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PhD thesis

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Ph. D.

Elleinstein and Althusser:

intellectual dissidents in the French Communist Party,

1972-1981

August 2001

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role played by intellectual dissidents in the French Communist Party from 1972 to 1981, focusing primarily on the philosopher Louis Althusser and the historian Jean Elleinstein, whose ideas in relation to the FCP were closer than previously thought.

The introduction sets the background out in which the FCP evolved after the Second World War and brings us to the 1970s, the decade during which the FCP lost its steam against most expectations — as the thesis demonstrates it. The first chapter deals with the perception communist intellectual dissidents had of their Party's internal organisation — an organisation which was deemed too rigid and too inflexible to encompass the plurality of opinion of its members. This rigidity was demonstrated by the Leadership's refusal to recognise the right to create tendencies within the Party, as the second chapter of this thesis shows. In this context, the third chapter argues that communist intellectual dissidents felt suffocated by a Party which did not give them enough leeway, even more so since it claimed to be the Party of the working class — a position which threatened the Party's adaptation to social change and which is developed in chapter four. However, this thesis also puts the criticisms expressed by Althusser and Elleinstein into perspective. Indeed, if these intellectual dissidents were free to express *des idées libérales et avancées*, this was not the case for the FCP leadership. The Soviet Union and its KGB had too strong a grip over the Party and its General Secretary, Georges Marchais, for the FCP leadership to be able to act freely. In that sense, if the FCP gave up the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat in 1976, as the fifth chapter shows, it could not criticise the Soviet Union too much, as chapter six demonstrates, nor get too close to the French Socialist Party as chapter seven shows, nor let its dissident intellectuals go on expressing *des vues trop dérangeantes*, as chapter eight concludes.

Each chapter is set against the Party's historical background and brings us to the modern times, which have seen the French Communist Party transform itself — a transformation which would have been welcomed by Althusser and Elleinstein back in the 1970s.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

French abbreviations

BP	Bureau Politique
CERM	Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CME	Capitalisme Monopoliste d'Etat
FGDS	Fédération de la Gauche Démocrate et Socialiste
IMEC	Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine
IRM	Institut de Recherche Marxiste
MRP	Mouvement Républicain Populaire
OPEP	Organisation des Pays Exportateurs de Pétrole
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PCI	Parti Communist Italien
PS	Parti Socialiste
RPR	Rassemblement Pour la République
SFIC	Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
SNCF	Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français
UDR	Union des Démocrates pour la République
UDF	Union pour la Démocratie Française
URSS	Union des Républiques Socialistes Soviétiques

English abbreviations

CI	Communist International
CIS	Community of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of Soviet Union
FCP	French Communist Party
GDR	German Democratic Republic
ICP	Italian Communist Party

MSC	Monopolistic State Capitalism
OPEC	(Organisation of) Oil Producing and Exporting Countries
SP	Socialist Party
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic

Russian abbreviations translated into French

GPOu	Direction Politique d'Etat (Gossoudarstvennoïé Politicheskoïé Oupravlenié)
KGB	Comité pour la Sécurité d'Etat (Komitet Gossoudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti)
NKVD	Commissariat du Peuple pour les Questions de Solidarité (Narodnii Kommissariat Gossoudarstvennoïé Bezopasnosti)
OGPOu	Direction Politique d'Etat Unifiée (Obioédinionnyé Goussoudarstiennoïé Politicheskoïé Oupravlenié)
RAFP	Association Russe des Ecrivains Proletariens
Tcheka	Commission Panrusse Extraordinaire pour la Lutte contre la Contre-révolution et le Sabotage (Vserossiiskaïa Tcherzvytchaïnaïa Kommissia po Borbe y Kontrevoliutsiei i Sabotajem)

INTRODUCTION

The 1970s was a key decade for the French Communist Party for three reasons. First, it was during this decade that the FCP completed its integration into the French political sphere — an integration which it had started in the 1960s. Second, it was a period marked not only by the domination of the *pompidoulienne* then *giscardienne* Right in power, but also by two successive economic crisis which brought to an end *Les Trente Glorieuses*, thirty years of post-war economic expansion. Third, it was in the 1970s that an unprecedented wave of dissent — swollen by the biting, but measured, criticisms expressed by the communist intellectuals Louis Althusser and Jean Elleinstein — swept the Party and affected its most prominent leaders.

The insertion of the French Communist Party into the French political sphere — and its consecutive assimilation of the constitutional rules of the Fifth Republic it had decried as from its advent in 1958¹ — started in the 1960s and became conclusive in the 1970s. The reasons behind the Party's decision to shift from a Leninist and antiparliamentary perception of state power to a parliamentary vision of its role within the state system were motivated by a clear-cut reflex of urgency. Fossilised into the opposition since its eviction from Ramadier's government in 1947,² the Party needed to regain a certain political legitimacy among its supporters in order to assert, in a more concrete manner, its ambition to move towards the radical change of society advocated by its Marxist-Leninist ideology. Relegated to the margins of the French political scene,³

¹ Ronald Tiersky, 'Declining Fortunes of the French Communist Party', *Problems of Communism* (1988), 2.

² Ronald Tiersky, *French Communism, 1920-1972* (New York: London Columbia University Press, 1974), ch. 4.

³ The Fifth Republic's elections on a majority basis, and in two ballots, contributed to the marginalisation of the FCP on the French parliamentary scene; cf. Jean Baudoin, 'L'assimilation progressive de la Constitution de 1958 par le Parti Communiste Français', *Revue Française de Science Politique* (1986), 799.

the FCP needed to become again a prominent political actor insofar as the Fifth Republic, General de Gaulle's creation, not only proved to be relatively popular among most French people, but also promised to be rather durable. Caught between its determination to preserve a distinctive 'revolutionary' identity which left it in the margins of French politics, and its will to move towards an integration into political life,⁴ which would make it resemble other parties to a greater extent, the FCP's margin of manoeuvre was relatively limited, and full of pitfalls — even more so since it was dominated on its left by *conservateurs*, and on its right by *progressistes*.⁵

Between its marginalisation and its integration into the French political sphere, the French Communist Party chose to return to parliamentarism in the 1960s. In 1964, at the time of its 17th Congress,⁶ and under the control of Waldeck-Rochet, who was endowed with a reformist character,⁷ the Party rejected the concept of a single-party political system, as applied in the Soviet Union, and instead officially recognised parliamentary pluralism.⁸ In 1972, it accepted the concept of political changeover between parties.⁹ In 1975, it made a *déclaration des libertés* in which it asserted its unconditional attachment to democratic freedoms.¹⁰ In 1976, it rejected the concept of

⁴ Isaac Aviv, 'The French Communist Party from 1958 to 1978: Crisis and Endurance', *Western European Politics*, 2, no. 2 (1979), 182.

⁵ In 1961, the communists Servin, Casanova and Kriegel-Valrimont were excluded from the Party for having, among other things, praised the Gaullist regime. In 1966, the communist cell of the Sorbonne faculty, in Paris, was dissolved by the FCP: it had criticised the Party leadership for not having put forward its own candidate at the presidential elections of 1965 and for having backed the candidacy of François Mitterrand; cf. Aviv, 'The French Communist Party from 1958 to 1978: Crisis and Endurance', *ibid.*, 183.

⁶ The 17th Congress of the FCP was held in Paris from 14 to 17 May 1964.

⁷ Thomas Ferenczi, 'Adieux au PCF', *Le Monde*, 9 February 2001, p. viii, by reference to Jean Vigreux's book, *Waldeck Rochet — Une biographie politique* (Paris: Editions La Dispute, 2001). Waldeck Rochet (1905-1983) succeeded Maurice Thorez (1900-1964) at the head of the FCP in 1964. Severely ill in 1969, he left his place to Georges Marchais (1920-1997), who filled the interim up to 1972, when he finally became General Secretary of the Party; cf. Stéphane Courtois, 'PCF: le parti de Moscou', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 47. It is worth noting that Waldeck-Rochet was under Moscow's grip.

⁸ Baudoin, 'L'assimilation progressive de la Constitution de 1958 par le Parti Communiste Français', 802; Neill Nugent and David Lowe, 'The French Communist Party: the Road to Democratic Government?', *Political Quarterly*, 48 (1977), 275.

⁹ Baudoin, *ibid.*, 803; Nugent and Lowe, *ibid.*, 277.

¹⁰ Baudoin, *ibid.*, 803; Nugent and Lowe, *ibid.*, 277. The freedoms guaranteed by the FCP included, among others, the right of association, of demonstration, and freedom of expression — freedoms

dictatorship of the proletariat¹¹ and instead advocated a pacific, and parliamentary, way to socialism.¹² However, if the French Communist Party had made the first steps towards complete acceptance of constitutional rules, it was nonetheless the case that the Socialist Party had pushed it in this direction¹³ and that this assimilation was not made without some reluctance.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the French Communist Party was no longer the opposition party *par excellence*. It was rejoined by the Socialist Party which, after having participated in various governments for over twenty-five years, was suddenly sent into the limbo of opposition by the Gaullists¹⁴ — and it was the trigger. Both parties were on known territory. The Popular Front period was still a recent memory,¹⁵ and the Tripartite era was even closer.¹⁶ Both the FCP and the SP clearly knew that, in order to put an end to their political isolation and to conquer a strong bipolar state power, there was only one solution: they had to forge a Union of the Left.¹⁷

The union forged between the FCP and the SP was as much tactical as circumstantial. It was a marriage of reason which was concluded on 27 June 1972.¹⁸ But it was also a turbulent marriage. François Mitterrand, who became the leader of the Socialist Party in 1971, rapidly appeared to be a strong personality — too strong, and too ambitious for the taste of the Communist Party which was used to being in the

which were not guaranteed in the USSR. This declaration thus marked a further move in the Party's destalinisation and confirmed the Party's attachment to Eurocommunism; cf. 'PCF-PCI: la déclaration commune — "Toutes les libertés devront être garanties et développées"', *Le Monde*, 19 November 1975.

¹¹ See ch. 5.

¹² Baudoin, 'L'assimilation progressive de la Constitution de 1958 par le Parti Communiste Français', 803.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 802.

¹⁴ Annie Kriegel wrote in that respect that 'les socialistes ont absolument besoin d'exercer [...] le pouvoir gouvernemental, car ils s'usent et s'étiolent dans une trop constante opposition, comme l'a montré le rapide déclin de la SFIO après 1958', in *Le communisme au jour le jour: chroniques du Figaro, 1976-1979* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), p. 87; cf. Aviv, 'The French Communist Party from 1958 to 1978: Crisis and Endurance', 184.

¹⁵ 1936-1938.

¹⁶ Agreement concluded between the FCP, the SFIO and the MRP (1945 to 1947).

¹⁷ Baudoin, 'L'assimilation progressive de la Constitution de 1958 par le Parti Communiste Français', 801.

¹⁸ See ch. 7.

opposition front-line. Mitterrand also rapidly showed that he was a charismatic leader, which suited the CP for a while, as it could boost the Union of the Left with new voters — but for a while only, as communists did not want to play second fiddle to the Socialists. At the 1974 presidential elections, Mitterrand brandished the banner of the Left¹⁹ — the Left which was admittedly united and relatively balanced, but which was also more and more riddled by internal disagreements, more and more on the verge of splitting up — and in 1977, it did split up.²⁰ As a result, at the 1981 presidential elections, everything changed because the FCP and the SP presented their own candidates: Georges Marchais stood against François Mitterrand.²¹ Everything changed for it was finally Mitterrand who became the winner of this race for power, the figurehead of his office — as was the case for de Gaulle in the 1960s, and as the communists had always feared — the one bestowing favours on a FCP reduced to the role of humble supplicant for ministries.²² Everything changed, for in 1981, the French Communist Party was no longer the strong and dominant party of the Left, as had been the case in 1972 and since the end of the Second World War in 1945. In 1981, the great Communist Party, which was so lauded in its golden years²³ as the Party of Thorez, *le fils du peuple*, and so decried by others as *le parti de l'étranger à la botte de Staline*,

¹⁹ At the 1965 presidential elections, Mitterrand was already the candidate of the Left. In the second round of the elections, he obtained 45.5% of the votes against 54.5% for de Gaulle, cf. F. Goguel, *Chroniques électorales: la Cinquième République après de Gaulle* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1983), quoted in Alistair Cole and Peter Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections since 1789* (London: Aldershot Gower, 1989), p. 99. During the May 1968 events, the FCP and the SP acted unilaterally (see ch. 7). As a result, each Party presented its own candidate at the 1969 presidential elections. In the first round, Duclos (PCF) got 21.5% of the vote and Deferre (SFIO) 5.1%. The second round was fought between Poher (Centre) and Pompidou (UDR), cf. F. Goguel and A. Grosser, *La politique en France* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1980), quoted in Cole and Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections since 1789*, *ibid.*, p. 115. In the second round of the 1974 presidential elections, Mitterrand obtained 49.4% of the votes against 50.6% for Giscard d'Estaing, cf. Goguel and Grosser, *ibid.*, quoted in Cole and Campbell, *ibid.*, p. 115.

²⁰ See ch. 7.

²¹ In the first round, Marchais got 15.48% of the votes. In the second round, Mitterrand obtained 52.22% of the votes against 47.78% for Giscard d'Estaing; Goguel, *Chroniques électorales*, quoted in Cole and Campbell, *French Electoral Systems and Elections since 1789*, p.125.

²² Baudoin, 'L'assimilation progressive de la Constitution de 1958 par le Parti Communiste Français', 813.

²³ Baudoin, 'Le déclin du PCF', *Regards sur l'Actualité* (April 1991), 36; Michel Winock, 'L'âge d'or du communisme français', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, pp. 56-65.

was a mere shadow of its former self.

From 1972 to 1981, the FCP lost its way on the French political scene despite the fact that its acceptance of the institutions of the Fifth Republic and its participation in the Union of the Left were aimed at propelling it to power. From 1972 to 1981, the CP lost its dynamism when it became modelled on the ‘Marchais style’.²⁴ Furthermore, if we look more closely at this decade, which was a decade both marked by economic crisis and dominated by the Right in power, we can see that the Party’s decline defied logic. From 1974 to 1981, the Party lost its appeal among voters when it had remained strong in a period of economic expansion, and at a time when it could have put forward its communist ideology as an alternative to capitalism — that is to say at a time when it should have been in its element. In this context, any interrogation, as to why and how such a decline could have possibly taken place, is perfectly legitimate for as Louis Althusser explained: ‘L’histoire est un théâtre, et [...] pour la comprendre, il faut chercher derrière les masques, les chefs et leurs discours, et surtout derrière la scène.’²⁵

From 1972 to 1981, the Right was still in power, as it had been since 1958. It was a Right which was dominated by the successive presidencies of Georges Pompidou²⁶ and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing²⁷ — two men with very different origins and styles, but two presidencies irremediably linked by the disruption of international economic order from 1973 onwards. 1973 was characterized by the advent of the first oil crisis,²⁸ which triggered a whole string of economic shocks.²⁹ In France, as in other countries, the first

²⁴ Marchais was General Secretary of the FCP from 1972 to 1994.

²⁵ Louis Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

²⁶ Pompidou (UDR) was President from 1969 to 1974.

²⁷ Giscard d’Estaing (UDF) was President from 1974 to 1981.

²⁸ In October 1973, the victory of Israel against Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippour war pushed the OPEC to increase the oil price by 70% and to reduce its oil production by 5% until Israel surrendered its occupied territories — which Israel refused to do; cf. Serge Bernstein and Pierre Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle: de 1974 à nos jours*, vol. 5 (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1994), p. 16. Interestingly, what industrialised countries called a ‘crisis’ in the 1970s represented a real economic boom in oil producing countries.

²⁹ In 1973, the increase in oil prices from \$3 to \$11.65 made the energy bill of industrialised and oil dependent countries, such as France, swell. As a consequence, the costs of industrial production increased. Stagflation settled in and unemployment escalated; see our ch. 4.

oil crisis not only provoked a deep sector-based mutation, but also an upheaval in social behavioural patterns modelled on growth.³⁰ In this context, the Keynesian-style policy, which was based on the strengthening of the Welfare State, and which was led by the Prime Minister Jacques Chirac as from 1974, proved incapable of turning around a depressed economy³¹ — the policy of economic liberalism advocated by Raymond Barre, as from his arrival at Matignon in 1976, did not succeed any better,³² even more so since in 1979 the second oil crisis³³ affected an already all too weakened France.

1973 was also a turning point for the French Communist Party: the economic crisis which started sweeping France was, potentially at least, a real godsend for the Party. Indeed, the Party could revive a Marxist-Leninist language based on the proletarianization of workers³⁴ and on the collapse of the capitalist system³⁵ — a collapse which, if we believe French communists, seemed to be materializing at last and thus to be placing the advent of socialism ‘in the colours of France’³⁶ under favourable auspices, if not within arm’s reach. The Party could assert itself as the champion of the working class and thus find its niche.³⁷ Finally the Party could close ranks, align its battalions behind its

³⁰ By reference, among other examples, to the need for a reduction in energy consumption.

³¹ Chirac (UDR then RPR) was Prime Minister from 1974 to 1976. Personal compulsory contributions in tax increased, social security was extended to non working persons and dismissals were made more difficult for companies to resort to from 1974 to 1975; cf. Bernstein and Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle: de 1974 à nos jours*, p. 60.

