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Mitterrand strategy

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## **The French left in 2002: the end of the Mitterrand strategy**

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French Socialists, and the French left in general, are still recovering from the shock of the 2002 presidential elections which saw their candidate eliminated on the first round and a run-off between the conservative's outgoing President Jacques Chirac and the National Front's Jean-Marie Le Pen. President Chirac won a landslide 82% of the vote (supported by the parties of the 'plural left') and went on to win a handsome majority in the general elections in June. This defeat has led to a good deal of public questioning and some suggestions that the problem lay with the candidate Lionel Jospin ('a pessimist surrounded by the autistic') rather than the left in general or the Socialist Party itself. There is some truth in this view because the campaign was slipshod and feckless and the candidate was not seen as presidential timber (particularly in contrast to the hail-fellow, glad handing President) and if the Radical had not stood or if only Chevènement had not stood.... France has a presidential system so it has to be noted that the left is currently leaderless, its main parties have been decapitated: Jospin has quit the PS for private life, Voynet, the Verts' Environment Minister was heavily defeated in the Jura, Chevènement's Citizens' movement is disbanded and Hue has been 'kicked upstairs' to the PCF's presidency.

However, even allowing for the contingent, the governmental left combined (what remained of it) got only 32.5% on the first ballot and Jospin would not have won on the second ballot. But deeper reasons are sought for the defeat of 2002 and, although there have been a few attempts to blame the media (notably for whipping up a panic about rising crime) and some criticism has been made of quarrelling party barons, in main part the problem has been diagnosed as one of strategy and of programme.<sup>5</sup> These two are, of course, linked and the discussion has turned on how to recreate a new party and on what

basis. This searching has taken place because 1997 was the last part of the Mitterrand strategy in which the left was principally the PCF/PS tandem. Mitterrand's Socialist Party at the Epinay Congress of 1971 started the process of building the left wing coalition of Socialists and Communists that won the 1981 elections as well as those of 1988. In 1997 the PCF was 10% and the PS some 25% and Jospin's tactical ability enabled the Verts and the Citizens' Movement to be added to this to make up the 'plural left' coalition and that was enough to win the general elections against a weak conservative right. Jospin's defeat and the collapse of the 'plural left' in 2002 has returned the party to the point before the Epinay Congress but with no obvious partner.

As with the Socialist Party at the beginning of the Fifth Republic, the party currently faces a united conservative right dominating the main centres of power from the Presidency to the Assembly and Senate and even the Constitutional Council. Although the problem of a united conservative right is not new the fragmentation of the left, its dispersal across small parties with different objectives and the simultaneous left and right wing challenges are novel. On the extreme left there has arisen a Trotskyite and protest left not interested in participating in mainstream politics. There is also a challenge from the extreme right in the form of Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front national. This threat from the extreme right should not be underestimated. In 2002 the Front national was the major party of the working class and the issues it raised (particularly law and order) were the principal issues for the left's voters. A Socialist Party inquiry found that in mid-2000 unemployment ceased to be the principal worry amongst French voters and the public anxiety focussed on crime, a development that was not the result of media manipulation and one that the Socialist Party did not recognise.<sup>1</sup> It was this neglect of the issue of crime and its exploitation by the conservative and extreme right that contributed greatly to the Socialist's defeat in 2002.

The genesis of the 'plural left'

In the 1970s the creation of the union of the French left (of Socialists and Communists) was the main development in the opposition to the conservative right and in the 1980s the government of the Socialist dominated union determined the political weather. However, this coalition had already run into problems in the late 1970s and in the 1980s it disintegrated and the Socialist Party itself became a discredited and was

almost destroyed as a political force. This period was one of radicalism (of language as much as of action) as well as of setbacks, U-turns and disillusion. François Mitterrand who presided over the Party's renaissance as well as its collapse in the early 1990s shaped socialist fortunes. By 1992 the defeat of the left was certain and the need to turn the page on the Mitterrand era was generally accepted.

It was in the aftermath of the 1993 defeat that the foundations for the 'plural left' were laid. Under the leadership of Michel Rocard (First Secretary from 1993-4) 'Estates General' of the left were held bringing together the splintered fragments of the left from the ex-Communists to the ecologists and others who had been disillusioned by the Mitterrand years or dissented from aspects of policy or found no welcome in the Socialist Party. This was not immediately successful (and Rocard left political life in 1994) but Lionel Jospin had played an important role in attempting to weave the coalition together and was committed to a similar approach. Jospin's aim combined the 'realism' of the Rocardian Socialists (a lesson, in any case, taught by the 1980s) with a firm anchorage on the left to the Communist Party but incorporating the ecologists and the supporters of Jean-Pierre Chevènement (mainly anti-Maastricht at the time). With Jospin's presidential success in 1995, reviving a moribund Socialist campaign and coming top of the first ballot, he became the principal figure of the left and its main presidential hopeful for 2002. This authority enabled Jospin to both rebuild the Socialist Party (suppressing its incipient factionalism) and build the new 'plural left'.

