

# The French Press in Wartime London, 1940–4: From the Politics of Exile to Inter-Allied Relations

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## Abstract

This article examines the history of the French press that was based in London during the Second World War, focusing on its contribution to political debates of and about French exile, its relationship to the British government and its role in shaping inter-Allied relations. The article begins by outlining the development of British policy towards the foreign press based in London before examining three publications: the left-leaning daily *France*, the Gaullist weekly *La Marseillaise* and the monthly cultural and political periodical *La France libre*. By drawing on the contents of these papers alongside a variety of French, British and American archival material, the article shows that while the French press in London had a limited readership, it exercised significant influence among political elites either side of the Atlantic during the war and helped shape the terms of French debates over the meaning of Gaullism well into the post-Second World War period.

## Keywords

anti-Gaullism, exile, cultural diplomacy, Second World War, Free France, Raymond Aron

French newspapers published in London during the Second World War have received limited attention in the political and social histories of French exile and are ignored in general histories of the French press.<sup>1</sup> On the face of it this is unsurprising. Most of

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1 The definitive political history of the Free French is J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France libre* (Paris 1996). M. Cointet and J.-P. Cointet, *La France à Londres: renaissance d'un État* (Brussels 1990) also contains some information on the press. Among the many biographies of de Gaulle, see J. Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*.

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the 12,000 French people living in Britain at the start of the war did not read the émigré press, even, as was often the case, when its publications were given away for free.<sup>2</sup> Given the much greater reach of French broadcasts on the BBC, and their centrality to Gaullist resistance mythology, the media history of the external French Resistance has understandably focused on radio.<sup>3</sup>

It would nevertheless be a mistake to assume that because of its limited readership the French press in Britain did not matter. In fact, as this article shows, the London-based French press had a significant influence on inter-Allied relations during the Second World War and enduringly shaped the terms of French debate over the meaning of Gaullism. While historians have long recognized the role of this press in the fractious internal politics of the French exiled in Britain during the war, the significance of these internal politics at the levels of both Franco-British and Anglo-American relations has not been studied in detail. Yet during the war it was in large measure the foreign policy ramifications of Franco-French political discord that made the stakes of such disagreement seem so high, both to the Gaullists and their critics in the French émigré press.<sup>4</sup>

Although de Gaulle himself rarely alluded to it publicly,<sup>5</sup> the French press in London's supposed role in fostering anti-Gaullist sentiment among the British and American political elites was a noted sore point for ardent Gaullists like Janine Serreulles. A French Moroccan woman with close ties to the Fighting French leadership through her marriage to de Gaulle's aide de camp, Serreulles gave a withering evaluation of the French émigré press during a speech in Algiers on 26 January 1944. After toasting the transferral of Fighting France's headquarters onto the French soil of Algiers, she remarked that there were no longer any important French intellectuals left in London. '[T]he only ones who remain', she remarked, 'prefer, out of fidelity to the British in whom they have more confidence, to work outside [French territory] and remain, as they say, "independent"'.<sup>6</sup>

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*The Life of Charles de Gaulle* (London 2018). For social history, see N. Atkin, *The Forgotten French: Exiles in the British Isles, 1940-1944* (Manchester 2003) and relevant chapters in D. Kelly and M. Cornick (eds) *A History of the French in London: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity* (London 2013). For a broader European perspective on this social history see M. Conway and J. Gotovich (eds) *Europe in Exile: European Exile Communities in Britain, 1940-1945* (Oxford 2001) and the ongoing research project led by Julia Eichenberg, 'The London Moment: Exile Governments, Academics, and Activists in the Capital of Free Europe, 1940-1945' The standard history of the French press is C. Bellanger, *Histoire générale de la presse française* (Paris 1969).

2 Atkin, *The Forgotten French*, 17.

3 On radio see J.-L. Crémieux-Brilhac, *Ici Londres, 1940-1944. Les voix de la liberté* (Paris 1975); A. Luneau, *Radio Londres, 1940-1944. Les voix de la liberté* (Paris 2005); J. Pessis, *Radio Londres, la guerre en direct* (Paris 2014); A. Vedel-Bonnery, *La voix de la France. BBC, une radio en guerre* (Paris 2017).

4 By examining the intersection of Franco-French exile politics and inter-Allied relations, this article aligns with a recent international turn in the historiography of resistance. See Olivier Wieviorka, *The Resistance in Western Europe, 1940-1945* (New York 2017).

5 Privately, de Gaulle did hold the émigré press partially responsible for the US government's negative attitude towards him during the war. See A. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, vol 1 (Paris 1994), 436-7.

6 'Extrait de la conférence faite le 26 janvier 1944 par Madame la Sous Lieutenant Serreulles à la mission militaire de liaison administrative' in 'Papiers Comert', Archives nationales (AN) 72AJ/461.

While dismissive in tone, the contents of Serreulles's remarks belied significant resentment that the criticism of a handful of little-known writers had significantly undermined de Gaulle's movement. It was due to their opposition, she claimed, that 'we have [...] no newspaper nor radio programme (except for five minutes of "Honneur et Patrie") nor any other means of propaganda'. She continued, 'I think that these 'individuals' (I say 'individuals' as opposed to the 'community' of Free France) have, by this refusal to adhere, caused trouble in the minds of our Allies, which is the basis of the difficulties that we have encountered many times, and of the setbacks in the representation of France as a spiritual, moral and material value in the world'.<sup>7</sup>

Three months later, this theme was taken up in an article in the Algiers-based Gaullist weekly *Combat*, which denounced the London-based French media as 'democrats without the people', 'British functionaries' whose claims to represent France were 'blatant fraud'. French émigré newspapers, it argued, 'bear a good part of the responsibility for the malaise that has always weighed on relations between Fighting France and its Allies, whose friendship they abused. It is they who have given the impression that the French were divided, anarchic, incapable of remaking France. At the same time [...] they give ample material to Vichy's propaganda by conducting themselves as real émigrés'. The judgement of the French people would not look kindly on these 'voluntary exiles', whose transgressions were much less forgivable than those of repentant Vichy officials who had changed sides after the liberation of French North Africa in November 1942.<sup>8</sup>

By labelling their critics in these terms, Gaullists drew upon a longstanding cultural tradition which had emerged in response to royalist emigration during the revolutionary wars of the late eighteenth century. Ever since then, as Emmanuelle Loyer has shown, the French émigré had figured as treacherous in intent yet pathetic in practice, colluding with foreign powers while infighting among themselves, and profoundly ignorant about the lived reality and national sentiment of the people in France.<sup>9</sup> At the start of the German Occupation, the Free French had been vulnerable to similar attacks from Vichy propagandists who had some success stoking widespread anti-British sentiment owing to perceptions first of abandonment by Britain during the Battle of France, then of betrayal following the bombing of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir. This was an important source of de Gaulle's well-known obsession with the appearance of Free French independence vis-à-vis the British throughout the war.

Criticism of the London-based French press as fractious and out-of-touch 'émigrés' in the pay of foreign powers would later become a trope in memoirs written by former Free French officials after the war.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent memoirs by London-based French journalists consequently adopted strongly defensive postures in which the extent of their wartime reliance on British government support is understated.<sup>11</sup> Dubious claims from memoirists with political agendas

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7 'Extrait de la conférence faite le 26 janvier 1944 par Madame la Sous Lieutenant Serreulles'.

8 Mercure, 'Les Dissidents', *Combat* (9 April 1944).

9 E. Loyer, *Paris à New York: intellectuels et artistes français en exil, 1940-1947* (Paris 2005), 78–82.

10 See e.g. J. Soustelle, *De Londres à Alger: souvenirs et documents sur la France libre* (Paris 1947), 20; Col. Passy, *Souvenirs. 2e Bureau Londres* (Monte Carlo 1947), 76, 136, 220, 240.