³² Barre (UDF) was Prime Minister from 1976 to 1981. It is also worth noting that economic liberalism was the cornerstone of Margaret Thatcher’s and Ronald Reagan’s policies. Jean Elleinstein summed up the Barre experience: ‘Un million et demi de chômeurs d’ici à la fin de l’année, une inflation de l’ordre de 12%, une production industrielle au-dessous de celle d’il y a quatre ans. Tel est le bilan de la politique économique libérale qui en revient aux recettes du dix-neuvième siècle’ in ‘Pour une alliance entre le PCF et le PS’, in ‘Pour une alliance historique entre le PCF et le PS’, *Le Monde*, 24 August 1978. For Louis Althusser, ‘c’est la droite la plus réactionnaire et la plus discréditée’, in ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

³³ In 1979, the Ayatollah Khomeini, who overthrew the Shah of Iran, reduced his country’s oil exports, thus provoking an increase in oil prices. The price of the oil barrel tripled between 1978 and 1980, going from \$13 to \$40; cf. Bernstein and Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle: de 1974 à nos jours*, pp. 25-6.

³⁴ See ch. 4.

³⁵ 21^e Congrès, *Union, Programme Commun, Socialisme: le Parti Communiste propose (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (Vitry, 24-27 October 1974); Jean Fabre, ‘La crise de la société française, la crise de l’impérialisme’ (report to the Party conference on ‘La crise de la société française et la crise dans le monde capitaliste’), *L’Humanité*, 24 May 1975.

³⁶ See ch. 5.

³⁷ See ch. 4 and 7.

Leadership,³⁸ and form a stronghold against capitalist forces — a stronghold which seemed unassailable to outsiders, but which nonetheless was cracking within.

It was in the 1970s that an unprecedented wave of dissent swept the French Communist Party and affected its most prominent leaders. Inflated by the Party's too stringent organisation,³⁹ blown by its ambiguous attitude towards the USSR,⁴⁰ swollen by its inexhaustible strategic waltzes, and amplified by the break up of the Union of the Left in 1977 and its consecutive failure to win the 1978 legislative elections, this wave of dissident was unprecedented in the Party's history because of its scale and nature.⁴¹

In the 1970s, dissidence was no longer an isolated phenomenon that was mainly limited to communist intellectuals. It was ingrained at all levels of the Party's organisation. It came from any kind of Party member, from workers and from intellectuals. It spread from the conservative left of the Party to its progressive right.⁴² It thus appeared to be an heterogeneous and disparate form of dissidence⁴³ which was confronted to a sectarian and united communist Leadership, and which seemed either doomed to fail or poised to split the Party into factions⁴⁴ — but appearances can be

³⁸ See ch. 1, 3 and 4.

³⁹ See ch. 1.

⁴⁰ See ch. 6.

⁴¹ Jean Baudoin, 'Les phénomènes de contestation au sein du Parti Communiste Français (avril 1978-mai 1979)', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, no. 30 (1980), 79; Colette Ysmal, 'La crise du Parti communiste', *Projet*, no. 129 (November 1978), 1086; Frank L. Wilson, 'The French CP's Dilemma', in 'Eurocommunism in 1978', *Problems of Communism*, 17 (July-August 1978), 7. Other conflicts, opposing communist intellectuals or fellow-travellers to the FCP took place, for instance, at the end of the 1930s (at the time of the Moscow trials), in the 1950s (over Soviet deportations), in 1956 (when Hungary was invaded by the Red Army) and in 1968 (when Czechoslovakia was invaded by Soviet troops); see, among others, David Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), pp. 311, 335; Jean-Pierre Gaudard, *Les orphelins du PC* (Paris: Belfond, 1986), p. 108. Roger Martelli also noticed that 'à partir [des années 1970] [...] la périodicité des crises s'est accélérée', in *Le rouge et le bleu: essai sur le communisme dans l'histoire française* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1995), p. 34.

⁴² Wilson, 'The French CP's Dilemma', *ibid.*, 8.

⁴³ Although, in the 1970s, some communist dissidents came together to sign petitions or to write books; cf., for example, 'Cent militants: que valent les formalités juridiques face aux exigences de la démocratie?' (joint declaration), *Le Monde*, 17 May 1978; "'Le retard de notre parti à se mettre à jour ne saurait, sans grave dommage, s'accroître", déclarent plus de trois cent communistes' (*Pétition d'Aix-en-Provence* signed, among others, by Althusser and Elleinstein), *Le Monde*, 20 May 1978; Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, Georges Labica and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Ouvrons la fenêtre, camarades* (Paris: Maspero, 1979).

⁴⁴ See ch. 2.

deceptive in some cases and at certain times.

In the 1970s, communist intellectuals were the driving force of movements of dissent within the Party:⁴⁵ they were the most determined and the boldest in their attitude. They did not hesitate to infringe the Party's rules of democratic centralism by questioning decisions taken 'sovereignly' by their communist leaders. They did not hesitate to bypass the Party-controlled press by voicing their criticisms in the so-called bourgeois media.⁴⁶ They did not hesitate to exploit their own influence in order to try to convince other communists of the validity of their 'dissenting' arguments. These were, therefore, dissidents who took risks, who were perfectly aware of them, and who accepted them because, as far as they were concerned, the transformation⁴⁷ and the modernisation⁴⁸ of the FCP were prizes worth fighting for. Jean Elleinstein acknowledged this when he wrote:

Face au Goliath qui gouverne le Parti, je ne suis — je le sais — qu'un petit David avec sa fronde, mais ne sommes nous pas des milliers de petits David? Et puis, David a bien fini par vaincre Goliath...⁴⁹

In this context, the leaders of the French Communist Party were ready to crush any dissident they faced⁵⁰ — unaware that two influential intellectual dissidents, endowed with a calm but passionate character, were determined to leave their personal mark on the Party, namely the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser⁵¹ and the Eurocommunist

⁴⁵ Interestingly, the most prominent communist intellectual dissidents were those who did not depend from the Party financially.

⁴⁶ Ysmal, 'La crise du Parti communiste', 1088. It is also worth noting that some Party leaders, like Georges Marchais, did not hesitate to use non communist media such as *Le Monde* and *France Inter*.

⁴⁷ Louis Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, Paris, IMEC. fond Althusser, ALT2.A27-01.05, unpublished manuscript.

⁴⁸ Jean Elleinstein, 'L'avenir des communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 September 1978, p. 50.

⁴⁹ Jean Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!* (Paris: Belfond, 1981), p. 15.

⁵⁰ See ch. 8.

⁵¹ In the 1970s, the *Althussériens* included, among others, Etienne Balibar (a philosopher and a former disciple of Althusser), Georges Labica (a philosophy lecturer at the University of Paris X) and Guy

historian Jean Elleinstein.⁵²

Born in 1918, Louis Althusser joined the French Communist Party in 1948,⁵³ after having met Hélène — his future wife,⁵⁴ his safest lifeboat in his moments of mental agitation, the anchor of his life, the consenting-recalcitrant victim of his love conquests,⁵⁵ the woman he unknowingly and unwillingly strangled in 1980, in the middle of a ‘dreamlike delirium’. In his works about the FCP — whether in books, articles, or manuscripts left unfinished and unpublished when he died in 1990 — Althusser is at once brilliant, frank, fiery, biting and eloquent: he gave life to his writings and stamped his own character on them. It thus transpired that he loved being protected, whether by his wife on a personal level, by the Ecole Normale in Paris on a professional level, or by the Party on the level of political and intellectual commitment. But what he loved above all was his freedom and his independence — his freedom to express any criticism he wanted and his intellectual independence. He acknowledged this himself: ‘Sous les espèces de [ma] vive contestation [au sein du PCF], conduite sous les garanties d’une protection dont jamais je n’enfreignis les limites de la tolérance’, he wrote in a manuscript, ‘ce que je réalisais assurément, avant tout, [c’était] [...] le désir d’avoir un monde à moi, le vrai monde, celui de la lutte.’⁵⁶ This was his ‘goût fantasmagorique’,⁵⁷ as he called it — a

Bois (a medieval history professor at the University of Paris VII); cf. Jean-Pierre Gaudard, *Les orphelins du PC* (Paris: Belfond, 1986).

⁵² In the 1970s, the Eurocommunists included, among others, Maurice Goldring (a lecturer at the University of Paris VII and a contributor to *La Nouvelle Critique* and *France Nouvelle*), Raymond Jean (a literature lecturer at the University of Aix-en-Provence), Antoine Spire (a FCP worker and a contributor to the Party’s Editions Sociales), Henri Fiszbin (the former Secretary of the *Fédération Communiste de Paris*); cf. Gaudard, *ibid.*

⁵³ At the time of the Stockholm Appeal.

⁵⁴ Althusser met Hélène in 1946 and married her in the early 1970s. It is also worth noting that in the 1940s, the FCP accused Hélène of having been a Gestapo agent during the Second World War when in fact she had been active in the Resistance (she was also Jewish). After her trial within the Party, she was excluded from the *Conseil communal*. Althusser was deeply marked by this event and he wrote: ‘Cela me donna évidemment sur le Parti, ses directions et ses méthodes d’action, une vue singulièrement réaliste’; cf. Louis Althusser, *L’avenir dure longtemps* (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1992), p. 195.

⁵⁵ See, among others, Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, ‘Les incantations amoureuses d’Althusser’, *Libération*, 28 July 1997, p. 28, by reference to the relationship between Althusser and his Italian mistress Franca; Althusser, *L’avenir dure longtemps*, *ibid.*, pp. 132-3 (among others).

⁵⁶ Althusser, *ibid.*, p. 192.

⁵⁷ Althusser, *ibid.*, p. 158.

taste which he shared with Elleinstein.

Born in 1927, Jean Elleinstein joined the FCP at the time of the Liberation, in 1944.⁵⁸ ‘C’est l’histoire de l’Armée rouge, la participation des communistes à la Libération [qui m’ont motivé] [...]’, explained Elleinstein, ‘[mais] mon engagement à moi, c’était d’abord une libération personnelle par rapport à mon milieu, par rapport aux tabous, aux ambitions.’⁵⁹ The background Elleinstein referred to was his family — a family which was deeply rooted in the Parisian industrial bourgeoisie, and which had not destined him to become a communist activist. But Elleinstein was endowed with an independent mind which came across in a brilliant manner in his writings — notably his books and his articles about the French and Soviet Communist Parties.⁶⁰ This was even more the case towards the end of the 1970s, when he publicly voiced his disagreements with the communist Leadership — for Elleinstein only had ‘disagreements’ with his Leadership. He never described himself — like Althusser in that respect — as being a ‘dissident’ of the FCP, even if, in the literal sense of the term, he disagreed with some political orientations taken by French communist leaders and with the Party’s internal organisation. He did not describe himself as a ‘dissident’ for he was not a separatist: like Althusser, he loved his Party too much to see it split into opposing factions.⁶¹ His refusal to call himself a ‘dissident’ was, therefore, a political act by which he signified his attachment to the FCP and his desire to remain an integral part of it — but while keeping at the same time his intellectual independence and his right to express pointed criticisms.

In the 1970s, Althusser and Elleinstein were unquestionably the two most

⁵⁸ In the 1970s, Elleinstein was the deputy manager of the CERM (Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes); cf. ‘Un communiste juge les communistes’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, p. 60.

⁵⁹ André Harris and Alain de Sédouy, *Voyage à l’intérieur du Parti Communiste* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1974), p. 169.

⁶⁰ See ch. 6.

⁶¹ See ch. 2.

prominent dissenting figures within the French Communist Party.⁶² Many non-Marxist academics turned their attention to their writings and differentiated between the ideologies of these two communist intellectuals.⁶³ Althusser was thus generally perceived as advocating a return to traditional Marxism and Elleinstein as looking ahead towards Eurocommunism. However, if we analyse these dissidents' writings and, more specifically, Althusser's unpublished manuscripts, we quickly realise that, in the 1970s, most criticisms expressed by Althusser and Elleinstein towards their Party had more in common than previously thought.

In this context, this thesis is, to a large extent, based on French, Russian, British, and American publications — any attempt to interview FCP members and officials was most of the time blocked by the present communist Leadership.⁶⁴ Indeed, Party leaders showed a considerable reluctance to discuss the subject of 1970s communist intellectual dissidents. This subject was certainly judged as being too sensitive, as reviving an 'old' controversy, and as potentially validating dissident actions — the Party still does not like this kind of interference in its internal affairs. Written sources were, therefore, multiplied, diversified, compared and matched up so that this thesis could reflect a diversity of opinions — the opinions expressed by French and Soviet communist dissidents, the ideas

⁶² Maurice Cranston wrote that 'Louis Althusser must be regarded as the leading theorist of the party. Indeed, he is among the most distinctive and original of living Marxist philosophers', in 'The Ideology of Althusser', *Problems of Communism*, 12 (March-April 1973), 53; regarding communist historians like Elleinstein, Gaudard wrote that 'si leurs travaux sont si importants, c'est que le communisme est un monde sans mémoire, qui a besoin de l'oubli pour imposer sa dialectique', in *Les orphelins du PC*, p. 180.

⁶³ See, among others, Ysmal, 'La crise du Parti communiste', 1094; Baudoin, 'Les phénomènes de contestation au sein du Parti Communiste Français (avril 1978-mai 1979)', 91.

⁶⁴ Francette Lazard (a party official who works at the Espace Marx), Mr. and Mrs Charmont (two communist activists who belonged to the Party section of Mâcon, Saône-et-Loire, France), and Mr. Gabriel (the Secretary of the Party section of Mâcon) were the only persons who agreed to meet me (respectively in July 1999, on 7 August 1998 and on 28 July 1998). When I tried to meet other activists, I was told that I could not do so. When I tried to meet Party officials in Paris, they were either 'unavailable' or 'on holiday', despite the fact they had told me that they would see me. Letters sent to Party officials 'never arrived'. When I arrived at the Party headquarters in July 1999, four communists received me at the reception only to tell me that 'they would help' but that 'nobody could meet me' — I was politely dismissed and nothing came out of that rather short 'meeting'.

voiced by FCP and CPSU leaders, the points made by French communist activists, the line taken by Soviet historians, and the views put forward by non communists. These sources come from University libraries, the National Library of Scotland, the Documentation Service of the FCP, the Party's Bibliothèque Marxiste and the Espace Marx in Paris,⁶⁵ the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC). The IMEC provided the original material of this thesis, namely Althusser's unpublished manuscripts which were placed at the disposal of researchers after his death in 1990. Without these manuscripts, it would have been near enough impossible to have a full vision of Althusser's criticisms towards the FCP and to link them to that of Elleinstein.⁶⁶

This thesis deals, therefore, with the subject of 'Elleinstein and Althusser: intellectual dissidents in the French Communist Party, 1972-1981'. Themes examined revolve around the dissenting ideas expressed by Althusser and Elleinstein, the way their criticisms were received by both French and Soviet communists, and the impact they had on the Party both in the 1970s and in the long run.

⁶⁵ The Espace Marx was formerly called the IRM (Institut de Recherche Marxiste).

⁶⁶ It is worth pointing out that although Althusser was willing to open up his work to researchers, this has not been the case for Elleinstein. At the end of the 1990s, the historian refused to talk about the role he played within the Party in the 1970s despite numerous letters sent to him and several phone calls.

CHAPTER 1

The internal organisation of the French Communist Party

The French Communist Party was, at the outset, a breakaway group of the French Socialist Party:¹ the contentious issue which bitterly divided the socialists was the adoption of Lenin's 21 conditions of adhesion to the 3rd Communist International. Léon Blum and a majority of socialists were against it, a minority in favour.² It was this minority of socialists who founded the FCP in 1920.³ From there onwards, French communist leaders followed the tune called by Moscow.⁴ This was generally true from an ideological point of view — as this thesis will demonstrate in the following chapters — and this was the case for the FCP's internal organisation in three respects.

First, the internal organisation⁵ of the French Communist Party was, up to 1993,⁶ based on the principle of democratic centralism which was defined by Lenin's twelfth condition of adhesion to the 3rd Communist International. This stipulated:

[Tout parti] appartenant à l'Internationale Communiste [doit] être [édifié] sur le principe de la centralisation démocratique [...]. [II] ne pourra remplir son rôle que

¹ The French Socialist Party was then called the SFIO.

² See, among others, Georges Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste sous la troisième république (1875-1940)*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963), ch. 1, 'le grand schisme'.

³ The FCP (or SFIC, as it was called at that time) was created at the Tours Congress which was held from 25 to 29 December 1920; Lefranc, *ibid.*, ch. 1.

⁴ Moscow called the tune up to 1984: Tchernenko died in 1985 and the communist reformer Gorbachev arrived in power; see our ch. 2.

⁵ Jean Elleinstein, *Le PC* (Paris: Grasset, 1976), pp. 63-6; Annie Kriegel, *Les communistes français* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), ch. X on 'Le mécanisme de sélection'; see our appendix.

⁶ After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the FCP became completely liberated from its Soviet tutelage. At its 28th Congress of 1994 the FCP thus decided to abandon the principle of democratic centralism and to replace it by the concept of 'souveraineté des communistes'; Francette Lazard, *Rapport introductif au Comité Central des 28, 29 et 30 septembre 1993*, (*L'Humanité*, 29 September 1993); 28^e Congrès, *Rapport de la commission sur les statuts (rapport présenté par Francette Lazard) suivi de Les statuts du PCF* (St-Ouen, 25-29 January 1994); see our ch. 2 and conclusion.

s'il est organisé de la façon la plus centralisée, si une discipline de fer⁷ confinant à la discipline militaire y est admise et si son organisme central est muni de larges pouvoirs, exerce une autorité incontestée, bénéficie de la confiance unanime des militants'⁸

This twelfth condition was unequivocal: the grassroots of the FCP had to be organised in a 'military' manner around a powerful, if not apparently untouchable, communist leadership — a type of organisation which was commended by the 'revolutionary' position occupied by the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, and which was transposed onto the French Communist Party.