Thus the 'plural left' that sprang into being to win the snap 1997 elections was not a recent creation, it had taken several years to build and was still in the process of formation when the dissolution was announced.<sup>3</sup> There were many latent issues of friction that had not been resolved including nuclear power and Europe (the supposed reason for the snap election) and it was cobbled together with bi-lateral deals between the Socialists and the small parties. Many of these deals were incompatible and some, like the commitment (of 29 April 1997) that the government would stop privatisation, were not kept. But Jospin was still some way through the process of formation and the coalition was partially built, although the details had not been negotiated and the partnership was not firm when the President's announcement was made. It was the necessities of the dissolution and the prospect of office that provided the impetus for the

consolidation and then the imperatives of government. Jospin was able to weave into the 'plural left' led by the Socialist Party the Communist Party, the Verts, the Citizens' Movement and, of course, the Left wing Radicals. But, as rapid as the process looked, it was difficult and it was kept together only by the glue of government office.

Most important of the Socialist's partners were the Communists. However, French Communism has been in steady decline since the Liberation when it polled 28% in 1946. In the Fifth Republic it hovered at around 20%, in 1969 at the presidential elections the PCF's Jacques Duclos polled 21.5% and almost got onto the second ballot and in 1978 the Party polled 20.6%. However, its decline became steeper after 1981 when Mitterrand won the elections and its candidate Marchais polled only 15% and in 1988 Lajoine polled only 6.9%. Membership figures, sales of the Party's daily *l'Humanité* (critically below the level needed for survival) and the support for the Communist CGT unions told a similar story. But their new leader, nominated in 1994, Robert Hue saved the Party from extinction at the 1995 elections when, running as its presidential candidate, he had polled a respectable 8.7%. This result was a temporary reprieve from the seemingly inexorable downward trend of Communist results and Hue himself was established as a familiar half-bearded and friendly face on the television with a moderate and empathetic appeal. Hue had to fight off the Old Guard in the Communist Party and impose himself as leader but the process was far from complete. Still, Hue was amenable to a governmental role and was available to finesse the Party's hostility to Europe and its attachment to nuclear power to enable a coalition to be built. For the Communists there was the hope that participation in government would halt - or even reverse - the long term decline. In Jospin's view the Communists were the key component and the rest could be built around that.

But there were the other small parties: the Verts and the Citizens Movement. In the ecological movement personality and ideological wars had been fought and had prevented them from realising their potential. In 1993, possibly their best chance, they had 11.2% of the vote yet emerged without a seat and in the presidential election of 1995 they had polled a disappointing 3.3%. After the presidential elections the Verts' candidate (Dominique Voynet) led the majority determined to cement an alliance with the Socialists and to make an impact on the Assembly and in government. This involved a, for the

Verts, unusual pragmatism and decisiveness but it was determination to go in the same direction as the PS.

Jean-Pierre Chevènement's Movement des citoyens was a breakaway from the Socialist Party (in which he had been an enfant terrible of the left) and he had quit in 1994 because of their opposition to the Maastricht Treaty. This break had been a long time in the making and Chevènement had been a semi-detached government minister in the Gulf War (before resigning) but his main object of scorn was the European Union on which subject he wrote a coruscating little pamphlet. Chevènement still had national ambitions and for that he needed wider backing and - probably - a spell in government. Chevènement was not in sympathy with the Verts and Communists' soft line on immigrant policy and although he could agree with the PCF's anti-Maastricht stance he was not reconciled to privatisation and deregulation. Chevènement became Minister of the Interior and able to take tough decisions on crime and hence a key figure in a government composed of more idealistic groups. In this Chevènement and Jospin were at odds with those who, like the Verts, not without courage, rejected a hard line and repeated the left's principal emphasis on prevention - tough on the causes of crime.

