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FRANK R. BAUMGARTNER
The University of Iowa

Parliament's Capacity To Expand Political Controversy In France

This paper examines the policy role of the parliament in the French Fifth Republic. Under the constitutional strictures within which it operates, the parliament can affect the policy process principally by changing the venue of a debate from the realm of experts to that of politicians, forcing the issue onto the national agenda. In such a case, the parliament may force the government to scale down or abandon its plans, in spite of the government's greater constitutional strengths.

The French parliament generally plays a limited policy-making role in the Fifth Republic. However, on occasion it can play a greater role by generating controversies about governmental actions and by stimulating debates on issues which would otherwise be considered only by specialists. Policy makers know that the outcome of a policy debate is decided in large part by the arena in which it is considered. They use sophisticated rhetorical strategies to force consideration of an issue into the arena of policy making which is most favorable to them. The national legislature plays a central role in these strategies even in France, where its impact on the policy process is otherwise limited.

Generally speaking, politicians become involved in political questions, and civil servants and other experts decide technical ones. The definition of what is "political" and what is "technical" is anything but straightforward, however. In fact, the definition of the issue is the battlefield on which strategic policy makers maneuver. Those on the losing side of a conflict within a specialized community of experts attempt to demonstrate that the issue has broad political implications so that political generalists will become involved, thus changing the balance of power in the policy community (Schattschneider, 1960). These policy makers are called "expanders." "Contractors," on the other hand, dominate the specialized policy arenas and attempt to portray issues as narrow technical measures appropriately left to the "experts" to decide. Expanders focus on easily understood symbols, of which some examples are "liberty," "equality," and "anticommunism." Contractors use the most arcane and incomprehensible vocabulary possible so that

nonspecialists cannot even understand the questions being discussed. Almost all issues involve some political and some technical aspects, and strategic policy makers portray issues in contrasting ways, depending on whether they want to expand or to contract participation. The result of the rhetorical battle between expanders and contractors determines where the issue will be considered and therefore what the outcome will be.

Politicians and other policy makers are adept at manipulating arguments to suit their needs (Kingdon, 1984). One of the first major controversies of the Chirac government in 1986 involved the proposed sale of a state television channel. Socialist opponents of the measure transformed it into a broad question indeed: "The proposal . . . has already generated the widest public protest of any Government measure so far, with many groups here contending that the state-owned stations are an inalienable part of the national cultural heritage" (Bernstein, June 12, 1986). Selling off the national cultural heritage is not a popular position in France, and opponents of the sale will have killed it if they succeed in portraying it that way, whether or not they believe that it actually is related to France's cultural traditions. U.S. politicians are just as adept as their French counterparts at manipulating arguments to their advantage. In order to stop the Defense Department from transporting potentially hazardous nerve gas through his state, one senator was able to persuade his colleagues that the plan actually represented "an unconstitutional usurpation of the Senate's power to ratify treaties." Since his fellow senators were not willing to vote against their own power to ratify treaties, this strategic politician transformed his minority position into the majority one (Riker, 1986, p. 110). Policy makers seeking funding for education in the United States showed their strategic skills when they established a link between the Soviet space program and the U.S. education system.

The fact that Sputnik spurred our primary space effort is from the standpoint of the student of policy initiation an expected outcome, since anybody can see the connection between the Soviet space effort and the United States space effort. The task of leading official thinking to make a connection between the perceived "threat" of imminent Soviet space exploration and inadequate funding of schools and colleges is of a different order of complexity, and suggests that entrepreneurial talent of a very high order was at work (Polsby, 1984, p. 170).

The parliament plays an especially important role in the expansion of national debates in France, since it represents one of the best opportunities for expanders to generate large amounts of news coverage and to force an item onto the general political agenda. In concert with expanders outside of parliament, allies within parliament can use the

legislative debate to create a massive public controversy where none existed before. It is no coincidence that street demonstrations and other publicity-generating techniques are timed to coincide with parliamentary consideration of a bill. The deputies and the senators of the opposition are natural allies of expanders within the specialized policy communities. Parliamentary expanders are often less interested in the substantive content of the bill than in the opportunity to embarrass the government. The interests of these "procedural" expanders in parliament and the "substantive" expanders from within the specialized policy communities coincide in important ways, though they do not overlap completely, as this article will illustrate.

All efforts at the expansion of an issue are not successful, and many bills are passed through parliament with little or no public controversy. On occasion, however, the combination of parliamentary and nonparliamentary tactics can lead to complete policy reversals—quite some power for a supposedly powerless legislature. This article shows how the French parliament can play an important, though a sporadic, policy role even under the tight constitutional strictures of the Fifth Republic.

Description of the Study

This article compares three pieces of legislation considered by the French parliament between December 1982 and July 1984. It is drawn from a larger study which compared 30 cases of policy making in the field of education. Over 100 interviews were conducted with upper civil servants, members of parliament, and interest group representatives as part of the larger study. This article compares only the three cases where extensive debates occurred in parliament. The fact that the national legislature held extensive debates in only 3 of the 30 cases in this larger study says much about the limited policy role of that body. Though the deputies and the senators are often completely absent from the policy process, this article seeks to demonstrate the sporadic, but essential, role which they sometimes play.

