

## **The origins of Canal+**

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This paper focuses on the establishment of Canal+ in the early part of the 1980s. It situates the debate surrounding the new channel and its launch in 1984 within various contexts. These are:

- **the political context** of the election of the first president and government of the left in 1981. Mitterrand and his Socialist government were committed to a political programme based around the theme of change. Major political and economic reforms were introduced near the start of the new presidency: a range of social reforms (eg abolition of capital punishment, shorter working week, longer paid holidays), economic reforms (eg a raft of nationalizations) and political reforms (eg decentralization). The debate surrounding the launch of Canal+ needs to be situated within this context of political change.

- **the media context** of internal pressures from various media policy stakeholders for the entry of new players into the broadcasting market on the supply side in both radio and television. Reforms were undertaken by the Socialist government in the broadcasting sector (eg legalization of community radio stations, the abolition of the state monopoly in broadcasting, new broadcasting statute committed to 'freedom', creation of a broadcasting regulatory authority) to seek to address these pressures.

- **the industrial context** of the desire to provide a boost to relevant French industries (television manufacturers, decoders) at a time when the state still regarded itself as having a prime managing role in the economy. In the media sector the Socialist government's commitment in the 1980s to a direct broadcasting satellite service managed by the transmission company TDF and to an ambitious cable plan formed part of the belief in state-led technological progress in the media.

- **the personal contribution** of certain key players, notably André Rousselet.

The paper reviews the key debates surrounding the political decision to establish the new channel as a pay-tv service, the first of its kind in France.