This naturally fissile material was brought together by Jospin's PS but it was not expected to last and that the 'plural left' governed for five years was a tribute to coalition maintenance of a high standard. Events kept intruding, as did the threat from the extreme left, but the coalition held together with remarkably few public difficulties. Yet this threat for the extreme left was confirmed at the 1998 regional elections when the extreme left joint list polled 4.2% and at the 1999 European elections when they polled 5%. Within the unions and amongst the political activists the Trotskyite parties LCR, LO and the Parti des travailleurs played a significant role and were a threat to the 'plural left' (and particularly to the PCF) both in votes and in their ability to capture the political high ground. According to an exit poll the majority union members voted for the Trotskyite left.<sup>4</sup>

Prime Minister Jospin's 'plural left' government performed relatively well over its five year term despite the challenges from the left and the conservative and extreme right. It was assumed that the Socialist candidate in 2002 would be the Prime Minister and that the 'plural left' would unite behind Jospin to defeat President Chirac. But the 'plural left'

was composed of small parties each trying to maximise their own position and this situation was competitive as well as collaborative. Competition gained the upper hand as the elections approached and each component of the 'plural left' jostled to increase its share of the coalition and sometimes, if necessary, at the expense of others and of the left as a whole. In the first phase of the 'plural left', with a new team involved in an unexpected opportunity and a limited platform to implement, the collaborative phase was uppermost. From 1997-1999 (approximately, starting with the resignation of the Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn) centripetal forces of skilful team work and a detailed programme combined with administrative competence kept the 'plural left' together. After 1999, the centrifugal effects of the 2002 elections began to pull the coalition apart and at the same time Jospin found it difficult to give a sense of direction to the second half of the legislature. As the election drew nearer it became more tempting to criticise the government and to point out its lapses to supporters.

But in the Verts and the left Radicals party there were also needs to make a mark. For the Verts the governmental experience had produced some electoral advances and some major measures had been passed but the grass roots of the movement were far from convinced that the 'plural left' were moving fast enough in the right direction. These reservations concerned environmental measures but also social issues (such as immigrant rights) and there was turbulence inside the movement that made it an uncertain ally. It first chose an inappropriate presidential candidate who then had to be replaced and then it had to recover the ground, something achieved by criticising the Jospin government's record. Noël Mamère, its candidate, polled respectably but Voynet (its minister and best known figure) was defeated and quit the front tanks. For the Left Radical Party the candidate from 'overseas France' Christiane Taubira proved to be a convincing campaigner and also - probably - took votes from the Socialists.

#### After the Flood

Robert Hue created the post of PCF president and was elected to it in October 2002 and the Sports Minister Marie-George Buffet became the Party's secretary. Hue's campaign was also forced to criticise the Jospin government but had little positive to say and was outstripped by the more adventurous Trotskyites (and Le Pen). Hue's difficulties were not just an individual lack of impact but a strategic vacuum unfilled since the

collapse of the USSR in 1992 left the Party orphaned. Hue's strategy put the Party in office for five years (its longest term ever) and it faced the voters as a member of the coalition but his vote of 3.3% could hardly be said to be an endorsement of that approach. Hue, lately, seems to have accepted that participation was a cause of the setback.<sup>6</sup>

In the Communist Party the disarray is no less evident. For the immediate the Party has taken a leftward turn. It is not interested in creating a federation of the left and it has blamed the failures of 2002 on the lack of radicalism in government and the inability to 'discomfort the tenants of the capitalist system'. There is also a fear that the reform of the electoral system will lead to the elimination of the small parties and a 'bi-polarisation' of political life to their detriment.

Robert Hue's attempt to save the Communist Party through an association with the Socialist's successful government term looked a success at the outset but the presidential election ended in a humiliation for the him and his Party. Hue's inability to persuade his traditional supporters to vote for him and his loss of votes to the extreme left as well as to the extreme right led to a poll below the two Trotskyite candidates (Laguiller and Besancenot) bringing the Party to a historic low point. There was a slight recovery by the Party at the general elections and that along with the concentration of the Communist vote enabled the Party to retain its group in the Assembly (although Hue lost his own seat). In addition the Trotskyite candidates were unable to compete. This fingertip hold on the Assembly did not stop the internal dissidence nor did it re-establish Hue as the leader.

None of the Communists Party factions have yet worked out how to deal with the challenges from the extreme left (nor the Verts or Le Pen, it might be added). There are two broad camps as well as the leadership's position at stake. Firstly there are those 'refounders' who call for a restructuring of the left of the left to incorporate the ecologists, 'alternative movements', Trotskyites, anti-Front national and others into a single party. What shape the party would take is unclear and, of course, crucial as the PCF's democratic centralism could lead to domination of it (or the Communists would be swamped). This is not a strategy that has found favour although elements of it (the outstretched hand to other leftists) have been tried without notable success. There are also the old-style Party loyalists who are resolutely opposed to the 'reformism' of the Parti

socialiste.