Leaders from each of the four parliamentary groups identified members from their party who were especially active in the three bills studied here. This produced a list of 18 Socialists (PS), 2 Communist (PC), 1 Conservative (UDF), and 6 Gaullist (RPR) members. Published reports and transcripts of committee sessions and of floor debates corroborated this selection of specialists. Interviews were conducted with 12 PS, 2 PC, 1 UDF, and 3 RPR members; 17 were deputies and 1 was a senator. Five staff members (two PS, one PC, and two RPR) were also interviewed. While the over-all response rate among members of parlia-

ment was 67% successful interviews were conducted with each of those most centrally involved; for example, respondents included each of the committee *rapporteurs*. In addition to the 23 parliamentary respondents, civil servants and interest group representatives involved in each of the three cases were also interviewed. The civil servant with the most direct responsibility for the bill was interviewed first, then others mentioned as playing an important role in the policy. In all, interviews were conducted with 50 policy makers involved in the three cases studied here (16 for the medical schools reform, 15 for the higher education reform, and 19 for the private school bill). Documentary sources such as the legislative debates, and administrative and interest group reports were also consulted.

The Limited Policy Role of Parliament

The framers of the 1958 constitution deliberately reduced the policy role of the national legislature because they perceived the powerful parliament of the Fourth Republic to be the source of instability. The constitution of the Fifth Republic restricts the areas of policy where the parliament may legislate, which were unlimited in the Fourth Republic, to an enumerated set. The government has control over the parliamentary agenda, the power to accept or to reject amendments, the power to make any vote a motion of confidence, and the power to force a "package vote" on government bills with no amendments accepted. In the budgetary process, parliament has strict time limits on debate, and the government's proposed budget enters automatically into effect if the parliament is unable to reach agreement within the specified time. Deputies are forbidden from offering bills or amendments which would decrease revenues for the state or increase expenses. "Under the Fifth Republic, the French parliament, 'once among the most powerful in the world, became one of the weakest'" (Williams, 1968; see also Wahl, 1959; Andrews, 1962; Chandernagor, 1967; Suleiman, 1973; Masclet, 1982; Safran, 1985; Bréhier, June 13, 1986; Converse and Pierce, 1986).

The degree of control which the government enjoys over the National Assembly can be illustrated by a few simple statistics. Between 1968 and 1983, 80% of the bills which the parliament passed into law were of governmental origin, with the figure reaching 95% in 1981, the year the Socialist party arrived in power (calculated from France, *Assemblée Nationale*, 1984). There are more member bills (*propositions de loi*) introduced in the typical session than government bills (*projets de loi*), but the government bills are almost assured passage while the member bills have less than a 1% chance of success. In 1983, for exam-

ple, there were 650 member bills and 159 government bills, but 115 of the government bills were approved while only 5 member bills made it to the end of the legislative road. Also, since members may not introduce bills or amendments which would increase government expenditures or decrease revenues, their bills tend to be limited in policy importance.

Since the government can accept or reject member amendments, it can insure that its bills are not altered significantly during consideration by the Assembly. Sixty-six of the 115 government bills passed into law in 1983 were subject to no amendments whatsoever. Even when amendments are accepted, they generally come from the government itself or from its allies in the majority. Of the government amendments, 89% were passed, as were 92% of the amendments offered by the committees. Within the committees, the *rapporteur* (and therefore the majority party) dominates. Of 2,600 amendments accepted in committee in 1983, almost 2,300 were from the *rapporteur*. Of the amendments offered by Socialists, 64% passed, but only 14% of Communist-supported amendments. Less than 5% of the amendments offered by the opposition parties were successful (cf. Andrews, 1978, pp. 484, 489).

Another aspect of the dominance of the executive branch over the legislative lies in its control of information. Except for the committee *rapporteur*, few individual legislators in France have the personal expertise or the staff resources to conduct an investigation independent of the party. By U.S. standards, the staff resources of French deputies are miniscule (Campbell and Laporte, 1981; Ranney, 1981). Most deputies interviewed for this study indicated they relied on a single staff aid for their legislative work and on another for their district case work. The minimal staffing levels of the parliament as a whole and of the individual legislators in particular make it easier for the government and the parliamentary majority to control debates, thereby adding to an already impressive set of constitutional advantages of the executive over the legislative branch.

The constitutional reforms of the Fifth Republic and the limited staff resources of the parliament make its policy role smaller than that of the U.S. Congress or the parliament of the Fourth Republic. The reforms have no effect on the parliament's role as a focal point for national debates, however. Indeed, the reduced role of parliament in substantive and detailed policy decisions creates incentives for the deputies and the senators to contribute to the policy process in other ways. Members of parliament are natural expanders of policy debates, and the parliament as a whole plays its greatest role when it generates or amplifies controversy. The members of the governmental majority only rarely play this role. Opposition members seize almost any opportunity to criticize governmental policy, so they are the natural allies of policy

expanders hoping to shift an issue from the specialized to the general political arena.

