

**The Mediatization of Politics during the Fronde:
Condé's *Bureau de Presse***

**by
Mark Bannister**

The Fronde is a very complex phenomenon. Scholarship in recent years, that of Lloyd Moote, Orest Ranum, Michel Pernot and others, has ensured that the old idea of the Fronde as a “guerre en dentelles” is dead, and Hubert Carrier’s monumental work on the mazarinades has shown that the key to understanding the political subtleties of the time lies in the mass of pamphlets produced on a daily basis rather than in the memoirs of self-interested individuals written usually long after the event.¹

The Prince de Condé seems to have largely missed out on this rethinking of political rôles. It is less than forty years since one historian of the Fronde was repeating as fact the old story that Condé had been persuaded to start a civil war by his sister who wanted a good excuse not to have to rejoin her husband in Normandy.² Kossmann, writing in 1954, declared that Condé’s ambition was insatiable but also aimless. He wanted power, wealth, prestige, but had no policy whatsoever. His view has been influential and is still being repeated in some quarters.³ Unfortunately, it is not so very far removed from the idea of a man who would go to war to please his sister.

It is certainly true that Condé was ambitious, arrogant and keen to acquire wealth, but it is demonstrably untrue that he had no program or policy during the civil war against the Court in 1651-52, as a study of the pamphlets published for him and the journals kept by contemporary observers reveals. Moreover, in presenting that program to the public, the team of pamphleteers who wrote for him developed a number of techniques which can justifiably be compared with modern ‘*médiatique*’ methods.

In 1648, Condé had returned triumphant from yet another victory over the Spanish and had been drawn reluctantly into the

confrontation that had arisen between the Court and the Parlement. He was asked to take charge of the military blockade of Paris when Mazarin's policies provoked open rebellion, and he thereby earned himself the hatred of a good proportion of the population.⁴ When a kind of order was restored, he expected to benefit from the outcome and, for a time, his arrogance and his low opinion of Mazarin were very apparent. The result was that he was arrested and imprisoned, and from that point onwards it is possible to trace the rapid development of an ideological commitment on his part. He was never brought to trial, but the Court formulated their charges against him in a number of published documents which they hoped would convince the public that the arrest was justified. It is here that the conflict between two concepts of the state becomes clear and explicit.

Condé was accused of wanting ever more positions of power and authority within the state because he was ambitious and avaricious. He wanted an area of sovereignty of his own and it was hinted that he aimed to usurp the royal power itself. Most offensive of all, the Court attacked the very basis of his heroic status, by suggesting that his glorious deeds were motivated primarily by self-interest rather than by service to the king: "l'esprit qui le portoit dedans les batailles n'estoit pas le vray genie de la pure generosité, [...] Il a seruy l'Estat & son Roy, mais son premier motif estoit de se servir soy-mesme."⁵ These charges have to be seen in the light of the theory of absolutism as it had been developing for thirty or forty years. Cardin Le Bret, Silhon and others had predicated their political writings on the assumption that the subject had always to be defined in relation to the monarch. All authority, all power, all *gloire* derived solely from and were vested solely in the king, and the subject could therefore do no more than reflect them. Consequently, a subject who became too powerful or acquired too much authority within the state posed a political threat to the king and could be imprisoned, even though he had committed no crime.

Condé's arrest clearly took him by surprise, but, during the thirteen months of his imprisonment, he and his supporters went through a rapid learning process as regards both the need to define

what exactly he stood for and also the need to find effective methods of putting his case before the public. This process is very evident in the pamphlets published between January 1650 and February 1651. When Condé was first arrested, his family and supporters responded in a predictable and frankly unimaginative way. The Court had published its charges against Condé: they therefore responded by taking up those charges and setting out to refute them one by one. The result was a series of pamphlets of great length, resembling the traditional treatise, full of classical and biblical references. For instance, the *Apologie pour Messieurs les Princes*, written by Sarasin, runs to 96 quarto pages and is pedantic in its insistence on picking up each point in the Court's charges and worrying it to death. If we look at what was being published seven or eight months later, it is apparent that Condé's team had realised that long and detailed appeals to justice and fairness were of limited use and that they had to adopt a more eye-catching approach.

