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French Socialists: Refusing the "Third Way"

In 1997 the French Socialist party, in alliance with the small parties of the Communists, Verts (left-wing ecologists), Citizens' Movement, and Radical Socialists (the so-called plural left), won a narrow victory defeating the President's party, the failing government and its beleaguered prime minister. In June, the left formed a government under its leader, Lionel Jospin, and included ministers from all of the formations. Its victory was unexpected as in 1993 the Socialist party had suffered a near obliteration and the conservative right had won a landslide, but it had revived at the 1995 presidential elections, when it ran Lionel Jospin, and steadily—though not spectacularly—revived after that. However, the victory in 1997 was more the result of the conservative right's divisions, an unpopular government, the hostility of the Front National, and the spectacular miscalculations of the neo-Gaullist President Jacques Chirac than to the prowess of the renewed Socialist party.

French Socialist policy was put together initially in the presidential campaign of 1995 with a view to building and maintaining this plural left coalition. Once in power, the government performed competently and was popular, though it was not without its setbacks, and proved administratively effective in the difficult constitutional position of "cohabiting" with the conservative President Chirac. There were problems both with retaining coalition partners and the cohesion of the Cabinet, but the party, under First Secretary François Hollande, proved stolidly supportive of the prime minister. Part of the strategy was to position the premier for the presidential election of 2002 and, when Jospin was eliminated from the runoff, this failed.

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Jospin's failure was partly personal (a feckless campaign) but was rooted in the contradictions of the Socialist position trying to stretch between the extreme left and the center.

Taking its cue from Mitterrand's dictum that the "party is won from the left," Jospin's strategy in 1995 was to restore the coalition of the left by emphasizing the Socialists' radical and socialist outlook. Its credibility as a governing party was to be restored at the same time, but this came at the price of a continuation of the radical disseverance between "discourse" and practice. Jospin became the Socialists' presidential candidate after a primary against the then First Secretary Henri Emmanuelli in 1995. When he became party leader in the same year, he refashioned it into an instrument for taking power very much through his personal authority. Jospin had no internal opposition to speak of, although there was a "Gauche socialist" faction and the friends of the Speaker (and subsequently finance minister) Laurent Fabius were not the leader's principal claque. Where the left in the 1970s around Chevènement was a serious opponent to Mitterrand's leadership, the Gauche Socialiste was an irritant to Jospin, which, although capable of opposing the leadership on Europe and constantly attacking "neoliberalism," had no alternative to offer. Jospin used his authority to bring the left back to power, but not to revise the party's doctrine or to modernize its appeal on a centrist or "realist" line. Therein lies the distinctiveness of the French party: a government practice that was in line with other European states but an outward hostility to any compromise with socialist ideals and a repudiation of the "Third Way."

Socialist History

In French Socialism there always has been a *décalage* between the radical rhetoric of the party and its timid government practice. Crucially, the French Socialists had to ally with the Communist party (Parti communiste français—PCF) in 1936 and was forced to do so again in the 1970s to build a coalition capable of winning power. Communists polled 28 percent shortly after the Liberation and in the 1960s and 1970s it regularly took more than 20 percent. In addition, the PCF was a massive organization, disciplined, well funded, and with a network of supporting unions, newspapers, and fronts. Hence this alliance reinforced the Socialist party's stance as critic outside the system and alien to its circuits of power. Thus the French

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never had their "Bad Godesberg" Congress as did the SDP. In the German spa town in 1959, the Social Democrats stripped themselves of the Marxist references from their program to prioritize the humanist tradition of freedom, justice, and solidarity.[1]

This stress on Marx and Marxist purity might explain why the "Bad Godesberg" moment never arrived and why the party had an "opposition" mentality rather than a culture of government. The need to fend off competition from the Communist party and to defend its shaky hold on its own voters, as well as to forge an alliance with them, explains in practical terms why the new Socialists never moved to modernize their party in the 1970s. Socialists defended their positions in the party in the traditional way. All of which meant that there was a vast outpouring of energy, but away from the practical and the pragmatic and into the lyrical and "revolutionary." Eyes were fixed on the far horizons of the revolutionary transformation and not on the quotidian preoccupations of the reformist. In this view, the cathartic moment would be the accession to power of the new team guided by their purity of intentions and morally representing the dispossessed and exploited. They would be able, because they represented the working class and not the "bourgeoisie," to press ahead with necessary policies and they would win. How these were to be effected were of less concern than the need to keep the vision intact.