Parliament and the Expansion of Conflict

Media coverage of an issue increases dramatically whenever parliamentary debate focuses on it. Especially when combined with public demonstrations and other activities outside of parliament, the parliamentary debate can explode an issue onto the front pages of the newspapers and onto the national political agenda. The parliament is one of the few places where credible and respected spokesmen regularly criticize governmental policy and is therefore routinely canvassed by reporters (Sigal, 1973). Because of the privileged access to the media which the parliament enjoys, those on the losing side of a debate within the specialized policy communities can expand the issue and force it onto the national political agenda. This section discusses three bills which illustrate the special role parliament plays in the expansion of debates within the French policy system.

The Medical School Law

In response to rules adopted by the European Community in 1975 (European Community, 1975a, b), the government of Prime Minister Raymond Barre passed a law which would increase the level of training of general practitioners and specialists (law no. 79-565 of July 6, 1979 *relative aux études médicales et pharmaceutiques*). Before this law was applied, however, the Socialist electoral victories of 1981 occurred, and the new government decided to pass a different law. A small group of Socialist legislators interested in health questions established an informal working group shortly after the 1981 elections, and this group worked closely with the government in preparing the new law. Each member of this group was a doctor, a pharmacist, or another type of health professional by training. They met with ministerial officials before the submission of the bill and steered the legislation through parliament with only minimal debate. The leader of this informal group, Louis Lareng, a Socialist deputy and a medical doctor himself, became the *rapporteur* of the bill on medical studies. Law no. 82-1098 *relative aux études médicales et pharmaceutiques* was passed on December 23, 1982. Up through the passage of the bill, participation was entirely restricted to specialists. Officials from the Ministries of Health and National Education, the deans of the medical schools, and the small group of Socialist deputies with expertise in the health area completely dominated the process. The bill was a model of policy making by specialists.

On deputy closely associated with the passage of the law described in an interview how the bill sailed through parliament. "Frankly, it was not a law which led to a great debate at the National Assembly. It incited no passions. The law was very technical and could only interest a few specialists." Another Socialist deputy gave his own explanation for the limited participation which surrounded the bill.

There were about ten deputies who followed this bill. As long as there is no conflict among the Socialist deputies following the bill in the committee, or between the [Socialist] Group and the Government, then there is no problem. The larger group will ratify the decisions of the smaller. When there is conflict, then the question must be brought up at the weekly party caucus [and the party leaders and other nonspecialists will become involved].

Consensus within the community of experts led to the automatic ratification of each decision by the next higher group. This system is similar to that described by Fenno (1973, p. 96) in the U.S. House Appropriations Committee: in the absence of conflict, specialists dominate; where conflict is greater, those on the losing side appeal to outside allies and participation increases. In the case of the medical studies, no single actor had an incentive to expand the debate because of the consensus among those involved in the specialized negotiations. The issue was portrayed as a complex technical question rightly of interest only to medical professionals. Other deputies eschewed participation in the debate, considered themselves unqualified, and saw no reason to question a policy proposal which was the subject of consensus among the specialists.

Shortly after the medical school law was passed, the issue of medical studies reform suddenly appeared on the nation's political agenda. Medical students went on strike and took to the streets in protest against the new law. The issue was transformed from a technical to a highly political question, as the nightly newscasts showed students from the most prestigious Parisian medical schools in their lab coats protesting the law in the streets of the capital (see "De nombreux étudiants. . .," February 17, 1983; "Le mouvement de grève. . .," February 18, 1983; Nau, April 9 and May 23, 1983).

A member of parliament remarked in an interview, "The question was being treated within the community of those interested in medical and health questions, but when the people saw all the *blouses blanches* (lab coats) in the streets, things changed." Parliamentary leaders of the opposition were quick to support the striking medical students and used the forum of parliamentary debate to generate publicity for their cause. The medical students' strike marked one of the first opportunities for the opposition to criticize the government in defense of an identifiable, mobilized, vocal, and highly visible constituency. The fact that they had

not made a major issue of the bill when it was passed in December 1982 and that many considered the Socialist bill to be very similar to their own 1979 law did not stop the opposition from assailing the government in the spring of 1983. Their interests meshed perfectly with those of the medical students. The students saw the generation of controversy as the only way to alter the legislation, and the opposition hoped to capitalize politically on the show of public displeasure with the government. When the medical students took to the streets, therefore, opposition figures in parliament helped them gain publicity by participating in the demonstrations, by making speeches in parliament, and by generating articles in the press.

Medical students had been excluded from the negotiations leading up to the 1982 law because they lacked a representative organization. The government consulted those groups which did exist, "but these groups are very unrepresentative of the medical students," according to the Education Ministry official most closely involved in the negotiations. "One of our big problems was to find a reliable and a representative partner" among the students, a governmental negotiator explained in an interview (see also Lorenzi, March 16, 1983). Without organized representatives, the medical students could not participate in the specialized negotiations leading up to the 1982 law. When the students found out about the law, therefore, they had to shift the debate out of the specialized community of health experts and onto the national political agenda.