11 See e.g. C. Gombault, *Un journal, une aventure* (Paris 1982).

have since been reproduced across the limited secondary literature on the French émigré press, with the result that the nature of this press's relationship with the British government in particular has often been misunderstood.<sup>12</sup> This article's account of the French press in wartime London differs from existing studies by paying greater attention to the published contents of French émigré newspapers and by drawing on extensive archival research to explore their relations with the Free French and with the political and media establishment in Britain and the United States. In doing so, it builds on existing accounts of anti-Gaullism in London and more recent research on the cultural politics of the external resistance.<sup>13</sup>

The article examines three French titles published in London during the Second World War: the daily paper *France*, which had close ties to the French Socialist Party, the official Gaullist weekly *La Marseillaise*, and the monthly political and cultural periodical *La France libre*, which despite its title was independent of the Free French movement. These case studies have been chosen because a main focus of the article will be the politics of French Gaullism and anti-Gaullism with particular reference to how this interacted with British domestic politics and with Franco-British and Anglo-American relations. *France*, *La Marseillaise* and *La France Libre* are where polemics over the political significance of Gaullism were most heated and the most far-reaching in terms of impact beyond the émigré community. A fourth French newspaper published in wartime London, the Catholic *Volontaire pour la Cité Chrétienne*, is omitted because it was much less involved in these polemics and left little trace in the British and American government archives from which this article draws its primary source material.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the archives of the State Department, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Information (MOI), and Prime Minister's Office, the article draws on the personal archives of individuals involved in the newspapers under consideration, including Raymond Aron of *La France libre* and Pierre Comert, the founding editor of *France*.

By examining a series of political controversies involving the French press in London during the Second World War, the article shows that the émigré press punched far above its weight in terms of elite political influence, even if French newspapers often did not reach a large readership. This influence pointed in several directions. French newspapers and periodicals shaped the terms of elite political debate within the French exile community in the United Kingdom and beyond. They also informed discussions of Anglo-French relations within the British government and in the British press. Finally,

12 See e.g. Cointet, *La France à Londres*, 126; Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France libre*, 246; F. Broche, G. Caïtucoli and J.-F. Muracciole (eds) *Dictionnaire de la France libre* (Paris 2010), 631, 676.

13 In addition to the works already cited, on anti-Gaullism see J. Jackson, 'General de Gaulle and his enemies: anti-Gaullism in France since 1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 9 (1999), 43–65; P. Foro, 'L'Anti-Gaullisme. Réalités et représentations, 1940-1953', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toulouse II (1997). On cultural politics see C. Faucher, *Propaganda, Gender and Cultural Power: Projections and Perceptions of France in Britain, c. 1880-1944* (Oxford 2022); C. Faucher, 'From Gaullism to anti-Gaullism: Denis Saurat and the French Cultural Institute in wartime Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 54, 1 (2019), 60–81; C. Faucher, 'Transnational cultural propaganda: French cultural politics in Britain during the Second World War', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 37, 1 (2019), 48–69.

14 On this paper see R. Bédarida, 'Un journal de la France libre: *Volontaire pour la cité chrétienne*', *Révue Historique*, 268, 1 (1982), 225–44.

the French émigré press helped to shape American attitudes towards de Gaulle and sometimes placed Anglo-American relations under strain. And at various points during the war, controversies in and around the émigré press forced the British government to weigh allied demands for tougher censorship against rising public concerns over press freedom.

In a review of the foreign press in wartime Britain conducted in June 1943 it was established that the MOI was supporting 70 foreign language newspapers, magazines and periodicals in 13 different languages.<sup>15</sup> Although these publications relied on the MOI for financial and / or distributional assistance, they were subject to the same voluntary censorship arrangements as the British press. The censorship regime under which the French émigré press operated was consequently more lenient than the one established in France prior to the defeat of 1940, when French newspapers had been subject to direct political censorship in advance of publication. The reasons for this were both practical and political. MOI officials felt that subjecting French newspapers to active political censorship 'would involve staff and administrative problems of such magnitude that we have not regarded it as practicable'. They also remarked that 'The introduction of political censorship would put these foreign papers under a régime different from that which applies to British papers and periodicals, and would saddle His Majesty's Government with responsibility for anything which might appear in them. This would be a very awkward responsibility'.<sup>16</sup> British officials were right about the potential political sensitivities of backing foreign newspapers published in London, but they were wrong to imagine that voluntary censorship would stop Britain's allies from holding its government responsible for the contents of such publications.

British censorship policy was initially meant only to prevent publication of material that might help the enemy's war effort.<sup>17</sup> Under conditions of total warfare, however, this policy was inevitably ambiguous. While early censorship was supposed to apply only to factual military information, in practice freedom of political opinion was hardly sacrosanct.<sup>18</sup> In January 1941, the communist *Daily Worker* was banned after being judged to have fomented opposition to the war, while in March 1942 the *Daily Mirror* was almost banned for criticism of Churchill and the army high

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15 'Allied Governments in London. Publication of Newspapers and Broadcasting', 17 June 1943. The National Archives (TNA) CAB66/37. Susan Briggs remarks that during the war 'News stalls were thick with foreign journals, some with unpronounceable Czech or Polish names, each with its own slant, and often sharply contradictory'. Susan Briggs, *The Home Front: War Years in Britain, 1939-1945* (London 1975), 130-1.

16 'Allied Governments in London'.

17 On press censorship see Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1939-45* (London, 1969), 504-8; Aaron L. Goldman, 'Press freedom in Britain during World War II', *Journalism History*, 22, 4 (1997), 146-55.

18 According to the retired naval officer George P. Thomson, who was appointed Chief Press Censor by Churchill in December 1940, 'Censors knew from the beginning of the war that the press were free to express their opinions - for opinions are not facts and therefore could not provide information of value to the enemy. But until the legal mind had been brought to bear on the problem, they were never quite sure of the right answer and I'm afraid that in the early days "freedom of opinion" in the press was much more evident in theory than in practice'. See Rear-Admiral George P. Thomson, *Blue Pencil Admiral: The Inside Story of the Press Censorship* (London 1947), 39.

command.<sup>19</sup> Despite the supposedly limited military remit of British censorship policy, French newspapers and magazines published in London also sometimes came under political pressure from MOI officials acting both as agents of the British government and, sometimes, as proxies for the Free French. Formal political censorship was finally introduced in March 1942, when newspapers were forbidden to publish material ‘calculated to create ill-feeling between the United Nations or between them and a neutral country’.<sup>20</sup> Yet because voluntary censorship was retained under this new dispensation, Polish and French newspapers funded by the MOI continued publishing harsh criticism of the Soviet and American governments, respectively.<sup>21</sup> Allied complaints about this led to the aforementioned review of the foreign press in London, resulting in the banning of the Gaullist weekly *La Marseillaise* in June 1943.

The first French newspaper to be established in London during the war was the daily *France*, whose first issue was published on 26 August 1940. Its director, Pierre Comert, had previously directed the information services of the League of Nations’ Secretariat (1919–32) and the French Foreign Ministry (1933–8), where he was serving as a plenipotentiary in the American section at the outbreak of war.<sup>22</sup> Comert had initially approached the senior MOI official Lord Perth about the possibility of establishing a French language daily the previous June. He was not alone his ambition to set up such a publication, but he was well placed to do so having worked closely with Lord Perth during the latter’s tenure as Secretary General of the League of Nations.<sup>23</sup> Comert was also in contact with several French journalists who had recently arrived in London, and these men had previously worked at some of the best-selling newspapers in pre-war France, such as the weekly *Match* and the dailies *Paris-Soir* and *Le Populaire*, the latter being the official organ of the Section française de l’internationale ouvrière.<sup>24</sup> Most of *France*’s editorial board were socialists and some had close ties to the party establishment, while at least three of its most senior writers – Georges Gombault, his son, Charles, who was *France*’s editor-in-chief, and Louis Lévy – were Jewish. This prompted Mary Spears, whose husband Edward represented the British government to the Free French, to remark that “‘France’ speaks with the voice of Blum and the Front Populaire’.<sup>25</sup> Étienne Bellenger, head of the Cartier jewellery company in London, referred to *France* as ‘that dirty newspaper’ which ‘speaks constantly of that bastard Blum and the whole Radical-Socialist clique that has brought us to where we are’.<sup>26</sup> Such views were not uncommon in London’s French colony or among the Free

19 Goldman, ‘Press Freedom in Britain’, 149, 152–3. On the *Daily Mirror* see also Daniel Todman, *Britain’s War. Into Battle, 1937-1941* (London 2016), 495–6; Daniel Todman, *Britain’s War. A New World, 1942-1947* (Oxford 2020) 181–3.