There were those who demanded a return to the Leninism of the original Communists and a rejection of the 'reformist' Socialists and there were also 'refounders' demanding the creation of a radical left wing coalition. This so-called 'pôle de radicalité' had strong support in the Party and wanted the creation of a radical movement bringing together the extreme left and other 'alternative' groups into a new force.<sup>7</sup> This is not a strategy with an immediate and clear pay-off and why the PCF should take a leap in the dark (which might not work) in the expectation that an agglomeration of anti-Socialist discontents (LCR said that it would not vote for Jospin on the second ballot) will reanimate the left is unclear. Neither the form (party or more fluid movement) nor the content of the 'radical pole' is worked out in detail and it has not been well received by either the Verts or the extreme left and could lead to splits in the PCF itself. In the event the leaderships' strategy retained the place in government but was unable to show convincingly what had been gained from that or to say how ministerial office had benefited its supporters. Occasional forays into rhetorical socialism (as late as the presidential campaign) did not dispel the problem that they were confined by government loyalty opening the way for the extreme left and radical groups led the anti-globalisation and minority protest movements. Within the Communist Party criticism of the 'plural left' and of the Socialist Party may lead to a leftward lurch to recover lost ground from the extreme left. Secretary Buffet made a symbolic (twenty-minute) visit to the Saint-Denis Church where immigrants were on hunger strike. So much was recognised by no less a figure than its popular ex-Minister Gayssot who said that others were better at occupying the terrain than the PCF.<sup>8</sup> But a return to socialist alliances can be expected before the 2004 elections. It may end up, as it feared, playing the flute in the great orchestra of social democracy.<sup>9</sup>

Faced by their electoral débâcle, Robert Hue's Communist Party found that it had a dilemma similar to the Socialists over whether to move left ward or rightward. On the one hand it was tied into the alliance with the Socialist Party, particularly in local government where it was still a force (one of the few places where it was still a presence), and had two ministers in the government. This approach leads the PCF to becoming a presence on the left of the Socialists but tightly bound up with them. On the other hand,

this governmental commitment prevented it from radicalising its appeal and from running an anti-European campaign. It was not able to use its other strength (in the CGT unions) to keep its more anti-system support and it was constrained from running a 'revolutionary' campaign.

#### Verts

For the Verts the experience of government was not easy. They were not a disciplined party and they did not capitalise on their administrative experience to advance much in other elections. This problem was symbolised in its first choice of presidential candidate made on 20 June 2001: Alain Lipietz. Lipietz was a former Maoist who retained a revolutionary rhetoric and who was a Verts theorist (strong on anti-globalisation) and given to unpredictable sorties in the press.<sup>10</sup> One of these, on the subject of Corsica, ran so fragrantly counter to government policy that he had to stand down and he was replaced by the former journalist Mamère who was a 'safer pair of hands' although less acceptable to Verts activists. Mamère launched his campaign outside the AZF chemical plant in Toulouse where there had been a catastrophic accident but also pushed loyalty to the government to the limit on, for example, energy policy. (Mamère called for nuclear energy to be scaled down from 80% to 60%). Mamère's success led the Socialists to move onto Verts' territory (proposing a voting age of 17, for example) and their camping strategies were not always compatible. Mamère's 5.25% was just sufficient to get the Verts' expenses reimbursed and they won three seats in parliament but it was far from what was expected and did not constitute the nucleus of a new party of the left. They have not been able to construct a stable core vote and have not constructed a local base despite their alliance with the PS. For many ecologists (from whom Lipietz is the theorist) the ecological movement is the movement of the future and destined to be radical although this is at odds with many of its voters. But it leaves unresolved the tension between a radical environmental movement involved in protest and in extra-parliamentary activity and the slow administrative ecologism of government.

#### Chevènement's movement

Chevènement was not content to act as a bolster the 'plural left' nor to play a part in Jospin's presidential campaign and quit the government at the end of August 2000 in a disagreement about the policy of devolving power to a regional parliament in Corsica.