The combination of noisy demonstrations in the streets and daily speeches by the national leaders of the opposition created a major national issue on a topic which months before had been voted through parliament with the sustained interest of only a handful of legislators. The students' strategy was successful.

Many will only remember the image of the students in lab coats taking to the streets, neutralizing the toll booths on the freeways, occupying the Ministry of Health, and disturbing everything they could possibly disturb In this sense, the action committees will have fully reached their goal: to focus the attention of the media and to popularize . . . a conflict which is difficult for the larger public to understand (Nau, May 23, 1983).

Even though the government had already passed its law with very little controversy, it now named a special body of mediators which gave in to the students on several key demands. Later, amendments attached to an unrelated bill rescinded provisions of the 1982 law. Specialized actors in parliament and in the civil service complained bitterly in interviews about the intrusion of nonspecialists into the process, but the government had to do something to defuse the political controversy. They preferred to give in to some of the students' demands rather than to allow a national controversy to continue to rage. Despite the constitu-

tional arsenal which the government enjoys over the parliament in France and despite the fact that this bill had already been voted into law, opponents forced the government to back down on aspects of a reform by altering the public perception of the issue.

The Higher Education Law

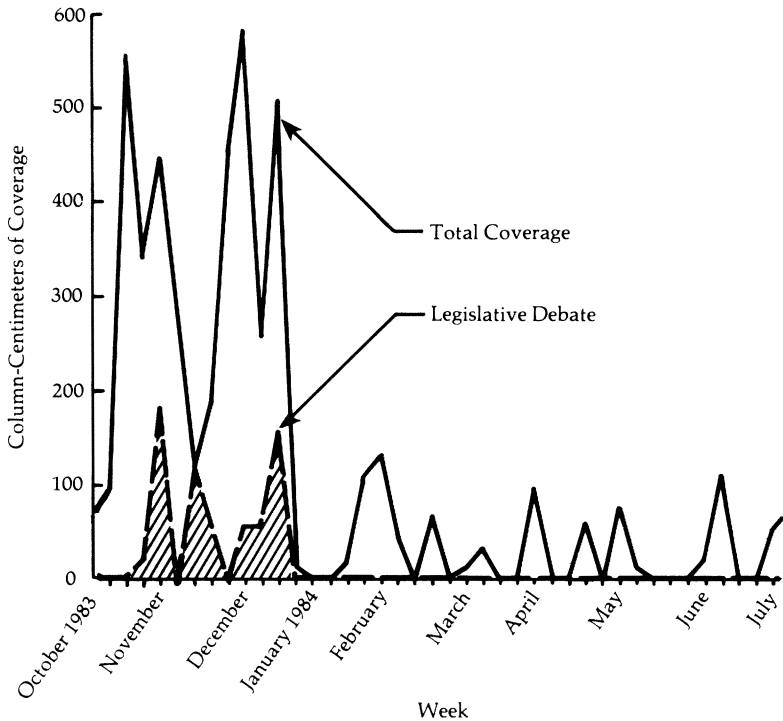
The Savary higher education law (law no. 84-52 of January 26, 1984 *sur l'enseignement supérieur*) dealt with a broad range of issues, including the relations between junior and senior faculty, the development of ties between the universities, the *grandes écoles*, and industry, the question of competition between universities, and the distribution of authority within departments and colleges. Just as each of the deputies and senators involved in the medical school reform during its first consideration had been a health professional, most members taking an active role in the Savary higher education law indicated that their involvement stemmed from professional experience. Socialist and Communist participants were almost all university teaching personnel. Opposition involvement was not limited to specialists at all, however. From the beginning of the debate on higher education, party leaders of the opposition became involved.

The government and the majority tried to keep discussion limited to specific points of the law, but the opposition continually raised more general objections with constant references to such broad symbols as "academic freedom" and "national independence." The debate became a rhetorical battle between opponents of the law, who attempted to demonstrate that the issue was broadly political, and proponents, who wanted to show that it was a technical measure of interest only to specialists. A Socialist deputy closely associated with the bill said in an interview after the debate in parliament,

The specific points of the law were not of very much interest to the opposition. What they were interested in was the conflict with the government. The relative power of the full professors vis-à-vis the junior faculty, the idea of competition between universities, and selection of students were important points of conflict. But for the opposition, they were especially interested in making the debate last as long as possible in order to prolong the discontent with the government after the law on medical studies. So while the debate took place formally on the merits of this one text, in fact, or for the opposition at least, it was a continuation of the other debates, on the nationalizations, medical studies, and more. The debate took place on the level of symbols, and was often very far removed from the text which deals with precise questions.