20 ‘The Press’ Report by the Lord President of the Council. TNS CAB66/23.

21 ‘Parliamentary Question on Allied Newspapers in the United Kingdom. *La Marseillaise*’. TNA FO371/36056.

22 ‘Pierre Comert’, *Le Monde*, 19 March 1964.

23 ‘Témoignage de Pierre Comert (1951)’ AN 72AJ/1909.

24 On the backgrounds of the various staff at *France* see Gombault, *Un journal*, 13–43.

25 Quoted in ‘The Daily Newspaper “France”’, 13 November 1940, PRO FO371/24345.

26 ‘Commentaires et critiques contre certains articles de “France”’ in Papiers Comert, AN72AJ/461.

French,<sup>27</sup> but the politics of *France's* editors would not have been obvious to most British readers of *France*, which *World's Press News* described as 'one of the most objectively restrained newspapers being published anywhere'.<sup>28</sup>

Although this paper was written and edited by a team of Frenchmen, it was established and financed by the British government. The possibility of founding a French daily newspaper had first been raised at a meeting of the MOI's policy committee on 9 July 1940, with final treasury approval secured for a renewable three-month period on the 15th of August.<sup>29</sup> By the summer of 1943 *France* had a circulation of about 23,000 but since a large portion of its readers – including French servicemen and women and British MPs and libraries – received the paper for free it relied on an annual subvention of £42,000 from the MOI to stay afloat.<sup>30</sup> This reliance on the British government had been a political liability for *France* ever since it was established. In order to rid the paper of 'the stigma of British financial control' its director Pierre Comert repeatedly pressed the MOI to redefine its subvention as a loan.<sup>31</sup> This would have brought the financing of *France* in line with that of the Free French movement, whose British government funding was defined as a loan for reasons that were as much political as financial.<sup>32</sup> Comert's requests for an equivalent financial status were declined, however, because MOI officials did not want to reduce their control over a paper which they considered to have been 'founded by and paid for by this Ministry in order that it should pursue the policy of His Majesty's Government'.<sup>33</sup>

*France's* relationship with the British government was a source of considerable irritation to the Free French, who did not have their own newspaper and failed in their attempts directly to influence its editorial line. These began from the moment the first issue of *France* appeared, when a representative of General de Gaulle telephoned Charles Gombault to ask that the paper remove the motto 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité' from its masthead.<sup>34</sup> Following Gombault's refusal, numerous complaints about *France's* alleged left-wing, anti-Gaullist bias were made to British officials.<sup>35</sup> Yet explicitly

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27 On political opinion in the longstanding French colony in London see Atkin, *The Forgotten French*, 186, 199, 291. On anti-parliamentary and anti-Semitic views in parts of the Gaullist movement see Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*, 585–90. According to Comert, Gaullist hostility to *France* was exacerbated by the paper's coverage of the assassination in 1941 of the Jewish socialist politician René Marx Dormoy by the Cagoule, a far-right terrorist group reputed to have ties to the Gaullist intelligence service. *France* would become exceptional for the extent of its coverage of anti-Semitic persecution in general and the Holocaust in particular. On this see Renée Poznanski, *Être juif en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris 1994), 326–8.

28 'France maintains tradition', *World's Press News*, 25 June 1942.

29 Minutes of MOI Policy Committee Meeting, 9 July 1940, TNA INF1/849; Minutes of O.E.P.E.C Meeting, 15 August 1940 and 'French Daily Newspaper - "France"', both in TNA T162/1011/5.

30 'Notes of a Meeting in the Minister's room, 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1943, to discuss question of the French Press'. TNA FO371/36056, Z7063/371/17.

31 Quotation is from a note by the Foreign Office official William Strang dated 6/2/42 in TNA FO371/31924.

32 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France libre*, I, 84.

33 Letter from Nigel Laws (MOI) to Somerville Smith (Spears Commission), 11 October 1940, TNA FO892/

24. See also letter from Nigel Laws (MOI) to W.H.B. Mack (FO), 12 February 1942 in TNA FO371/31924

34 Gombault, *Un Journal*, 32–3.

35 Various documented in TNA FO371/31924.

anti-Gaullist content appeared only rarely in *France* and its occasional implicit criticisms of de Gaulle were usually mild and subtly presented.

In some cases, the paper sinned more through omission than by direct criticism of the Free French or their leader. For instance, in October 1940 it published an editorial on a speech by Churchill that had been broadcast on the BBC's French service the previous evening. 'Mr Churchill spoke to the French people like nobody has since Clemenceau', the piece enthused.<sup>36</sup> It is not difficult to see why some of de Gaulle's more ardent supporters at Carlton Gardens might have interpreted this as a deliberate snub. In another editorial the same month *France* remarked that a recent expansion of Britain's war cabinet carried salutary lessons for the Free French. At a time when this organization was still effectively a one-man show, the implication here was that strong leadership could co-exist with collective responsibility. In making this argument, *France*'s description of Churchill as 'the unique leader, solely responsible for the destinies of England, the British Empire and its Allies' would have done nothing to assuage Gaullist concerns about the paper.<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere anti-Gaullist content was sublimated into ethical discussions about how Frenchmen and women in exile should conduct themselves. An article on the relevance of Chateaubriand's memoirs for the contemporary ethics of exile offers one of the more subtle examples of this kind of content; another article insinuating that the Free French lacked the moral authority to speak for France because their officials devoted so much time to luxurious fine dining provides a more obviously controversial example.<sup>38</sup> Yet it was not until the summer of 1943 that *France* published explicit political criticism of de Gaulle or his movement, and this never became a permanent feature of the newspaper's editorial line.<sup>39</sup>

This does not mean that Gaullist concerns about *France* amounted to no more than paranoia. From the summer of 1940 onwards the paper's staff formed the nucleus of a left-wing anti-Gaullist opposition in London. The fact this was not obvious from *France*'s contents is partly down to the MOI's editorial oversight, but it also reflected the editors' own desire to avoid offering German and Vichy propagandists the opportunity to exploit 'the degrading spectacle of polemics between Frenchmen in exile'.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, from the summer of 1940 onwards, members of *France*'s editorial board were convinced that the Free French movement posed an authoritarian threat to the future of French democracy.<sup>41</sup> And they regularly shared these concerns with foreign

36 'Vaincre d'abord', *France*, 23 October 1940.

37 'Cabinet de guerre', *France*, 4 October 1940.

38 R. Mengin, 'Conseils d'outré-tombe', *France*, 24 April 1941; R. Mengin, *No Laurels for de Gaulle* (London 1967), 144.

39 The first explicitly critical editorial to be published was 'Pause', 17 May 1943. Prior to this Comert had committed in writing not to criticize the Free French or de Gaulle in *France*. This document is reproduced in Gombault, *Un journal*, 34. Comert informed de Gaulle that the paper would adopt a more critical line after the announcement in March 1943 of the general's intention of moving headquarters to Algiers. On this see 'Témoignage de Pierre Comert' and accompanying correspondence in AN 72AJ/1909.

40 Gombault, *Un journal*, 36.

41 'Témoignage de Pierre Comert', AN 72AJ/1909; R. Cassin, *Les hommes partis de rien* (Paris, 1987), 218.

diplomats, journalists, politicians and civil servants.<sup>42</sup> The political impact of this anti-Gaullist agitation is hard to measure and was at any rate uneven. As we shall see, the MOI tended to side with the Gaullists in disputes with the émigré press, but Foreign Office officials were, initially at least, more sympathetic. By the end of 1941 Free French complaints about *France* reached Anthony Eden, who refused to allow Carlton Gardens control of the newspaper because he said it would then be ‘bound to reflect the unsatisfactory views of the extreme right-wing elements there’. It was better, Eden decided, ‘to run *France* as before, keeping it away equally from becoming a Socialist paper or from following the “fascist” tendencies of Carlton Gardens’.<sup>43</sup> Such concerns were widely held within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the time; indeed, according to one report the problem of ‘de Gaulle’s dictatorial tendencies’ was something ‘on the danger of which everyone is agreed’.<sup>44</sup> By this point Churchill too voiced concern at allegations that de Gaulle had ‘moved towards certain Fascist views’.<sup>45</sup>

