

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-39108-5 - Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic

Henri Mendras

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

#### SOCIAL CHANGE IN MODERN FRANCE

*Social Change in Modern France* describes and explains the radical transformations which have taken place within French society during the past thirty-five years. The authors contend that these changes constitute a revolution in French affairs as important as that of 1789. Since the late 1950s the traditional social structures of the Third Republic have been transformed: peasantry and bourgeoisie have disappeared or mutated; the great national institutions of church, army, trade unions and schools have declined or severely weakened, and a late and rapid industrialisation has wrought profound economic changes. Even the French Communist Party has become a virtual irrelevance. All these institutions, so characteristic of French society throughout the Third Republic, have now ceased to be the object of major conflicts and tensions. In their stead local institutions, voluntary associations and the family have acquired a renewed strength and serve as the basic network for social relations and social life. Traditional French 'joie de vivre' has become diversified, and expressed in a series of varied life-styles. In contrast to the conventional analysis of a conflictive, endemically unstable country, Mendras and Cole regard contemporary France as a sturdy and cohesive society, based on widespread consensus.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-39108-5 - Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic

Henri Mendras

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

This book is published as part of the joint publishing agreement established in 1977 between the Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge. Titles published under this arrangement may appear in any European language or, in the case of volumes of collected essays, in several languages.

New books will appear either as individual titles or in one of the series which the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and the Cambridge University Press have jointly agreed to publish. All books published jointly by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme and the Cambridge University Press will be distributed by the Press throughout the world.

Cet ouvrage est publié dans le cadre de l'accord de co-édition passé en 1977 entre la Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme et le Press Syndicate de l'Université de Cambridge. Toutes les langues européennes sont admises pour les titres couverts par cet accord, et les ouvrages collectifs peuvent paraître en plusieurs langues.

Les ouvrages paraissent soit isolément, soit dans l'une des séries que la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme et Cambridge University Press ont convenu de publier ensemble. La distribution dans le monde entier des titres ainsi publiés conjointement par les deux établissements est assurée par Cambridge University Press.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-39108-5 - Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic

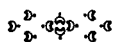
Henri Mendras

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*Social change in  
modern France*

*Towards a cultural  
anthropology of the Fifth Republic*



HENRI MENDRAS

*Directeur de recherche au CNRS;  
Professeur à l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris  
with*

ALISTAIR COLE

*Lecturer in Politics, Keele University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

EDITIONS DE LA MAISON DES SCIENCES DE L'HOMME  
Paris

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-39108-5 - Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural  
 Anthropology of the Fifth Republic  
 Henri Mendras  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

With Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme  
 54 Boulevard Raspail, 75270 Paris Cedex 06

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521391085](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521391085)

Originally published in French as *La Seconde Révolution française*  
 by Gallimard, Paris, 1988  
 and © Henri Mendras 1988

First published in English by Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme  
 and Cambridge University Press 1991 as  
*Social Change in Modern France:  
 Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic*  
 English adaptation © Maison des Sciences de l'Homme  
 and Cambridge University Press 1991  
 Reprinted 1993

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Mendras, Henri.

Social change in modern France: towards a cultural  
 anthropology of the Fifth Republic / Henri Mendras with Alistair Cole.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. ).

ISBN 0 521 39108 3.—ISBN 0 521 39998 X (pbk.)

1. Ethnology — France. 2. France — History — 1958–. 3. France —  
 Social life and customs. I. Cole, Alistair, 1959–. II. Title.

GN585.F8M46 1991 90–1493 CIP  
 306'.0944 — dc20

ISBN 978-0-521-39108-5 hardback  
 ISBN 978-0-521-39998-2 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2007

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-39108-5 - Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural  
 Anthropology of the Fifth Republic  
 Henri Mendras  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## Contents



<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
Introduction	I
PART I THE BREAKING-UP OF TRADITIONAL CLASS STRUCTURES	13
1 The bourgeois, the workers and the peasants	15
2 The transformation of the social classes: the triumph of the central constellation	31
PART II THE DE-MYSTIFICATION OF THE GREAT NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	49
3 The army and the church	51
4 Working-class institutions	73
5 The national education system	91
6 The new national consensus	107
7 A village democracy	122
PART III THE STAGES OF LIFE	143
8 The strength of kinship	145
9 Men and women	163
10 Young and old	177
PART IV A NEW CIVILISATION	197
11 Changing lifestyles	199
12 The cultural explosion	212
13 A moral revolution?	226
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 247
<i>Index</i>	252

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-39108-5 - Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic

Henri Mendras

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Preface



*Social Change in Modern France* originated as *La Seconde Révolution française*, by Henri Mendras. It started from the precept that the social sciences had recently become too specialised, that social scientists were in danger of losing sight of the overall structure of society by concentrating too exclusively on their own specialisms. Taking as its object the post-war social revolution and the likely future evolution of French society, the book set itself the task of drawing together the main pieces of this complex mosaic, in order to give a comprehensive overview of the whole. This procedure is obviously open to the objection that it leads to a cavalier interpretation of each particular sphere of society, upon which specialists would prefer to deliberate alone. This risk is fully assumed by the authors. The dual ambition of *Social Change in Modern France* is to provide a considered analysis of the revolution which has changed French society during the past thirty-five years and to attempt to draw an outline of the new society of the third millennium, which is presently in the process of construction.

In its analysis of the Second French Revolution, the book concentrates initially upon the great institutions (such as the church, the army, the school and local government) and their working-class counterparts (the Communist Party and the trade unions), which have traditionally claimed so much attention. It charts the fundamental changes to which they have been subjected. It looks beyond these institutions, however, and seeks to discover the new social structures which organise the lives of groups and individuals. These institutions are frequently barely visible; indeed, they are often still in the process of being invented.

The great success of *La Seconde Révolution française* in France prompted Professor Mendras to have the book translated into English: Alistair Cole agreed to undertake the task. What began as a work of translation, however, was transformed into one of adaptation, interpretation and creation. The result is that *Social Change in Modern France* is more than a translation of *La Seconde Révolution française*: it is the fruit of a collaboration between Henri

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-39108-5 - Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic

Henri Mendras

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

viii

*Preface*

Mendras as author, and Alistair Cole as co-author. The authors hope that *Social Change in Modern France* will fill an important vacuum in the understanding of contemporary France in the English-speaking world. It attempts to provide a serious but accessible sociological study, we hope avoiding the pitfalls of journalese and impressionism which have characterised most other such works. The authors are grateful to Vincent Wright of Nuffield College, Oxford, who played no small part in the materialisation of this project, and to Shirley Letwin, who read the manuscript. Any mistakes are, of course, our own.