A member of the cabinet of Education Minister Savary with personal responsibility for much of the bill demonstrated the strategy of the

FIGURE 1
Newspaper Coverage of University Reform
In *Le Monde*, 1983-84



minister when he said in an interview, “What really surprised me in the parliamentary debate was the violence of the political attack by the opposition to what was a very technical bill, or at least one which was presented as such by the minister.”

Expanders within the parliament followed two tactics. First, they spoke at a higher level of generality, avoiding questions of precise levels of enrollment and focusing on “national independence,” “freedom of choice,” and the “quality of French science.” No one but a specialist could become excited about a debate focusing on precise enrollment levels in different areas of study or on the specific composition of university committees, but many nonspecialists could become interested in a debate which focuses on questions of academic freedom, equality, and national independence. Second, they generated publicity through

parliamentary maneuvers and obstruction. They shunned specialized negotiations in committee or with ministerial officials but sought the broadest forums to mount their generalized attack on the government and its bill.

The opposition succeeded almost completely in expanding the debate from the specialized to the general political arena. The National Assembly considered nothing else for over three weeks, as the opposition proposed over 2,000 amendments on substantive and grammatical points during 133 hours of floor debate and used the bill as the focus of a general political attack on the government (see Chabord, 1983). The parliamentary debate provided the forum for a much larger discussion of the issue.

Figure 1 shows weekly coverage levels of the university reform in France's leading newspaper, *Le Monde*, for the period from October 1983 to July 1984. The upper line indicates total levels of coverage, the lower line coverage specifically on the parliamentary debates. Newspaper coverage of the debates in the Assembly accounted for only 638 column-centimeters of coverage (the equivalent of just over two full pages); total coverage of the issue during this period was over 3,900 column-centimeters (over 14 full pages). There was five times as much coverage of the issue during the three months of parliamentary consideration of the bill as there was during the seven following months. While coverage in *Le Monde* is not by itself sufficient to indicate increased public awareness or interest in the topic, differences of this magnitude which coincide with coverage in other printed and electronic media clearly indicate a shift. The parliamentary debate had moved the issue from the specialized to the general political arena.

Key to the success of the parliamentary opposition in generating such a debate were the coordinated activities of other opponents to the bill outside parliament. Students and others showed their objections by protesting, sometimes violently, in the streets of Paris. The Fields Prize-winning mathematician, Laurent Schwartz, published a book entitled *To Save the Universities* in which he said that "the degradation of the universities is leading us towards under-development" (see Bolloch, October 7, 1983). Schwartz became the leader of a group of noted scientists and professors, who came to be known as the *55 sages* (wise men). They went public with their objections to the bill by purchasing full page ads in *Le Monde* ("*Appel au Président. . .*" of November 23, 1983 and "*Les 55 sont déjà mille*" of December 16, 1983). One member of this group, a leading political scientist, used his position as columnist at *Le Monde* to publish his views on page one of that paper (Duverger, November 25, 1983).

The combination of parliamentary and nonparliamentary tactics caused an explosion of the issue onto the front pages of the newspapers and elevated it directly to the highest levels of the state. The adverse publicity generated around the issue made it politically impossible for the government to ignore the appeals of the professors. Presidential advisors, many of whom had been students of the professors at the most prestigious *grandes écoles* now heard their appeals. Naturally, they were more sympathetic than the education specialists within the Socialist party or in the Ministry of Education who had proposed the reform in the first place. Despite the assured passage of the bill through parliament, and indeed over the objections of the Socialist deputies in parliament, the government made several concessions to the disgruntled professors. For the president, the minister, and the government, the prospect of Nobel and Fields Prize-winning intellectuals making public statements and taking out full page ads in *Le Monde* in opposition to their higher education policies was distasteful in the extreme.

Education ministry officials responsible for the bill were instructed to include representatives of the 55 *sages* in their working groups and to make sure that they were aware of planned reforms well before they were made public. Socialist deputies and other supporters of the government's bill were openly resentful of the *Elysée's* more conciliatory attitude (Bréhier, November 24, 1983). After going through the long process of preparing a bill which they expected to see enacted into law with little or no change, they saw the highest leaders of the government give in to the demands of those whom they had just defeated in the specialized negotiations. The Socialist *rapporteur* of the bill complained about the tactics used by the opposition.

Usually, work is done in committee, and when the text gets to the floor, it is all set [*bouclé*]. In this case, however, the opposition was mute during the committee work, and then suddenly became very talkative when the bill got to the floor. They presented over 2,000 amendments, and dragged the debate on for weeks . . . They are ridiculing everybody, making a sham of the parliamentary process.

An Education Ministry official involved in the negotiations before the parliamentary debate said, "The opposition showed a much more conciliatory attitude in private. When the [ministerial] committee received these people in private, many of them had much experience in the area, and were very constructive. When the issue became a public debate, however, they changed to systematic opposition to the reform." Union officials who supported the reform complained in interviews and in public of the enlargement of the policy community to include these newcomers and questioned their claims to represent the views of a majority of professors.