Second, in the early 1920s, the Soviet Union was a relatively young state. Russia had gone through consecutive revolutions in 1917, the second of which allowed the Bolsheviks to seize power. The Bolsheviks still feared the revanchist assault of the 'bourgeois' enemy, but were determined to assert their 'socialist' power and to crush any 'bourgeois' element in a class struggle.⁹ This battle was permanent as any subversive element could penetrate the Party's ranks: purges became a by-word to protect the Party.¹⁰ This battle was constant: the 'discipline militaire'¹¹ necessary to any struggle had to be strictly applied — and it certainly was in the French Communist Party, even after the death of Lenin in 1924, the dissolution of the Communist International in 1943, and the death of Stalin in 1953. When one enjoys 'une autorité incontestée',¹² it is difficult to

⁷ Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *La maladie infantile du communisme: le gauchisme*, French translation (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1953: [n. pub.], 1962), p. 13.

⁸ Jean Burles, *Le Parti Communiste dans la société française* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1979), p. 136.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, English translation (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp. 65, 70, 81, 107, 120; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, English translation (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 12, 16, 34, 39; Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *Lenin's Thesis on Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship*, English translation (Glasgow: Socialist Labour Press, 1920), p. 14.

¹⁰ Stalin, *The Party* ([n.p.]: [n.pub.], 1924), pp. 97-109, quoted by Martin McCauley, *Stalin and Stalinism* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), p. 90.

¹¹ Burles, *Le Parti Communiste dans la société française*, p. 136, by reference to the twelfth condition of adherence to the Communist International.

¹² Burles, *ibid.*, p. 136.

question it, and all the more so to do without it. The long-lasting and centrally focused domination of Maurice Thorez and, to a lesser extent, of Georges Marchais at the head of the FCP proved this.¹³

Third, the strengthening of the Party leadership — in the CPSU as in the FCP — led to the near deification of the Leader,¹⁴ which meant that the power of the Party was intermingled with that of its General Secretary. Khrushchev was fully aware of this, and in 1956, at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, he denounced both Stalin's abuses of power and personality cult in an attempt to reform the Soviet system¹⁵ — an attempt which failed in the long term.¹⁶ Nothing changed in the CPSU: from Brezhnev to Gorbachev,¹⁷ the power of the CPSU kept intertwining with that of its leaders.¹⁸ Nothing changed in the FCP:¹⁹ Thorez' personality cult did not fade away²⁰ and the confusion between the power of the Leadership and that of the Party as a whole remained as such. However, too great a concentration of power in the hands of the FCP leadership could only cause a backlash in the long term — and in the late 1970s, this is precisely what happened.

The breakdown of the 'Programme Commun de la Gauche' in 1977²¹ and the failure of the Left at the 1978 legislative elections²² sparked off a wave of discontent

¹³ Lenin justified this position by writing that 'il ne saurait y avoir de solide mouvement révolutionnaire sans une organisation de dirigeants qui en maintienne la continuité dans le temps', Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *La maladie infantile du communisme: le gauchisme*, French translation (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1953: [n. pub.], 1962), p. 139; it is worth noting that Thorez was the leader of the FCP from 1930 to 1964. He was succeeded by Waldeck-Rochet from 1964 to 1972. Marchais was then Party leader from 1972 to 1994; Stéphane Courtois, 'PCF: le parti de Moscou', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 47.

¹⁴ Lenin and Stalin were deified to such an extent that they were even embalmed at their death and put into a mausoleum.

¹⁵ Khrushchev thus started a *déstalinisation* which could have led to a 1950s-style perestroika (he was leader of the CPSU from 1953 to 1964); Nicolas Werth, 'La Russie soviétique: révolution, socialisme et dictature', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 20.

¹⁶ Pierre Daix, *Ce que je sais de Soljenitsyne* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1973), pp. 26-7.

¹⁷ Brezhnev was leader of the CPSU from 1964 to 1982. Andropov (1982-1984), Chernenko (1984-1985) and Gorbachev (1985-1991) then became leaders of the CPSU.

¹⁸ Pierre Daix, *Le socialisme du silence* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976), p. 201.

¹⁹ Daix, *ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁰ Michel Winock, 'L'âge d'or du communisme français', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 59.

²¹ On 27 June 1972, the FCP and the SP signed the 'Programme Commun de Gouvernement de la Gauche'; see ch. 7.

²² At the 1978 legislative elections, the Union of the Left got 45.6% of the votes; the FCP scored 20.7% in the first round and the SP 24.9%; David S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party*

which was not only unprecedented in the French Communist Party.²³ but which was also very much targetted at the Leadership.²⁴ Indeed, after having followed their Leadership blindly in the name of an iron discipline ‘justified’ by class struggle, in the name of ‘l’unité de tous les communistes autour [d’une] politique’,²⁵ and in the name of a promised victory, French communists only reached a defeat. As a result, the Party leadership was singled out for criticism,²⁶ for it was the Leadership which had carried out a doomed strategy and which had applied Stalin’s motto word for word: ‘Iron discipline does not preclude but presupposes conscious and voluntary submission, for only conscious discipline can be truly iron discipline’²⁷ — and in the 1970s, the leaders of the French Communist Party had made the best of it.

It was in this context that voices like those of Louis Althusser and Jean Elleinstein started to be raised. According to them, the defeat of March 1978 was the direct consequence of policies devised for too long in a dictatorial manner by the leaders of the FCP. As a result, they launched direct and pointed attacks against democratic centralism, which they both wanted to democratise.²⁸ They put their fingers into the cogs of the ‘machine’²⁹ and, from there onwards, delved deeper and deeper.³⁰

This chapter on the internal organisation of the French Communist Party will thus

in the Fifth Republic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 167; François Platone and Jean Ranger, ‘L’échec du Parti Communiste Français aux élections du printemps 1981’, *Revue Française de Science Politique*, no. 31 (1981), 1017.

²³ See introduction.

²⁴ As Althusser explained, ‘à partir du moment où le Parti s’ouvre largement vers l’extérieur, et pratique avec les non-communistes de nouvelles formes d’échange et de discussion, pour renforcer l’unité populaire, cette même exigence se fait plus fortement ressentir à l’intérieur du Parti’, Louis Althusser, *22^e congrès* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), p. 67.

²⁵ *22^e Congrès, Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

²⁶ Jean Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!* (Paris: Belfond, 1981), p. 11; Denis Berger, ‘La forteresse lézardée (A propos du XXIII^e Congrès du PCF)’, *Critique Communiste*, no. 27 (June 1979), 23; Louis Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le Parti Communiste* (Paris: Maspero, 1978).

²⁷ Joseph Stalin, *The Party* ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], 1924), pp. 97-109, quoted in McCauley, *Stalin and Stalinism*, p. 90.

²⁸ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 120.

²⁹ Althusser called the French Communist Party the ‘machine’ in *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A27-01.05, unpublished manuscripts; cf. Georges Lavau, ‘A quoi sert le PCF?’, in Duhamel and Weber, *Changer le PC?*, pp. 209-10.

³⁰ See following chapters.

examine the main elements which cemented the internal organisation of the French Communist Party in the 1970s, meaning first the Party's monolithism and second its regimentation.

The FCP's monolithism was characterised on the one hand by the unity of the Party, which ensued directly from a mastery of general political thought given concrete expression by unity of action,³¹ and on the other hand by the sacralisation of the Leadership's power which expressed itself through dogmatism and strict efficiency.

The unity of the Party was a general watchword in the 1970s. If joining the FCP resulted from a personal decision, and if by becoming a member the communist expressed his will to become part of the edifice, his originality would later be erased: the edifice was only made of one block for, as Party official Paul Laurent explained, '[le parti] est une organisation volontaire qui rassemble tous ceux qui approuvent la politique communiste sur un plan général'³² — which was true in general. However, for Party leaders, this 'approbation' had a very special meaning: it was conceived in term of submission to decisions taken at the summit.³³ One had to agree with any political orientation decided by one's superiors and one had to form a block behind them for a precise reason: only unity of thought within the Party could lead to a strong and coherent unity of action and thus to a greater manoeuvre of communist activists by the Party leadership.

In this context, the FCP formed and moulded its *cadres* in the schools of the Party. It published leaflet after leaflet — real codes of conduct for the perfect communist — in order to 'inform' its members. It 'recommended' quite strongly precise reading to

³¹ Louis Althusser. *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e congrès)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser. ALT2.A24-01.01/02 to -02.01, unpublished manuscripts; Althusser, *22^e Congrès*, p. 58.

³² Paul Laurent. 'Centralisme démocratique: tenir les deux termes', *La Nouvelle Critique*, 1977, p. 2.

³³ Daix, *Ce que je sais de Soljenitsyne*, pp. 170-2.

its activists,³⁴ thus offering them a *cadre de pensée* which they could not go out of for fear of becoming ‘class enemies’.³⁵ If Mao had his little red book, the FCP had its references too, for in the name of *l’unité du Parti* all communists were to be cast in the same image,³⁶ thus giving the image of ‘soumission ou [...] simple conformisme’, as Althusser put it cynically.³⁷

However, this image could have been reversed for, according to Elleinstein. ‘le Parti communiste ne doit pas être une sorte d’Eglise à laquelle on est attaché d’une façon religieuse’.³⁸ This was right in theory. It was indeed perfectly possible for communist activists to question the Party’s unity of thought for, whatever the Leadership said in the name of communist ideology, unity of thought was not the *sine qua non* condition of unity of action. Plurality of thought and unity of action could have been combined. But in practice, the system favoured by the Party leadership appeared to run well in the 1970s. From the signature of the Common Programme in 1972 to the defeat of the Left in 1978, communist activists kept hoping that, ultimately, things would change. They kept hoping that they would have a voice, their own voice, within the Party. The 1976 22nd Congress certainly strengthened this hope with the opening up of preliminary discussions,³⁹ but it was an empty gesture as once again the Leadership simply imposed a new line for the activists to follow⁴⁰ — and they did follow it, thus tacitly adhering to the unity of thought and action promoted by their Party leaders.

³⁴ Such as Thorez’s book, *Fils du peuple*; Winock, ‘L’âge d’or du communisme français’, p. 58.

³⁵ Jean-Pierre Gaudard, *Les orphelins du PC* (Paris: Belfond, 1986), pp. 57, 129.

³⁶ See ch. 4.

³⁷ Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts; Antoine Spire, *Profession: permanent* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 45; it is worth noting that in some cases, discussion could be buoyant and far from being entirely conformist; cf. Jane Jenson and George Ross, *View from Inside a French Communist Cell in Crisis* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984): they refer to Henri Fiszbin’s Eurocommunist federation; Denis Berger, ‘PCF: l’impossible stratégie’, *Critique Communiste*, no. 22 (February-March 1978), 43.

³⁸ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 110.

³⁹ Michel Barak, *Fractures au PCF — Des communistes parlent* (Aix-en-Provence: ÉDISUD; Paris: Karthala, 1980), pp. 13-4; Raymond Jean, *La singularité d’être communiste* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979), p. 74.

⁴⁰ By reference to the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat; see ch. 5.

In the 1970s, communist activists did follow the unity of thought and action promoted by their leaders even more so since the economic crisis, which swept France as from 1973, seemed to toll the bell of French capitalism⁴¹ and announce the potential birth of socialism. In this context, it was more than ever necessary for FCP leaders to ensure the coherence of the Party. It was imperative that communists marched as one man behind their Leadership. As a result, the Leadership itself could only be strengthened: not only did it have a monopoly on political thought, but it could also move its activists like pawns⁴² on a chessboard. It went too far in doing so, however, as the rise of discontent after the defeat at the 1978 legislative elections proved. As Althusser explained:

Généreux et confiants, les militants peuvent oublier bien des choses. Mais quand on les traite comme des pions, pour les mener à la défaite d'un combat où ils se sont dévoués corps et âme, alors ils veulent savoir.⁴³

Excessive centralisation of decision-making in the name of unity of action was arguably tolerable as long as victory appeared to be within reach. However, when everything collapsed and that hope was broken, the leaders of the FCP were the first to be answerable for it and to be punished for it. The activists no longer subordinated themselves to the Leadership. They began to think for themselves.

Consequently, in order to guarantee a certain unity of action, the Leadership could have strengthened the Party's democratic character — an idea which was put forward by Elleinstein who explained that 'au niveau de l'action, il faut une cohérence,

⁴¹ Jean Fabre, 'La crise de la société française, la crise de l'impérialisme' (report to the Party conference on 'La crise de la société française et la crise dans le monde capitaliste'), *L'Humanité*, 24 May 1975.

⁴² 'Des pions' in French: this term was used by Simone de Beauvoir and Althusser.

⁴³ Louis Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 26 April 1978; Barak, *Fractures au PCF*, p. 96: 'Il a fallu cet échec historique de mars 1978, l'autosatisfaction incroyablement affichée, l'opération de perroquetterie qui s'ensuivit pour que nos yeux s'ouvrent enfin: c'en était trop.'

c'est cela le centralisme, mais il doit venir de la démocratie et y retourner."⁴⁴ Indeed, the Leadership's constant pressure on grass roots activists was not entirely justifiable: unity of action within the Party was naturally achieved by activists through their membership of the FCP, their subsequent adherence to Marxist-Leninist ideology, and their respect for democratic centralism, whereby decisions were taken at the summit and followed by the grass roots, inevitably acted in conformity with their communist convictions. In that sense, the communist dissidents, and nonetheless activists, Elleinstein and Althusser inscribed their roles as intellectuals within the French Communist Party with a perfectly unitary perspective.⁴⁵ They only started attacking democratic centralism and the Party leadership when the FCP's unity, which virtually merged with that of the Common Programme after 1972, started crumpling in 1977⁴⁶ and in 1978.

In this context, the criticisms expressed by Elleinstein and Althusser were unequivocal: they put the Party leadership in the dock. According to these communist intellectual dissidents, the power of the Party had merged with that of its leaders as a result of the adoption of Stalinist practices by the FCP.⁴⁷ Democratic centralism had lost its democratic character.⁴⁸ As Althusser wrote, 'le centralisme démocratique a été travesti et caricaturé par les effets et la "déviation stalinienne."⁴⁹ Hence the power, which should have been in the hands of all members in a Party which was nominally communist, was monopolised in the hands of leaders whose decisions were given a sacred status.

The leaders of the FCP had made its power sacred by adopting a very dogmatic

⁴⁴ Jean Elleinstein, 'L'avenir des communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 September 1978, p. 51.

⁴⁵ See ch. 2: Elleinstein and Althusser never wanted to split the Party into factions as a result of their dissenting actions.

⁴⁶ At the time of the break-up of the Common Programme.

⁴⁷ Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste (1972-1982)*, vol. 3 (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 336.

⁴⁸ Jean Elleinstein, 'PC: Elleinstein s'explique'. *Politique Hebdo*, 23-29 January 1978, p. 6; Hélène Parmelin, 'La contestation dans le PCF? C'est la suite normale du XXII^e congrès', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 10 July 1978.

⁴⁹ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

image: they allowed themselves to think for their members as they believed — and were admittedly made to believe so following the example set by communist leaders in the Soviet Union — that they were not only the font of all Knowledge, but also of all Truth⁵⁰ which had to be swallowed by grass roots communists like fledglings just out of the egg.⁵¹ In that sense, communist leaders nurtured them completely, and it was with blind faith that most activists followed their trail. For the case cannot be misjudged: the Party was here to guide, to educate, to transmit its Knowledge and its Truth to the masses — whether they were workers, white collar employees or intellectuals. Consequently, as Althusser put it to Marchais in a conversation he had with him in 1977: ‘Le Parti, comme organisation, [...] est incapable de reconnaître la vérité qui est dans la tête de ses militants.’⁵²

Within the FCP, the individual was crushed by a leadership system which was derived from the Soviet Union and which denied grass roots communists the right to think for themselves. In this context, communist intellectuals did not form a separate category. It was up to them to pave the way by ratifying everything that emanated from the Party leadership for fear of being condemned by it.⁵³ Just as the court prayed in the direction of the Sun King, French communists kneeled in front of the divine authority of the Leadership which treated them like ‘valets’⁵⁴ more often than not — or at least that was the impression given by communist dissidents such as Althusser who did not hesitate to warn that, in this context, ‘une des sentences les plus anciennes de la pratique

⁵⁰ Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 26 April 1978.

⁵¹ Hélène Parmelin, *Libérez les communistes!* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1979), p. 83.

⁵² Althusser, discussion with Marchais (1977) reported in *Projet de livre sur le communisme*, unpublished manuscripts. Althusser told Marchais: ‘Quand un ouvrier [ou un autre communiste] ne veut pas parler, tu peux parier à 100% qu’il a des choses à dire, et des choses très importantes. S’il ne parle pas, ou bien il croit que toi, Secrétaire Général dirigeant et l’appareil du parti, et ses chercheurs, tu es bien mieux placé que lui pour connaître la réponse, donc il se tait. Ou bien il a des choses à dire sur le parti et son syndicat, que les choses ne vont pas, et comme tu es le Secrétaire Général, il ne va pas te faire un dessin [...] Alors il ferme sa gueule. Mais tu peux être sûr qu’il l’ouvre avec ses copains.’

⁵³ See further.

⁵⁴ Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts.

politique [...] dit qu'on n'a jamais intérêt à prendre les gens pour des imbéciles'.⁵⁵ The wave of criticism which swept the Party at the end of the 1970s demonstrated this.

Tactically, the Party justified the extremely tight control it exercised over its members because it increased its margin of political manoeuvre — a strategy which was justifiable to some extent. Indeed, the leaders of the French Communist Party could not only impose last minute decisions without the risk that they would be contested within the FCP, but they could also respond rapidly to measures taken by outside movements.⁵⁶ This made the Leadership highly efficient. The fortress might well have been under siege from all sides — as much from inside, notably by intellectual dissidents, as from outside by the Socialist Party after the breakdown of the Common Programme in 1977 and the defeat of 1978 — and the edifice might well have been falling into ruins, but the Leadership remained intact, all be it weakened. However, as Machiavelli put it, 'celui qui se bâtit une forteresse et s'y réfugie se fait le prisonnier de ses murs: il est perdu non seulement pour la guerre, mais aussi pour la politique'⁵⁷ — a warning the FCP could not take into account because of pressures exercised by Moscow, as will be demonstrated. The monolithic character of the Party was unshakeable, even more so since it was accompanied by an unfailing regimentation at the level of its internal organisation.