This resignation, in effect, announced the beginning of his presidential campaign. In a climate dominated by the duel between the Prime Minister and the President, Chevènement appeared as a the 'Third man', a novel figure, and his 'republican and patriotic' approach supporting a strong state (internally in economic matters and externally against the EU and the USA) law enforcement, solidarity, secular schools and so on had an appeal beyond the left to the gaullist right (he was joined by several personalities of the anti-European right). Chevènement was credited with 15% in the polls at the beginning of 2002 but this was before Le Pen entered the field and other campaigning had started in earnest. Chevènement tried to straddle the left right divide hoping to pick up votes from the President as well as from the left but, like many before him, he was unable to transcend this division. On 21 April, the first ballot, Chevènement polled 5.33%, a result that marginalised him (he was not a figure in the second round campaign) and his Pôle républicain was not relevant. But Chevènement was also defeated in the constituency of Belfort, which he had represented since 1973, and that entailed the extinction of the 'Republican pole'. Socialist activists blamed Chevènement for the defeat of their candidate but it was the end of his career as well. Chevènement's MDC failed to get a single one of its 408 candidates elected and it was dissolved after the general elections. MDC supporters decided to organise in Chevènement's absence and create an Association pour une gauche républicaine (AGR) devoted to the republican ideal but repudiating the idea that it was possible to transcend the left/right division.

#### Socialist Party problems

Despite their humiliating defeat in the 2002 presidential elections and their elimination from the second ballot (the first time the left had been absent since 1969) and then their defeat by the conservative right in the general elections, the Socialists remain the dominant force on the left. It is, however, weak. Relative to 1995 its strongholds (of over 17.5% of votes) were reduce to a handful and it resisted best in the less dynamic regions of rural and industrial France. In 1997 the PS amounted to 57% of the left's vote but in 2002 it was 65% and the bi-polarisation of the party system looks likely to be strongly increased by a proposed reform of the electoral laws. This domination does not amount to an opportunity because the Socialists have rarely been able to command a majority on their own and this time, unlike the Mitterrand years, there are no partners.

Notwithstanding the drop in vote for the other parties of the left, the Socialist Party and its Radical ally retained their percentage of the vote at the general elections although some of the principal personalities of the Socialist Party were defeated. Socialists are thus agreed on the need for a new project or platform and on the need to renew discussions with others on the left but beyond that on little else.

For the first time in thirty years the Socialist Party has leaders but no leadership. During the election campaign the party was able to pull together behind First Secretary François Hollande but he had been delegated to run the party on Jospin's behalf and lacked independent status. Who will lead the left is at stake in all the internal party wrangling. But the lack of a potential 'presidential' leader remains debilitating and the Party needs allies to defeat the conservative right and that requires a clear strategy to be developed. There is a danger of a return to the extreme factionalism that tore the party apart in the early 1990s as the presidential contenders compete for personal control of the party but the party's route forward is also a subject of serious dispute between members. Hollande, while deploring factionalism, is busy organising his own support with the help of former ministers Guigou and Vaillant – though with mixed success.<sup>11</sup>

Inside the Socialist Party there is no consensus about either leadership or direction. Jospin's abrupt departure from political life (while understandable) has left the PS in the grip of a succession struggle and disarray. One idea floated after the elections by quite a broad section of the PS was for a large party of the left but the Verts and the Communists refused to consider losing their identities. There then followed more fluid notions of a 'confederation' or of a 'great rally of the left' but without convincing detail. There are broadly two camps inside the Socialist Party. First there are those who argue that the principal effort must be to recapture the 'lost' working class and 'popular' vote and that means a leftward shift. This is asserted by the former Gauche socialiste Jean-Luc Mélenchon and by Henri Emmanuelli who have created a new faction called 'New World' to 'move the party's centre of gravity' to the left. Second there are those who say that the main challenge is to respond to the new environment and modernise Socialism with a view to understanding the new globalisation and the dynamics of the market. Apart from Rocard who located the left's core in human dignity rather than in demands and the defeated J.-M. Bockel Blair's Third Way is explicitly repudiated by these groups.

But they are animated by similar ideas of privatisation, flexible markets and financial discipline and their 'Blairite' tone is somewhat disguised by talk of 'opening to private capital', modernisation and 'new political offer'. Some of these people say that the left of the Socialist Party (Communists and extreme left) are irrelevant and 'not involved in politics'. This group is itself split into the partisans of the former Finance Ministers Laurent Fabius and those of Dominique Strauss-Kahn who differ on very little doctrinally. To these two main groups could be added the smaller faction around Arnaud Montbourg that calls for a revision of the Fifth Republic's institutions in a parliamentary direction but also criticises the closed nature of the Socialist Party elite.