The resentment of union officials, of Education Ministry officials, and of Socialist deputies who had been responsible for the reform is easy to understand. While they had dominated the policy process when it was limited to the specialized community of experts, they no longer enjoyed the same power after the issue had moved onto the general political agenda. The opponents of the bill had shifted the balance of power by forcing the issue from the specialized policy community to the general political arena.

Government negotiators prefer to encounter criticism in private rather than in public. In both the medical studies and the higher education reforms, government negotiators indicated in interviews that they would have been happy to include more people in the specialized negotiations within the ministries and to give in to some of their demands rather than to see their policies ridiculed and attacked on the front pages of the nation's newspapers. In both cases, however, the lack of organized representatives for these groups precluded their systematic participation in the specialized negotiations. When disgruntled policy makers attempted to expand the debates, they found a natural ally in the parliamentary opposition. The parliament functioned as a court of last appeal for expanders in their efforts to generate publicity and to shift the debate from the specialized to the general political arena. Attempting to determine the relative importance of the many tactics used by those opposed to the bill is less important than realizing that the debate in parliament provides a prime opportunity for opponents both inside and outside of the legislative to expand the debate.

The Private School Bill

The private school bill (*Projet de loi no. 574 relatif aux rapports entre l'Etat, les communes, les départements, les régions et les établissements d'enseignement privés* of May 24, 1984) was a major national controversy even before it reached the National Assembly. Nonetheless, parliamentary consideration of the issue provided the opportunity for expanders to generate more and more adverse publicity. In fact, the parliamentary debate became the subject of so much controversy that President Mitterrand withdrew the proposal and called for the resignation of both the Education minister and the premier.

The private school bill was the opposite of policy making by specialists. Only 2 of 17 deputies interviewed with respect to this issue indicated that their involvement was related to their personal or professional background. One deputy explained his participation this way:

I am not even a member of the commission which would have had jurisdiction . . . I became

interested in this debate from the moment when it became a major political problem. I intervened not as a specialist in the matter, but rather as a person with national political responsibilities.

Reform of the relations between the state and the private school system was a long-standing plank in the Socialist party platform. Private schools enroll about 17% of all school children in France, and 95% of all private schools are associated with the Catholic church. Since 1959, private schools have benefitted from considerable subsidies from the state, including the payment of all teachers' salaries. This and other grants allow the private schools to keep their tuition levels extremely low by U.S. standards, thereby appealing to a broader clientele than would otherwise be possible. In one highly selective private school, for example, tuition ranges from \$18 to \$125 per trimester, depending on parents' ability to pay (Bernard, March 4-5, 1984). These large state subsidies have long been opposed by the parties of the left, and by the Socialist party in particular.

The slogan of the Socialist Party in the 1960s had been *fonds publics à l'école publique* (public monies for public schools), and private school supporters were worried about what might happen to their subsidies when the Socialists took power in 1981. The party had considerably amended its policies since the 1960s, however. In fact, state subsidies to the private schools rose from 10 billion francs (\$1.4 billion) in 1980 to 18.5 billion francs (\$2.3 billion) in 1984, 68% increase during a time of Socialist rule (Rollat, July 1-2, 1984; see also France, Ministry of the Civil Service and of Administrative Reforms, 1983, p. 39; Arditti, June 8, 1984). The 1983 Socialist proposal did not call for a reduction in subsidies to church schools, but rather for stricter controls over how the money would be spent. Municipalities which had refused to contribute to the private schools under the previous law would even be forced under the new law to do so. Cardinal Lustigier of Paris referred to the proposal as a historic occasion, since it was the first time that a government of the left recognized the legitimacy of state support for the private schools ("Une 'chance historique'. . ." March 3, 1984; Lhomeau, March 16, 1984).

On the other hand, the bill would increase state control over the private schools in a number of ways. In particular, the management of personnel would be affected with the creation of a new corps of civil service position for the private school teachers. Paradoxically, the private school teachers were in favor of this provision, since it would guarantee them the greater job security enjoyed by French civil servants. Private school leaders, however, feared that over the years they would lose control over hiring, firing, and transferring their teachers. In addition, the

bill would limit the use of public money for the creation of new private schools in areas where a public school did not already exist. Under the previous law, any private school that opened and stayed in operation for a specified period would automatically receive state funds, even if enrollment levels were low. Public schools, on the other hand, had to meet many requirements before they could receive money for additional classes. The bill would have forced the private schools to meet the same requirements for opening new classes as the public schools did.

Governmental negotiations on the private school issue were conducted in the utmost secrecy during the two years following the 1981 elections. At the end of 1983, the government finally was prepared to go ahead with its bill, and it used all its constitutional powers to force the bill through parliament in the shortest time possible. First, it insisted on the creation of a special committee in order to avoid possible delays in the 120-member Cultural Affairs Committee and possible jurisdictional claims by other committees. Second, it cut short the work even of this committee and forced the bill to the floor before one quarter of the articles had been discussed. Finally, after forcing the bill to the floor, it used article 49-3 of the constitution to call for a package vote with no amendments accepted (Lhomeau, March 16, 1984; Bréhier, May 19, 1984).