Paul Laurent produced quite an interesting definition of democratic centralism because it gave a good picture of what the leadership of the French Communist Party believed:

Le centralisme démocratique se définit par une double pratique: d'abord celle de la discussion, d'une confrontation large et démocratique des opinions entre tous

⁵⁵ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

⁵⁶ Sue Ellen Charlton, 'Deradicalization and the French Communist Party', *Review of Politics*, no. 41 (1979), 53.

⁵⁷ Machiavelli quoted in Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 28 April 1978.

les adhérents du parti et la participation de tous à l'élaboration de sa politique. Et en second lieu, cette idée que les décisions prises, une fois la discussion terminée, elles doivent être appliquées par tous.⁵⁸

If we thus trust Paul Laurent, the Party was indeed democratic in the 1970s, and if we believe Georges Marchais, it was at that time 'le plus démocratique de ce pays'⁵⁹ — an opinion Elleinstein and Althusser both contested. Talking about the Leadership, Althusser thus wrote in an unpublished manuscript:

C'est organiquement dans ses habitudes [...] [de] se payer le luxe de laisser 'librement' discuter les militants, puisque de toute façon ça ne tire pas à conséquence, les vraies discussions (secrètes) [ayant] lieu au Secrétariat et au BP où se prennent les décisions qu'entérine comme un seul homme le Comité Central qui a [...] l'avantage de se croire près de la Vérité.⁶⁰

This criticism cannot be contested for it shows what really happened inside the Party in the 1970s. On the one hand the internal organisation was too compartmentalized, as the principle of verticalism was used by the Leadership to sift out dissenting opinions, and on the other hand the Leadership proved sectarian at the level of the circulation of ideas, which had ineluctable repercussions on the Party's relations with the masses.

First, in the 1970s, the Party was endowed with a hierarchical pyramidal structure which allowed the Leadership to cloister its activists in order to indoctrinate them.⁶¹

From the cell to the Central Committee, all the internal tiers of authority applied the

⁵⁸ Paul Laurent, 'Centralisme démocratique: tenir les deux termes', p. 2.

⁵⁹ Georges Marchais, *Avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 26, 27 et 28 avril 1978)*, (*Cahiers du Communisme*, March 1978 and *L'Humanité*, 28 April 1978).

⁶⁰ Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁶¹ Régis Debray, *Lettre ouverte aux communistes français et à quelques autres* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 115.

principle of verticalism which made it possible not only to filter information coming from the grass roots,⁶² but also to dilute the harshest and the most radical decisions taken at the top.⁶³ As a consequence, the power of Party leaders came out strengthened. At the base of the pyramid, communist activists played a rather diminished role, whereas at the summit the Leadership had the principal one. Indeed, if communist activists held lively discussions in their cells, these merely gave them the illusion to play an ‘active’ role within the FCP when, in fact, decisive strategical decisions were taken by the Central Committee.⁶⁴ However, when it came to applying decisions taken ‘by the majority’ and to vote at a congress,⁶⁵ then information went back up from the cells to the Leadership with ease and rapidity: any dissident was identified, singled out and sharply held to account, or even condemned.⁶⁶ No deviation was to be tolerated. No criticism was to be put up with. No dissenting action was to be endured. In this context, it took a great deal of boldness for dissidents to dare to take off their iron collars and put forward a more flexible alternative to the organisational verticalism of the Party — and in the 1970s, they did.

With regard to the FCP’s internal organisation, the ideas of Elleinstein and Althusser coalesced. Indeed, they both argued that the principle of horizontalism should be substituted for that of verticalism,⁶⁷ as this would allow the activists to break out of

⁶² Pierre Daix, *La crise du PCF* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 175; Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 26 April 1978.

⁶³ ‘Mardi 2 mai Etienne Fajon rend compte devant les communistes de la Seine-St-Denis des travaux du CC du PCF’, *Dialectiques*, no. 23 (1978), 32-3.

⁶⁴ Jacques Denis, ‘Sur l’eurocommunisme et les relations européennes’, *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 4 (April 1978), 103.

⁶⁵ Philippe Robrieux, *La secte* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1985), p. 112; Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste*, pp. 520-1.

⁶⁶ See ch. 8; it is worth noting that this situation changed in the 1990s with the democratization of the Party and its recognition of the diversity of opinion of its members; cf. 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français (document adopté par le 29^e Congrès)*, (Arche de la Défense, 18-22 December 1996); *L’Humanité*, 23 December 1996; Jacques Chambaz, *Réalités et stratégie: le PCF, une démarche nouvelle* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions Sociales, 1990), p. 154.

⁶⁷ Jean Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme* (Paris: Julliard, 1979), p. 93; ‘Du XXII^e Congrès du PCF à l’échec de la Gauche — Aller au fond des choses’, *Le Monde*, 15 April 1978; Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 26 April 1978.

the confined framework of their cell by collaborating with other communists from the grass roots. Their argument was relatively convincing in the sense that this system could not only have broken the routine of well-established relations between cells, sections and federations, but also offered the grass roots a broader overall view of the Party's activities. In that respect Althusser, who used to complain '[de n'avoir] jamais rencontré un seul prolétaire ni dans [sa] cellule, ni dans les conférences de section auxquelles [il a] assisté',⁶⁸ could have made fruitful contacts with the Party's most humble members if horizontalism had been implemented. This could have resulted in wide-ranging discussions between activists at all levels. Furthermore, if we go beyond the thought of Elleinstein and Althusser, we can argue that horizontalism could have strengthened relations between workers and intellectuals. Indeed, verticalism sealed the debate off in individual cells which, in most cases, were not entirely representative of the composition of the Party as a whole. In that sense, horizontalism could have put an end to this compartmentalization which existed between intellectuals and workers. As a result, the debate could only have been richer and more fertile.⁶⁹

However, in the 1970s, FCP leaders had a very different view from that of Elleinstein and Althusser. Horizontalism was unthinkable, and was not going to be applied within the Party as it would have robbed them of a weapon which was certainly very useful when it came to shooting down intellectual dissidents — i.e. to set the intellectuals, who were 'assis derrière un bureau',⁷⁰ against the workers who toiled in factories and mines.⁷¹ The fact was that Party leaders had everything to fear from a close alliance between the workers and the intellectuals: they feared that this alliance would

⁶⁸ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁶⁹ Michel Donati, un sidérurgiste, in Michel Cardoze, *Nouveau voyage à l'intérieur du PCF* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1986), p. 43; Stéfán Lequiem, 'Droit de tendance ou centralisme démocratique', *Luttes et Débats*, June 1979, p. 51.

⁷⁰ Georges Marchais, *Avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 26. 27 et 28 avril 1978)*.

⁷¹ See ch. 3 and 4.

open up debate to a considerable extent and spread dissent from the intellectuals to the workers, who were the real pillars of the Party. At the end of the 1970s, their fears proved justified. To see this, one only has to take into account the flood of letters of complaint written by FCP members coming from the most diverse social strata and sent to newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *Luttes et Débats*. The *althussérien* Etienne Balibar⁷² confirmed this by writing:

Ce que la direction perçoit très bien, c'est que la discussion au grand jour [...] manifesterait [...] des conflits internes qui vont très au-delà de son propre discours et celui des 'intellectuels' [...]. C'est que les conflits latents affectent sa base ouvrière.⁷³

The aim of horizontalism, however, as promoted by Elleinstein and Althusser, was not to nourish dissent. Their aim was to widen discussion within the Party. The cause was noble, but its realisation through horizontalism would not have gone far enough. In fact, there was no use building bridges between cells and between sections, in other words at the same level within the pyramid, if the information did not go up. The principle of horizontalism could only have worked insofar as workers, white collar employees and intellectuals were not compartmentalized into class specific cells in working-class towns or 'bourgeois' areas. It would have been worth implementing it if all social strata representative of the FCP had maintained relations which were close and favourable enough to restore a sense of criticism on the part of the activists. Horizontalism, as conceived by Elleinstein and Althusser, would not have led to the collapse of the Party's vertical structure. By contrast, what could have altered the Party's structure was the

⁷² Balibar studied under Althusser's supervision and became his disciple.

⁷³ Etienne Balibar, 'La responsabilité des communistes', *Dialectiques*, no. 23 (1978), 27.

direct control by the grass roots over decisions taken at Party congresses. Indeed, it would have been desirable to democratise the Party Congresses by giving participants the right to vote in all honesty for, or against, the resolutions put forward by the Central Committee. This system would have had the advantage both of putting an end to the unanimous vote which gave too Stalinist an image to Party congresses and of potentially renewing the FCP leadership,⁷⁴ thus reflecting the dominant currents of ideas of the Party.⁷⁵ However, in the 1970s, verticalism was here to stay.

From the FCP leadership's point of view, the Party's rigid structure helped to contain and overcome any divergence of opinion coming from the grass roots:⁷⁶ dissident could easily be marginalized within a particular cell.⁷⁷ Consequently, other tiers of authority remained untouched by what constituted an 'isolated act' and criticisms did not gain ground — that is, as long as they were expressed within the Party's organisations, a limitation both Althusser and Elleinstein did not hesitate to bypass to have a better impact on the whole Party. They thus wrote extensively in what the FCP called the 'bourgeois' press, and their articles were published in papers such as *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. However, what should have been a Chinese puzzle for Party leaders proved to be a child's game. They only had to turn their enemies' own weapons on them. As these intellectuals were writing in the so-called 'bourgeois' press, the Leadership considered that they were giving arguments to the class adversary and thus opposing the FCP publicly⁷⁸ — an argument which not only derived from the Soviet's

⁷⁴ Duhamel and Weber, *Changer le PC?*, p. 40; Charles Piraux, 'Pour une démocratie révolutionnaire', *Luttes et Débats*, January 1979, p. 25; Michel Dreyfus, *PCF: crises et dissidences de 1920 à nos jours* (Brussels: Ed. Complexe, 1990), pp. 215-6: 'Aucune lutte de succession ne semble menacer le pouvoir de Georges Marchais, installé aux commandes depuis deux décennies'.

⁷⁵ See ch. 2.

⁷⁶ Auguste Lecoœur, *Le PCF: continuité dans le changement* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1977), p. 79: cf. Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978; see our ch. 8.

⁷⁷ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, p. 67.

⁷⁸ Paul Laurent, *Le PCF comme il est: entretien avec Roger Faivre* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1978), pp. 146-7; see our ch. 8.

attitude towards French communist dissidents,⁷⁹ but which also proved relatively popular within the FCP, thus helping its leadership to marginalise intellectual dissidents.⁸⁰

Second, by securing its power on a rigid and highly compartmentalized structure, the French Communist Party showed definite signs of sectarianism. However, communist activists did believe that their party was opening up at the time of the 22nd Congress in 1976. Tribunes of discussion were opened in the columns of *L'Humanité* and the debate was very lively in the cells where communists talked about such matters as the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat,⁸¹ thinking it could be useful and lead to something positive at the highest level of the hierarchy — although the decision to abandon the concept had already been taken unilaterally by Georges Marchais.⁸² Unfortunately, communist activists were hiding themselves from reality for, as Althusser wrote:

Le XXII^e Congrès [...] ne changea en rien les pratiques de la direction. Car l'appareil avait déjà fait la découverte [...] qu'il pouvait s'offrir le luxe de laisser les militants discuter librement dans leurs cellules, sans exclusion ni sanction, puisque de toute façon ça ne tirait pas à conséquence: 'Ça leur fait tellement plaisir et ça nous coûte si peu', fait dire Chamfort à une marquise généreuse de ses charmes.⁸³

It was naive to think that the Party leadership could have changed so rapidly, for even

⁷⁹ See following chapters.

⁸⁰ See chapters 2 and 8.

⁸¹ Barak, *Fractures au PCF*, pp. 13-4; Jean, *La singularité d'être communiste*, p. 74: 'Il nous semblait n'avoir jamais rencontré tant de camarades différents, entendu tant de propos nouveaux, senti passé un souffle si neuf...'; see our ch. 5.

⁸² George Ross, 'The PCF and the End of the Bolshevik Dream', *The Politics of Eurocommunism: Socialism in Transition*, ed. by Carl Boggs and David Plotke (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 39; see our ch. 5.

⁸³ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 26 April 1978; cf. Jean Rony, 'La discipline stérilisante', in Duhamel and Weber, *Changer le PC?*, p. 57; Barak, *Fractures au PCF*, pp. 13-4.

the tribunes of discussion were strictly controlled. Indeed, if a communist activist contradicted decisions taken by Party leaders, his arguments were automatically destroyed by many other communists who preferred to follow the imposed line.⁸⁴ This was a very clever means of action on the part of the Leadership as it achieved two objectives. First, it did away with the criticisms coming from intellectual dissidents that Party leaders did not listen enough to their activists. Second, it helped convince the vast majority of communists that the decisions taken by the Central Committee were right and well-founded. The dissidents were thus marginalized⁸⁵ — which made the Leadership look certainly victorious, but also intransigent and over-controlling. However, Party leaders did not see things from this angle.

Talking to Althusser, Georges Marchais admitted that ‘[les ouvriers] ne veulent pas parler’,⁸⁶ and Paul Laurent echoed him by noting that:

On exprime ses idées, ses propositions dans sa cellule, mais on ne les transmet pas encore assez au Comité Central. Cela arrive de plus en plus souvent, mais il est certainement vrai que de bonnes idées se perdent encore et c’est dommage.⁸⁷

If the intentions of Party leaders seemed to be good at first sight, the fact remains that under cover of a permanent democratic concern, they hid themselves from reality. The Leadership could have, by contrast, turned the problem upside down: instead of blaming the activists at the grass roots, it could have looked closer at its own actions, as it was precisely here and not anywhere else that there was a blockage. Indeed, only opinions that echoed those of the Central Committee were taken into account. If an activist

⁸⁴ Conseil National du PCF (9 et 10 février 1980), *Les intellectuels, la culture et l’avancée démocratique au socialisme (projet de résolution)*, (*L’Humanité*, 11 December 1979).

⁸⁵ See ch. 8.

⁸⁶ Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁸⁷ Laurent, *Le PCF comme il est*, p. 106; cf. J.-P. Gaudard in André Harris and Alain de Sédouy, *Voyage à l’intérieur du Parti Communiste* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1974), p. 51.

expressed an original idea, then the Party's educational machine swiftly responded.⁸⁸ The activist was forced to repent his heresy. He had to be convinced that the arguments put forward by the Leadership were the right ones.⁸⁹ Therefore, in front of such a demonstration of strength, the 'heretic' could only retreat into silence. He was condemned to silence by a Party which feared losing control over the mass of its activists, and by Party leaders who had to be right.⁹⁰ By demonstrating such sectarianism, the Leadership forgot that in order for a party to move forward, ideas should constantly be renewed.⁹¹ Otherwise the party moves backwards or, at best, stands still.

Contrary to what Marchais thought, permanent discussion in no way paralysed action.⁹² In fact, it was precisely by constantly confronting the ideas of everyone that new solutions could have been found⁹³ not only to current problems, but also to future ones, as debate favours the anticipation of forthcoming events. The FCP was admittedly not a debating society animated by a leader who would play the role of referee.⁹⁴ However, if the Leadership had genuinely wanted to rally all its activists into action, then it would have delegated some of its powers by encouraging creativity and initiative at the grass roots. The Party would have overcome sterile ideas by recognising the right to differences in opinion,⁹⁵ by objectively analysing criticisms stemming from communist activists, and by drawing conclusions from these.⁹⁶ It was only under these conditions

⁸⁸ Lavau, *A quoi sert le Parti Communiste Français?*, p. 202.

⁸⁹ Parmelin, *Libérez les communistes!*, p. 83.

⁹⁰ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 26 April 1978.

⁹¹ Jean Kanapa, 'Le débat dans le mouvement communiste', *Le Monde*, 3 January 1977.

⁹² Georges Marchais, *Avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 26, 27 et 28 avril 1978)*; it is worth noting that Marchais contradicted what he wrote in *Le défi démocratique* (Paris: Grasset, 1973), p. 199.

⁹³ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁹⁴ Laurent 'Centralisme démocratique: tenir les deux termes', p. 2: 'Le parti communiste n'est pas un club où s'affrontent des opinions fondamentalement opposées'; cf. 'Préserver et développer la vie démocratique du parti — Résolution du Bureau Politique du PCF', *L'Humanité*, 20 May 1978; see our ch. 2.

⁹⁵ See ch. 2 and conclusion.

⁹⁶ Piraux, 'Pour une démocratie révolutionnaire', pp. 23-6.

that democratic centralism could have assumed its true meaning,⁹⁷ and that the Leadership could have got closer both to its grass roots and to the masses as a whole for, as Althusser wrote,

qui dit rapport d'autorité hiérarchique dit forcément non seulement distance, coupure entretenue entre l'appareil et les militants, mais aussi distance et coupure entre le parti et les masses.⁹⁸

And it was precisely this relationship with the masses that the Party put at stake by being so sectarian.

Contrary to what the Leadership thought, communist intellectuals did not make criticisms for the sake of attacking what Party leaders described as the 'permanently besieged fortress'⁹⁹ from the outside. If Elleinstein and Althusser denounced both the monolithism and the regimentation of their Party, it was precisely because they saw in these two characteristics a sign of immobility. Indeed, by cutting itself from the grass roots, the Leadership also cut itself from daily realities: if communist workers, white-collar employees and intellectuals were permanently in touch with the outside world, for their part Party leaders only evolved in the high stratospheres of insider politics. Thus, at the level of what was lived and experienced by each communist, a great gulf opened up between the activists from the grass roots and the Party leadership. On one side there were those who did not hesitate to mix with non-communists on an everyday basis, who talked to them and who not only knew but also shared their problems. On the other side was the Party leadership which locked itself up in its Ivory Tower and refused to open

⁹⁷ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, pp. 66, 93; *Lettre ouverte aux français sur la République du Programme Commun* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977), pp. 93-4.