Some of their efforts made a considerable impact. At dawn on November 4th, 1650, the population of Paris were surprised to find that several of the *poteaux à carcan* in the streets⁶ carried a printed effigy of Mazarin hanging by a noose of rope and, underneath each effigy, what purported to be a court judgement sentencing the Cardinal to be hanged for crimes against the state. The effect was immediate and telling.⁷ A month later, a letter from Condé to the Parlement was published, written by Condé himself in pencil and smuggled out of his prison. Unlike the earlier justifications, this one was short (only seven pages) and merely expressed the resignation of the great hero at being unjustly treated by his enemies: he was determined to suffer with constancy and asked for no more than the goodwill of the Parlement. He regrets that his enemies have

terny à moins de rien ma gloire, flétry mes palmes,
effacé la memoire de mes illustres actions, de l'eter-
nel souuenir de la posterité, & chassé honteusement
comme vn second Phaëton d'aupres de ce Soleil,
dont la seule veuë me faisoit reuiure. [...] Mais
comme ie n'ay iamais manqué de constance n'y de

valeur dans toutes les occurrences qui le pourroient
requerir, le ne manqueray point aussi de patience
dans vn lieu où les plus hardis perdroient toute leur
contenance.

His style and his technique of referring to himself at times in the third person make it read like a passage from *Le Grand Cyrus*, or perhaps more accurately from *Cassandre* which had been one of his favorite novels, but it clearly appealed to the *romanesque* sensibilities of the population and achieved its aim of swinging the sympathies of the Parlement towards him.⁸

In July 1651, five months after the release of the Princes and Mazarin's departure into exile, it became apparent that Gondi and the other Frondeurs were plotting to have Condé arrested again. He therefore found it necessary to withdraw from Court, but this time he was well prepared. He had an experienced team to form his *bureau de presse* and he had an ideological justification for his political stance. On the ideological side, Condé presented an alternative vision of the state to that expounded by the Court, one which allowed him to counter the accusation that he was trying to usurp the royal authority. He postulated a state in which the king was sovereign but not absolute. According to his vision, the *lois fondamentales*, which supposedly formed a kind of unwritten constitution, predated the monarchy and were therefore binding on the king as much as on his subjects. The various estates and orders had their own rights and areas of privilege in which the king could not interfere and the Parlement acted as a check on the exercise of the royal power. The great nobles in particular could claim their own sovereignty, for instance by being *seigneur* of a territory recognized as sovereign or by signing treaties with foreign princes, provided they did not thereby infringe the sovereignty vested in the king. The great nobles were also responsible for governing the provinces on behalf of the king, not as functionaries but as plenipotentiaries, using their networks of *fidèles* to maintain order and carry out the royal policy according to their own judgement. The Princes du Sang had a special function in that they acted as the king's chief advisers. During the king's minority, his senior male relative acted as Regent and chaired the Conseil du Roi, made up

of the Princes du Sang and any specialist advisers they might choose to appoint. Women and foreigners were specifically excluded from the Regency and from the Conseil.

This vision of the state, expounded progressively in a number of pamphlets, was held out to the French as the one established by their forefathers, the only authentic one and certainly the only one that could guarantee their individual and corporate liberties against the ever-present threat of tyranny. It allowed Condé to claim that those who wished to usurp the royal power, notably the devious and machiavellian foreigner, Mazarin, were trying to persuade the king that his power was absolute, to undermine the rights of every section of society and to replace the legitimate governmental and financial structures with their own separate networks of *créatures*. It may well be that, if Condé had been successful, his commitment to the traditional liberties of others would have been less than he liked to claim, but there is no evidence to support the charge that he was interested in usurping the royal power.⁹