Thus *Changer la vie*, the party program of 1972, condemned capitalist society for its attendant squalor and inequalities (see 8 and 19). It claimed to be able to "liberate mankind" and end exploitation of man by man. These and other similar references placed it in the long line of socialist documents describing the route to revolution and in that way it was traditional. It was Marxist-based and the vocabulary was certainly Marxist and situated the document in the current of Marxist debate, which at that time pervaded the non-Communist left in France. In the joint Communist/Socialist manifesto of 1972, there was a commitment to the "break with capitalism" and the Marxist influence was reaffirmed.

This socialism was formulaic, but the proposals came from the standard locker of non-Communist solutions, including nationalization and state planning. State industries have a long history in France and one that is not confined to the left (state industry is Royalist in origin), but the assumption was that if the right people (the left) were in charge of the state, industries, and then society, would be changed fundamentally. Under the Socialists, power would

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move from capital, and from the "multinationals," which were then the object of attack from the left, to the "people" by the agency of the state (14). Planning, through the use of the state's power and through credit, would complete the job of "socializing" the economy, turning it away from production for profit to collective ends. "Nationalization" and "planning," two classic themes, were topped off with a vaguely defined "self-management" ("*autogestion*") that was used to differentiate the Parti Socialiste from the Bolshevism of the Eastern bloc. This would be a new model of society as well as a peaceful revolution of all the classes and groups that were against capitalism, but one that would transform France into a socialist system through a "break" ("*rupture*") with capitalism.

In 1980 the party's *Projet socialiste* came from the same perspective: nationalization of the principal means of production, distribution, and exchange, egalitarianism, the general interest, education and culture, and the alliance of the working class with other "progressive" strata. Its insistence on the "grand soir" remained intact and it also promised to replace capitalism with another type of system ("one not based on profit" [172]) with full employment and a strong growth rate (183). However, it looked to the mechanisms of nationalization, planning, and self-management supported by the "class front" of the exploited and dominated to effect the transformation. It depicted capitalist society, and the "crisis" it was then alleged to be undergoing, in the same lurid terms. It described the "multinationals" grinding down young people and it ascribed to the "rich and powerful" the ambition to subject France to a range of miseries, including the deprivation of liberties and savage repression (370–71). On the other hand, it offered the chance to free humanity and make France the melting pot for the new society (9 and 371).

There was a response to this revolutionary lyricism. Michel Rocard's speech to the party congress in Nantes in 1977 was a veritable hymn to the market economy and a denouncing of the "jacobin, centralizing and state-centered nationalism" (the party program, in so many words). Yet there were strategic reasons (mainly the alliance with the PCF) for emphasizing the "revolutionary line," and Rocard's challenge to the leadership produced a defensive rally around the old ideas that then became a test of loyalty to First Secretary Mitterrand. It became impossible to back down, and even figures like Jacques Delors (famous, in the early 1980s, for being Mrs. Thatcher's favorite finance minister) found it prudent to stay silent

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or to attack Rocard. All of this ideological posturing took the party further from its modernization away from the "parler vrai" demanded by Rocard and toward the condemnation of the "so-called laws of economics . . . that are nothing more than the principles for running the capitalist system."[2]

First Experience of Government

Opposition mentality persisted and the transformation to a party of government was not even begun by the 1980s, although Rocard's ideas had a bigger audience on the left than was admitted at the time. This period has been summed up as one of triple negation: there was no international crisis (problems were of the French right's making), no problem of competitivity (it was the behavior of the capitalist ruling class that was wrong), and no decline of the working class (only a policy of despoliation). In a stroke of political magic typical of the Houdini that was Mitterrand, the presidential campaigns were always run on a personal platform very different from, and more moderate than, the Socialist party's manifesto.

Unlike the British Labour party, the French Socialists did not have long years of opposition in which to rebuild a realism, and its experience in the 1970s was a contrary one.[3] Parti Socialist reeducation was undertaken on the task and that meant that it was not deep and that it had some peculiar features. But the key change in the double septennate of President Mitterrand was the development of a party of government. In fact, surprisingly, given its long march around the institutions of the Republic, the party adapted quickly to being the support for the government and the president and through a variety of mechanisms became an associate in the Mitterrand system of governance. This enabled the party to profit from the spoils and patronage system typical of French politics of the time and to exploit the funding opportunities suddenly opened to it. In this way, it quickly redefined its role as a party of power and not of opposition and of solidarity with the government, but also, as in some sense, the conscience of the movement and the guarantor of the platform. However, the idea of the party outside parliament laying down the law for the government disappeared and the Socialists accepted the logic of the presidency (though not without some grumblings).