As the American Chargé d’Affaires in London wrote to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull,<sup>46</sup> it was largely to counteract such allegations that de Gaulle began to adopt republican political rhetoric in his speeches between the winter of 1941 and spring 1942. This began with a speech at the Albert Hall on 11 November in which the General used the words ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ for the first time. The radicalization of de Gaulle’s political rhetoric culminated in two speeches the following April, when he repeatedly claimed the mantle of the French Revolution and insisted that ‘National liberation cannot be separated from national insurrection’.<sup>47</sup> When the first official newspaper of the Free French was finally established in June 1942, these changes in de Gaulle’s political rhetoric were reflected in its presentation. Entitled *La Marseillaise*, this weekly paper carried the motto ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ on its masthead alongside the original Gaullist motto of ‘Honour and Fatherland’. The masthead of the first issue of *La Marseillaise* also included a quotation from the revolutionary constitution of 1793, serving not only to advertise Free France’s republican credentials but also to provide a revolutionary basis for Gaullist political legitimacy: ‘When the government violates the rights of the people, insurrection is for the People, and for each portion of the People, the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties’.<sup>48</sup>

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42 On foreign journalists’ frequenting the offices of *France* see Gombault, *Un journal*, 36–7. Churchill’s proposal to end British support for de Gaulle, which was sent to the War Cabinet on 21 May 1943, included telegrams from Roosevelt referring to Comert’s allegations of Gaullist crypto-fascism. See Most Secret Cypher Telegram, 23 May 1943, TNA CAB65/38.

43 Letter from Mack to Law, 31 December 1941 in ‘Future of Newspaper France’, TNA FO371/31924.

44 R.L. Speight, ‘His Majesty’s Government’s Relations with the Free French’, 11 January 1942, TNA FO371/31948.

45 Quoted in J. Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France*, 444.

46 ‘The Chargé in the United Kingdom (Matthews) to the Secretary of State, London, January 15 1943’ in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, Europe*, vol 2, Available at: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943v01/d459> (accessed 10 June 2021).

47 Ibid, 590–600, 619–21, 653–5. Quotation on page 621. This change in de Gaulle’s political rhetoric was also apparent in his ‘Declaration to the Resistance Movements’ of late April 1942. See J. Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford 2003), 431.

48 *La Marseillaise*, 14 June 1942.

*La Marseillaise* was not directly financed by the British government; its running costs were paid by the Free French, with the MOI supplying newsprint for 7500 weekly copies to be printed in London and a further 15,000 in Cairo.<sup>49</sup> From these sites the paper was distributed free of charge among Free French volunteers in the United Kingdom and among Free French Committees overseas, including in French colonies and the United States. Officials in the Foreign Office and MOI were always sceptical that *La Marseillaise* would adhere to Britain's voluntary censorship policy; indeed, earlier plans for a Gaullist weekly had been shelved in the summer of 1940 for this reason.<sup>50</sup> But it was dimly hoped that the MOI's control of the paper's supply of newsprint would allow it to exercise indirect censorship where necessary.<sup>51</sup> Eventual British support for *La Marseillaise* in June 1942 was thus belated and highly reluctant, a concession granted after months of Gaullist complaints about *France* and the inequity of the Free French being deprived of an official newspaper like those of the Polish, Czechoslovakian and other governments-in-exile.<sup>52</sup>

*La Marseillaise* was edited by François Quilici, who had been editor-in-chief of the press agency Havas's diplomatic service before the war. Quilici was close to several senior political figures among the Free French: his editorship was overseen by Jacques Soustelle, the National Commissioner for Information, and in September 1942 he was appointed as deputy to Gaston Palewski, de Gaulle's *Directeur de Cabinet*.<sup>53</sup> Although it published articles from authors associated with all the political currents within the Free French, *La Marseillaise*'s editorial line was consistently ultra-Gaullist, aggressively populist and anti-parliamentary. This, together with the increasingly anti-American orientation of its editorials, meant that the paper was not universally admired even within the Free French movement,<sup>54</sup> while its views on most matters concerning the nation's political future were strongly at odds with the parliamentary socialism of *France*.

The arrival in London of the deputy leader of the far right Parti Social Français Charles Vallin in September 1942 brought the two papers' political differences into stark relief. *La Marseillaise* celebrated Vallin's arrival with the socialist Pierre Brossolette as evidence of Gaullism's powerful syncretic appeal and the bankruptcy of old-style

49 The annual cost of this arrangement to the MOI was budgeted at £42,000 net. Treasury officials took a dim view of this expenditure, which was significantly greater than that required for an equivalent German language paper, *Die Zeitung*. 'Comments on Fighting French Publicity Budget', 20 January 1943, TNA T162/1011/5.

50 Letter from Cyril Radcliffe (MOI) to Bruce Lockhart (Political Warfare Executive [PWE]), 23 February 1942 in 'General de Gaulle's Wish to Obtain a Newspaper for Himself', TNA FO371/31924.

51 Note by Hogg, 28 January 1942, and letter from Bruce Lockhart (PWE) to Cyril Radcliffe (MOI), 16 February 1942 in 'General de Gaulle's Wish to Obtain a Newspaper for Himself', TNA FO371/31924.

52 Memo from R.L. Speaight, 6 April 1943 in 'Complaint at views expressed in *La Marseillaise*'; R.L. Speaight, 'La Marseillaise', 8 June 1943. Both in TNA FO371/36056.

53 Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre*, 490.

54 *La Marseillaise* was a particular source of irritation for René Massigli, Fighting France's Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, who when informed of the end of British support for the paper 'expressed no surprise and just welcomed [the] decision'. Telegram from Resident Minister in Algiers to Foreign Office, 24 June 1943, TNA FO371/36056. A highly critical chapter is devoted to *La Marseillaise* in H. de Kérillis, *I Accuse de Gaulle* (New York 1946).

parliamentary politics.<sup>55</sup> The journalists at *France* on the other hand were appalled at the prospect of Vallin joining de Gaulle's National Committee and orchestrated a successful publicity campaign against him in the British press.<sup>56</sup> *France's* hostility to Vallin prompted Brossolette to write an article for *La Marseillaise* which seemed to confirm the worst fears of the anti-Gaullist left. 'The issue is not whether the reconstitution of the old political parties [...] is desirable in itself', Brossolette claimed, 'it is to understand that this [...] would inevitably drive the country towards dictatorship out of disgust'.<sup>57</sup>

Although the anti-parliamentary tone of *La Marseillaise* gave credence to anti-Gaullist journalists' concerns about the general's authoritarian intentions, this was not what ultimately sealed the newspaper's fate. Much more important here was the increasingly anti-American orientation of the paper following the Allied landings in French North Africa in November 1942. British support for de Gaulle while the United States backed his rival General Giraud had strained Anglo-American relations since early 1943, and *La Marseillaise's* coverage of the power struggle between the two generals exacerbated this. Strongly anti-American editorials in March and April drew complaints from the State Department, prompting British officials to threaten a suspension of *La Marseillaise's* supply of newsprint unless Quilici was sacked.<sup>58</sup> This problem arose while similar controversy was being generated by anti-Soviet content in the Polish émigré press, prompting a review of British government policy towards such papers. In a Commons debate on this topic on 20 May, the Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken, warned that 'we shall be duty bound to prevent the hospitality of Great Britain being abused by journalists who seem to be more interested in feuds than in news'. When challenged on this Bracken responded that 'This is not a question of the freedom of the Press at all' insisting that 'I am quite in favour of British papers criticising the Government, because I think that criticism is the absolute basis of democracy, but I might point out that the contents of these small, obscure papers are wired abroad and do infinite harm'.<sup>59</sup>

By threatening to discontinue its support for émigré newspapers in this way the MOI was acting in accordance with a change in the law passed in March 1942, when newspapers had been forbidden to publish material 'calculated to create ill-feeling between the United Nations or between them and a neutral country'.<sup>60</sup> Yet when British support for *La*

55 F. Quilici, 'La fin des mythes', *La Marseillaise*, 20 September 1942.

56 Col. Passy, *Souvenirs. 10, Duke Street Londres* (Monte-Carlo 1947), 240–2; Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France libre*, I, 494.

