THE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS OF FRANCE

The Government and Politics of France

Second Edition

Anne Stevens

Macmillan Education

THE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS OF FRANCE

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Preface

Early in the 1950s my parents tired of summer holidays mostly spent on chilly wind-swept beaches and embarked, with hire car, tents and four young children, on what was, in the lingering climate of post-war austerity, a still unusual adventure – a tour through France. I still recall the vivid realisation, as the ferry approached Calais, that France looked different, and the even sharper shock of discovering that it really did sound different too. That journey took us from Calais to the Spanish border, and back along the Mediterranean coast. When the family turned towards the Channel again my twin sister and I stayed behind, to spend a further few weeks near Nîmes, in the Ardèche and in Marseilles with the French family with whom we had been corresponding.

That summer left its mark on both my twin and me. It was for both of us the start of a continuing interest in and affection for the country and the first of many visits. For me it was a beginning that, twenty years later, led me, through many changes and chances, to the study of contemporary France. My sister came earlier to the subject, as an undergraduate in Philip Williams' lectures when the Fifth Republic was still quite young. She retains her connections with France and French people, nowadays in part through the association that twins the Anglican cathedral of Manchester with the Roman Catholic basilica of Saint Sernin in Toulouse. This book is dedicated to her.

The book is intended as an introduction to the study of French government and politics for students in sixth forms, colleges and universities, and also as a guide for general readers with an interest in French affairs. I hope it enables those interested in and concerned with events in France to understand and analyse them with a clear understanding of their background and context. For this reason the emphasis is on long-term trends and on elements of continuity as well as on change. Nevertheless, the constitutional, governmental and political changes that have occurred since 1992 seemed to justify a second edition and, while much has remained unchanged, I have

taken the opportunity to update and revise extensively. In this second edition I have tried to correct errors, adjust the emphasis where it has not stood the test of time, carry forward the story where appropriate and include some new material, especially in areas which reviewers quite rightly suggested were dealt with too sparingly in the first edition. I have reshaped Chapter 11, extending the discussion of France and Europe, which seems more than ever a crucial aspect of French government and politics, and placed the general conclusion in a separate chapter. I have been pleased to learn that readers found the first edition helpful, and am grateful to those students and their teachers whose comments have assisted the revisions for the second edition.

Teaching and research on aspects of French politics and administration have been at the centre of my working life for the past two decades, and I owe a great deal to the many colleagues, acquaintances and friends who make this area of study so congenial and stimulating. I should like particularly to mention my gratitude to the Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France, to the editors of *Modern and Contemporary France* and to the Maison Française at Oxford for all they do to make the study of contemporary France both pleasant and fruitful. Such merits as this book may have derive quite largely from successive generations of students on the course, 'The Politics of the Nation State: France', which I taught at the University of Sussex, and on 'The Politics and Government of France' and 'Politics in Contemporary Western Europe' at the University of Kent at Canterbury. I am grateful to them and to Nicholas Wrathall who read the first draft. Without Liz Davies, of the University of Sussex Computer Centre, much of the text could not have moved from Brighton to Canterbury with me. Chrissy Emms saw me through my first year in Canterbury and Sheila Holness has looked after me ever since.

I have accumulated many debts over the years I have worked in this field; as I look back I am particularly conscious of those to Dr Howard Machin, Professor John Gaffney, Professor Siân Reynolds and Dr Peter Holmes. Professor Clive Church and Professor Françoise Dreyfus both read the whole manuscript of the first edition and assisted with the second edition, the latter through her comments and the former by carrying additional burdens so that I could undertake the necessary revisions during part of a study term generously provided by the University of Kent at Canterbury. I am also grateful for comments from Dr Robert Elgie which assisted the revision. My

family, Handley, Hilary, Lucy and Mary Stevens all believed in me and in the book, even when progress seemed difficult. So did a patient and supportive editor, Steven Kennedy. Without Vincent Wright there would have been no research, no teaching and no book at all. For the weaknesses and errors it contains I am alone responsible.

December 1995

ANNE STEVENS

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The Regions of France