From this base of political theory, Condé's team set out to manipulate public opinion, using a range of techniques which arguably had much in common with modern media methods. They were very professional and were certainly more effective than the teams supporting Mazarin and Gondi. Condé's printer, Nicolas Vivenay, moved his presses into the Hotel de Condé in July 1651 so that he was out of the reach of the *lieutenant-civil* and his police. At that time, Naudé complained to Mazarin that "il n'y a personne qui prenne le soing de faire escrire pour leurs Majestez pendant qu'on ne void que des manifestes de la part de Monsieur le Prince": several months later, he was still inveighing against those who published pamphlets "avec tant de soin parce qu'ils reconnoissent evidemment le bon effect que cela produit en leur faveur."¹⁰ Between 1650 and 1653, according to Carrier, Condé's *bureau de presse* published more than 400 pamphlets, reaching at the busiest times an output of four or five a week.¹¹

These pamphlets were intended to fulfil a number of functions. First, the public were presented with what might be called a news service, giving accounts of military and political events. The offi-

cial *Gazette* was the mouthpiece of the Court (even though Mazarin felt that Renaudot was not sufficiently critical of Condé) and Condé's *bureau de presse* naturally wanted to correct the balance. In reports on military engagements, they made sure that every skirmish between Condé's troops and those of Mazarin appeared as a victory or at least as giving the advantage to Condé. Factual accuracy was less important than the overall impression. When Condé routed the royal army at Bléneau, for instance, Turenne was said to have had to swim across the river to escape after the defeat, although he was not actually present at the battle.¹²

In political matters, they often scored highly with the public because Condé had an extremely good intelligence service which could provide and publish information on, for instance, Mazarin's movements as he prepared to re-enter France or the arrival of Mazarin's agents in Paris and their activities thereafter. They provided details of the manoeuvrings and in-fighting at court. They got hold of the secret agreement between Mazarin and the Frondeurs conspiring against Condé, and published it. Because their reports were frequently accurate, they had sufficient credibility with the public to allow them to embroider the circumstances, such as when they claimed to have got hold of Mazarin's orders to the Queen Mother being carried by his agent, Ondedei: some of the facts they put forward were incorrect but their overall interpretation of Mazarin's intentions was very plausible and in fact the Queen was later to carry out all the actions they had predicted.¹³

Secondly, they built on the base of this information service to manipulate public opinion and provoke action among selected sections of the Parisian populace. The use of placards was very effective in this respect, partly because it was applied judiciously so that its effect was not weakened. Although less striking than the effigy of Mazarin hanged for his crimes, the *Second Avertissement aux Parisiens* issued on July 14th, 1651 is a typical example of the technique, aimed in this case at persuading the people to stand firm against the likely return of Mazarin. Whereas the *affiches* put out by the Court almost always consisted of royal edicts of some length couched in legal terminology, the message here is structured very simply. On the one hand, the main theme comes through

strongly: Mazarin is the sworn enemy of the people of Paris, determined to return and avenge himself in the most bloodthirsty way. He is on his way even now. There are traitors among us helping his cause, quite possibly including the Parlement. Short phrases emphasize the reality of the threat: “la perte de ton sang & de tes biens” , “ta perte seroit inévitable”, “la ruyne entiere de tout le Royaume, & principalement celle de Paris.” Counterpointed around the main theme is the consolatory message: Monsieur le Prince is with you. If you support him, he will make sure that Mazarin cannot harm you. If you do not, he will have no option but to move to Bordeaux and leave you to your fate: “ce grand Prince te monstre le chemin, seconde ses bons desseins”, “Monsieur le Prince est encore à tes portes”, “offre luy ton bras & tes assistances, donne luy ton secours.” Condé’s party was uniquely successful in mastering the technique of presenting direct messages in this way, as is shown by the placard that appeared on the streets on April 2nd, 1652, when news came that Condé was about to arrive back in Paris after the victory at Bléneau. It urged the population to assemble on the Pont Neuf to show their support and a huge crowd turned up, estimated variously between 3000 and 6000. This was perhaps the best result achieved by Condé’s party and represented the high point of his popularity.

