French political system and French society? In 2006, during the Rennes colloquium on «the recomposition of the partisan system between 1956 and 1967 », François Audigier had insisted on the demilitarization of this security apparatus during the period considered and suggested that this phenomenon reflected both the particular change in culture politics of Gaullism and the more general evolution of the French political framework and society. This demilitarization reflected in his eyes the pacification of French political life, itself a consequence of profound changes linked to the modernization of the country in the heart of the Thirty Glorious Years. His work *Les Prétoriens du Général* (2018) can be considered as an extension of this theory. He shows that the Gaullist order service changes in twenty years from an assumed paramilitary model (the SO of the RPF) to a more policed and police model (the SAC), and explains the reasons and the challenges of this evolution.

The mutations encountered by order services

In his last book, he first sets out the overall evolution of the security apparatus during the period considered, recalling the highlights and introducing those responsible. It is essential indeed to stop at the moments of crisis of an organization which, because its very nature exposes it to violence, is confronted more than another, with periods of extreme tension which mark it in depth. Regarding the SO of the RPF, the two meetings of Japy constitute founding moments just as the bloody incident of the meeting in Grenoble in September 1948 represents a decisive shift in terms of managing the balance of power with the Communists.

Regarding the SAC, the tear of the Algerian war leaves deep scars while the two contradictory meetings of the legislative elections of 1967 where the “big guns” frame Georges Pompidou during his face-to-face meetings with Pierre Mendès France in Grenoble and François Mitterrand in Nevers are remembered. May 1958 and May 68 represent, as expected, significant episodes in the history of Gaullist service, whose activists intervened in the first case to promote the return to power of the General and then ten years later to protect a very threatened regime. Beyond these large known sequences, the study focuses above all on a maquis of more modest and anonymous actions, which from contradictory meetings heckled in disrupted poster campaigns, sees people from the security service developing a professionalism in militant security which allows them to assert more and more effectively the Gaullist presence. The author insists a lot on this «technicality» of the militant order service which, contrary to popular belief, does not consist in the display of force alone but requires the mastery of particular skills and the respect of a protocol of action. specific. It is also an opportunity for him to present those who will «embody» the security apparatus in the eyes of the general audience (Colonel Rémy, Dominique Ponchardier, Colonel Carré, General Billotte for the SO of the RPF, Pierre Debizet, Paul Comiti, Charles Pasqua for SAC), often colorful charismatic characters, heroes of the Resistance or of free France. In a political current already marked by the cult of the chief and a culture of order, the order service dominated by a very military ethos pushes to the extreme this personification of authority.

Towards a police-like structure

The two other points put forward in François Audigier's study are more structural and offer the opportunity to validate the thesis of the progressive demilitarization of the Gaullist service in connection with a rapidly changing political and socio-cultural context. At the time of the RPF, the security apparatus seemed to be deeply militarized: considerable manpower (10-15,000 men) which made it look like a small private army, authoritarian and vertical supervision, over-representation of soldiers in reserve but also active, circulation of firearms even if the practice is prohibited, offensive operations where the militants in motorized convoys will provoke the adversary in his bastions, presence of an intelligence service which investigates the supposed red infiltration in the army and the police. This paramilitary model is not trivial. If it was formed in reaction to the context of extreme political tension linked to the Cold War and communist aggressiveness, if it is carried by the legacy of the inter-war period and the culture of brutal post-war virility, it promotes slippage and validates the speeches of the Third Force as of the PCF presenting the Rally as a factious and violent party. For the left, this order service became the successor to the Croix de Feu of Colonel de La Rocque. In the 1960s, the security apparatus changed a lot. Gaullism is in power and can now benefit from the protection of the official police services, the communist danger is no longer as great in the face of the appeasement of international relations and the relative electoral decline of the PCF. The new security apparatus, the SAC, therefore mobilizes fewer troops (around 3,000 members) and abandons its militarized references. The weapons are more discreet, the badges replace the pennants and armbands, the ranks fade in favor of a political terminology, the offensive spirit gives way to a simple deterrent presence and even during moments of extreme tension like April 1961 or May 1968 the “big guns” do not tip over into armed violence in the face of the nationalist or leftist adversary. This new posture refers to an overall decrease in political tension from the end of 1958, a long-term development that the terrorist violence of the Algerian war and the sometimes serious incidents of May 68, concealed at the time. Political violence, once accepted by public opinion, even valued by activists, becomes generally repulsive and it is symptomatic that the Gaullist service, previously integrated into the party, came out of it as if it were to symbolically repress this marked structure by excess.