⁹⁸ Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁹⁹ Meaning the FCP itself.

the door to reality by only thinking in terms of classes, of good and evil, of for and against. If you were not for the French Communist Party, then you were automatically against it. But it was precisely this ‘forme de pensée manichéenne’¹⁰⁰ which distanced the Party from the masses. Indeed, by withdrawing into itself, it cut itself off from the people who, if the FCP could have offered a truly democratic image in a period of revival of the Left, would have taken up membership of the Party, would have rallied to the communist cause and would have voted accordingly.¹⁰¹ The zone of influence of the Party could only have been greater as a result.¹⁰²

Therefore, what the Party could have done in the 1970s was to fit into a new dynamic. It could have accepted debate and criticism in order to regenerate, on a perpetual basis, both its ideas and its approach to daily reality. It could have gone out of the immobility which sterilised its actions and prevented it from going forward. In fact, at the end of the 1970s, it was the Party’s existence itself which started to be at stake in the long run, for if the Party could not evolve and thus adapt to social change,¹⁰³ it was bound to disappear as a credible political force.¹⁰⁴

To conclude, by expressing criticism of democratic centralism, intellectual dissidents such as Althusser and Elleinstein rang alarm bells in the French Communist Party: communist activists did not flourish in their Party and too few new members came to replace the mass of those leaving. In this context, Althusser addressed himself to the leaders of the FCP by writing that: ‘[Il faut] revoir entièrement les principes d’organisation du [...] parti communiste. Les formes sont vieilles et caduques [...] [les]

¹⁰⁰ Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

¹⁰¹ Gérard Belloin, *Nos rêves camarades* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p. 180.

¹⁰² Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 28 April 1978; cf. Parmelin, *Libérez les communistes!*, p. 265.

¹⁰³ See ch. 4.

¹⁰⁴ See conclusion.

résultats [sont] épouvantables.¹⁰⁵ Elleinstein agreed fully with him when he declared: ‘L’important [...] c’est de changer radicalement le système et d’abandonner des pratiques qui remontent aux âges archéologiques de la vie du Parti.’¹⁰⁶ There was, therefore, a consensus between these two intellectuals who, by expressing criticisms, only reflected the internal crisis undergone by the Party. Indeed, the actions of Elleinstein and Althusser were far from being isolated: other activists also attacked their Leadership publicly by writing to newspapers, by signing petitions, and by rebelling in their cells. Consequently, the crisis was general¹⁰⁷ and it found its roots in the monolithism and the regimentation of the French Communist Party.

What the activists desperately wanted was to democratise the Party and to be able to take a deep breath of fresh air inside it. Because they loved their party so much, they devoted themselves to it, keeping quiet and enduring stoically the authority of the Leadership. It was precisely because they cherished their Party that they did not want to see it sink. On the contrary, they wanted to see it sail ahead, go further and further again at full steam in order to carry the flag of hope for all communists. In this context, the French Communist Party could have overcome the barrier of democratic centralism by listening to what the activists had to say, by analysing their views and by drawing the appropriate lessons from their criticisms. The FCP could have undergone a fundamental process of democratisation. However, contrary to what Elleinstein and Althusser thought, it was not by democratising democratic centralism that things were going to change — dictatorial practices were too deep rooted, and when an edifice cracks on all sides, there is no point fixing it by patching it up here and there. What the Party could have done, by contrast, was to follow the route marked out at the 22nd Congress of

¹⁰⁵ Louis Althusser, *Lettre d’Althusser de Grèce*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07, unpublished manuscripts.

¹⁰⁶ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁷ Berger, ‘La forteresse lézardée’, 29.

1976. After abandoning the dictatorship of the proletariat,¹⁰⁸ it could have dispensed with democratic centralism¹⁰⁹ and reinvented itself on the basis of new principles of internal organisation that corresponded to the aspirations of all communist activists.¹¹⁰ But for Party leaders, and particularly for the FCP's General Secretary Georges Marchais, it was not that easy — if not completely out of the question.

According to recent evidence published in *The Mitrokhin Archive*,¹¹¹ the KGB was determined not to let Georges Marchais open up the Party any further by continuing on the route which was paved at the 22nd Congress. Enough was enough. The USSR had already witnessed the rise of Eurocommunism and the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in France and Italy,¹¹² it could not afford to lose any more control over some Western Communist Parties and to have its zone of influence in Western Europe greatly reduced. It was in this context that the Soviet Union had to cut back the margin of manoeuvre of Marchais by the end of 1976. In an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Christopher Andrew declared that 'le KGB a sérieusement envisagé de faire publier les documents sur le passé de Marchais [en tant que travailleur volontaire dans une usine] en Allemagne pendant la guerre'.¹¹³ If these revelations had come from non communist sources, they would have been deemed as pure anti-communist propaganda. But coming from the homeland of socialism, a country which exercised a tight financial, ideological and strategic control over the FCP, these revelations had to be taken seriously, for the CPSU could have 'replaced' Marchais by a more conservative and docile man. This is why Georges Marchais had to walk straight, and this is why the

¹⁰⁸ See ch. 5.

¹⁰⁹ The FCP gave up democratic centralism in 1993.

¹¹⁰ See further and see conclusion.

¹¹¹ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London: Penguin, 1999).

¹¹² See ch. 5.

¹¹³ Christopher Andrew, interview of, 'Le KGB en France', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23-29 September 1999, p. 145; cf. Althusser, *Sur la mort du PCF (Mort et survie du PCF), (1982-83?)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A29-01.05, unpublished manuscripts: 'Tout ce beau monde vit sous la direction d'un Georges Marchais tenu par les soviétiques et ses propres camarades pour avoir eu un jour vingt ans et avoir commis la bétise de partir dans la production de guerre allemande.'

French Communist Party could not reinvent itself on the basis of new principles of internal organisation — that is until the collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989 and the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The FCP paved the way for a ‘new’ Communist Party little by little in the 1990s. Instead of Stalinist practices, the Party implemented new democratic reforms. Instead of democratic centralism, it opted for ‘la souveraineté des communistes’.¹¹⁴ Instead of a pyramidal internal organisation, it substituted a more horizontal approach.¹¹⁵ Paul Lespagnol, a member of the National Committee, thus declared at the 30th Party Congress which was held in March 2000:

[Il faut] sortir de la logique ‘pyramidale’, d’une direction se cooptant et se recooptant sans cesse [...]. Nous voulons désacraliser encore la fonction de dirigeant [...]. L’expérimentation proposée [...] va permettre aux communistes eux-mêmes d’inventer les formes de vie de nos directions.¹¹⁶

This was precisely what Althusser and Elleinstein had demanded in the 1970s.

¹¹⁴ 28^e Congrès, *Rapport de la commission sur les statuts (rapport présenté par Francette Lazard)* suivi de *Les statuts du PCF* (St-Ouen, 25-29 January 1994); see our ch. 2.

¹¹⁵ 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s’attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000).

¹¹⁶ Paul Lespagnol quoted in *L’Humanité*, 27 March 2000, pp. 8-9.

CHAPTER 2

Trends and tendencies

or the risk of factionalism within the FCP

In the 1990s the French Communist Party underwent a fundamental and unprecedented transformation by looking closely at its past and by questioning its Stalinist practices. This extensive transformation was carried out in three successive stages. The first stage was marked by the opening up of the FCP to the outside world, the second by the abandonment of democratic centralism, and the third by the recognition of the diversity of opinion of the communists activists.

First, perestroika — meaning the politics of restructuring led in the USSR by Mikhail Gorbachev from 1985 to 1991 — catalysed the transformation of the Party into a ‘new FCP’.¹ This strategy of modernisation and the opening up of the Soviet Union to the rest of the world had, as direct consequences, not only the collapse of the Eastern bloc,² but also the dismantling of the USSR³ and the resulting overthrow of the CPSU with the arrival of Boris Yeltsin in power.⁴ This blatant failure of socialism, in countries which were used for so long as models by the French Communist Party,⁵ allowed Georges Marchais to express his opinion about these so called socialist regimes in an open way — and no longer in private.⁶ This experience led Party leaders to reach

¹ 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français (document adopté par le 29^e Congrès)*, (Arche de la Défense, 18-22 December 1996); report also published in *L’Humanité*, 23 December 1996.

² Cf. the fall of the Berlin wall on 9 November 1989, the end of the communist regime in Hungary on 23 October 1989, the nomination of a non-communist Prime Minister coming from Solidarnosc in Poland in 1989 and the overthrow of Ceausescu’s dictatorial regime in Romania in December 1989.

³ On 8 December 1991.

⁴ M. Gorbachev had to resign on 25 December 1991.

⁵ See ch. 6.

⁶ Andrew, Christopher, and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London: Penguin, 1999). see chapter 18 on Eurocommunism.

conclusions which were beyond reproach: ‘L’expérience historique enseigne qu’aucune transformation sociale ne peut s’effectuer en faveur du peuple qui ne soit décidée, maîtrisée, contrôlée par celui-ci.’⁷ The General Secretary of the Party could thus act freely as from 1991 in order to pursue the strategy of ‘socialism in the colours of France’, which he had advocated in the 1970s. He was able to distance the FCP from the former socialist bloc and to launch it on a new trajectory. In that sense, Georges Marchais gave his Party the new impetus which it had needed for so long and which was so vigorously demanded by dissident communists in the 1970s.

However, if it is certain that Marchais really wanted to open up the Party to the outside world in order to integrate it more effectively into French society, it is nonetheless true that the FCP’s transformation was accelerated by the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. In fact, at that time, pressures exercised in order to change the Party became external. They were no longer internal as in the 1970s, when communist dissidents such as Althusser and Elleinstein sparked a wave of discontent.⁸ In that sense, the intensive media coverage of the 1989 events opened the eyes of a great majority of communist activists who clearly saw that their Party had to undergo a fundamental mutation in order to distance itself from socialism as applied in the former eastern bloc. In that respect an activist declared that:

La fin du bloc de l’Est, la chute du mur de Berlin ont complètement bouleversé les choses [...]. Tout à coup on s’est aperçu qu’on n’avait pas toujours raison. On avait affirmé des choses qui s’étaient avérées fausses par la suite [...]. Le Parti communiste n’a pas pu s’émanciper tant qu’on a traîné ce fardeau.⁹

⁷ 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français*.

⁸ See ch. 1.

⁹ Mme Charmont, interviewed by myself on 28 July 1998; see our ch. 6.

However, if the transformation of the FCP came rather late, it is to Marchais' credit that he prepared the ground for Robert Hue, his successor at the head of the Party in January 1994.

Robert Hue was elected as the new leader of the French Communist Party at the 28th Congress of the Party.¹⁰ If Hue placed his men in key positions within the different levels of authority of the FCP, and if he distanced his style from that of his predecessor, he nevertheless knew how to pursue the politics of modernisation launched by Marchais. The 29th Congress of the FCP, which was held in December 1996, thus went back to the precepts laid at the 22nd Congress of the Party¹¹ with a delay of twenty years exactly — the irony being that it is never too late to do the right thing, as the party usually reacts twenty years too late¹² — by declaring that ‘affirmer la modernité communiste implique que la réflexion soit poursuivie sur ce qui s’est passé au nom du communisme et sur les empreintes du stalinisme sur notre propre histoire.’¹³

An analysis of major events which shook the FCP in the 1970s was therefore drawn up. If we go back to this decade, we can see that the 1970s were not only marked by the signature of the Common Programme with the Socialist party in 1972,¹⁴ which demonstrated a common will to conquer power, but also by a crisis. This period of crisis was interpreted by the Communist Party as an economic, political and social crisis marking the limits and the potential end of capitalism. It is in this context that class struggle was truly meaningful: with its intensification, it allowed the Communist Party to play its role of enlightened guide to the popular masses.¹⁵ Under the aegis of Georges Marchais, the leadership of the Party thus tightened its ranks. All communist activists had

¹⁰ St-Ouen, 25-29 January 1994.

¹¹ St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976.

¹² By reference to Khrushchev's report (1956), in which he denounced Stalin's crimes and personality cult, and to the FCP's destalinisation in 1976.

¹³ 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français*.

¹⁴ See ch. 7.

¹⁵ See ch. 4.

to form a bloc behind their leadership. No criticism was permitted, under the pretext that it served the game of the bourgeoisie, and no faux pas was tolerated for fear of being sent away from the Party.¹⁶ Unity at any cost was thus the key word within the FCP. Nothing other than a Marxist-Leninist ideology riddled with Stalinism could cement this unity which sterilised Party life, for as Althusser put it, ‘si le parti est vivant, son unité sera contradictoire, et le parti sera unifié par une idéologie vivante, qui devra être contradictoire, mais qui sera ouverte et féconde.’¹⁷ However, at the end of the 1970s, this idea was not to the taste of the Party as its internal organisation — too central and not democratic enough, as we have just seen in the previous chapter — did not leave room for any manoeuvre. The 1990s were, in that respect, the decade in which theory broke free from these organisational constraints.

Following a decision taken by the Central Committee in September 1993, the 28th Congress of the FCP held in 1994 wiped away the principle of democratic centralism by replacing it with the concept of ‘souveraineté des communistes’¹⁸. Born under a new sign imposed by Robert Hue, ‘[un homme] d’une autre génération, éloigné des jeux de pouvoir interne [et] dénué de toute sensibilité d’apparatchik’,¹⁹ this Congress was memorable because of its content. It was indeed the only one in nearly twenty years to answer at last expectations from communist activists and to insert itself fully into the new Eurocommunist line set by the 22nd Congress of the Party in 1976.²⁰ Francette Lazard underlined that matter in the successive reports she presented to the Central Committee on 29 September 1993 and to the Commission on Status in January 1994:

¹⁶ See ch. 8.

¹⁷ Louis Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 27 April 1978.

¹⁸ 28^e Congrès, *Les statuts du PCF* (St-Ouen, 25-29 January 1994); See our ch. 1.

¹⁹ Pascal Virot, ‘Le Parti communiste a fait son autocritique en novembre, mais aucune victime de purge ne souhaite revenir. Les exclus du PCF refusent la main tendue de Hue’, *Libération*, 30 December 1998, p. 2.

²⁰ See ch. 1.

La décision prise en 1976 à propos de la dictature du prolétariat a ouvert une nouvelle page. Il appartient aux communistes d'élaborer eux-mêmes toute leur politique, dans toutes ses dimensions [...].²¹ Il n'est plus question, comme avec le centralisme démocratique, de subordination des organisations au 'centre' et d'obligation d'application. Il [...] est question de souveraineté des adhérents et de promotion de leurs capacités d'initiative, en toute responsabilité individuelle et collective.²²

Finally launched on this new trajectory, and remaining faithful to its willingness to democratise its internal organisation, the French Communist Party decided to take a new step at its 29th Congress in 1996.²³ The Party officially recognised that 'la diversité des communistes est une réalité non seulement tolérée, acceptée, mais [aussi] revendiquée comme une richesse.'²⁴

It is therefore certain that this step ahead was a historic moment in the life of the Communist Party in the sense that any activist is now apparently free to think and express himself in all honesty.²⁵ Currents of ideas, which were advocated by Elleinstein in the 1970s, are theoretically accepted — but as always with a delay of twenty years.²⁶ However, the French Communist Party still categorically refuses to consider Althusser's demand for a right to create tendencies within the Party. In that sense, the Party does not push its logic to its own conclusion. In the eyes of Party leaders, it is one thing to acknowledge tactically what a dissident like Elleinstein demanded, but it is another

²¹ 28^e Congrès, *Rapport de la commission sur les statuts (rapport présenté par Francette Lazard)* suivi de *Les statuts du PCF* (St-Ouen, 25-29 January 1994).

²² Francette Lazard, *Rapport introductif au Comité Central des 28, 29 et 30 septembre 1993* suivi de *La discussion (L'Humanité, 29 September 1993)*.

²³ The 29th Congress of the FCP was held at the Arche de la Défense from 18 to 22 December 1996.

²⁴ 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français*.

²⁵ Jacques Chambaz, *Réalités et stratégie: le PCF, une démarche nouvelle* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions Sociales, 1990), p 154.

²⁶ By reference to Khrushchev's report (1956), in which he denounced Stalin's crimes and personality cult, and to the FCP's destalinisation in 1976.

matter to take Althusser's point of view into account. If the FCP went back on its past errors, the Party still refuses to talk, to mention or even to make an allusion to the dissidents who were active in the 1970s — they could have been right. In the 1990s, we could thus see the same pattern being drawn up as in the 1970s. On the one hand we had the Party, which was ready to open itself up, and Elleinstein who wanted to move carefully towards a system of internal organisation animated by currents of ideas. And on the other hand we had Althusser who pushed the logic further than ever by demanding the recognition of the right to create tendencies.

The first part of this chapter on the right to form tendencies in the 1970s establishes the positions of the Party as well as those of Elleinstein. The second part throws into relief the theory which Althusser developed in his unpublished manuscripts whose titles are *Les vaches noires*, *Sur la mort du PCF* and *Projet de livre sur le communisme*.²⁷

According to Marxist-Leninist thought, the Party must be perfectly unified around its leadership in order to secure the coherence of its action in a context of class struggle. The role of the Party is therefore to guide the masses towards communism with the help of 'revolutionary' intellectuals who are here to educate and enlighten all those who believe in this cause with their knowledge.²⁸ Intellectuals thus occupy a key position, although they do not have any real authority as the Party leadership centralises all decisions, and consequently all the power.²⁹ It is only too true for, as we have just seen in the previous chapter, the Stalinist deviation strengthened the leadership of the FCP by giving it the keys of supreme knowledge in the name of a so-called scientific and

²⁷ Documents held in the archives of the IMEC (Institut de la Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine, Paris).