One part of the challenge is to respond to the united conservative right (in Chirac's UMP) which is now a major party and no longer a federation of small parties (although the small centrist Union pour la démocratie française remains outside). A new confederation of the 'plural left' with a government vocation has been proposed but this will mean raising those questions evaded from 1997-2002 because they would have embarrassed the government.<sup>12</sup> Within the PS a vigorous debate has opened out between factions each led by a personality (the more 'presidential' the more powerful) and this means that the intellectual and the personal are inextricably linked. First Secretary François Hollande's leadership was based on the coalition that Jospin put together to lead the Party and he was deployed as the Party's leading attacker on the conservative right. Hollande is now faced with the task of retaining the leadership while keeping factionalism to a minimum but at the same time making concessions to the activists and regional barons. A first concession, to Fabius and making him second in command in the Party, demonstrated the limits of his authority and that concessions will have to be made to retain the leadership.

On the Socialist left the New World view was that there had been a 'social-liberal' drift and that that had been one of the principal reasons for the defeat in 2002.<sup>13</sup> In their view the socialist vote went elsewhere in 2002 and there was a much bigger gap between the party and the 'popular areas' as well as from unions and activists. Thus there was an increase in abstention, votes for the extreme left and anti-globalisation and other protests.<sup>14</sup> This group includes the old '*Gauche socialiste*' of Mélenchon and Dray but has divided and is in the process of recomposition around the former First Secretary of the

Party, Henri Emmanuelli.<sup>15</sup> There is a strong (if mainly implicit) critique of the outgoing leadership on the grounds that there ought to be a larger vision, support from the social movements (anti-globalisation and others) and activists and one deploring the 'demagogy' of Jospin. This has caused one-time left wingers Julien Dray and Marie-Noëlle Lienemann (who supported a rapprochement with the leadership) to quit the left but at the last congress (2000) they would together have amounted to 27% of the votes and New World intends this time to stand as a separate faction.

For many years the principal and best organised faction has been that of Laurent Fabius but its potential has been kept in the background in the interests of party unity and to allow its leader to work a passage back since he was evicted from the leadership in 1993 by Rocard. Fabius is a presence and looking to the elections of 2007 but his problem is that a too obvious grab for the leadership of the Party would provoke a closing of ranks against him personally.

Although not the most popular with the left and with Party activists, Fabius is the principal figure of the left for the general public.<sup>16</sup> This group locates the defeat in 2002 in the ineffectiveness of reforms and in the increased insecurity as well as its response to globalisation were inadequate. Fabius' plea is that 'solidarity' the traditional rallying point of the socialists has to be nuanced because other aims can conflict and prevent, for example, the creation of jobs.<sup>17</sup> Public services are necessary and have to be defended but there has to be a clear distinction between the market and the non-market sector (like education, culture, defence etc) and those that must conform to a market imperative. Fabius claims not to want to reduce the state but to make it more effective.<sup>18</sup> By the same token the fight against inequalities has to take on a new form because insecurity, risk and unsure job insecurity are now causing the social gap to widen and despair to spread. Traditional social democracy does not address these concerns and new forms of more targeted or tailored intervention are required. Thus a way of ending the 'precarariat' is needed as well as an extension of the social net to those who fall outside through employment changes. But there is also a recognition that participation should be extended through decentralisation and the use of instruments such as the referendum. Internationally, the left should promote an authority to deal with pollution and reinforce Europe's social and cultural authority.

This group is somewhat dismissive of the problems the New World say are confronting the left.<sup>19</sup> It is the business of the Socialists to 'reconcile the popular classes with modernity' They do not regard chasing a 'moribund Communist Party' as the way ahead and they see the extreme left as being of no account.<sup>20</sup> This group note that Laguiller's 2002 vote remained at the same level as in 1995, the PCF's fell by half and the LCR's merely rallied in April's presidential election before falling to 1.5% in the June general elections. Most workers and employees voted for the right or extreme right and not for a move leftward. Social democracy is not against the market and that is not new in France (or elsewhere in Europe) but there are several types of market economy. Social democratic parties developed a market economy that combined dynamism with regulation and state authority conceived to channel market forces in a particular direction.