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But the experience of government in 1981 was not "lyrical." Even Mitterrand's slimmed-down presidential platform was too radical and impregnated with the "volontariste" ideal of the active state of opposition and not government. Mitterrand confirmed the commitment to the state-centered (jacobin) vision of government and the importance of nationalization in that optic.[4] Three devaluations and a severe balance-of-payments crisis put paid to the dash for growth of the first years. After 1983 the determination to tackle unemployment by reflation waned as this priority gave way to orthodoxy. When it became clear that the direction the government was moving in was not the right one, reservations were expressed (notably by Finance Minister Delors), but not by the party's moderates, who had been silenced. Then there came the Ides of March—the shattering U-turn of March 1983, not unheralded, but all the same a direct contradiction of the message they had promoted in opposition. This U-turn entailed the imposition of austerity measures accompanied by a much more market-oriented policy and priority to the balance of payments. Senior figures in the party were kept informed of the new policy and it was explained to the party executive by the finance minister, but the decision was principally the president's and only very marginally included party figures.[5] Yet the party, controlled by Mitterrand's supporters and pleased to be in power, kept quiet. In large measure the debate was stifled to prevent embarrassing the president and the government, but at the same time the need to retain the Communist party in alliance prevented a real rethink. In 1988 the President's "Lettre aux Français," which served as a manifesto, was virtually free of lyricism and totally free of the apocalyptic language of the past.

One of the key changes was the position of the nationalized industries. French Socialists repudiated any such transformation, and even the term "social democratic" became a hissing and a byword in party debates with most politicians preferring to call themselves "socialists" or perhaps (daringly) "democratic socialists" rather than to align themselves with the northern parties. Sweden was rejected as a model because it had not nationalized industries. It might be noted that the leader of the moderates (Michel Rocard) in the 1970s was condemned for suggesting that the state should take 51 percent stake in industries rather than fully nationalizing them. Nationalization was, then, in French eyes, the test of socialist commitment. In this Socialists also laid claim to the long "jacobin" tradition in French society that emphasized the strong and active state.

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It had long been asserted that nationalization was the principal feature of the socialist economy. Hence the greater the extent of nationalization, the more socialist the economy was. But nationalization also had a patriotic and technocratic side developed since the crucial state takeovers at the Liberation under de Gaulle and was the subject of a wide consensus. In 1981 the complete nationalization of six industrial groups, five banks, and state participation in others had created a more extensive state sector than in any other Western country. Altogether thirteen of the country's largest companies were state owned and state control of industrial turnover was 30 percent. Along with decentralization, this was one of the two principal measures of the septennate and was proof of the socialist's good faith in face of the PCF's criticisms.

The U-turn

The nationalizations in fact proved to be the first step in the liberalization of the economy. New and strong heads were nominated and the companies were rationalized and restructured in preparation for competition on the market (not for a retreat) and their burgeoning deficits were tackled. In 1982 the losses became a major problem and the autonomy of the companies was increased, as was the pace of restructuring. Taking moribund industries, restructuring them and fitting them for the international competition, became under the 1984 government the key "modernization." In French society the idea of nationalization also lost its legitimacy and the left lost one of its elements of identity.[6]

In addition to the idea of "nationalization," the belief of "socialism in one country" had also been dismantled in 1983. Before then, the standard Keynesian remedies were still believed to be valid, but after 1983 they no longer had that status. Thus the Socialist party started by stimulating demand in the economy (chiefly for the less well off) in the hope that this would restart growth. When it produced perverse results, the outlook changed and the emphasis was placed on supply and on competitiveness. They accepted the argument of external constraints and that increasing demand stimulated inflation but that macroeconomic policies did not increase growth and employment.[7] This reduced the differences between left and right and the gap steadily narrowed in subsequent years. By the 1990s the Socialists were also vulnerable on tax and the cost of the

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welfare state. Bérégovoy, as finance minister and then as prime minister, held to a rigorously orthodox fiscal regime, but the party had deprived itself of the instruments (taxation, price control, state intervention, deficit financing) that differentiated it from the right. No new socialist doctrine appeared to guide the party in an open system, although the left kept up their criticisms of "capitalism."