²⁸ Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *Que faire?* French translation (Paris: Librairie de l'Humanité, 1925), pp. 32, 76, 142; see our ch. 3.

²⁹ See ch. 1.

irrefutable socialism. The role which should have been played by communist intellectuals was thus wiped away: not only could they not think freely, but they also had to ratify blindly the decisions of the Leadership.³⁰ Any criticism was going against the Party's interests and played into the hands of the bourgeoisie, and by expressing such criticisms, dissidents like Althusser and Elleinstein were accused of creating factions within the Party. Publicly condemned in this French version of the Moscow trials,³¹ dissidents were subjected to the wrath of the Party. But when Althusser started demanding the right to create tendencies within the French Communist Party, the storm blowing around the communist dissidents worsened. The FCP certainly knew how to brandish its two most cutting arguments in order to crush Althusser's demands. The first one consisted in the looming spectre of a Communist Party stuffed with so-called bourgeois elements and the second one, which was also the more apocalyptic argument, warned all communists against the weakening and the subsequent splitting up of the Party.

First, the leaders of the French Communist Party were particularly keen to apply the little phrase launched by Lenin who argued that 'la "liberté de critique" est effectivement [...] la liberté de faire pénétrer dans le socialisme les idées et les éléments de la bourgeoisie.'³² In fact, in a context of class struggle, exacerbated both by the increasing popularity of the Union of the Left³³ and by social divisions that were becoming deeper in a period of crisis,³⁴ this 'liberté de critique' endangered the seemingly unshakeable unity of the Party around its leadership. And according to Party leaders, it could have been all too real if the movements of discontent raised by Althusser and Elleinstein in the 1970s had taken the form of tendencies which were advocated by

³⁰ See ch. 3.

³¹ See ch. 8.

³² Lenin, *Que faire?*, pp. 4-5.

³³ Number of seats obtained at legislative elections — 1973: FCP 73 and SP 89; 1978: FCP 86 and SP 102; cf. Maurice Larkin, *France since the Popular Front* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 335, 350.

³⁴ See ch. 4.

our philosopher.³⁵ However, the point was that the FCP could not in any way be diverted from its prime objective, meaning the institution of a ‘tricolour’ socialism in France by crushing the bourgeoisie democratically and by conquering power. The Party had thus to concentrate all its efforts on this unique objective. In this context, it could not afford to scatter its resources uselessly by fighting on two fronts: on the external one raised by class struggle and on the internal one mounted by communist dissidents. The Party could even have fought on numerous fronts if dissidents had managed to organise themselves into tendencies. As in any orderly battle, there was no way the FCP could scatter its forces for this would have risked strengthening the class adversary. On the contrary, the Party had to unify and concentrate all its resources around its objective. Althusser confirmed this by writing that ‘l’essence de [l’] unité [de l’organisation de lutte des classes] [est] une unité politique [...] [qui] ne peut être qu’une unité de pensée [...]. Cela veut dire que le parti ne peut non plus être soumis à une contrainte interne.’³⁶ In that sense, the very claim for a larger expression within the Party, or even for an official recognition of the currents of ideas put forward by Elleinstein and — worst of all — of the tendencies advocated by Althusser, was completely vain. In fact, French communist leaders were too afraid to see the very comfortable position they occupied in the Party put in jeopardy by well targeted criticisms which potentially could have become more and more popular with communist activists. Party leaders thus retreated behind the unavoidable, implacable and resolutely convincing argument: tendencies play into the hands of the class adversary. All the weapons were pointed at those who, like Althusser, dared to go further than the simple idea of enlarging the discussion within the Party by

³⁵ Ecole élémentaire du PCF, *La crise de la société française, la démocratie avancée et le socialisme, l’union du peuple français, le rôle d’avant-garde du parti communiste*, pp. 96-7.

³⁶ Louis Althusser, *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e congrès)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A24-01.01/02 to -02.01, unpublished manuscripts; cf. Georges Labica, an *Althussérien*, ‘Pour des pratiques nouvelles’, in Olivier Duhamel and Henri Weber, *Changer le PC?* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1979), p. 97 and Etienne Balibar, another *Althussérien*, ‘La responsabilité des communistes’, *Dialectiques*, no. 23 (1978), 25.

talking about the right to create tendencies outside the FCP's columns, meaning in the so-called bourgeois press.

The argument developed by the Party leadership was extremely brutal for all intellectual dissidents as it invoked the deepest class instincts of communist activists. In fact, according to the leaders of the French Communist Party, when Althusser and his followers put forward the simple notion of tendencies, they were acting not only in order to 'détourner une partie [du] potentiel [du Parti] vers un combat politique interne',³⁷ but also to infiltrate bourgeois ideas inside the FCP. On that matter, Marchais declared:

L'instauration dans notre parti de courants et de tendances [...] ruinerait sa vie démocratique [...] le transformerait en champs clos de rivalités personnelles et de querelles de clans qui donneraient à l'adversaire de classe des moyens rêvés pour manipuler des communistes contre d'autres et de peser sur nos décisions.³⁸

In that sense, the underground revolutionary fight, which was surrounded by suspicion and which was led by Lenin at the beginning of the last century, left a deep imprint on the whole history of the French Communist Party. Thus, in the 1970s, a general mistrust shrouded the Party. There was a permanent and latent doubt as to what real ideas and intentions were among communist activists for, in this counter-society³⁹ fighting endlessly against the bourgeoisie, every Party member was an object of suspicion in the eyes of other comrades — real camaraderie, in the initial sense of the term, was practically non-existent. Once more, this theory was justified by Marxist-Leninist theory

³⁷ Gilbert Berez, letter addressed by, 'Intellectuel, contestataire, donc communiste', *L'Humanité*, 14 June 1978; cf. Régis Debray, *Lettre ouverte aux communistes français et à quelques autres* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p 176; Ronald Tiersky, 'Le PCF, parti du passé ou parti d'avenir', in Duhamel and Weber, *Changer le PC?*, pp. 239-40.

³⁸ Georges Marchais quoted in Christian Colombani, 'M. Marchais: nous ne souhaitons, nous ne voulons exclure personne', *Le Monde*, 6 June 1978.

³⁹ Expression used, among others, by Annie Kriegel.

according to which the bourgeoisie might infiltrate, ‘contaminate’ and destroy the Party at any time.

However, the class instinct was also very much alive inside the French Communist Party because of internal pressures sparked voluntarily by Party leaders. By accusing intellectual dissidents of playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie, the FCP leadership set working class activists, who either could acquire or had puppet powers inside the Party, against the thinking minority. Marchais thus went into the attack one more time by raising the standard of *l’ouvriérisme* and by addressing himself to the bourgeois press he denigrated so much, and which could not be used by Party members others than FCP leaders for fear of being accused of factionalism.⁴⁰ He declared:

Les tendances, ou les tentatives pour créer des tendances, la négation du rôle des directions élues et responsables à tous les niveaux, le refus opposé dans les faits aux ouvriers de devenir permanents, ne pourraient que diviser et affaiblir notre parti, paralyser sa vie démocratique et son efficacité.⁴¹

We therefore can see very well that the Party called for the straight forward opposition between workers and intellectuals in order to eradicate the notion of tendencies. However, as we will see later on, *l’ouvriérisme* was not the best strategy adopted by the Party. Far from that indeed. And in fact, regarding tendencies, awakening the class instinct of communist activists was not even the most dangerous weapon held by the leaders of the Communist Party against intellectual dissidents. The Party’s most lethal weapon was of another kind, and it was pointed at those who, like Althusser, were

⁴⁰ Marchais interviewed on Antenne 2, *Question de Temps*, 9 August 1978, and quoted in ‘Comprendre pour construire l’union — Le texte complet des réponses de Georges Marchais à l’émission d’Antenne 2. *Questions de Temps*’, *L’Humanité*, 11 August 1978.

⁴¹ 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979).

actively in favour of the right to create tendencies.

The FCP's heavy artillery was deployed in the late 1970s because Party leaders saw a faction in each tendency. They feared the fragmentation of the Party which would consequently lose its influence in French society. In that sense, a communist activist was right to say that 'on pousse les extrêmes en agitant le spectre de la scission, du fractionnisme qui porterait atteinte à l'intégrité du Parti'.⁴² In fact, FCP leaders rejected categorically the right to create tendencies because they feared that they might not be able to control and to dominate such movements. That was the reason why they brandished the spectre of factionalism in the same way one uses a lucky charm to ward off evil spirits.

According to Party leaders such as Georges Marchais, Paul Laurent and Jean Kanapa, tendencies could split up the French Communist Party into '[des] chapelles' led by '[des] chefs de fiefs',⁴³ and these 'lutttes autochthones'⁴⁴ aimed at conquering power were diverting the Party from its real battle.⁴⁵ The FCP's action was thus paralysed precisely when the Union of the Left could potentially have catapulted the Party into power and have lead it to socialism in the colours of France. In this context Georges Marchais, who saw looming behind any criticism not only a tendency, but also a faction, did not mince his words by ordering '[une] ferme riposte politique [du] Parti'.⁴⁶ Intellectual dissidents had to keep quiet, as otherwise the Party's steamroller

⁴² Charles Piraux, 'Pour une démocratie révolutionnaire', *Lutttes et débats*, January 1979, p. 26.

⁴³ Paul Laurent quoted in *France Nouvelle*, 6 June 1977; cf. Roland Leroy, *La quête du bonheur* (Paris: Grasset, 1995), p. 213.

⁴⁴ Jean Kanapa, 'Favoriser l'apparition de valeurs morales nouvelles', *Le Monde*, 10 June 1976; see also Kanapa quoted in *France Nouvelle*, 26 January 1976, p. 11; Georges Marchais, *Le défi démocratique* (Paris: Grasset, 1973), pp. 201-2.

⁴⁵ 'Préserver et développer la vie démocratique du parti — Résolution du Bureau Politique du PCF', answer of the Political Bureau to the text of the 300 signatories (petition of Aix-en-Provence, 19 May 1978), in *L'Humanité*, 20 May 1978, and quoted in Michel Barak, *Fractures au PCF — Des communistes parlent* (Aix-en-Provence: ÉDISUD; Paris: Karthala, 1980), annexe; cf. Henri Malberg, 'Le mécanisme de la tendance', *France Nouvelle*, 5 June 1978, p. 9; Jacques Denis, a member of the FCP's Central Committee, 'Sur l'eurocommunisme et les relations européennes', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 4 (April 1978), 103.

⁴⁶ Georges Marchais quoted in 'Renforcer notre Parti en qualité et en quantité — Les réponses de G. Marchais aux journalistes', *L'Humanité*, 22 June 1978.

would crush them.

However, there is a misunderstanding. If organised tendencies could theoretically lead to factions, which could have greatly harmed the Party's unity, this fear was less justified than FCP leaders thought, as neither Elleinstein nor Althusser talked about organising behind them such tendencies. Althusser sharply denied being 'le dirigeant occulte [d'une] "frange d'intellectuels" rebelle',⁴⁷ and Elleinstein preferred not to engage too much in the debate and to opt for a 'majority of ideas'⁴⁸ which would render the debate more flexible by finding common ground on certain points.⁴⁹ This latter idea seemed to be a good one insofar as it could have established a compromise between the unshakeable monolithism of the Party leadership and the desire expressed by intellectual dissidents to open up discussion within the FCP. These currents of ideas could also have encouraged livelier and broader debates within the Party by developing the confrontation of opinions expressed by communist activists.⁵⁰ As a consequence, the rigid organisation of the FCP could have been broken down.⁵¹ However, it was vain to hide from reality: Elleinstein juggled with words, as under the cover of 'majority of ideas', or currents of ideas, he laid the notion of tendencies.

If on the one hand it was right to say that organised tendencies tore apart the debate and ineluctably led to the creation of factions, on the other hand it was also true that simple tendencies could have reflected the richness of diversity of opinions which, in the 1970s, were vegetating in a Party wiping off any trace of individualism in the name of unity of action and thought.⁵² It was thus in this context that Althusser's theory came to

⁴⁷ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁴⁸ Jean Elleinstein, 'L'avenir des communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 September 1978, p. 51; Jean Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme* (Paris: Julliard, 1979), p. 66.

⁴⁹ Elleinstein, 'L'avenir des communistes', *ibid.*, p. 51; cf. Gérard Molina and Yves Vargas, *Dialogue à l'intérieur du parti communiste français* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), p. 15.

⁵⁰ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, p. 66; Gérard Molina, 'Sur un pluralisme interne au parti', *La Nouvelle Critique*, 1978, p. 13.

⁵¹ Gérard Molina and Yves Vargas, 'Des contradictions au sein du Parti', in Duhamel and Weber, *Changer le PC?*, p. 113.

⁵² See ch. 1.

fruition, for as this philosopher said, 'il faut avoir le courage théorique et politique de reconnaître non seulement la nécessité, mais aussi le bien fondé et l'utilité des tendances.'⁵³

The French Communist Party had a very Manichean way of conceiving society. On one side there was the bourgeois class, and on the other that of the proletariat which was unified around its Party leadership in this fierce class struggle. However, if this conception was right from a purely theoretical Marxist-Leninist point of view, dating back to the early twentieth century, it was not only outdated, but also completely false in the 1970s. Indeed, the FCP committed two major mistakes.

First, any communist who did not have any working class origins could potentially become a 'class enemy', hence the mistrust, or even the contempt shown by the Party towards communist intellectuals who, even as far back as the 1970s, were workers in their own way. The problem they thus faced was that intellectuals could not insert themselves fully into any group. As communists, they were repudiated by the bourgeois class. As intellectuals, they were suspected of being 'class enemies' by their own Party at the slightest slip. Their margin of manoeuvre was, therefore, extremely limited. In that context, the safest route to take was either to follow the Party leadership blindly, or to avoid any problem, as in the case of Elleinstein, and follow the FCP leaders while keeping their distance by opting for a 'majority of ideas'. The other alternative was to be bold like Althusser and be willing to create tendencies. If this latter solution was by far the most dangerous one, as the Party was ready to respond swiftly, it was also the real way ahead. Indeed, tendencies would have fully integrated communist intellectuals into a group in which they could have recognised themselves, and in which they could have evolved, while still being part of the FCP's organisation. Tendencies could have,

⁵³ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

therefore, offered not only some kind of recognition to dissenting intellectuals, but also various platforms of reflection from which the Party could have gained in terms of the richness and the fruitfulness of internal debate. The diversity of opinion, which came to be recognised in the 1990s, could have found its meaningful sense two decades earlier inside such circles.

Second, the FCP hid behind the narrow conception of *ouvriérisme* which politically only took workers into account, and which saw them as similar to the proletarians of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*.⁵⁴ The Party thus left on the side not only communist intellectuals, but also all those who could not be labelled as workers. This was a terrible mistake because, in the race for power which took place in the 1970s — and against the Socialist Party to some extent⁵⁵ — the French Communist Party could not afford to forget the great majority of its electorate.⁵⁶ It was committing political suicide to the advantage of the Socialist Party, which was both a partner and a rival, as it appealed to the same section of the French electorate as the Communist Party.⁵⁷ Therefore, it would have been desirable for the FCP to move with the times, and insert itself into a post-industrial society in which the tertiary sector flourishes, while the number of industrial workers declines. In that sense, the Party could also have recognised fully the diversity of social origin of its members back in the 1970s.⁵⁸ This diversity could have enriched the Party if communist activists had been able in practice to debate their ideas inside tendencies reflecting diverse viewpoints. However, this was precisely what the Communist Party refused to accept at that time.

⁵⁴ See ch. 4.

⁵⁵ See ch. 7.

⁵⁶ Percentage of votes in favour of the FCP in 1973 and 1978: farmers 13 and 9%, small shopkeepers 10 and 14%, industrialists/high ranking executives/self-employed 6 and 9%, middle management/white-collar employees 17 and 18%, workers 37 and 36%, non-working population 20 and 17%, in François Platone, 'Les électors législatifs sous la Cinquième République', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, no. 42 (1992), 306, 310.

⁵⁷ Louis Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A27-01.05, unpublished manuscripts.

⁵⁸ Louis Althusser, *22^e congrès* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), pp. 63-4.

The Party leadership was afraid of plurality of thought, be it reflected in tendencies or not, because it endangered the supreme knowledge of FCP leaders which allowed them to manipulate their activists like puppets. It questioned the power of the Leadership which allowed it to define unilaterally a precise political line by centralising excessively and by flouting any democratic principle. Thus, as Althusser put it, ‘[la] diversité [des communistes] est atomisée en une infinité d’opinions individuelles’.⁵⁹ Internal debate was therefore completely frozen precisely when the richness of ideas could have animated it. Far from ‘ruiner la vie démocratique du Parti’,⁶⁰ the free confrontation of ideas could on the contrary have given internal debate the meaningful sense which had been lost over so many years as a result of the Stalinist practices used by the French Communist Party. But, as Althusser wrote, ‘[la seule façon] de donner à cette diversité [...] le moyen de s’exprimer [et] de se reconnaître [...], c’est d’admettre au grand jour, juridiquement, le droit aux tendances.’⁶¹ In this context tendencies could have played two active roles. First, they could have helped to embrace all communists, and second they could have helped to recognise fully the currents of ideas which ran through the Party.

The representation of all communists was essential in the sense that it could have given a voice to the minority of communists who felt they did not fit into the system of decision-making, on behalf of the majority, implemented by those who governed the Party. This system was indeed very perverse as the FCP leadership was free to act as a complete despot. Party leaders submitted their resolution schemes to Congresses, all Party executives ratified them unanimously, and all communists, without exception, had to apply them. Any minority of activists which abstained on a resolution was deemed to

⁵⁹ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁶⁰ Georges Marchais quoted in Colombani, ‘M. Marchais: nous ne souhaitons, nous ne voulons exclure personne’.