Gaullist order services: between ruptures and continuities of past activist practices

The Gaullist service is marked by both permanence and disruption. Permanence, as in terms of personnel (where the permanence of executives seems strong between the SO of the RPF and the SAC) and techniques of maintaining order where the expertise acquired during the Rassemblement was reused in the 1960s, contributing to the effectiveness of the “big guns” gaullists against their adversaries. This is also the case with infiltration and political intelligence. For thirty years, the Gaullist SO also constitutes a Service de Renseignement, a small internal intelligence service, even if the logics are obviously not the same between the SO of the RPF which spies on police stations and barracks to detect communist elements supposed to prepare for the insurrection, and the SAC whose members or sympathizers evolving in the official services of security and intelligence supervise the political fidelity of these same structures with the mode and play on occasion the parallel police forces.

Continuity also in terms of bad frequentation localized with certain elements of the Middle, which contribute to alter the image of the Gaullist order service and favor the amalgams between “big guns” and goons. Continuity finally and above all in the privileged relationship with de Gaulle. The order service is structured at the beginning around the close protection of the leader of the Rally and then evolves in a proximity as political as emotional with the man of June 18. Defining themselves as the square of the faithful, the people of the security apparatus maintain difficult relations with a party whose Gaullist fervor always seems to them suspect or insufficient. This distrust is coupled with socio-cultural frustration. Coming from often popular backgrounds, the members of the order service claim to have an « instinctive » and passionate Gaullism, in opposition to interested and intellectualized Gaullism which they believe is that of elected officials and party leaders from more favored categories. These representations question the notion of « militant milieu ».

A new way to write order services history

Far from the journalistic approach of the Gaullist order service which dominated for a long time exclusively, by imposing a factual and biased reading which gives pride of place in an eye-catching manner to blows and questionable links with police officers and thugs, François Audigier offers an analysis in political history of this security device. A political and cultural analysis of this object which reinstalls it in its political framework and its socio-cultural environment. He examines, for example, the intimate but often concealed relationship that the Gaullists have long maintained with secrecy and tension, even at times with clandestinity and violence. The origin of this particular political culture undoubtedly dates back to the early days of Gaullism, that of the Resistance and then of the RPF against the Communists and the police of the Third Force. Born during the Second World War, formed as a party during the Cold War, returned to power in favor of the Algerian war, reinforced in 68 in what seemed to some as a context of pre-civil war, Gaullism has knotted with violence in its extreme form of war or more banal of militant tension a singular and constant relationship that the historian questions. It is not insignificant in this respect that the only political current with which it shares, to varying degrees, this same ambiguous relationship to violence is the Communist Party also marked by this dramatic heritage. The movements of extreme left and extreme right do the same during the years 1968, but they are not studied by François Audigier. By taking up Georges Mosse's theses, he recalls that, due to the context of extreme political tension and demonization of the opposing camp that raged from the 1930s to the Cold War years, the use of force was dramatized to the point of trivializing excessive speech and normalize brutality. Officials and activists have come to view violence as a means, if not a legitimate one, of political combat, at least as an inevitable and therefore tolerable mode of action.