Even the extraordinary parliamentary tactics used by the government failed to defuse the debate over this bill. During the two years of negotiations with the Catholic and lay forces, Education Minister Savary had drafted a proposal which may or may not have been the basis for an acceptable compromise. Just before it was introduced in parliament, however, a group of Socialist deputies closely associated with the lay forces obtained the addition of several symbolically important amendments. These made the bill unacceptable to the clericals, prompting them to organize massive public demonstrations, to which the *laïques* responded in kind. The debate, which had been highly-charged all along, was elevated to an even higher level during the debate in parliament. Anticlerical activists who were unhappy with the governmental proposals appealed first to allies in the Socialist party who had not been involved in the ministerial negotiations and were able to obtain some satisfaction. This shift created a reaction by the Catholics, however, as they appealed to their own parliamentary allies.

Opposition leaders in parliament were quick to join the private school forces in attacking the government and were relentless in their attacks on the government's bill. Just as with the two other bills, the coordination of parliamentary and nonparliamentary opposition was important in causing the government to withdraw or alter its proposal. Op-

ponents of the bill expanded the issue by focusing on broadly political aspects and by portraying the issue in the most symbolic terms possible. They focused especially on the theme of liberty. A leader of one of the largest *laïque* organizations complained, "From the moment when one begins to use the term 'liberty', it becomes a huge trap. . . . One of the greatest successes of the opposition has been to pose the debate in these terms."

The opposition also attached great symbolic importance to aspects of the bill which would have very little concrete impact. For example, the provision that public monies would not be used to create private nursery schools in areas which did not already have either a public or a private nursery school would have affected only a few areas of the country and only a small number of children, but opposition leaders seized on it for its symbolic potential. A Socialist deputy complained, "Everything in this law has taken on such a symbolic quality that nothing can be done. Take the nursery schools for example. This represents almost nothing in concrete terms, . . . and yet it has become a major issue. . . . It is completely irrational." Another Socialist referred to the same symbolic aspects, noting how the issue had been elevated to such a level that the whole nation appeared to be in trauma.

The question has become purely symbolic. Take for instance the question of the nursery schools. . . . When there gets to be such a huge debate about the possibility of opening up new nursery schools, you know it has very little to do with the actual number of children and families who might be affected, but rather it has a great symbolic importance, since people believe that the other side is "indoctrinating" the children from an early age. . . . In this area, no matter what the facts, or no matter how little practical effect some of these measures may have, there has been an enormous psychological shock. We are now engaged in a collective national psychodrama.

Political leaders found it more difficult to generate mass mobilization around the substantively important aspects of the bill. The creation of a new corps of civil service positions for the private school teachers already on the state payroll and the composition of the local boards which would control the state funds for the private schools were by far the most important practical aspects of the proposal, and they generated great debate within the specialized community of those closely involved in the question. These issues were too complex to explain to the general public, however. "Freedom of choice for parents" is a more effective rallying cry than "No integration of private school teachers into the civil service." Mass mobilization and national controversy require easily understood symbols. Members of the parliamentary opposition understood this and spoke always in the most general terms.

The efforts of the opposition to create a massive public debate on

the private school issue were not always appreciated even by the supporters of the private schools. The alliance between the procedural expanders in the parties of the opposition and the substantive expanders in the private school organizations and in the church was strained from the beginning. While the opposition wanted to raise the level of the debate and to keep it in the headlines, private school leaders preferred some resolution to the conflict, and they realized that no agreements could be reached when the issue was treated in such an ideologically-charged atmosphere. A leader of the main private school parents' federation who was closely involved in negotiations complained that

the opposition is mistaken in wanting to transform this debate by always crying, "liberté!" By making caricatures, they only cause the *laïques* to make caricatures in return. The problem will not be resolved with this kind of debate. In order to resolve it, we will have to come down to a level below that of ideological debate.

While the issue might not be resolved by ideological debate, no resolution of a conflict is preferable to a resolution against one's interests, reasoned the expanders of the private school debate. According to this respondent, parliamentary leaders were more interested in provoking public opposition to the government in order to help them at the next elections than in finding a solution to the problem. Procedural and substantive expanders share some interests, but this alliance can be strained by the different foci of the two groups.

Expanders of the private school issue were extremely successful. No other issue dominated the news in France as the private school issue did. *Le Monde* coverage of the issue totalled almost 26,000 column-centimeters (the equivalent of 106 full pages) from October 1983 to July 1984. These figures can be put into perspective by comparing them with those for the higher education reform described in Figure 1. Coverage of the higher education reform reached a peak of about 600 column-centimeters per week just before the passage of the law in January 1984; the private school issue regularly generated over twice this amount each week during spring of 1984 and reached peaks of over 2,000 column-centimeters per week, or more than one full page of coverage per day. The combination of parliamentary debate, massive demonstrations by both the lay and Catholic forces in the spring of 1984, and the European Elections of June 1984 led to the explosion of the issue and to a political catastrophe of the highest order for the government. President Mitterrand withdrew the bill from parliament despite its assured passage and called for the resignations of both Education Minister Alain Savary and Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy.