⁶¹ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

form a faction and thus to represent a danger to the Party. In principle, the problem was not to determine if it was the majority or the minority of communists who were right, but rather to allow the minority to express itself, to put forward its arguments, to try to convince the others, and to overturn the majority.⁶² In practice, this right never questioned the position of Party leaders and factionalism was not on the agenda. On the contrary, the aim was to give a voice to all communists, so that they could recognise themselves in the decisions taken at the apex of the organisation, and to give democratic centralism its true meaning by making it more flexible. It was the only way currents of ideas could have met and parted on certain points, as Elleinstein expressed it. However, at the end of the 1970s, a very long road still lay ahead before such demands would be acknowledged.

If the leadership of the Communist Party was in the 1990s prepared to talk about ‘diversity of opinions’, it always saw a faction in every current of ideas and tendency,⁶³ thus mixing up the terminology in order to crush divergence even better. It is therefore necessary to define these terms precisely. Tendencies are the formal recognition of current of ideas which have always run through the Party.

In the 1970s, dissidents were divided into the *Althussériens* and the supporters of Elleinstein. However, what we must see is that by adopting these appellations, the Party strengthened the logic of its position. The *Althussériens* had Althusser as their ‘chef de file’⁶⁴ and the supporters of Elleinstein fell under the domination of the historian. Tendencies thus became organised around personalities who, according to Party leaders, could split up the FCP. In fact, communist leaders were afraid of seeing their dominant position questioned by so-called ‘bourgeois’ intellectuals. The way round this problem

⁶² Stéfán Lequiem, ‘Droit de tendance ou centralisme démocratique’, *Luttes et Débats*, June 1979, p. 51; see our ch. 1.

⁶³ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁶⁴ Expression used by Marchais and reported in *Le Monde*, 10 May 1979.

could have been to comfort the Party leaders and to use cunning. If the leaders of the French Communist Party juggled with words, then communist dissidents could have done this too. For instance, instead of accepting talk of the *Althussériens*, the term Neo-Marxists could have been used. Althusser would no longer have been considered as a ‘chef de fief’⁶⁵ ready to launch his battle, but rather as an ideological guide without any thirst for power.

This notion of ideological guide was rather appropriate as it could have allowed dissidents such as Althusser and Elleinstein to play fully their roles as intellectuals, and as mentors in some ways, Althusser advocating a return to Marxism and Elleinstein commending a definite switch to Eurocommunism. Far from battling permanently around themes like the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, these two tendencies found points of agreement on the need for internal democratisation for instance, as Elleinstein advocated. In fact, these informal tendencies made the richness of the movement of discontent which flooded the Party in the 1970s. Debate had never been so wide-ranging. Many communists recognised themselves in and became inspired by ideas put forward by these two intellectual dissidents. Althusser and Elleinstein thus led a multitude of communists ideologically.

At that time, the refusal to recognise tendencies was to hide from reality, because they did exist inside the French Communist Party. They certainly found their expression outside the various levels of authority of the FCP, but they did not have any choice as communist leaders denied the very existence of discontent within the organisation. Marchais claimed in an interview with *L’Humanité*: ‘Chez nous, il n’y a pas de contestation.’⁶⁶ There was no discontent, there were no tendencies: the Party had the last word at the end of the 1970s, as it had to paper over any crack in the facade of the Party

⁶⁵ Paul Laurent quoted in *France Nouvelle*, 6 June 1977.

⁶⁶ Georges Marchais quoted in ‘M. Marchais: il y a quelques contestations’, *Le Monde*, 15 April 1978.

unity.⁶⁷ However, the French Communist Party lost out in the long-term, for as Althusser wrote, ‘ce parti, tous ses intellectuels et la majorité de ses vieux cadres l’a abandonné [...] [mais] il durera, mort vivant, tant qu’il [...] trouvera des commandes à passer.’⁶⁸

To conclude, by recognising the ‘diversity of approaches’ within the French Communist Party in the 1990s and by coming back to the logic of opening up the Party which was underlined at the 22nd Congress in 1976, communist leaders made a great step forward. As a consequence, communist activists should not theoretically be afraid of reprisals if they express ideas that go against those of the Party leadership, for as Jacques Chambaz wrote, ‘un communiste qui manifeste de véritables divergences quant à l’orientation collectivement décidée n’est pas pour autant écarté de ses responsabilités.’⁶⁹ However, this recognition should be applied in practice and, considering the past experience of the Communist Party in term of internal democracy, it is difficult to believe truly in such an open attitude. This fear is confirmed by the fact that the FCP still refuses to recognise the existence of tendencies. There is thus a long way ahead before the Party even accepts the right to create tendencies. That is precisely what 1990s dissidents such as Guy Hermier, Lucien Sève and Roger Martelli warned against when they wrote:

Le progressisme vit et continuera à vivre dans une pluralité à la fois concurrente et féconde de sensibilités, de courants et d’organisations. Mais l’émergence de nouveaux points de repère, de nouveaux axes majeurs de combat doit permettre

⁶⁷ Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, Georges Labica and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Ouvrons la fenêtre, camarades* (Paris: Maspero, 1979), p. 184.

⁶⁸ Louis Althusser, *Sur la mort du PCF (Mort et survie du PCF), (1982-83?)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A29-01.05, unpublished manuscripts.

⁶⁹ Jacques Chambaz, *Réalités et stratégie: le PCF, une démarche nouvelle* (Paris: Messidor Editions Sociales, 1990), p. 154; see our ch. 8.

de nouvelles convergences, de nouvelles formes d'action et de regroupement.⁷⁰

By expressing themselves in such a way, they talked about '[un] pluralisme de droit'. They thus went further than the concept of a 'majority of ideas' envisaged by Elleinstein, but without daring to venture themselves towards the right to create tendencies which was advocated by Althusser. It means that in the 1990s, as in the 1970s, the existence of tendencies raised the spectre of factionalism. The Party, and the majority of its members, still feared that the FCP could split up and disappear. However, this risk did not exist in either the 1990s or the 1970s. On the one hand, as we have just seen, the main intellectual dissidents such as Althusser and Elleinstein did not want at all to create factions around themselves. They perfectly knew that they could potentially weaken the Party, which would have gone against their communist faith. On the other hand, tendencies would not have led automatically to the creation of factions within the Party as FCP leaders could have managed them and inserted them inside the Party's organisation. In that sense, in the 1990s as in the 1970s, the Communist Party could have looked at other parties to see what happened there. It would have seen that the Socialist Party was full of tendencies while still being relatively powerful and influential. The *Chevènementistes*, the *Rocardiens* and the *Mitterrandistes* certainly did not agree on everything, and they effectively had their own supporters, but they also knew how to make their ideas converge and how to unite their efforts. The French Communist Party could have taken this lively, rich and fruitful party life as a model. However, in the 1970s, the FCP would never have 'lowered itself' by imitating the Socialist Party for two reasons.

First, the Socialist Party was not only an ally, but also a competitor. In this

⁷⁰ Text signed by, among others, Charles Fiterman, Jacques Ralite, Guy Hermier, Lucien Sève and Roger Martelli and quoted in 'Déclaration du Bureau politique du parti communiste français', *L'Humanité*, 29 October 1993.

context, it was out of the question for Communist leaders to take this party as a model. The identities of both parties were far too mixed up in the eyes of FCP leaders at a time when the Communist Party wanted to distinguish itself from the socialists.⁷¹ Secondly, accepting tendencies in the 1970s would have meant that the FCP was recognising the value of Althusser's demands. However, in a period of deep discontent, the Party refused categorically to consider, or even to take into account demands expressed by communist dissidents. Party leaders would have interpreted this intervention as a step back in their power and as a weakening of the Party unity which required that activists followed their Leadership rather than dissidents.

Nonetheless, it was in the 1970s that the FCP could have transformed itself. It could have recognised the diversity of opinion and the right to create tendencies when this desire became more intense and when a new wave of discontent was flooding the Party. On the contrary, the FCP did not embark on these mutations soon enough, and it lost both in term of influence and in term of political credibility. As Althusser wrote: 'Ceux qui ont eu le simple courage de voir clair avant les autres, d'avoir été non pas 'en retard' mais en avance [...] ou tout simplement pas d'accord [...] se [sont retrouvés] sur les pâquerettes.'⁷² At the end of the 1990s, it was too late, and if the French Communist Party could not turn back the clock, it still had the possibility to push its logic to its own conclusion. It could have answered a more and more pressing need which was advocated by Althusser: it could have recognised the right to create tendencies. However, at present, the road ahead is still very long and the French Communist Party is not ready to accept the existence of tendencies, be it in theory or in practice. If it did, it would mean that Althusser was right back in 1970s, and it would also mean that movements of discontent were useful to the Party's progress. However, the inherent flaw in Althusser

⁷¹ This was confirmed to me by Francette Lazard (July 1999); see ch. 7.

⁷² Louis Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07, unpublished manuscripts.

and Elleinstein's position is that they treated the Party and its leader, Georges Marchais, as free agents who could take momentous decisions without the prior approval of Moscow. This, as we shall see, was not the case and therefore the responsibility of the Party leadership in this matter may well have to be viewed with circumspection.

CHAPTER 3

The role of communist intellectuals in the Party of the working class

In the 1970s, the main problem faced by French communist intellectuals was to define precisely the role they should play within a party which went further than the mere representation of the working class, by incarnating this class intrinsically, even at the highest levels of its decision-making bodies.¹ The question was of central importance both for the French Communist Party and for its intellectuals. It was a matter of knowing whether the role of communist intellectuals was to reflect and to apply the Party line, intellectual activities thus serving the socialist cause, or whether they should preserve their intellectual independence at any cost. In that sense, the problem which was raised within the ranks of the FCP in the 1970s was relatively similar to the issue which emerged in the USSR of the 1920s, and which was solved by the FCP in 1994, when it officially allowed its members to express themselves freely.²

Lenin, whose manichean vision of society pushed him to think in terms of class conflicts, divided intellectuals into two very distinct camps. On the one hand, there were those truly revolutionary intellectuals, who dedicated their work to the Party and to Communism. On the other hand, there were those who were “indécrottablement” *petits-bourgeois par leur ideologie*,³ and who any communist party worth the name should ‘vaincre’, ‘transformer’, ‘refondre’, ‘rééduquer’.⁴ Lenin’s words had a powerful meaning. Beyond the simple compartmentalisation of intellectuals, his ideas of breaking

¹ Maurice Thorez was previously employed in a mining company, Waldeck-Rochet was a former farm worker, Georges Marchais was a former metal worker, and Robert Hue was previously a nurse.

² 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français (document adopté par le 29^e Congrès)*, (Arche de la Défense, 18-22 December 1996); *L’Humanité*, 23 December 1996.

³ Louis Althusser, *Positions* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1976), p. 44.

⁴ Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *La maladie infantile du communisme: le gauchisme*, French translation (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1953: [n. pub.], 1962), p. 177; cf. David S. Bell, ‘Communism and French Intellectuals’, *Modern and Contemporary France* (1993), 27-36.

down ‘deviationist’ intellectuals had a much deeper implication. His ideas sought to ascertain whether art and intellectual thought should be revolutionised, thus submitted to a proletarian culture serving the Party.

Faced with this question, two trends were opposed in the 1920s USSR. On the one hand, ‘proletarian writers’ of the RAFP — the association of Russian proletarian writers⁵ — gathered around Vardine, a man of letters who proposed to create in 1924 a ‘literary Tcheka’⁶ in charge of controlling the strictest application of the Party line in Russian literature. On the other hand, Trotsky was completely opposed to the concept of proletarian culture.⁷ He swept away any interventionist Party action on art in general by declaring:

Un pouvoir authentiquement révolutionnaire ne peut ni ne veut se donner la tâche de ‘diriger’ l’art, et encore moins de lui donner des ordres, ni avant ni après la prise de pouvoir.⁸

And yet, although the 1917 Russian Revolution loosened for a while the artistic censorship which had been imposed during the reign of the Tsars,⁹ it again became the norm in the Soviet Union. In the 1920s, the cleaver of the literary censorship fell infallibly on works which were judged as being too critical towards the Soviet system,

⁵ Alla Chelkiva, ‘Qui a écrit *Le Don paisible*?’, in Mikhaïl Cholokov, *Le Don paisible*, French translation (Paris: Julliard: Presse de la Cité, 1991), pp. 1391-1402; The *Association Russe des Ecrivains Proletariens (RAFP)* became the *Union des Ecrivains* in 1932, cf. Sophie Coeuré, ‘Un écrivain face au système: le cas Pasternak’, *L’Histoire*, July-August 1998, pp. 38-9; in France, Paul Vaillant-Couturier created the *Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires* in 1932. The association had a journal, *Commune*, to which Aragon, Nizan, Gide, Rolland and Barbusse contributed, cf. David Cauter, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), ch. 3.

⁶ Jean-Jacques Marie, *Trotsky: textes et débats* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1984), p. 240.

⁷ Marie, *ibid.*, p. 231.

⁸ Trotsky, *Littérature et Révolution*, quoted in Marie, *ibid.*, p. 245.

⁹ See, among others, the short story written by Alexander Pushkin, ‘Dubrovsky’, in *The Queen of Spades and Other Stories*, English translation (London: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 61-150.

and as from 1934, Socialist Realism became the method of literary representation.¹⁰ In the USSR, under the influence of Lenin, then of Stalin, intellectual expression was transformed into a revolutionary instrument¹¹ used both to transmit a positive image of the homeland of socialism, and to strengthen the political strategy of the CPSU.¹² The authors Mikhaïl Cholokov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn demonstrated this point.

Mikhaïl Cholokov's historical novel, *Le Don paisible*, which was serialised in the Russian journals *Oktiabr* and *Novy Mir* from 1928 to 1940, illustrated the problem posed by an artistic representation of Soviet power. Although as soon as the first part was published in 1928 the RAFFP accused Cholokov of treason against proletarian literature,¹³ communist activists being depicted in a rather disparaging way,¹⁴ Cholokov's work nevertheless managed to acquire the status of official book in the USSR,¹⁵ thanks to a decision taken by Stalin himself in 1941. From a deviationist traitor to a literary master, Cholokov owed his reversal of fortunes to a different and more revolutionary interpretation of his book. From political criticism to historical glorification, Cholokov's masterpiece was transformed into a revolutionary instrument used by the CPSU to ratify its communist ideology.

This blatant manipulation of art in favour of the Russian Communist Party was not unique. It was also used in 1962, when Khrushchev authorised the publication of the amended version of Solzhenitsyn's controversial book, *Une journée d'Ivan Denissovitch*.¹⁶ Khrushchev did not interpret Solzhenitsyn's book as a general criticism of the Soviet regime as a whole. Instead, he saw in it an open criticism of the Stalinist era.

¹⁰ Introduction of J. Curtis in Mikhail Bulgakov, *Diaboliad*, English translation (London: Harvill Press, 1995), p. viii.

¹¹ 'Est-ce le communisme qui a échoué en ce siècle?', in 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000) and in *L'Humanité*, 27 March 2000, p. vii.

¹² Pierre Daix, *Ce que je sais de Soljenitsyne* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1973), p. 31; cf. Coeuré, 'Un écrivain face au système: le cas Pasternak', pp. 38-9.

¹³ Chelkiva, 'Qui a écrit *Le Don paisible*?', p. 1394.

¹⁴ Chelkiva, *ibid.*, p. 1394.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1395.

¹⁶ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Une journée d'Ivan Denissovitch*, French translation (Paris: Julliard, 1975).

It allowed Khrushchev to redirect Solzhenitsyn's criticisms against his predecessor, and it allowed him to strengthen the logic of the denunciation of the cult of Stalin that he had initiated in 1956, at the CPSU's 20th Congress.¹⁷ The manoeuvre was skilful, and the result was decisive. In the hands of Khrushchev, Solzhenitsyn's book became once again an ideological instrument and a political backing.

In the homeland of socialism, the land of social equality and social freedom, intellectuals were just like puppets activated by a puppeteer at the apex of the Socialist state. The balance was precarious, for intellectuals could be condemned at any time, and they could be rehabilitated at any moment, on a simple decision made by the CPSU. Surrounded by suspicion, crushed by a powerful partisan ideology, the margin of manoeuvre of Russian intellectuals was extremely limited until the arrival of Gorbachev in power in 1985.¹⁸ The democratisation of media and institutions, which was first initiated by the new General Secretary of the CPSU, then strengthened by the collapse of the USSR in 1991, unlocked the intellectuals' right of critical expression not only in the former Soviet Union, but also in France, inside the FCP.

Although in the 1970s any criticism stemming from a French communist intellectual was deemed contrary to the FCP's interests, in the 1990s the French Communist Party paved the way for a greater freedom of critical expression within its own ranks. Thus, at its 28th Congress of 1994, the FCP decided to place each party member at the very centre of its strategy, and at its 29th Congress of 1996, the Party officially declared that 'la diversité des communistes est une réalité non seulement

¹⁷ Preface from Jean Cathala, in Alexandre Solzhenitsyn, *Une journée d'Ivan Denissovitch*, *ibid.*, pp. 9-24.