Like some elements of the modern press, Condé’s *bureau de presse* made attempts to use their news function to bring about the results they wanted to achieve. On May 14th, 1652, the Parlement were holding a debate on how law and order could be restored. Orléans arrived and announced that, since the people generally respected him, he was prepared to take charge of the situation but he would require the Parlement to invest him with full authority. Outside, the Princes were telling the crowd that the Parlement had voted to grant Orléans absolute authority and, later in the day, pamphlets appeared reporting on these decisions and on the rapturous response of the people. Unfortunately for the Princes, the Parlement chose not to vote in favour of Orléans and the attempted *coup* failed.¹⁴

The ability of the *bureau de presse* to work at great speed was crucial to their success. The Battle of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine

took place on July 2nd, 1652 and the next day five accounts of the events were published, interpreting the outcome as a victory for the Princes, showing how Condé had risked his life for the Parisians. Speed, however, was achieved at the expense of editorial coordination and the writers were uncertain as to how they should present the part played by the citizens of Paris themselves. Some claimed that a large troop of volunteers had insisted on going outside the gates to support Condé's efforts; others criticized the bourgeoisie for being influenced by the mazarinists and failing to provide the necessary backing for the man who was fighting on their behalf.¹⁵

The third and vital function of Condé's *bureau de presse* was to maintain a constant polemical output, in order to convince as many sections of society as possible that Condé's cause was legitimate. Part of the operation involved responding to polemical pamphlets from opposing camps and, here again, Condé's men worked with remarkable speed. If the Court issued an edict against Condé or one that affected his position in some way, or if Gondi or one of his supporters published a justification of their position, a response and in some cases several responses would normally be on the streets within a week. So, at the height of the power struggle between Condé and the Frondeurs in August 1651, Gondi's pamphlet *Avis desinteressé sur la conduite de Monseigneur le Coadiuteur* provoked three substantial refutations of varying degrees of virulence within no more than seven days.

The main polemical function, however, was to keep reiterating Condé's case, adjusting the presentation in the light of changing circumstances but always hammering home the same message. The chief polemicist was Dubosc-Montandré, who produced about fifty substantial pamphlets. He was extremely skilled at finding effective ways of catching the public eye and came to exercise a major influence on the methods employed by all sides. Two of his pamphlets, *Le Point de l'ovale* and *La Franche Marguerite*, both published in March 1652, became notorious because they called for a general uprising including the killing of known supporters of Mazarin. The Parlement was horrified and had them publicly burned by the hangman (though significantly they did not launch proceedings against Montandré himself). This has tended to feed

the myth that Paris was in the hands of the mob and that Condé was trying to use it to start a reign of terror. Christian Jouhaud has used *Le Point de l'ovale* as evidence in his enquiry into the extent to which the mazarinades were revolutionary.¹⁶

However, it is necessary to analyze Montandré's output in the context of Condé's policy. In March 1652, the immediate aim was to bring about "l'Union des Princes et de la Ville" with the Princes du Sang and the Parlement all speaking with one voice so that Mazarin and his supporters were clearly isolated and the program put forward by Condé was legitimated beyond doubt. The problem was the Parlement. They kept issuing statements against Mazarin and sending deputations to the Queen to ask for his exile, but two-thirds of their members never made any serious move to support the Princes. An increasing number of them were being bought off by Mazarin's agents. Condé therefore had to put pressure on them to convince them that the mass of the population supported the Princes and that they would be in trouble if they did not do the same. The key to success was the class of Parisian between the *menu peuple* and the prosperous bourgeoisie, the large number of *artisans*, *boutiquiers* and lower-level professional people who had a vested interest in stability as they understood it but who did not have *rentes* or offices on which to live. They were convinced that all their troubles were caused by Mazarin and a supposed legion of *financiers* who were draining away the money which they produced by their labours and which rightfully belonged to them. Aware of the level of discontent, Condé had been cultivating this particular section of society since his withdrawal to Saint-Maur in July 1651. He made a point of taking part in their festivities, dancing with their wives. They were the people who spontaneously surrounded his coach when they thought he was going to be arrested by a regiment of the Guards, who came to Orléans saying there were 4000 of them who would fight in the Princes' army because trade was so bad and they wanted to bring order back again, who formed the rank-and-file troops of the bourgeois militia but at one point refused to guard the Parlement because they were a bunch of mazarinists.¹⁷