Conclusion

The debate in parliament presents the best opportunity for the expansion of an issue in France, and skillful policy makers outside of parliament take advantage of this whenever they believe they will lose a battle if it remains confined to the specialized arena. They cultivate relations with party leaders in parliament so that they can appeal to them when they need to expand a debate. For those who wish to keep an issue restricted to the specialized arenas, the results of a lively parliamentary debate can be disastrous, as they were for the Socialists in each of the three cases described in this article. In each case, a combination of parliamentary and nonparliamentary maneuvers led to the explosion of the issue into a major political controversy. Parliamentary debate may not be enough in itself to push an issue onto the national political agenda but, when combined with public demonstrations and other activities outside of parliament, it can be very effective. Parliamentary debate served as a focal point for wider discussion of the topics considered here, and strategic politicians focused on easily-understood symbols in order to create these national controversies. Despite the constitutional regime of the Fifth Republic, which gives great power to the government over the opposition in parliament, the parliament can nonetheless play an important role in the policy process by lifting issues from the specialized to the general political arena.

In explaining the dominance of the government over the parliament in the French Fifth Republic, Andrews (1978) wrote that the "political situation" was more important than the constitutional advantages enjoyed by the executive. This article also emphasizes the importance of "politics" in determining policy. Controversies widely reported in the press and in the electronic media can force a government to alter its plans, even if the government has the legal and the constitutional powers to go ahead with its proposals. Since the parliament is in a privileged position to generate such publicity, it plays an important role in the policy process in France, despite the constitutional limits on its activities.

One of the biggest points of contention between Socialist President François Mitterrand and Conservative Prime Minister Jacques Chirac during the first weeks of shared rule in 1986 was whether Chirac would be allowed to rule by decree or be forced to pass laws through parliament (Bréhier, March 22, 1986; Duverger, March 22, 1986). The argument sounds pointless, since the prime minister has a majority in parliament and is therefore assured of the passage of the laws which he demands. This article shows why the debate is important, however. The political debates which can surround the parliamentary consideration of a bill can have a catastrophic effect on the political standing of the

government. Mitterrand found this out himself with the three bills considered here, and he hoped to force Chirac to share this unpleasant experience.

The tactics of expansion of a parliamentary debate often consist of obstructing the debate by procedural maneuvers and grammatical amendments. Three weeks of parliamentary debate dominated by arguments over the relative merits of semicolons and commas is not a pretty sight and appears to play no policy role (see Bréhier, June 13, 1986). These tactics are far from devoid of policy importance, however. They are the means by which the parliamentary strategists drag on the debate and keep the issue in the headlines. Putting issues in the headlines not only has important political implications, but also great policy implications, as this article has shown. Given the limited role of the French parliament in the policy process in general, this is the means by which it can play its greatest role. Even the constitutional restrictions placed on the parliament of the Fifth Republic cannot take this function away from it.

The relations between civil servants in France and their political counterparts (both political executives and elected officials) have been the subject of sustained interest among students of French politics. In particular, researchers have noted the disdain with which high civil servants in France view the roles of the elected members of the legislature. Suleiman (1973, p. 731) has written that "there are probably few democratic societies where the deputies are held in such derision by the civil servants as in France." Noting the different roles which each group plays in the policy process explains much of this dislike. The upper civil service tends to dominate the specialized policy communities in France. Its members have their greatest power when the public is unaware of the decisions they are making. In concert with the largest interest groups and other organizations in their sectors, they make most decisions with only minimal input from their political superiors. Members of parliament, on the other hand, play their greatest role when they use the legislative debate to generate and amplify the controversy surrounding governmental plans. They attempt to shift debates out of the specialized communities, where the civil servants and certain outside groups dominate, onto the national political agenda, where the civil servants lose their control. There should be no mystery surrounding the dislike of civil servants for the "intrusion" of politicians in the policy process in France. Each time the parliament succeeds in its efforts to create controversy, the civil servants and other specialized actors lose influence.

It is important not to overstate the policy role of the legislature in the Fifth Republic. In the larger study from which this article is drawn, the vast majority of policy cases were decided with no parliamentary in-

volvement whatsoever. In addition, many bills are discussed in each legislature, but only a few become the subject of great debate in parliament or elsewhere. The question of why certain issues become expanded while others do not is beyond the scope of the present article. It has to do with the intensity of conflict surrounding the issue, with the organization of interests both within and outside of the government, with the rhetorical skills of the expanders and the contractors, and with the political context of the time. This article has pointed out that the parliament plays an essential role in this process by helping to push some issues onto the national political agenda. This is a sporadic influence, however, and is not always successful. The French parliament is not the center of policy making by any stretch of the imagination. It is the center of politics, however, and politics can have a great impact on policy.

Frank R. Baumgartner is Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242.

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