57 P. Brossolette, 'Renouveau politique en France', *La Marseillaise*, 27 September 1942. Brossolette's visit to London is discussed in Andrew W.M. Smith, 'Eclipse in the dark years: pick-up flights, routes of resistance and the Free French', *European Review of History*, 25, 2 (2018), 392–414, 402–4. On Brossolette more generally see Guillaume Piketty, *Pierre Brossolette: un héros de la Résistance* (Paris 1998).

58 On 8 June 1943, in a memorandum pushing the MOI to end its support for *La Marseillaise*, R.L. Speaight of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office wrote that 'Several of its numbers last month gave special offence to the State Department, who took the matter up with us'. See R.L. Speaight, 'Draft Telegram to Resident Minister in Algiers', 9 June 1943, TNA FO371/36056. On removing Quilici from the editorship of *La Marseillaise* see memo from R. L. Speaight, 6 April 1943; R.L. Speaight to Charles Peake, 10 April 1943 and Peake's reply on 12 April, all in 'Complaint at Views Expressed in "La Marseillaise"', TNA FO371/36056.

59 'Parliamentary Question on Allied Newspapers in the United Kingdom. "La Marseillaise"'. TNA FO371/36056.

60 'The Press' Report by the Lord President of the Council. TNS CAB66/23.

*Marseillaise* was finally withdrawn in June the government's official justification was that the establishment of the Comité français de Libération nationale in Algiers meant there was no longer any need for the MOI to support an official Fighting French paper in London.<sup>61</sup> Despite the fact recent changes in censorship policy allowed the government to ban newspapers for publishing material that threatened to undermine Britain's relationship with its allies, heightened public sensitivities over press freedom made it tread carefully.<sup>62</sup> This did not stop the effective banning of *La Marseillaise* being protested repeatedly in parliament and the British press.<sup>63</sup>

Inside government, the proposal to withdraw support for *La Marseillaise* came from the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, and was endorsed by Churchill.<sup>64</sup> This decision was taken amidst a wider review of government support for foreign language newspapers in Britain, prompted partly by the controversy surrounding *La Marseillaise* but also by a similar controversy over anti-Soviet content in the Polish émigré press. During this review, officials at the MOI proposed to end their involvement with *France* at the same time as dropping *La Marseillaise*. 'The chief point', they wrote, 'is that the Ministry do not feel justified in continuing to spend tax-payers' money at the rate of some £42,000 a year in the support of a paper which, although published ostensibly for the benefit of the French community in this country, has a much larger circulation amongst English people and non-French Allied nationals than among Frenchmen'.<sup>65</sup> This view was not shared in the Foreign Office, where one official replied that 'I cannot understand why it is considered an objection that many of the readers are allied nationals. It is surely just as important that they should receive their news and views on events from a decent and friendly paper well-disposed to this country and not from sources which may be less desirable. It may be regrettable, but it remains a fact that the majority of these allies read French more easily than English. Their own papers are not always satisfactory substitutes and indeed in the case of the Poles we would rather they read *France* than many of their own papers'.<sup>66</sup>

Ultimately public opinion proved more important than budgetary considerations in determining the MOI's position on the future of *France*. As representatives of the government ministry most exposed to criticism on the controversial issue of press censorship,

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61 'Telegram from Foreign Office to Algiers (Resident Minister), 22 June 1943, TNA FO371/36056; Note from Harold Macmillan to René Massigli, 23 June 1943, TNA FO371/36056.

62 At a meeting on the future of the French émigré press the Minister of Information Brendan Bracken 'expressed the fullest approval of the idea that steps should be taken for the suppression of *La Marseillaise*, but said that since M.O.I. would have to face any outcry which this step might cause he would prefer to handle the business from here, rather than leave it to the Foreign Office to do the telegraphing'. 'Notes of a Meeting in the Minister's Room, 16 June 1943, to Discuss Question of the French Press', TNA FO371/36056.

63 'The suppression of *La Marseillaise* has given rise to much comment in the press, which seems generally critical of the method used'. Minute by J.W. Simpson in 'La Marseillaise', TNA FO371/36056. For a contemporary report on this controversy see M. Panter-Downes, *London War Notes, 1939-1945* (London 2014), 346-7.

64 Note from Churchill to Eden, 26 June 1943 in 'Publication of 'La Marseillaise' in United Kingdom' Note from Churchill to Eden, 26 June 1943, TNA FO371/36056.

65 Minute by R.L. Speaight, 25 June 1943 in 'Position of French Papers published in the United Kingdom', TNA FO371/36056.

66 Minute by J.W. Roberts, 25 June 1943 in 'Position of French Papers published in the United Kingdom', TNA FO371/36056.

its officials argued that if Pierre Comert's newspaper was allowed to continue operating from London with government support then the public justification for withdrawing such support from *La Marseillaise* would lack credibility. Pressed by Anthony Eden to 'keep *France* going', Brendan Bracken, the Minister for Information, 'said he could not do so if "Marseillaise" were to be suppressed, as such action would look too anti-de Gaulle'.<sup>67</sup> In making the case for removing British government support for *France*, MOI officials also suggested that Pierre Comert himself would be open to such a move. This was not completely implausible given his longstanding desire to free the newspaper of 'the stigma of British financial control'. Comert had apparently sounded out *The Observer's* David Astor about a private subsidy, a possibility to which Astor was open and which the MOI was keen to pursue, but nothing ever came of this.<sup>68</sup>

In the end, broad support for *France's* continuation as a London-based, government backed newspaper counted for more than Comert's putative views on the issue or the reservations of the MOI. Responding to rumours of *France's* looming suppression, the Labour Party leader Clement Atlee lobbied Brendan Bracken and Anthony Eden to maintain the government's support for the paper. So too did the former head of the Foreign Office's press division, Charles Peake, who had since moved to Washington DC as an aide to the British ambassador Lord Halifax.<sup>69</sup> But as far as Eden and other Foreign Office officials were concerned such appeals were pushing at an open door. As the ministry most exposed to American pressure, the Foreign Office was the driving force behind the suppression of *La Marseillaise*. Its parallel desire to protect *France's* status as a British government backed newspaper was motivated by concern that the alternative policy would create an opening for a new Gaullist daily that was not under British control. As one official put it, 'We do not want another and daily "Marseillaise"'.<sup>70</sup> The question of *France's* future was finally decided after Churchill sided with the Foreign Office against the MOI on the issue.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately the need to maintain good relations with Britain's American ally proved more important than hopes of avoiding further public controversy over the question of press freedom.

Yet the case of the periodical *La France libre* shows that in some instances the émigré press could exploit public concerns over press freedom to its advantage. In April 1942 this journal's editor, André Labarthe, received a letter from Enid McLeod at the MOI notifying him that the Free French had cancelled their latest order of *La France libre* because its editorial contained a passage mildly critical of de Gaulle's theory of tank warfare. McLeod sternly warned Labarthe against further criticism of the General, remarking that 'it would be impossible for us [...] to appear to countenance criticism of a movement

67 Note dated 4 July 1943 in 'Future of French Paper France', TNA FO371/36-56.

68 'Future of the Paper "France"', TNA FO371/36056.

69 Letter from Clement Atlee to Anthony Eden, 22 June 1943; telegram from Charles Peake to Foreign Office, 24 June 1943. Both in 'Position of French Papers Published in the United Kingdom', TNA FO371/36056.

70 Telegram from Charles Peake to Foreign Office, 24 June 1943, 'Position of French Papers Published in the United Kingdom', TNA FO371/36056.

71 See notes exchanged between Eden and Churchill on 25 and 26 June 1943 in 'Position of French Papers Published in the United Kingdom', TNA FO371/36056.

which His Majesty's Government supports'.<sup>72</sup> At this point the issue of censorship was generating significant public interest because of a controversy over threats made to the *Daily Mirror* by Churchill after the paper had criticized the British army's high command.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, when André Labarthe threatened to inform Liberal MPs about McLeod's letter it provoked a minor crisis within the British government. The Minister of Information responded by arranging a meeting at which he reassured Labarthe that he 'need not abandon reasonable criticism of General de Gaulle so long as such criticism [does] not lend itself to quotation by enemy propaganda'.<sup>74</sup> When Labarthe mentioned his ambition of establishing *La France libre* in the United States, the Minister effectively bought his silence by promising to arrange the necessary financial support. The affair was thus resolved in a mutually beneficial way: by helping *La France libre* to establish its American edition,<sup>75</sup> the government got rid of the journal's troublesome editor and avoided another censorship scandal.