Montandré developed a technique specifically to persuade this class, which might in the twentieth century be categorized as

lower-middle or perhaps skilled-working class, to support Condé. It can be seen in all his major pamphlets published in the second half of 1651 and beyond, but *Le Point de l'ovale* is one of the best examples. The key is a clear and supposedly irrefutable line of argument. The title-page gives a concise five-point summary of what is to come so that there is no doubt about the message: (a) we should all support one party so that the war is brought to an end; (b,c) the party that has justice on its side, maintaining and being maintained by the law, is the one to support; (d,e) having identified that party, we should rise up and destroy the other. The argument is then presented methodically stage by stage. Each paragraph makes a specific point, building on the previous one, and all are kept short, with an average length of eight lines as against the twenty or more in the majority of polemical mazarinades. As the case for an uprising is developed, the key points are reinforced by ideological statements which can serve as rallying-cries:

Quand les guerres dureroient cent ans, ceux qui les
fomentoient n'en seroient iamais moins gras.

Ne le dissimulons plus: les grands se ioüent de nos-
tre patience: & parce que nous endurons tout, ils
pensent estre en droit de nous faire tout souffrir.

Voyons que les grands ne sont grands que parce que
nous les portons sur nos espauls: nous n'auons qu'à
les secoüer pour en ioncher la terre.

C'est vne folie au pauvre peuple que de se laisser
succer iusqu'à la derniere goutte de son sang, pen-
dant qu'il ne tient qu'à luy qu'il ne s'engraisse de
celuy de ses tyrans.

As the reader follows the stages of the intellectual argument in favour of an uprising, he also absorbs the emotional reassurance that he is drawn from the solid and hard-working core of the nation. He and his fellows are suffering from the depredations of the blood-suckers above, specifically those who support Mazarin and who are therefore opposed to the traditional liberties of the people,

while at the same time the common people below are shown to be volatile and unreliable. The anti-Mazarin uprising in 1648 had failed because the *artisan*-class had not carried it through to its logical conclusion. Now that Condé has taken up the defense of the nation's rights, they must support him and help him to finish the task. It is not surprising that the Parlement felt *Le Point de l'ovale* deserved to be burnt.

Montandré's methods were so successful in seizing the attention of the public that they were adopted by pamphleteers of all parties, but in general they were much less well handled by others. *Le Flambeau d'Estat*, for instance, shows what the form was likely to become in less skilled hands. Published in August 1652, it was written by one of Condé's partisans (but not Montandré) and was still calling for a general uprising even though the Princes claimed by then to be in control of the Parlement and the City of Paris. The front page contains what purports to be a straightforward summary of the argument, but it lacks a strict logic. The sections of the pamphlet setting out the argument pass from calm, measured discussion to heights of indignation and back again to a rational conclusion. Section I is a discussion of the definition of justice in basically abstract terms. Section II then makes excessive and heavy-handed use of anaphora and hyperbolic cumulation in an attempt to make the need for justice in the current situation seem irrefutable, leading awkwardly to the conclusion in Section III that justice requires the people to rise up against Mazarin. Section IV assures the reader that such an uprising is entirely justified and brings the argument back to the theoretical level in Section V with copious references to Aristotle, Aquinas, the Book of Kings, etc. to show that a people has the right to seek justice for itself. There is more than a touch of the pulpit and the court-room in *Le Flambeau d'Estat* and, in showing how difficult it was for many writers in the mid-seventeenth century to let go of the heavier techniques of rhetoric, it underlines the success of those such as Montandré who had grasped the need for more direct polemical techniques to serve an active and immediate political cause.