But the party itself did not debate the U-turn or draw lessons from it. In part this was because the party leadership, the president's supporters, had called on party unity behind the government while they were in power. There were profound disagreements and internal battles, but these were kept behind closed doors.[8] This prudence had the effect of stifling debate in the name of governmental responsibility but also prevented a profound discussion of the U-turn away from the program of the 1970s. It was not possible, so it was asserted, for two lines to exist in the socialist movement: one for the party and one for the government. President Mitterrand in 1984 engaged the new government in a "third way," in between the state power of the past and free-market liberalization. These ideas were wrapped up in the notions of "modernization," enterprise, and efficiency that the Fabius government preached in 1984.

In 1983 this policy was presented as a decision for Europe. It was also a way of putting off the explanation of the reasons for the U-turn and repackaging the market reforms as something else. Spending restraints and return to financial orthodoxy were accepted in these terms (the party was always profoundly pro-European) and accepted by most of the PS—though not by the rest of Chevènement's leftist supporters. This presentation enabled the anti-Europeans to mobilize and find a settled target and has remained a division within the left since that time. Thus an anti-European left emerged mobilized around opposition to Europe—a barn-door target. Voters were able to impute their difficulties and the restrictive economic policies to Europe and the real reason for them was not explained.

When it came to a justification of the U-turn, the party leadership, the other main thought was a "parenthesis." This idea, proposed by the then party leader Lionel Jospin, put off a radical rethink.[9] This idea made the U-turn a matter for the elite who were easily convinced or had probably not believed in the radical program in the first place. However, it was not a cultural conversion of the rank and file. What the "parenthesis" implied was that the party's course was in general sound and that the methods and goals were constant, but also held out was the promise of a return to the policies of 1981.

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If there had been a temporary lull in the pace of reform, the necessity remained to keep faith with the old values and to avoid absorption of others' principles.[10] Former Prime Minister Mauroy, who had promoted the party's realism while in office, noted, in 1986, the party's determination to "break with capitalism" but added that it was a long-term affair, not one for a single legislative term.[11] From this point of view, the Socialist party had not gone back on its promises and it had remained faithful to them. This became the leitmotif of the party's Bourg-en-Bresse Congress (the first after the U-turn) in the shape of the assertion that fundamentally "nothing had changed." Later it was noted that the policy was to promote reform in other areas to show that the left "remains true to its promises."[12]

This notion of a "parenthesis" and not avowing exactly what the government is doing has been maintained through the 1990s. There were critics, particularly among the partisans of an "alternative politics" based on an even more vigorous state intervention and a dose of protectionism, but the new line was accepted at the party's executive meeting (CD) in March 1983.[13] At that meeting the party leaders were told that it was not realistic to leave the European Monetary System at that juncture and that the government's policy of restraint was a hard choice—though just. Henceforth, it was explained, the necessity would be to reestablish and to "modernize" the economy while maintaining a policy of social solidarity.[14]

But the discussion in the party never took off because the main "modernizers" (Rocard's supporters) decided for internal reasons not to make their own voice too forceful. Rocard did, however, make clear that the implementation of social welfare and other aspirations depended on the vitality of the spirit of enterprise and that the party had yet to accept that.[15] Such views as were expressed from that wing of the party emphasized the need to reform institutions and to open out the state to participation and to make it responsive to the public. Rocard outlined the need to come to terms with a new form of state, not an operator but a facilitator, an organizer of social dialogue and a guardian of the long-term interests of society against the short term of the market.[16]

Theory and Practice

At this point the party's philosophy and mentality again parted company from the practice of the government. Fabius's government re-

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structured the nationalized industries, started the competitive deflation that has characterized economic policy since then, and placed the emphasis on a less engaged state.[17] This view was contrasted with the conservative right (then in Reaganite mode) and its willingness to let the devil take the hindmost. A Socialist government would, by emphasizing education and solidarity, prevent the creation of a laissez-faire market society. However, all the party had to propose were very general statements. There was no new idea to take the place of the Marxism that had once been the dominant mode in its discourse. For most of the late 1980s, the party implemented a form of alliance politics designed to enlarge its support as widely as possible. This was the "catchall" socialist party, but it had no clear substitute for its depassé ideology: nothing replaced nationalization, planning, and self-management. In its limitless pragmatism, it was not all that different from the practice of the old SFIO (with is maximal language and minimal politics).