Dominique Strauss-Kahn opened the post-election debate with a contribution to *Le Monde*<sup>21</sup> and through the club 'Socialisme et démocratie' which has 43 members on the 204 strong PS national council. Strauss-Kahn's outlook is not that different from Fabius and looks to a left free of its statist past and bringing together the old party base with modernity and he is close to the UK's Policy Network think tank.<sup>22</sup> His book, for example, proposes ending the state's involvement in the competitive sector of the economy and maintains that redistribution has had its day both as instrument and ideology.<sup>23</sup> In this view the left has to respond to the conservative right's UMP coalition by creating a large unified party of the left. There has been no effective organisation to this group and only after the 2002 elections was it turned into a working support for Strauss-Kahn with a structure and a distribution of tasks. This late start in the competition (relative to Fabius' support) may lead it to join the main leadership in the near future with a view to widening and deepening support over the next few years. This group describes its approach as being to defend political liberties and even to extend them by making them effective for everybody.<sup>24</sup>

Finally there is Arnaud Montebourg who, supported by numerous former Jospin supporters (Valls, Rebsamen, Peillon) wanted an end to the sterile and 'buckled up partisan system' of self-selecting combatants. Montebourg is a young deputy who in the 1997-2002 ran a long campaign against the President's unwillingness to go before the courts (to the displeasure of the Socialists Party archons) and was unsuccessfully opposed

by Jacques Chirac's lawyer Francis Szpiner in his constituency. Montebourg polled 35 votes (to Ayrault's 85) in the poll for the presidency of the PS Assembly group and wants, as the leader of the Convention pour la V<sup>e</sup> République, to table a motion at the Congress which will be calling for the reform of institutions but which will deal with globalisation, a new social contract and European integration. In it Montebourg opposes the enlargement of Europe on the grounds that it will hamper the creation of a European Republic as an counterweight to the USA. Montebourg has campaigned in the party base over the summer and is hoping for 15-25% but he has a regular group of about 15 deputies and the support of some personalities in the party (like David Assouline and Christian Paul)

The Extreme Left

French 'exceptionalism' is a recurrent theme amongst commentators on French politics but, whereas this used to turn on the Communist presence, then Le Pen's Front national, the poll of over 10% for the extreme Trotskyite left is now added to the list. There is a new radicalism based on pauperisation of the unemployed, distrust of political elites and a rejection of the orthodox free market drive now current in France and Europe. This is a relatively new phenomenon and is not confined to the Trotskyite parties. There are also small issue groups devoted to the unemployed, immigrants, marginal farms, globalisation, low paid workers, the ill-housed and so on. These groups are very different and not necessarily compatible. Not all of these are Trotskyite (far from it, some are close to Christian milieux and others like José Bové are unclassifiable) but they are relatively recent. Many sprang up in the mid-1980s but at that time they were brought in to the Socialist Party's orbit and some of their leaders joined the party later in the decade. More recently they have challenged Jospin's plural left government and the Trotskyite parties have capitalised in elections on these movements and on the 'neo-liberal' drift they claim has taken place.

Lutte ouvrière is the biggest of these parties. It is run in a tightly organised, hierarchical and secretive manner by a shadowy figure (Robert Hardy) who is in fact an orthodox business entrepreneur.<sup>25</sup> It has regularly run a candidate at presidential elections since 1974 and that has always been Arlette Laguiller although she is only the 'electoral face' of an organisation devoted to industrial politics. In 1974 Laguiller polled 2.3%, in 1981 2.3% again and that fell to 2% in 1988 but the party had a break through in

1995 when Laguiller polled 5.3%. This was a threat to the PCF and its ambition is to replace the Communist Party as the Communist left a hope that was not realised in 2002. It has made some progress in local elections and now has a small number of councillors (33) and in regional elections but its sectarian refusal to contemplate durable alliances and its organisation limit its appeal. Lutte ouvrière's position in-between presidential ballots when it refused to call for its supporters (unlike the rest of the left) to vote for Jacques Chirac on the second round damaged it with its new voters. And it may not recover from this display of sectarianism.

Lutte ouvrière has turned its back on other 'alternative' movements but the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire has invested effort in these to its benefit. LCR is led by the veteran of May 1969 Alain Krivine and has looked (until recently) to forge an alliance with LO and there was a brief success at the 1998 regional elections and 1999 European elections. In 2002 the LCR overtook LO at the general elections although the numbers involved were tiny (320,467 votes to 301,984). Pierre Lambert's Parti des travailleurs, who ran Daniel Gluckstein at the 2002 presidentials, is even smaller but has influence beyond its size in the unions (especially Force ouvrière) and is another very closed and secretive organisation. French trade unions have also been changed over the last ten years by splits and the rise of more combative organisations. These are almost wholly in the public sector and are small by European standards but provide a source of recruits and support for the Trotskyite movement and compete with the Communist CGT. Altogether the Trotskyite parties have a bigger working class audience than the Communist Party and they are also backed by some prestigious intellectual figures and there are many participants in the struggles of May 1968 available to join these groups. They have flourished as the orthodox left has struggled or disappointed but they are agreed on very little and find it hard to collaborate. They are hostile to mainstream politics and are not going to be incorporated into coalition as easily as the PCF and its cadres.