It is no doubt anachronistic to look too closely for parallels between the mazarinades and modern journalistic methods, if only

because the mazarinades were a response to a very specific and abnormal political situation of a sort that the modern press does not have to deal with and in a world that has long since disappeared. None the less, the pamphleteers of 1652, and particularly those working for Condé, can claim the credit for having prepared the way for the polemicists of the pre-Enlightenment, such as Pierre Bayle, because they refined the techniques of debate and argument and sharpened up the use of the language. As Carrier has suggested, « c'est la souplesse, l'agilité de la langue qui constitue la plus importante et la plus durable des conquêtes littéraires de cette période.”¹⁸ Where a Balzac or a Silhon had felt it necessary to write treatises of considerable length to put across their political points, Condé's *bureau de presse* showed the advantages of the condensed presentation, the repeated slogan, the ironic aside, the rapid response. They demonstrated how to respond flexibly and effectively to a complex political situation, a skill that was to prove invaluable as the seventeenth century moved towards the Enlightenment, and they consequently represent an important stage in the movement towards modern methods of persuasion.

Oxford Brookes University

NOTES

¹ A.L.Moote, *The Revolt of the Judges: the Parlement of Paris and the Fronde (1648-1652)* (Princeton: UP, 1971); O.Ranum, *La Fronde* (Paris: Seuil, 1995); M.Pernot, *La Fronde* (Paris: Fallois, 1994); H.Carrier, *La Presse de la Fronde (1648-1653): les mazarinades*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1989-91).

² P.-G.Lorris, *La Fronde* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1961), p. 244.

³ E.H.Kossmann, *La Fronde* (Leiden: U.P., 1954), p. 196.

⁴ For the most complete expression of that hatred, see Du Portail, *Discours sur la deputation du Parlement à Monsieur le Prince de Condé* (s.l.n.d. [1649]).

⁵ *Discours et considerations politiques & morales sur la prison des princes de Condé, Conty, et duc de Longueville* (Paris, 1650), p. 8. The official charges were published in the *Lettre du Roy sur la detention des princes de Condé et de Conty, & duc de Longueville*

(Paris, 1650) but Lionne's *Discours* provided a much more theoretical gloss on them.

⁶ Used for fastening chains across the streets when it was necessary to prevent unrest.

⁷ A facsimile of the placard has been published by Carrier in *La Presse de la Fronde*, I, 350.

⁸ *Lettre de Monseigneur le Prince de Condé à Messieurs de Paris* (Paris, 1650).

⁹ These political theories are embedded in a dozen or more pamphlets, of which the principal ones are *Les Decisions du censeur monarchique* (Paris, 1651); *La Decadence visible de la royauté* (s.l., 1652); *La Franche Marguerite* (s.l.n.d. [1652]); *Le Grand Ressort des guerres ciuiles en France* (s.l., 1652).

¹⁰ *Considérations politiques sur la Fronde: la correspondance entre Gabriel Naudé et le cardinal Mazarin*, ed. K.Willis Wolfe and P.J.Wolfe (Paris, Seattle, Washington: Biblio 17, 1991), pp. 51, 93.

¹¹ *La Presse de la Fronde*, I, 143.

¹² *Relation de toutes les particularitez de la grande et signalée victoire obtenue par Monsieur le Prince de Condé* (s.l., 1652).

¹³ *Lettre d'un marchand de Liege à un sien correspondant de Paris* (s.l., 1652).

¹⁴ *Resultat veritable de ce qui s'est passé dans le Parlement [...] le quatorzieme May 1652* (Paris, 1652); *Les Dernieres Resolutions faites en Parlement [...] le 14. May* (Paris, 1652).

¹⁵ The 'official' version published by Vivenay and possibly written by Marigny (*Relation veritable de ce qui se passa le Mardy deuxieme de Iuillet au combat donné au Fauxbourg Saint Anthoine*, Paris, s.d. [1652]) describes bourgeois volunteers assembling with cries of joy and making a foray outside the gates to support Condé's troops.

¹⁶ *Mazarinades: la Fronde des mots* (Paris: Aubier, 1985), pp. 168-73. See also A.Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain: sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), pp. 60-68.

¹⁷ August 22, 1651, April 3, 1652 and May 12, 1652 respectively.

¹⁸ *Les Muses guerrières: les mazarinades et la vie littéraire au milieu du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1996), p. 634.