By proposing a reading in political history of the Gaullist service, the author comes to wonder about the official but especially unofficial relations that after 1958 certain figures and certain State services maintained with the SAC. Indeed, benefiting from secret funds, sheltering police on secondment, collaborating with Place Beauvau in matters of political surveillance, taking advantage of a certain indulgence on the part of commissioners and magistrates, the SAC poses the question of the existence in a modern democratic country, a militant organization that is partly clandestine and often violent, linked by its political leader (Jacques Foccart) to the very heart of the presidential executive. Confronted with the terrorism of the hardliners of French Algeria, the regime does not make itself look on the means and people engaged in this shadow fight made of eliminations and attacks. Habits having been acquired, certain Gaullist officials remain convinced that it is possible to circumvent laws and official structures to fight or spy more effectively on political adversaries. Especially with the emergence of the figure of the “internal enemy” during the 1960s. In fact, the period saw the functioning of parallel networks and pharmacies such as those of Pierre Lemarchand, Dominique Ponchardier or Roger Barberot. Even if the SAC does not strictly speaking come from this troubled universe on the border between diplomacy, espionage and the police, it maintains discreet connections with this shadowy world which overlaps, but only in part, Foccart networks. The function of the security service does not stop at the protection of Gaullist meetings. With this militant apparatus whose ramifications extend to “Françafrique” and which has penetrated the official security services, the power has a politically secure parallel force, capable of doubling the police in its information work and policing if necessary.

Taking into account dark legends to get away from them

To study the Gaullist service as a political historian is to finally recall the « speech of suspicion » of many men on the left, but also of a part of the right about Gaullism in the 1960s.

This political current, heir to the caesarist and plebiscite tradition, seems suspect by nature according to the Mitterrandian thesis of the « permanent coup ». Supposed to return to power in the vans of the Resurrection plan, Gaullism would have retained the marks of this original defect. Everything in the functioning of the Fifth Gallic Republic as perceived by the left would then return to its fake origins: discretionary presidential power, excessive practice of state secrecy, use of parallel police forces, control of the media and justice to orders. The muscular and sometimes criminal actions of the SAC, like the secret actions of the shadow counselor Foccart, fuel this negative imagination. The slippages of the police do not constitute accidents for the left, they reveal the exact nature of a repressive power that would use its nerves to lock society and intimidate the population. A magnifying mirror, the SAC would constitute the hidden face of Gaullism, of which it would have revealed the share of violence and secrecy. This indictment became radical after May 68. As Jean-Pierre Le Goff notes, intellectuals read certain repressive measures (anti-breakers law) as a « Salazarist drift » of the regime. A leftist press (from *Libération* to *Rouge*) denounces the parallel militias mixing political violence and organized crime and affirms that this combination stems from the very nature of the regime. The latter, an extension of economic interests and supported by a dominant party which colonizes the state apparatus, must to stay in power, protect behind the scenes a troop of shock likely to maintain order in the event of a crisis. Where can we find personnel more qualified for this task than the goons of the underworld? The fight against the FLN then the OAS, the repression of the struggles of May 68, would only have reinforced these « nervis » and « barbouzes » infiltrated in the cogs of security: police, RG, DST, SDECE ...

Brief conclusion: For a history of militant violence and the militant security services of political parties

The long presentation of the last works of François Audigier - concentrated in his last book which we analyzed earlier - made it possible to highlight all the interest that the study of the police services and, more generally, of militant violence, can contribute to political history. If we focused in this article on the case of Gaullist order services in France, we do not forget that it is quite possible - and even called - to do the same with different political parties from various countries. Thus, the study of the movement order services from the far left and the French far right is still sorely lacking, while their German, Italian and American counterparts already seem to arouse more interest among the community researchers. A multiscallary and transpartial approach would also have much to teach us about the cultural and political history of political parties in the late 19th / 20th centuries. After all, if we rely on certain media, militant violence seems to come back in force in many countries and territories: Brazil, United States, France, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, etc. A story about the time of militant violence, in part through that of order services, could therefore help us to better understand the evolutions that our societies have experienced with regard to their relationship to violence (threshold of tolerance towards it, positioning of political parties, repressions, media games, etc.).

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