This solution was, however, much less beneficial to the Fighting French. After the liberation of French North Africa *La France libre* adopted a frankly anti-Gaullist line. The Gaullists responded by cancelling their orders for the journal and protesting to the MOI, which agreed not to distribute offending issues of the journal in North Africa. Yet this had no impact on *La France libre*'s anti-Gaullism, which, if anything, hardened over the course of 1943. For instance, the journal greeted the founding of the Comité français de Libération nationale with extreme caution. Under an ostensibly celebratory headline of 'Vive la République' its editorial made six references over four pages to an authoritarian threat inside the new committee. 'France', the author remarked, 'has paid too high a price for the experience of dictatorship [...] not to maintain a constant vigilance'.<sup>76</sup> Two months later *La France libre* published an article by the philosopher Raymond Aron that would become the most notorious critique of alleged Gaullist authoritarianism to appear during the war. By this point de Gaulle had long since embraced the rhetoric of democratic republicanism to counter claims of crypto-fascism from the anti-Gaullist left, but what made Aron's piece so powerful was that it used the General's apparent embrace of democracy to support the hypothesis that he harboured authoritarian intentions. Gaullism, Aron implied, belonged to a Bonapartist tradition that had always 'brandish[ed] the sacred words Republic and democracy [...] to enslave the nation' and amounted to a 'French version of Fascism'.<sup>77</sup>

72 E. McLeod to A. Labarthe, 2 April 1942 in 'Censoring of 'France Libre': M. Labarthe and the Ministry of Information', 17 April 1942, TNA FO371/32075. The offending passage is in A. Labarthe, 'À propos du procès de Riom', *La France libre*, 3, 17 (1942), 351–6, 353–4.

73 On this episode in the context of wider debates over press freedom, see Goldman, 'Press freedom in Britain during World War II'. For a contemporary commentary on this controversy see Panter-Downes, *London War Notes*, 267–8.

74 N. Law, 'Censoring of "France Libre": M. Labarthe and the Ministry of Information', 17 April 1942, TNA FO371/32075.

75 Ibid. The American edition of *La France Libre* was published in New York under the title *Tricolor* from April 1944 to September 1945.

76 R. Aron, 'Vive la République!', *La France Libre*, 6, 32 (1943), 80–4, 82.

77 R. Aron, 'L'ombre des Bonapartes', *La France Libre*, 6, 34 (1943), 280–8, 288.

Although the editors of *La France libre* were just as concerned about Gaullist authoritarianism as those at *France*, they could express these concerns more freely in print because, unlike Pierre Comert's newspaper, they were not financially reliant on the British government. Whether this financial independence derived from the journal's commercial success is unclear. Raymond Aron's biographer writes that *La France libre* was the best-selling monthly periodical in wartime Britain, but this claim, which originates from Labarthe, who was renowned for his tall tales, may be exaggerated.<sup>78</sup> Another possible source of the journal's financial security was its ties to international communism. *La France libre* was established with funds provided by its secretary Martha Lecoutre, a communist who had worked for the Profintern before the war.<sup>79</sup> MI5 at the time considered Lecoutre 'a Soviet agent' and was similarly suspicious of André Labarthe.<sup>80</sup> The post-Cold War publication of American intercepts of Soviet intelligence reports from the early 1940s showed these suspicions to have been well founded.<sup>81</sup>

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78 'The 8000 copies of the first issue soon sold out and a reprint of 10,000 was produced. [...] *La France libre*'s early success was not shortlived and its first volume, containing the first six issues, had to be reprinted. [...] By November 1943 *La France libre* had a circulation of 40,000 (not counting an American edition then in preparation in New York). Indeed, it came to have 76,000 subscribers and the largest circulation of all the monthlies published in England'. R. Colquhoun, *Raymond Aron: The Philosopher in History* (Beverly Hills 1986), 227, 229. Colquhoun's source for the last of these claims is *The Listener*, 18 November 1943, 586, but *The Listener*'s source is Labarthe. Gillois p. 103 is source for 40,000 figure. Oberlé p. 104 is source for 'biggest of all monthlies'. On Labarthe's tall tales see R. Aron, *Mémoires: 50 ans de réflexion politique* (Paris 1983), 170; A. Gillois, *Histoire secrète des Français de Londres de 1940 à 1944* (Paris 1973), 103–4. 79 Gillois, *Histoire secrète*, 103. On Lecoutre's pre-war political engagements see T. Wolton, *Le Grand recrutement* (Paris), 317–19.

80 'France: Prof. Labarthe', TNA FO371/24343.

81 American intercepts of Soviet intelligence cables published in the mid-1990s detail the activities of an agent codenamed Zheron / Jerome, a senior figure within the early Free French movement who had worked for the French Air Ministry during the Popular Front and was writing a book on the fall of France. After making contact with his handler in July 1940, Jerome was tasked with providing military and technical intelligence. The intercepts reveal him to have done this, including informing Soviet intelligence in advance about the Free French expedition to Dakar in September 1940. Labarthe is the only figure among elite French political exiles in London who fits the description of Jerome given in these documents. It is also very plausible that Labarthe would have leaked details of the Dakar exhibition given his close ties to Admiral Muselier; this was certainly the view of MI5 at the time, who were 'convinced that the leakage about Dakar was through Professor Labarthe' (see 'France: Prof. Labarthe', TNA FO371/24343).

After Labarthe was sacked as de Gaulle's Director-General of French Armament and Scientific Research in September 1940, Jerome apparently became a less valuable asset: all but one of the declassified sources concerning him date from July–September 1940; the last is from August 1941 but its contents are apparently lost. No mention is therefore made of *La France libre*, which first appeared in November 1940, in these sources, though, of course, that does not prove that Jerome's intelligence work had ended by the summer of 1941. The sources show Jerome and his secretary Martha to have received a regular allowance of £50 with assurances that the amount would increase in line with the quality and quantity of their intelligence. There is no indication that Jerome's propensity for political intrigue was encouraged or endorsed by his handler. On 24 July 1940, it is recorded that he wants to wage a campaign to move de Gaulle leftwards politically; however, this proposal was rejected as 'unrealistic' – 'I explained that the General and the whole movement were in the hands of the British, who also were putting their money on him. If they turned the General into a revolutionary, everything would fall to the ground'. Jerome's handler evidently had a higher estimation of Jerome's secretary, Martha ('Politically she is stronger than JEROME and influences him'), deciding that all direct contact should be with her rather than Jerome. The biographical details of Martha in the intercepted intelligence cables match those of Martha Lecoutre as described in Aron, *Mémoires*, 230, 234–5. The above quotations from these declassified documents are taken from 'Martha, Jerome, Mary and Dick', 24 July 1940, [https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/dated/1940/24jul\\_mjmd.pdf](https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/dated/1940/24jul_mjmd.pdf) and 'Martha, Jerome, Aptekar and Mark', 17 July

This does not mean that *La France libre*'s editorial line was subject to direct Soviet influence; the journal probably functioned as a cover for its editor's clandestine intelligence activities and not as a vehicle for directly promoting Soviet interests. Although the Soviet position on French émigré politics was in flux during 1942–3, de Gaulle was increasingly favoured over Giraud because he was considered more likely in the long run 'to create a more authoritative French centre which could be more independent in regard of England and the USA'.<sup>82</sup> The strongly anti-Gaullist position adopted by *La France libre* in the second half of 1943 was thus directly at odds with the increasingly positive Soviet view of de Gaulle during the same period.