Rocard, as prime minister in 1988, recognized the problems of the overbearing state and expressed a determination to reform the state and to decentralize it to renovate public services.[18] This went beyond the cosmetic renewal of state property and some staff training and implied a modernization of the state and its contact with people. None of this, it has to be stated, implied a dismantling of the state or a minimal state. At the beginning of the 1990s there was a potential for the clash of ideals, notably between Jean-Pierre Chevènement's supporters, along with Jean Poperen and the modernists around Michel Rocard, who had been joined—in much of their analysis—by some principal Mitterrand supporters. This discussion was also elided in preference to a clash of the factions in 1990 (at the vicious but vacuous Rennes Congress) and then the anodyne final resolution that avoided any issues that might embarrass the government.[19]

A decision was made, however, to define what socialist values were for the next millennium. Chevènement and his group, who believed that the party had sold out, became increasingly dissatisfied and eventually left the party in 1994. It had become an increasingly pragmatic party, and bit by bit the Marxist language of "revolution" and "class struggle" was being stripped out, but the positive sense of direction was missing. President Mitterrand, who traveled ideologically light, saw no point in starting a doctrinal debate as long as the party gave him a free hand (which it did) and undertook no renovation. In 1991 the Congress of the Party at l'Arche

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completely revised its *projet,* stripped it of its Marxism, and redefined its relation to the market, but this was not much noticed.

It was again Rocard who invited the Socialists to rethink their ideology on the eve of the 1993 elections.[20] In one sense this was apposite. Scandals, failures to cure the malaise of unemployment, and the wearing process of the long Mitterrand presidency had taken their toll on the party and it had to be rebuilt. But it was also in a position of extreme weakness. In the East, the Soviet Union had collapsed and had taken with it the revolutionary future and the idea of the counter model of society. Social democracy had been undermined just at the point where the French party might have been disposed to embrace it. But the party's new policy was never fully "sold" to the activists or the left's voters. As a result, the party's archons were able to pursue policies similar to those on the center right and to make a success of them. However, the education of the party lagged behind and the successes—which were considerable—were hidden by the elite's proclaimed fidelity to traditional socialist values. Hence the party's language was stuck in the groove of the high noon of state intervention of the 1970s. It was the job of presidential candidate Jospin to manage this in 1995 and 1997.

Jospin's Socialist Government

French Socialism remains a "class party" in its own eyes if not in its sociology. It defines itself as the workers' party and talks of alliances between the middle classes and the working and popular classes, even if it no longer sets itself up in an antagonistic opposition to the "bourgeoisie." This is also in part a recognition by the Socialists of their need to come to terms with the middle classes and with the new groups in society reflecting new cleavages in the body politic.

In 1997 Jospin was keen to "say what would be done and do what was said" and avoid the heady rush of a "first hundred days." It was a modest program limited, on the economy, to reducing the workweek, creating 700,000 jobs for the young unemployed, and reorienting the health tax to the CSG. It was, all the same, compared with Blair (who had won in England a few weeks before) and its state direction was contrasted to the New Labour message. Jospin was in agreement with Blair on the outdatedness of the old socialism. But the PS's administrative expertise, the acceptance of the market, regulation, and social security did not serve to differentiate

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it sufficiently from French conservatives. (Even so, the conservatives helped by criticizing the Socialists' "extremism.")

Jospin's government has been closer in its policies to Rocard's "second left" than to Mitterrand's early jacobin approach. In practice, Jospin went further than the "neither nationalization nor privatization" of 1988, for example, taking up a stance that recalled Rocard's dictum that the state should not be involved in manufacturing but in fact retreating from services and finance as well. Thus, although the state was used to create jobs for the young unemployed, it was not used to take over industries. Jospin noted that "socialism is no longer defined by nationalization" and the government undertook the biggest privatization program in French history.[21] The rapid program of very extensive privatization was set under way touching on the core socialist nationalizations of 1981 and even the Liberation nationalizations. But the Socialist government has refused to refer to "privatizations" (instead calling them "private participation") and has not promoted them as one of its success stories.