### Conclusion

French Socialists, and the left in France, face the same problems as parties in the rest of Europe but with some added elements of coalition and leadership. First is the crisis of socialist thought that is common to other parties. French Socialists were for many years influenced by – or explicitly – marxist. This marxism was rejected during the

Mitterrand septennates 1981-995 but it was replaced with a 'social democracy' that was to the left of the 'Third Way' and novel. This 'Jospinian' solution is now in question or in debate but at the same time the partners of the Parti socialiste, the Communists, the Verts and the diminished Citizens' movement, have also had to review their doctrines. For the Communist Party the trauma of revision has been greater than for the Socialists and there are few other possible models on offer. At the same time as revising their doctrine the Socialists need to reforge alliances and build leadership – a tall order – and as Gaëtan Gorce (deputy for La Nièvre) noted not something the Socialists have accomplished before.

What this brief summary of the evolution of the French left shows is that the process of coalition building is intricate and dependent on the élan provided by the presidential process but that the same factors are also potentially disruptive. Overall the left needs to replace the 'plural left' coalition with a new alliance strategy and it needs new federating leader to replace Lionel Jospin. This process will have to be undertaken by the Parti socialiste but it will need to provide a long-term project capable of mobilising their supporters and rallying others to the left. This project will need to address the problems that caused its defeat in 2002 and these will include the reaffirmation of the authority of the state, how to reach full employment, Europe, redistribution and of course crime.<sup>26</sup> Over the last two septennates insecurity has increased, inequalities have increased, public services have failed, there has been the difficulty of integrating the second generation of immigrants ('beurs') that they have been left on the side. But the left's assertion that it is still committed to a society of equality and fraternity is still dominant in the Socialist Party although they claim that the means are now in question. Furthermore the French left's traditional responses to social questions have not worked and have to be rethought. It is a tall order and the left cannot rely (as happened in 1997) on the conservative right to blunder once again.

But the parties of the left all face the same problems on a smaller scale. None of the parties of the French left have come through the period of government undamaged but the broad position remains one of Socialist Party domination but accompanied by a need for support from the smaller groups. All the parties of the former 'plural left' are searching for a new strategy and are seeking new leadership. Yet it is the strategic crisis that

remains the principal one because, faced with a united and triumphant conservative right, the French left is condemned to an indefinite period in the wilderness. It took the left twenty-three years to return to power after de Gaulle's victory in 1958 (and they thought that return was temporary).

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> S. Agasinsky *Journal interrompu, 24 janvier-25 mai 2002* (Le Seuil, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> *Le Point* 12/7/02

<sup>3</sup> C. Amar and A. Chemin *Jospin & Cie – Histoire de la gauche plurielle, 1993-2002* (Seuil, 2002)

<sup>4</sup> *Liaisons sociales* 30 April 2002

<sup>6</sup> *l'Humanité* 12/9/2

<sup>7</sup> Roger Martelli in *Le Monde* 14/6/2.

<sup>8</sup> *20 Minutes* 3/9/2

<sup>9</sup> *Libération* 30/8/02

<sup>10</sup> Alain Lipietz *Qu'est-ce l'échange politique?* (La Découverte, 1999)

<sup>11</sup> *Nouvel observateur* 26/9/02

<sup>12</sup> *Le Monde* 25/8/02

<sup>13</sup> *Journal du dimanche* 4/8/02

<sup>14</sup> *Libération* 30/8/02

<sup>15</sup> *Le Monde* 13/8/02

<sup>16</sup> *Le Monde* 31/8/02

<sup>17</sup> *Le Monde* 29/8/02

<sup>18</sup> *Nouvel observateur* 11/7/02

<sup>19</sup> *Nouvel observateur* 11/7/02

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Alain Touraine comment that 'the PS/PCF alliance is now pointless' in the *Nouvel observateur* 15/8/02. Henri Weber and others (close to Fabius) have made similar remarks see *Libération* 30/8/02

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<sup>21</sup> *Le Monde* 18 June 2002.

<sup>22</sup> *Nouvel observateur* 18/7/02

<sup>23</sup> Dominique Strauss-Kahn's book is *La flamme et la cendre* (Grasset, 2002)

<sup>24</sup> *Le Point* 23/8/02

<sup>25</sup> F. Koch 'Dr Barcia et Mr Hardy' *L'Express* 8/4/98

<sup>26</sup> H. Algarrondo *Sécurité: La gauche contre le peuple* (Laffont, 2002)