This editorial positioning instead reflected Labarthe's close ties to Giraud, who appointed him to a short-lived stint as Minister of Information in Algiers in 1943. It was also shaped by Raymond Aron, who operated as the journal's de facto editor while Labarthe was in North Africa. Although he had yet to emerge as the leading figure of postwar French intellectual anti-communism, Aron was not ideologically sympathetic towards the USSR during the war, while the Atlanticism for which he would later become known was already evident in his wartime writings.<sup>83</sup> Unlike *La Marseillaise*, which was ultimately hoisted with its own anti-American petard, *La France libre* generally told the United States government what it wanted to hear. This was even true during the most controversial phase of American policy in French North Africa, when the former Vichy prime minister François Darlan was recognized as head of the French civil and military authorities in Algiers. While *France* and *La Marseillaise* joined much of the Anglophone press in denouncing the Darlan deal, *La France libre* urged its readers not to indulge in such divisive recriminations.<sup>84</sup>

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1940, [https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/dated/1940/17jul\\_2nd-reissue.pdf](https://www.nsa.gov/Portals/70/documents/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/dated/1940/17jul_2nd-reissue.pdf) (both accessed 14 September 2020). The digitized Venona Project files from which these sources derive are held on the American National Security Agency website. Labarthe's ties to Soviet intelligence are discussed in Wolton, *Le Grand recrutement*, 453–77.

82 I. Magadeev, 'France in Soviet Foreign Policy, 1943–45', paper presented at the conference 'France and the Second World War in Global Perspective, 1919–1945', University of Strathclyde, July 2015. Text available online at: [https://www.academia.edu/27545322/France\\_in\\_Soviet\\_foreign\\_policy\\_1943\\_45\\_Paper\\_presented\\_at\\_the\\_International\\_conference\\_France\\_and\\_the\\_Second\\_World\\_War\\_in\\_Global\\_Perspective\\_1919\\_45\\_University\\_of\\_Strathclyde\\_Glasgow\\_July\\_2015\\_](https://www.academia.edu/27545322/France_in_Soviet_foreign_policy_1943_45_Paper_presented_at_the_International_conference_France_and_the_Second_World_War_in_Global_Perspective_1919_45_University_of_Strathclyde_Glasgow_July_2015_) (accessed 14 September 2020).

83 For example, in 'Vive la République', Aron omits the USSR from his remarks about future French foreign policy, writing that the only viable diplomacy for France after the war will be one based on 'close collaboration with Great Britain and the United States'.

84 See e.g. F. Quilici, 'Le sens de cette guerre', *La Marseillaise*, 15 November 1942; F. Quilici, 'L'insultante amnistie', *La Marseillaise*, 22 November 1942; Anon, 'Deux fois traité', *France*, 17 November 1942. Compare A. Labarthe, 'Armée de la République', *La France libre*, 5, 26 (1942), 81–5. In his memoirs Raymond Aron remarks that Labarthe did not always write the editorials that he signed, and this piece is probably an example of that. Its argument certainly matches that later given by Aron, who criticized the 'primitive Manicheanism', 'sectarianism' and 'verbal violence' of the Gaullists who turned exile into a 'Manichean universe'. 'Gaullist propaganda', he wrote, 'attacked the Vichy government with such violence that it sometimes seemed like an anti-French propaganda'. See Aron's preface to A. de Saint-Exupéry, *Écrits de guerre, 1939–1944* (Paris 1982), 7–13, 8, 9, 12. In his memoirs Raymond Aron placed his support for the Darlan deal in the framework of a larger reconciliatory political vision that placed him at odds with the Gaullists. 'To reconstruct France it would be essential to exclude the fewest possible 'traitors'. Were the collaborators traitors? Yes. The proponents of the National Revolution? Certainly not'. 'It was necessary not to excommunicate all the Vichyists, but to bring most of them over to the cause of France and its allies'. 'The role of Admiral

Studying the French press in wartime London sheds new light on the history of the external resistance understood both as a national phenomenon and in its larger international context. At the national level, it shows how specific features of modern French political culture, such as the peculiarly negative connotations attached to exile and the controversial legacy of Bonapartism, shaped the terms of Franco-French political controversy in London during the war. Here the article confirms the findings of earlier research focussed on the French resistance in the United States.<sup>85</sup> It has also shown that for all the powerful syncretic appeal of Gaullism, the external French resistance was more seriously divided than postwar Gaullist mythology allowed. While this finding broadly aligns with extant scholarship on the external resistance, such scholarship that has not overlooked the émigré press altogether has perpetuated inaccuracies and distortions regarding sensitive questions of funding and political loyalties, often due to an overreliance on memoirs.<sup>86</sup> By reconstructing a history of the French émigré press using archival sources it has been possible to achieve a fuller and more accurate understanding of the subject.

Contrary to the dismissive accounts that appear in Gaullist memoirs published after the war,<sup>87</sup> de Gaulle and the Free French took the opposition of papers like *France* and *La France libre* very seriously. Even the mildest of perceived slights provoked a furious reaction from Free French officials, who sought to exercise indirect censorship over unfavourable content via their contacts at the MOI. Although de Gaulle himself mostly remained aloof from these squabbles, they lingered long in his memory. He apparently never forgave Raymond Aron for his wartime anti-Gaullism, despite Aron's later repentance and rallying to the Gaullist cause. In 1947, anti-communism and a dislike of the parliamentary regime constituted in the Fourth Republic led Aron to join de Gaulle's *Rassemblement du Peuple Français*, a movement that was regarded as crypto-fascist across large parts of the French left. Having previously done much to create a plausible image of de Gaulle as a would-be dictator, Aron now worked hard to demolish the myth that he had helped to build.<sup>88</sup> Yet this counted for nothing when the general, remembering his wartime treachery, overruled Aron's candidature for a professorship at the Collège de France in 1966.<sup>89</sup>

Such enduring hard feelings towards anti-Gaullist émigrés are largely explicable in terms of the high international stakes of dissent during a period when the political status of the Free French was often uncertain and insecure. This article has accordingly moved beyond the national frame, following Olivier Wieviorka's recent injunction to

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Darlan did not scandalise me; it put an end to fighting between the French and their allies; it created a transition between the Marshal and the General'. Aron, *Mémoires*, 175, 180, 181.

85 Loyer, *Paris à New York*, 78–82.

86 See note 13 above.

87 Soustelle, *De Londres à Alger*, 20; Passy, *Souvenirs. 2e Bureau Londres*, 76, 136, 220, 240.

88 R. Aron, *Le grand schism* (Paris 1948).

89 For a first-hand account of de Gaulle's reminiscence concerning Aron during the war and the French émigré left opposition in Britain and the USA more broadly, see A. Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, vol 1 (Paris 1994), 418, 436–7. On de Gaulle vetoing Aron's nomination to the Collège de France see A. Peyrefitte, vol 3 (Paris 2000), 117.

internationalize the history of resistance.<sup>90</sup> Here it has shown that the French émigré press's limited readership did not equate to negligible influence.<sup>91</sup> Political controversy over the French press in London had a significant impact outside the French exile community. This was firstly because these newspapers were an important source of information on French politics for British and American journalists. Consequently, although comparatively few people read most of these publications, they influenced the coverage of newspapers with much larger circulations. For instance, increasingly critical coverage of de Gaulle and the Free French in *The Observer* between 1942 and 1944 is partly attributable to contacts between that paper's staff and the anti-Gaullist opposition in London.<sup>92</sup> And at a time of heightened public sensitivity over the issue of press freedom, reports in the mainstream press of censorship against émigré newspapers generated significant political controversy outside the communities those papers were meant to serve. Sometimes London-based French newspapers were able to leverage the potential for such controversy to their advantage, as the case of *La France libre*'s establishment in New York shows. Politicians and officials on both sides of the Atlantic would have been less concerned about political controversies in and around such newspapers were it not for the fact that these controversies had the potential to be amplified in the pages of *Tribune*, *The Times* or *The Observer*.<sup>93</sup>

It is impossible to measure the precise extent of the French émigré press's influence on the British and American governments. The least that can be said in this regard is that senior officials and politicians in both countries took an interest in these newspapers. And this interest was far from passive. Because it was responsible for the financing of *France* and *La Marseillaise* and for the supplying and overseas distribution of all three papers, the British government was liable to be held responsible for their contents. This is indeed what led to the eventual suppression of *La Marseillaise*: when its anti-Americanism threatened the cohesion of the Anglo-American alliance the paper lost the British support on which it depended. Yet the British government did not speak with one voice when it came to the question of how to handle political controversy

90 Wiewiorka, *The Resistance*, 3–6.

91 On this point the present article aligns closely with ongoing research on the Vichy government's establishment of its own small circulation French language newspaper in Dublin, which although ostensibly directed at the French émigré community in Ireland was in fact conceived as a means of shaping wider media coverage of Vichy in Ireland and North America. On this see Luc-André Brunet's unpublished paper 'Vichy's transatlantic propaganda: the case of *Nouvelles de France*', presented at the annual conference of the Society for the Study of French History in June 2021.