Likewise its legislation for the thirty-five-hour workweek, whether or not it created new jobs, introduced a new flexibility. Socialists stated that full employment could not be achieved through a "flexibility" entailing insecurity, but they still noted that this "flexibility" should be negotiated.[22] In the same vein, Labour Minister Aubry's "plan d'aide au retour à l'emploi" was close to Blair's in its thinking, bearing down as it did on fraud to reduce costs and placing the obligation on the unemployed to take work. In 1999 new Finance Minister Fabius even made inroads into the pension system with "épargne salariale" in keeping with Jospin's views.[23] But, unlike Blair and Schröder, the PS is not explicitly inegalitarian.

At the same time, Jospin has sought to improve the responsiveness of the state and to use management tools to promote reforms, but, as the finance minister said, "unlike yesterday's left we must not intervene in the market."[24] Jospin, like Rocard, believes in the active state and the state as the guarantor of equality and opportunity and has been careful to praise public employees (the left polls strongly among public service workers) and tried to keep their support for the proposed reforms. Despite this determination, the public service workers have been reluctant and the extreme left and Chevènement picked up votes on the Socialist's left from the partisans of the jacobin state. In the regional elections of 1998, the European elections of 1999, and the local elections of 2001, this drift from the Socialists was evident. Jospin's view remained that the state should promote

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innovation and is indeed vital in the modern context. Thus the state has to support and nourish future sources of growth as well as invest in infrastructure and invigorate the business environment.[25] But Jospin was also determined to press ahead with reforms intended to make the state more responsive and accessible.

The Party System

A major constraint is that French Socialism is precariously placed within the party system. Although in 2001 it was the biggest party in France, and it will likely be the principal party of opposition in the future, it depends on its allies. Jospin's government was popular and did withstand the test of power, remarkably holding out against the usual decline in a government's popularity after the second year. However, the Socialist party was not hegemonic on the left as its homologues are in other Western societies. Thus it had the fourth lowest percentage vote of EU socialist parties, and with 58 percent had the lowest share of the total left-wing vote (that is, including the diverse ecologist parties, Communists, etc). It is strong enough to make its will prevail but not strong enough to impose its authority on a fragmented left wing. It has not yet recovered from the ravages of the two Mitterrand septennates and scandals that periodically surface to remind people of that time. It is much more precarious in its hold over the voters than in the 1970s (when it represented a new force), and it is not as popular with the younger generation as it was then.

Socialist party difficulties stem from the nature of the coalition of the "plural left," which it has led since 1997, but this alliance prevents it from moving to the center as Blair has done and as some (the Fabius supporters) in the party propose.[26] Involved in the "plural left" alliance were the Movement of the Radicals of the left, the Verts (the biggest ecology party), the Citizens' Movement, and the Communist party. It was not possible for the Socialists to find a majority in the Assembly without their support, but the real influence of the small partners comes from their ability to attract the voters the Socialists cannot and to put a new face on the Socialist coalition. This alliance of small parties with the Socialists proved less fragile than anticipated (although the minister of the interior resigned) and held together in the face of challenges from the conservative right and the "events" of office for five years. But it was a

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fissiparous alliance that, by its nature, needs the small parties to assert themselves by criticizing the Socialist party. In the 2002 presidential elections, the left, broadly defined, fielded seven candidates and six of them turned their fire on the Socialist government. Thus there was a tension at its heart that compromised the reelection of the government.

French Socialists still confront the dilemma identified by Przeworski and Sprague in which they have to reach out beyond their core support to become a majority (catchall) party, but in doing so they lose their traditional working-class support. Socialist parties, in this view, either cling to their core vote and become marginal to mainstream politics or abandon their ideals and seek middle-class followers and this way betray their supporters. In the 1980s the party had a different discourse for each constituency and the presidential election facilitated this simultaneous appeal to moderates and leftists. In the late 1990s the coalition of the "plural left" performed this function of talking to different constituencies with the smaller parties picking up support from the voters not amenable to the Socialist party.

This particular dilemma is acute in the French case because the main working-class party had until very recently been aligned with the Communists. Hence the alliance between the Communists and the Socialists was still the heart of the "plural left," as it was of the "union of the left" in the 1970s, and the Socialists could not dispense with Communist support if they were to win power at the national level. Unfortunately for the Socialists, the support of other sectors of opinion is also necessary and alliance with the PCF makes this difficult—though, evidently, not impossible—and the decline of the Communists meant that the extreme left had escaped the embrace of the coalition.

