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Marc Martin. *Medias et journalistes de la Republique.* Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1997. 494 pp. 180 FF (cloth), ISBN 978-2-7381-0490-8.

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In the current English-speaking academic world, "media studies" evokes expectations of a multidisciplinary interpretation of media content. Marc Martin's history of the French media from the Second Empire to the present belongs to an older tradition, although it offers new insights on many familiar issues. Martin, author of several previous books on French media history, concentrates on the relations between newspapers, radio and television, and republican institutions. His broad-ranging survey argues that political liberty and media freedom have been mutually dependent on each other, and that the radical changes in the French media in the past few decades point to a potential crisis in the country's political institutions.

Martin's book, based on his own extensive research on the history of journalism and a thorough reading of recent scholarship, is both broader and narrower than the corresponding volumes of the collaborative *Histoire generale de la presse francaise* (5 vols., Paris, 1969-75), the standard reference in the field since its appearance in the mid-1970s. Martin incorporates the history of the broadcast media into his story and pays special attention to the development of the journalistic profession, a field in which he has done pioneering work. On the other hand, readers looking for detailed information about specific publications or about technological advances in printing are still better served by the older work.

Martin starts by demonstrating that the origins of a mass newspaper press in France date from the last decade of the Second Empire, with Moise Millaud's *Le Petit journal* (1863). While he asserts that the Third Republic's claim to have "liberated" the press ignored the loosening of controls in Napoleon III's last years, he acknowledges the fundamental importance of the republican press law of 29 July 1881. This new law swept away the entire apparatus of printing licenses, taxes on newsprint, caution money, and arbitrary judicial procedures which every regime from the Directory onward had used to intimidate journalists and publishers and limit newspaper circulation. The Republic proclaimed press freedom as one of its fundamental defining characteristics and, as Martin shows, it fostered the development of journalists' professional consciousness by promoting the formation of professional associations and providing subsidized pensions to their members.

In Martin's view, the period from 1881 to 1914 was the golden age of the French press. An increasingly literate population provided a growing market for daily papers, both in the capital and in the provinces. The "big four" popular dailies–*Le Petit journal*, *Le Petit parisien*, *Le Matin*, *Le Journal*–reached a national audience and claimed circulations which put them among the most widely read publications in the world. The press served the republican regime by fostering a sense of participation in national politics, although Martin notes that highly politicized episodes such as the Dreyfus affair taught the entrepreneurs of the mass press the wisdom of posing as neutral sources of information rather than taking the risk of alienating some sectors of the public. The press's concern for marketing meant turning away from "the civic function that the public and the republican regime assigned it" (p. 109).

As in so many areas of French life, the First World War marked the end of a period of dynamism and prosperity. Martin absolves the papers of the charge that they deliberately misled the public about the course of the conflict–at least until the spring of 1917–since readers would not have accepted a critical or defeatist press, but he emphasizes the industry's inability to cope with the economic difficulties resulting from the war. Newspaper circulation stagnated after 1919, production costs soared, journalists' salaries slumped, and the reputation of the press suffered lasting damage from the revelation of the extent of pre-war subsidies from the Tsarist government and other sources.

From the early 1920s onward, there were calls for a fundamental reform of the press which underlined its own loss of legitimacy and the danger its decline posed

for the republican regime with which it was so closely identified. The crisis in the print press preceded the rise of radio, but by the mid-1930s, the new medium–not yet under government control–was rapidly gaining a mass audience and challenging print journalism's traditional monopoly on the transmission of political news. The newspaper industry struck back by lobbying for government-imposed controls on news broadcasting; the National Assembly's passage of such a law in 1937 reflected the continuing bond between print journalism and the Third Republic's political elites. The passage of the 1935 law regulating the profession and guaranteeing special privileges to registered journalists was another sign of this alliance. So was the strength of the *Syndicat des journalistes*, founded in 1918, when members of the profession began to abandon older forms of association for a new one modeled after the trade unions.