92 R. Cockett, *David Astor and the Observer* (London 1991), 108–112. *The Observer*'s increasingly anti-Gaullist orientation was a matter of some concern among British officials at the Ministry of Information and the Foreign Office. See report by Ridsdale, 3 June 1942 in 'Criticisms of General de Gaulle', TNA FO371/32001; memo from Hodge to Carter concerning *The Observer*, 11 August 1943 in 'Government Policy toward General de Gaulle', TNA INF1/970.

93 Official concerns about controversy in the French émigré press spilling out into the mainstream British press are expressed in e.g. 'Complaint at Views Expressed in "La Marseillaise"', TNA FO371/36056. Regular contact between French émigré journalists and their Anglo-American counterparts is confirmed in Gombault, *Un journal, une aventure*, 36: 'Most of our English and American colleagues came to our office often to talk about the situation in our country'. J. Soustelle, *De Londres à Alger : souvenirs et documents sur la France libre* (Paris 1947), 20; Col. Passy, *Souvenirs. 2e Bureau Londres* (Monte Carlo 1947), 76, 136, 220, 240.

in the French émigré press. Officials and politicians at the MOI were generally more sympathetic to the Gaullists than were those at the Foreign Office, but positions changed over time in response to events.

Although the Roosevelt administration's hostility to de Gaulle originated independently of any influence from French intellectuals in exile, it was exacerbated by the French émigré press. This is most obvious in the case of *La Marseillaise*, which was effectively banned by the British government in response to American complaints. But the tendency of British and American politicians privately to criticize de Gaulle as a kind of French Mussolini-in-waiting derived in large part from the influence of French émigré journalists. In July 1943, *The Washington Post* reported that Britain was considering dropping its support for de Gaulle, who had come to be regarded as a fascist among government ministers.<sup>94</sup> There was substance to this story. It was based on a series of telegrams making the case for abandoning de Gaulle that Churchill had sent to his cabinet the previous May. Included among these were various memoranda given to Churchill by Roosevelt in which it was alleged that de Gaulle was a fascist. One of the sources for this allegation was Pierre Comert, the editor of *France*.<sup>95</sup> Nor was this the first time that allegations of Gaullist crypto-fascism originating from French émigré journalists gained a sympathetic ear at the top of the British government: as noted earlier, at the end of 1941 Anthony Eden had refused to hand control of the newspaper *France* to de Gaulle so as to keep it from 'following the 'fascist' tendencies of Carlton Gardens'.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, the influence of such claims should not be exaggerated. By the summer of 1942 Eden had changed his mind about de Gaulle. On 1 June that year he sent a memo to the war cabinet remarking on 'the large amount of support which General de Gaulle enjoys in Occupied France' before adding that 'My informants speak very strongly against the French émigrés in London and in the United States who display a certain activity but have not joined the Free French movement'.<sup>97</sup> The following spring the war cabinet rejected Churchill's proposal to drop the troublesome general. In communicating this decision to Churchill on 23 May, Eden and Atlee dismissed Comert's concerns on the grounds that he had 'a bitter personal prejudice against de Gaulle and will say almost anything to discredit him'.<sup>98</sup> The probable cause of this change of heart was that the imprisoned leader of the French Socialist Party Leon Blum had come out firmly in support of de Gaulle the previous spring. This marginalized a London-based socialist opposition to de Gaulle that had always represented only one strand of left-wing opinion on the Free French. Four days after the war cabinet's rebuttal of Churchill's proposal the National Resistance Council was established, formally uniting the internal French resistance under de Gaulle's leadership and further marginalising the anti-Gaullists of *France* and *La France libre*. Yet if de Gaulle eventually emerged

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94 'Survey Special: Ernest Lindley's Column', 13 July 1943, TNA INF1/970. On coverage of France in the American press more broadly, see Y-M Péréon, *L'image de la France dans la presse américaine, 1936-1947* (Brussels 2011), 251–310.

95 'W.M. (43) 75<sup>th</sup> Conclusions, Minute 1: Confidential Annexe', 23 May 1943, TNA CAB65/38.

96 Letter from Mack to Law, 31 December 1941 in 'Future of Newspaper France', TNA FO371/31924.

97 Memorandum to War Cabinet by Anthony Eden, 1 June 1942, TNA CAB/66/25/13.

98 Memorandum to Churchill by Eden and Atlee, 23 May 1943, TNA CAB65/38.

triumphant at the Liberation, this outcome was short-lived and far from inevitable. Nor did concerns over de Gaulle's political ambitions simply evaporate as he paraded down the Champs Élysée in August 1944. By promoting the idea that de Gaulle was a dictator-in-waiting the French émigré press established what would become a well-worn trope of anti-Gaullist politics from the Cold War to May '68. The fractious politics of French exile during the Second World War thus helped to shape the terms of political debate in France long after the end of the war. But anti-Gaullism was only one part of its legacy in this regard.

In an important essay on the postwar legacies of European exile in London, Martin Conway has argued that 'Exile was above all an education in anti-communism for European socialists' and that, in this respect, the political culture of the Cold War was partly rooted in the experience of exile.<sup>99</sup> In fact, this experience did not generate an anti-communist consensus among London-based French socialists,<sup>100</sup> but it did help shape the political culture of French anti-communism during the Cold War. In 1951 Raymond Aron co-founded *Preuves*, a monthly French magazine financed by the anti-communist cultural front the Congress for Cultural Freedom.<sup>101</sup> Not only was the format of this periodical modelled on that of *La France libre*; its covert reliance on CIA funding also mirrored the murky finances of its predecessor.<sup>102</sup> Nor was Aron the only French émigré intellectual to draw on wartime experience to inform their postwar cultural entrepreneurship: in 1948 André Labarthe and Martha Lecoutre capitalized on their association with the renowned *La France libre* to establish *Constellations*, a monthly magazine subsidized by the French Foreign Ministry and aimed at the Latin American market to maintain French cultural influence there in the face of the perceived threat to that influence increasingly posed by the United States.<sup>103</sup>

Viewed through an international lens too, then, the history of the French émigré press matters beyond its immediate context in the external French resistance. The cases of *Preuves* and *Constellations* show the history of the French press in wartime London to have been a significant episode in the pre-history of postwar American and French cultural diplomacy. With historians of twentieth-century cultural diplomacy increasingly favouring trans-war temporal frames, the international émigré press in London during the Second World War could provide a wealth of new source material. The French examples studied here are especially pertinent to ongoing debates over periodization and the relative influence of state and non-state actors in the operation of

99 M. Conway, 'Legacies of exile: The exile governments in London during the Second World War and the politics of post-war Europe', in M. Conway and J. Gotovitch (eds) *Europe in Exile: European Exile Communities in Britain, 1940-45* (New York 2001), 255-74, 270.

100 D. Klemperer, 'The Ideological Crisis of French Socialism, c. 1930 - c. 1950', unpublished PhD dissertation, Queen Mary University of London (forthcoming 2023).

101 N. Stenger, 'The difficult emergence of an 'Anti-totalitarian' journal in post-war France: *Preuves* and the congress for cultural freedom', in G. Scott-Smith and C.A. Lerg (eds) *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London 2017), 91-106.

102 On format see R. Aron, *Les dernières années du siècle* (Paris 1984), 237; for the CIA connection see F. Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London 1999).

103 T. Cottour, 'Constellation et Rencontre (1967-1970): Un malentendu fécond', in F. Vallotton (ed.) *Les Éditions Rencontre, 1950-1971* (Lausanne 2004), 137-74.

cultural diplomacy.<sup>104</sup> If governments ultimately decided the fates of papers like *France* and *La Marseillaise*, émigré journalists were nevertheless able to shape the terms of foreign policy debate within and beyond their host country. Small newspapers ostensibly directed towards exiled and diasporic populations could exert an influence on international affairs far greater than their often-meagre circulations might lead us to expect.

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104 For a recent survey of these debates, including on the trans-war perspective, see B. Martin and E. Piller, 'Cultural diplomacy and Europe's twenty-year crisis: An introduction', *Contemporary European History*, 30 (2021), 149–63.