French Communism has been in constant and apparently unstoppable decline through the Fifth Republic and the alliance with the Socialist party has not halted that tendency. For the Communist party, there is a tension between its oppositional tendency developed over the years since its foundation and built to attack the "bourgeois system" (including the "social democrats") and its need for alliances. Communism is strong in the unions (CGT is Communist controlled) and in the run-down industrial and marginal agricultural areas. This is expressed in an anti-Europeanism and fierce anticapitalist rhetoric that, although somewhat attenuated these days, is still recognizably Marxist. On the other hand, the PCF's remain-

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ing strength is in local government, where it has held out against the trend elsewhere in Europe largely as a result of its organization and dedication and its alliances with the Socialists. To destroy its local base would be to reduce the Communist party to the ranks of the minor left-wing parties on the extreme left. Communist unions are also strong in nuclear power, which leads to a clash with the ecologist parties in the alliance. For the Communists the alliance with the Socialists is a daily struggle between the elements hostile to "capitalist society" and the reformists who want to collaborate with the PS. The Communist party decline deprived the Socialists of a crucial 5–10 percent and of their powerful electoral and political machine.

But beyond the Communists is the need to retain the left-wing vote. In France the vote for the extreme left in presidential elections and in general and local elections is real and is a manifestation of discontent with the Socialist government. It is the extreme left that has been the beneficiary of Communist decline and not the Socialists or still less the center. Thus the rise of the Trotskyite Lutte Ouvrière and (to a lesser extent) of LCR is a serious treat to the continuation of the coalition and explains why the Socialists have gone out of their way to condemn "neoliberalism" and the new right. They claim to belong to the left but are willing to vote against the "plural left" or to abstain. In the presidential elections of 2002, the Trotskyite candidates polled over 10 percent, and those votes were not additions to the left but appreciably hostile to it.

As much ecologist support as can be garnered is also needed by the Socialist party. In the early 1990s they were well placed to profit from the collapse of the PS, but, disorganized and squabbling, they failed to capitalize on their opportunity. Their divisions and lack of organization counted against them, although they are seen as attractive by most groups in society and have an appeal that goes beyond their limited electoral core. One of the attractions of the ecologist parties was that they had not been pulled into the party system; in becoming part of the government coalition, however, they lose that specificity. Moreover, no real ecologist core had been consolidated in the 1990s and their vote remains highly volatile in what is more naturally an opposition than government movement. Although the Verts (but not all ecologists) are currently on the left, their voters are disinclined to place themselves on the left/right continuum. Ecologists are like the socialists in their antiracism; they

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promote libertarian values, but they are effective among the young, the middle classes, and those with higher education.

Jean-Pierre Chevènement's small Citizens' Movement was at the outset also a part of the "plural left." This party split from the Socialists in 1994 over the European issue, but it promotes a strong state and has a nationalist policy summed up by the notion of "Republicanism." Its anti-Europeanism sits badly with the PS and the Verts, but not with the PCF, while Chevènement's tough law-and-order policies do not find favor with the ecologists—nor did his crackdown on illegal immigrants. Combining a law-and-order, state interventionist, and anti-European message appeals to important sections on the left and makes a conciliation of the Citizen's Movement. Chevènement played a crucial role as minister of the interior and brought a firmness to policies on crime that did not allow them to be depicted as "soft" on crime. This was a key role in an area of traditional left-wing weakness and where most parties of the left feared to tread. However, in 2000, Chevènement resigned in protest at the government's devolution of power to Corsica and started to campaign for the presidency against the prime minister. This trajectory took Chevènement into calling for the reinforcement of state authority and outside of the left's coalition.

But the Socialists were also faced by competition from the extreme right. Le Pen's Front National appeals to a popular electorate against "them" (the establishment, the "gang of four") through anti-elitist, anti-European, and xenophobic antihumanist messages. Le Pen's has been an attack on the humanitarian and Republican values of the Socialist party; the Front National undermined its support with the working class. Socialists found this attack very difficult to counter given that these values were central to the PS' definition of itself. Le Pen's effect was particularly marked in 1993 (when the PS collapsed) and a "left-wing Lepenism" then appeared, which has continued to take votes from the working class, which might have been expected to vote Socialist. Thus in the 2002 presidential elections, 26.1 percent of workers voted for the Front National, 12 percent for the PS, and only 5.3 percent for the Communists. And those elections made the Front's electorate the most working class with 37 percent to the Socialist's 26 percent and the Communist's 35 percent.[27] Le Pen's Front National was not recognized as a threat. This had two important side effects: (1) it was not the divisive factor on the conservative right that it was, and (2) its formidable reputation as a movement on the march had been undermined and it did not

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serve as the force to keep the left together in the first ballot of the 2002 presidential elections.