The military defeat of 1940 toppled the Third Republic and the press which had been so closely associated with it. Martin's brief account reminds us that the underground Resistance papers were only a small part of the wartime media story. The overwhelming majority of pre-war journalists continued to work for papers authorized by Vichy or Nazi Germany, while the Free French broadcasts on the BBC reached a far larger audience than the clandestine press. However, the war cleared the way for an effort to implement reform ideas first articulated in the 1920s. The Provisional Government's ordinance of 22 June 1944 provided for the expropriation of papers which had continued to publish during the Occupation; their facilities were turned over to journalists representing the Resistance. Other reforms, intended to free the press from the domination of economic interests, broke up the Havas news service monopoly and Hachette's grip on newspaper distribution. In an exercise of "radiophonic Jacobinism" (p. 283), broadcasting was made a state monopoly. This new division of media roles restored republican legitimacy to the media system: rather than competing with each other, broadcasting and print journalism played complementary roles, one as the voice of a democratically defined general will, the other as the representative of a diversified public opinion.

The idealistic 1944 press reforms quickly collided with economic reality: soaring costs and inexperienced personnel soon eliminated most of the new papers, while others were taken over by experienced veterans of the pre-Liberation era (i.e., both Vichy and Third Republic). More disturbingly, newspaper circulation, which hit an all-time high in 1946, began a steady decline. The national dailies were affected first, but by the late 1960s the regional press, whose growth had been virtually uninterrupted from the beginning of the century, was also registering losses. Hampered by union opposition, the French press was slow to adopt new printing technology and introduce computerization. By the 1980s, per capita newspaper sales in France had sunk to a level well below that in other western countries. In an age of global media conglomerates, even the empire of the much-maligned Robert Hersant was too small to be competitive.

Broadcasting was the growth sector of the French media after the war. The Fourth Republic combined a state radio and television monopoly with carefully regulated tolerance of "peripheral" broadcasters such as *Radio Luxembourg* and *Europe 1*, controlled through various indirect arrangements. Charles de Gaulle, whose wartime career had been launched by radio, recognized the potential of television when he returned to power in 1958, and his years in power coincided with the new medium's rise to dominance. As television became an important part of national life, resistance to the Gaullist regime's tight control of its content also grew. Martin sees the broadcasters' strike, a major aspect of the May 1968 protest movement, as the harbinger of the movement which led, via the pirate radio movement of the 1970s, to the breakup of the state broadcasting monopolies in the 1980s. The decision of Mitterand's Socialists to embrace liberalization in 1979 was decisive: Martin underlines the irony of the fact that the initiative in this area came from the heirs of the Jacobin tradition rather than from advocates of the free market. The Socialist-backed radio law of 29 July 1982, enacted on the 101st anniversary of the passage of the 1881 press law, allowed them to renew the symbolic alliance between republican liberty and media freedom.

Although the 1982 law seemed to extend the logic of media freedom to the audiovisual sector, Martin's concluding remarks suggest anxiety about the future of the alliance between republican values and the media. He notes polls showing a marked decline in public trust in the media since the mid-1970s. The strong leftist tilt of the profession may have put it out of touch with a public that is more evenly divided politically. The solidarity of the profession itself, consolidated in the 1880s, is threatened by the emergence of a "super-elite" of celebrities linked more to political and cultural *vedettes* than to their colleagues. In the era of satellite broadcasting, the French media space is increasingly open to messages and economic influences from outside. Given the long symbiosis between media and political structure in France, these challenges affect all of French public life: "The fate of the information system and that of the republican regime remain tightly linked…" (p. 428).

The main outlines of what Martin says about the press are familiar, but his brief account of the history of French broadcasting will be new to most north American readers, and his investigation of the structure of the profession breaks new ground. Although he is critical of some aspects of the republican tradition, particularly in its more puritanical forms, Martin provides a fair-minded account of the many controversies he treats. The defense of free-market capitalism, which made his own history of French advertising (*Trois siecles de publicite en France* [Paris, 1993]) more provocative, is muted here, appearing only in his brief but generally sympathetic portraits of such publishing innovators as Millaud in the 1860s, Jean Prouvost in the 1930s, and Hersant in the 1960s and 1970s. Although he insists that a healthy media system must have a sound economic base, Martin also recognizes the dangers which a purely market-driven press can present for a regime based on idealistic principles underlying French republicanism. He is not interested in post-structuralist analyses of how media texts actually function, such as in Maurice Mouillaud and Jean-Francois Tetu's imaginative *Le Journal quotidien* (Lyon, 1989). Within the limits of what the author has set out to do, however, Martin provides a broad interpretive overview of his subject which will be of use both to specialists and to anyone interested in a key facet of French public life over the past century.

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