French Socialist difficulties of coalition management are evident at a number of points, but one is an illustration of the problem: the so-called Michelin affair. In September 1999, the head of the Michelin Company rather maladroitly announced that its European organization would be rationalized and that 7,500 jobs would be lost in France. There was consternation, but Jospin, perhaps feeling that this was the time to make a pedagogical point about the new world of global forces and industrial competitiveness, went further than he had gone before. On 13 September he stated that people "should not expect everything from the state and the government." This was too much for the coalition of parties in the "plural left" and an outcry forced the prime minister to back down and to make the traditional response of the left and condemn the company.

Conclusion

In 1997 the Socialist party capitalized on the mistakes of the conservative right and won power for five years. The government had some notable successes (unemployment, in particular, fell noticeably and growth was strong), but they discovered that five years were not enough to effect a real transformation. There were still many unemployed, job security had not been reestablished, and poverty remained widespread with many living on the minimum "dole."[28] Full employment was not restored and the perception of job losses and of increasing employment insecurity was hardly changed.

Politically speaking, Jospin's Socialist government, while denying any capitulation to the marketization vogue, has advanced certain measures as proof of its left-wing credentials. It introduced a thirty-five-hour workweek, extended health and welfare coverage, reduced unemployment by more than a million, and made layoffs of workers more difficult. Probably the most symbolic measure was the thirty-five-hour workweek. On the left the reduction of working hours is a traditional measure (started first by the 1936 Popular Front) and it became the flagship legislation of 1997. It had the good fortune to be opposed by the employers' federation, but it was used to introduce flexibility into working time and in this way to bring down business costs. It was far from being a straightforward attack on mar-

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ket principles or competition, as it was presented, and was opposed by the far left and by some unions.

It was into this context that the debate about the "Third Way" intruded. Blair's determined effort to woo the center and business sector is at cross grains with the French Socialists' need to keep their left-wing support together. Blair and Jospin came to power at the same time (Blair in May and Jospin in June 1997), but their first meeting as Premiers was at the Malmö International Socialist meeting. This was the conference at which Blair invoked the "Third Way" as the future of European Socialism. That necessitated a response from Jospin, who could not accept such a frank, not to say brutal, exposition of the virtues of the free market. An antinomy was set up between the Blair/Schröder vision of flexible labor and capital markets outlined in June 1999 (just before the European elections) and the French party's view.[29]

In a sense, the French Socialist party needed the counterpoint of the Blair/Schröder Third Way to oppose and to enable it to assert its position on the left. In the same way, it needed from time to time the reassuring outrage of the French business community. Thus Jospin chose to stress the need for social solidarity and the respect for national traditions. In addition, the party defended the nation-state and its "framework" for solidarity while claiming to be the most left-wing government in Europe. Blair became something of a bogeyman on the French left and Blair's landslide reelection in June 2001, which came at the same time as the Socialist party's commemoration of its "Epinay Congress" (which defined the party on the "revolutionary left"), was not greeted with rapture; in fact there was some barracking.

In sum, the French Socialist party won the general elections of 1997 because of the mistakes of the conservative right. It proved a competent administrator but did not replace its old doctrine. It has sought to win over the center-floating vote without alienating its core support and was successful enough in 1997 to scrape through with a narrow majority. However, in 2002 it lost on two sides. It went too far to the center (and so lost crucial white-collar and public-sector votes on the left) and the needed support on the left from the Trotskites and the Chevènementists was not forthcoming. Jospin's Socialists were continually obliged to look to the center and at the same time appeal to the far left. This proved too much: in the presidential elections of 2002, Jospin lost crucial votes on the left to minor candidates (and to Le Pen) and these were not compensated by gains from the center.[30] This is a two-way stretch inherent in the

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European socialist position, but it is more acute in the French case than in others. With the defeat of Jospin in the 2002 presidential elections, for many years the only figure capable of bringing together both left and center, the party leadership is disputed by personalities preaching a modernizing "Blairite" message that is more likely to split than unite the fragmented left.

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Notes

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