¹⁸ Gorbachev rehabilitated all those who had been politically condemned, with a few exceptions, cf. Pierre Broué, 'La vérité sur les procès de Moscou', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 36. The French Communist Party refused to do the same as, according to Francette Lazard (unrecorded conversation, July 1999), it would mean holding a trial in which the Party would be the judge, which was to be avoided; cf. Francette Lazard, *Réflexion de la commission d'arbitrage sur la portée, au regard de l'histoire, de la mutation des pratiques du débat dans le parti (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 16 et 17 novembre 1998)*, (*L'Humanité*, 19 November 1998).

tolérée, acceptée, mais aujourd'hui revendiquée comme une richesse'.¹⁹ This strategic reversal was possible insofar as the international political context was radically different from that of the 1970s. At that time, on the one hand the model of Marxist-Leninist thought applied, thus making the working class the core of the FCP's action, and on the other hand the separation of the world into two antagonistic camps conditioned the allegiance of the FCP to the CPSU. It was neither the moment to repudiate a proletarian theory applied in the land of socialism, nor the time to question the practices of a Soviet Union which was confronting the capitalist United States. And this was precisely what the 29th Congress of the Communist Party recognised in 1996. Published in *L'Humanité* on 23 December 1996, this breakthrough document stipulated:

Notre conception de la société et du monde [...], de notre rôle n'est plus celle qui, longtemps, inspira notre action [...]. La cohérence de ce modèle de pensée [...] instituait comme réalité déterminante de l'évolution de la société la lutte entre la classe capitaliste et la classe ouvrière [qui] [...] en se libérant [...] libérait la société tout entière.²⁰

This position was that of the French Communist Party in the 1970s, and at that time the role of communist intellectuals was torn between two opposite conceptions. On the one hand, the FCP considered that communist intellectuals should serve the cause defended by their Party unconditionally. On the other hand, intellectual dissidents such as Althusser and Elleinstein demanded both the right to preserve their intellectual independence and the right to play a more active role within the Party.

The first part of this chapter on the role of communist intellectuals within the

¹⁹ 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français*; *L'Humanité*, 23 December 1996.

²⁰ 29^e Congrès, *ibid.*

Party of the working class establishes the position of the FCP, and the second part underlines the demands of intellectual dissidents such as Althusser and Elleinstein.

Politically and economically, the 1970s were characterised by three phenomena which pushed the French Communist Party to keep a firm hand on its intellectuals. First, the bipolarisation of the world into two antagonistic blocs as from 1947²¹ pushed the FCP to become the unconditional ally of the Soviet Union and to tighten its ranks around its Leadership. Party unity became imperative. Ideological consensus became central, and conformism to the party line became the norm. In this context, criticisms expressed by communist intellectuals were deemed unacceptable by the French Communist Party, for they had considerable ideological weight and profound political impact on the communist electorate and on the FCP in general. Coming from outside the Party, these criticisms would have been mere anti-communist propaganda. Coming from inside the Party, they were much more credible and dangerous.

Second, the accentuation of social disparities, coupled with the loss of influence of the Communist Party to the benefit of the Socialist Party,²² forced the FCP to re-centre its identity and its strategy around the working class by bringing back the well-tried tactic of ‘class against class’ applied from 1928 to 1934. However, if this class struggle strategy attracted numerous intellectuals at that time, in the 1970s, it had precisely the opposite effect. Communist intellectuals felt relegated to a subaltern position compared to the working class. They felt deprived of any power compared to the workers who monopolised all communist energy.

Third, the wave of dissidence which fell on the Party at the end of the 1970s

²¹ The French, Italian, Soviet, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Polish, Romanian, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Communist Parties adhered to the Cominform in 1947. In 1947-8, the Soviet model was imposed on all popular democracies.

²² See graph in Michel Winock, ‘L’âge d’or du communisme français’, *L’Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 58: the Socialist Party had a greater influence than the Communist Party until the 1940s. The SP regained that influence around 1974; see our ch. 7.

showed the power of intellectual expression. By expressing themselves on various media platforms, and by targeting the non communist press, communist intellectuals took their criticisms out onto the public stage. Their ideas were thus widely disseminated. They provoked thought among communist activists. They polarised communist opinion and they divided the Party into tendencies.²³ Faced with this risk of compartmentalization, the FCP had no other alternative but to try to gather all its troops. The strategy adopted by the Party was thus relatively simple. On the one hand, it tried to flatter communist intellectuals by showing them why the Party needed them, while on the other it tried to bring them closer to the working class by proving to them that they too needed the Party.²⁴

In accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology, the French Communist Party granted a central place to its intellectuals insofar as it was up to them to disseminate communist thought.²⁵ The role of communist intellectuals was thus to educate the workers, to form those who would later on assume responsibilities within the Party. The schools of the FCP proved this, for it was in these schools that intellectuals not only diffused the revolutionary ideology, but also spread the Party's political line. Highly political executives were thus trained, then mobilised at all levels of the communist hierarchy, from the cell to the section, and from the federation to the Central Committee. Real soldiers standing to attention, their role was in turn to disseminate communist thought and to control its strictest application within the Party. In tight ranks, the Party army could go on to assault French capitalist society.²⁶

In this context, communist intellectuals were the organists of the church-Party

²³ See ch. 2.

²⁴ Georges Marchais, *Le Parti communiste français s'adresse aux intellectuels: le changement avec vous* (Paris, Hôtel Sheraton, 9 June 1977); cf., among others, François Hincker, *Le Parti Communiste au carrefour: essai sur quinze ans de son histoire, 1965-1981* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), pp. 157-8.

²⁵ David S. Bell, 'Communism and French Intellectuals', *Modern and Contemporary France* (1993), 29.

²⁶ Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *Que faire?* French translation (Paris: Librairie de l'Humanité, 1925), pp. 88, 91.

which they served both as intellectuals and as communists.²⁷ As intellectuals, they had to resort to their knowledge and to their analytical faculties. As communists, it was their duty to keep in check their critical sense in order to follow and to legitimate the line of the Party they adhered to voluntarily. Thus, in the Party schools, they used the approved texts of communist literature in such a way as to strike the right note. They catalysed thought in one direction, then disseminated it with flawless harmony and perfect strength. During the Second World War, Stalin's organs emitted fire; in the period of the Cold War and the intensification of class struggle, those of the FCP disseminated a collective thought within the Party. And it was precisely this collectivisation of thought that the Party needed to unite its forces behind it. Any criticism became an attack on the group, on the common policy and on the collective ideology. Any disagreement was considered as dissent by a party which preferred uniform adherence to orthodox communist thought.

However, if on the one hand the Party tried to avoid any breach in its ideological system by channeling and unifying the thought of communists, it attempted on the other hand to make a precise distinction between intellectuals and workers. This distinction allowed it to act like a real puppeteer and to co-ordinate the functions of the former and the latter.²⁸ Thus if the workers needed the intellectuals both to enrich their political culture and to develop their revolutionary consciousness,²⁹ it was also true that, in the eyes of communist leaders, intellectuals needed the Party of the working class.

In order to prove to communist intellectuals that they needed the Party, communist leaders made a simple observation. The social and economic crisis which was

²⁷ Jacques Chambaz, 'Intellectuels, classe ouvrière: faire progresser l'alliance', *France Nouvelle*, 10 July 1978, p. 13.

²⁸ Etienne Balibar, 'La responsabilité des communistes', *Dialectiques*, no. 23 (1978), 27; Christine Buci-Glucksmann quoted in 'En publiant leurs interventions à la réunion de Vitry — Les intellectuels contestataires précisent leurs positions', *Le Monde*, 2 March 1979; Buci-Glucksmann's speech given at a meeting organised in Vitry by the FCP for 400 intellectuals on 9 and 10 December 1979, 'Brève histoire d'une déstalinisation impossible: sur les "retards" de 56, 68 et 78', in *Ouverture d'une discussion? (Rencontre de 400 intellectuels communistes à Vitry, 9 et 10 décembre 1979)*, (Paris: Maspero, 1979).

²⁹ Jacques Chambaz, 'Les communistes et les intellectuels', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 6-7 (June-July 1978), p. 31.

shaking France in the 1970s had an effect not only on the workers, but also on the intelligentsia. Communist and non-communists intellectuals therefore needed the Party on two levels. First, the Party offered them a protective space in which they could evolve, and second the project of communist society was their guarantee of a better future.³⁰

According to the Communist Party, the crisis of the 1970s affected intellectuals both personally and professionally. As Georges Marchais put it in 1977,

le système [capitaliste] actuel exploite et opprime plus que jamais les intellectuels, les atteint dans leurs conditions matérielles d'existence, entrave leurs possibilités d'épanouissement, mutile ou dévoie leur activité créatrice.³¹

The conclusion of the Party was beyond reproach. Like workers, intellectuals too had quantitative and qualitative claims which only the Party of the working class could meet.³² It was indeed the Party which acquired an experience in terms of social conflicts.³³ It was the Party which was at the forefront of popular demands,³⁴ and it was only the FCP which could unite workers and intellectuals in a common fight for socialism.³⁵ Intellectuals could thus rely on the reassuring protection of a FCP which,

³⁰ Waldeck-Rochet quoted in *La Nouvelle Critique*, no. 22 (March 1969) and reported in Roland Leroy, 'Le Parti Communiste, les intellectuels et la culture', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 12 (December 1970), 96.

³¹ Georges Marchais and Roland Leroy, *Pour la culture avec les intellectuels (discours prononcés lors du 25^e anniversaire de La Nouvelle Critique)*, (18 December 1977).

³² Jacques Chambaz, 'Classe ouvrière et intellectuels: une alliance féconde nécessaire', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 2 (February 1977), 24, 26-7; 'Les communistes et les intellectuels', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 6-7 (June-July 1978), 28-9; Guy Konopnicki, 'Ouvriers et intellectuels. Au jour le jour... et au-delà', *France Nouvelle*, 1 March 1976, p. 11; Wolikov, in Jean Burles, Lucien Marest and Serge Wolikov, 'Les intellectuels', *France Nouvelle*, 28 April - 4 May 1979, p. 8; Speech given by Georges Marchais, 'Intellectuels et ouvriers: l'alliance capitale', *L'Humanité*, 10 June 1977; Conseil National du PCF (9 et 10 février 1980), *Les intellectuels, la culture et l'avancée démocratique au socialisme (projet de résolution)*, (*L'Humanité*, 11 December 1979).

³³ Gérard Belloin, 'Un discours, une politique', *France Nouvelle*, June 1977, p. 10.

³⁴ Roland Leroy, 'Le parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture', 88.

³⁵ Danielle Bleitrach, 'Des changements à prendre en considération', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 2 (February 1980), 43.

while offering them a zone of expression through its publications³⁶ and its research centre,³⁷ went even further by guaranteeing them a brighter future.³⁸ This brighter future would be secured by socialism which could achieve it insofar as the project of society of the French Communist Party gave a predominant place to culture. Socialism would ensure that everyone could participate in cultural and intellectual life by freeing it from bourgeois hegemony. As Jacques Chambaz, who was in charge of the intellectuals' section at the end of the 1970s, wrote,

libérateur, le socialisme le sera en permettant une croissance nouvelle orientée vers la satisfaction des besoins matériels et intellectuels dans leur diversité [...]. Il fera de la culture, dans la diversité de ses composantes, un bien réellement partagé.³⁹

By depicting an ideal society in which intellectuals could really blossom, and in which culture could flourish, the Communist Party called for intellectual idealism. Culture in a socialist land was compared favorably to the petty materialistic capitalist world. Knowledge in a socialist country would be shared among all instead of being the privilege of the few. The Communist Party therefore brought hope. It gave intellectuals the unexpected chance to imagine, to change, and to build a cultural world on a par with their idealism.

However, in front of this display of flattering arguments, the answer of some intellectuals was not really the one that the FCP expected to hear. Far from uniting

³⁶ It was the case of *France Nouvelle* and *La Nouvelle Critique* which opened their columns to intellectuals.

³⁷ The *Espace Marx* is an example. It was previously called the *Institut de Recherche Marxiste*.

³⁸ Georges Marchais, *Le Parti communiste français s'adresse aux intellectuels: le changement avec vous* (Paris, Hôtel Sheraton, 9 June 1977).

³⁹ Jacques Chambaz, 'Classe ouvrière et intellectuels: une alliance féconde et nécessaire', 25; 'Des raisons nouvelles pour l'alliance', *France Nouvelle*, 1976, p. 24; 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

themselves around the Party, some dissident communist intellectuals like Althusser, Elleinstein and Pierre Daix, a man of letters, camped on their positions by asserting that intellectual activities should not be subordinated to the needs of the Party, and by demanding to play a more active role within the Party.

Communist intellectuals had a dual role in the 1970s. As members of a Communist Party which advocated a revolutionary social change, they were not only highly politicised, but they also belonged to the revolutionary battalion of the Party. As intellectuals only, they were specialised in a specific area of knowledge which led them to think in an objective way. And it was precisely this dual role which pushed them to be tugged between two very distinct positions. Either they considered that the intellectual could not be dissociated from the communist, and in that case they became the associates of the Leadership of the French Communist Party, or they considered that communist intellectuals should preserve their independence of judgement by dissociating the intellectual from the communist⁴⁰ and, as Althusser wrote, ‘[en agissant] [...] en conformité avec [leurs] convictions’.⁴¹

By subordinating their activities to the needs of the Party, communist intellectuals agreed to depoliticise themselves, and to play a relatively reduced role within the FCP, insofar as they allowed their thinking to be directed by the Leadership.⁴² It was indeed the Party which held supreme knowledge in the name of a Stalinist Marxist-Leninist theory which was meant to be ‘scientific’, therefore inflexible and undeniable. It was the Party leadership which determined the revolutionary political line members had to follow in tight ranks and to approve unconditionally. In this context, some communist

⁴⁰ Raymond Jean, ‘Politique et littérature’, *L’Humanité*, 12 May 1978.

⁴¹ Louis Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07, unpublished manuscripts.

⁴² Jorge Semprun quoted in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 15 June 1979.

intellectuals felt suffocated and diminished by their Party.⁴³ They were not short of expressions to describe this situation. From Althusser who wrote that ‘le PC traite ses intellectuels [comme des] valets’⁴⁴ to the writer Raymond Jean, who compared communist intellectuals to ‘[des] potiches d’honneur’, and to ‘[des] fleurs à la boutonnière’,⁴⁵ all these strong expressions served to convey their sadness, or even their anger towards a Party which, according to them, used intellectuals to boost itself. But it was a fact. Intellectuals such as Roger Vailland, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir⁴⁶ gave the French Communist Party a certain prestige which contributed to its popularity up to the 1970s. Unfortunately, the gilded coat-of-arms of the Party, which went together with the image of the USSR, lost its brightness little by little. Disenchanted intellectuals left the Party as early as the Soviet political trials of the 1940s,⁴⁷ the Red Army invasion of Hungary in 1956,⁴⁸ the Prague Coup in 1968, and finally the TV pictures of Siberian camps coupled with the Solzhenistyn Affair in 1974.⁴⁹ This slow exodus of communist intellectuals and fellow-travellers bled the Party white, for all these figureheads backed and legitimised communist policy, both nationally and internationally.

In the 1970s, the Communist Party could afford even less to lose its intellectuals insofar as the Cold War and the economic crisis intensified class struggle, and as the Union of the Left advanced the perspective of a Socialist France. The Party therefore gathered its intellectuals behind the Leadership by pushing them to think both as intellectuals and as communists. Any form of intellectual activity was put in the service of class struggle. Any writings were made in the name of class struggle. In this context,

⁴³ Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Le réveil des somnambules: le parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture (1956-1985)*, (Paris: Fayard, 1987), p. 45.

⁴⁴ Louis Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A27-01.05, unpublished manuscripts.

⁴⁵ Raymond Jean quoted in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 15 June 1979, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Roger Vailland was a member of the French Communist Party between 1953 and 1956; Sartre and de Beauvoir were fellow-travellers of the FCP.

⁴⁷ Caute, *The Fellow-Travellers*, ch. 8.

⁴⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘I condemn entirely and without any reservation the Soviet Aggression’, quoted in Caute, *ibid.*, p. 335. This condemnation was approved, among others, by de Beauvoir and Vercors.

⁴⁹ ‘Le parti de la classe ouvrière... et les intellectuels’, *Luttes et Débats*, January 1980, p. 33.

communist intellectuals who accepted the rules of the game of the Party submitted themselves consciously, or unconsciously, to a certain form of censorship.⁵⁰ In some cases — which were certainly relatively exceptional — as in Great Britain with Christopher Hill⁵¹ and in France with extremely conservative activists, this censorship took the form of a refusal to see clearly and to analyse the facts objectively if these went against Communism.⁵² If Russian famines were the so-called ‘invention of anti-communist propaganda’, the gulags were so-called ‘mere’ prison camps. The idealisation of Socialism could become excessive in the West, as it was to an even greater extent in the USSR, homeland of political distortions and lies.⁵³ This idealisation thus brought up the question of intellectual responsibility. But in 1970s France, if communist intellectuals could allow themselves neither to criticise their Party too much, nor to condemn the Soviet Union as a whole insofar as it could directly arm the FCP, some of them nonetheless refused to sacrifice their intellectual integrity to the Socialist cause.

Communist intellectuals who wanted to keep their own independent judgement faced two choices. Either, like Pierre Daix in 1974, they decided to leave the Communist Party in order to give free rein to their ideas outside any political shackles, or, like Jean Elleinstein, they remained in the FCP and entered into dissent by choosing to fight for greater freedom of expression inside the Party. However, if the question of independence of mind was raised by these intellectuals, the Party denied the very existence of the problem. Georges Marchais declared that ‘[le Parti] ne [veut] pas tenir l’art en laisse, le contrôler, le censurer’.⁵⁴ As for the Party official Guy Hermier and the philosopher Lucien Sève, they asserted that ‘rien ne nous est plus étranger que la volonté de régenter

⁵⁰ Georges Labica, ‘Le parti, les intellectuels: contribution à l’analyse d’un désordre’, in *Ouverture d’une discussion? (Rencontre de 400 intellectuels communistes à Vitry, 9 et 10 décembre 1979)*, (Paris: Maspero, 1979), pp. 88-9.

⁵¹ See ‘*Tourists of the Revolution - The people’s flag*’, BBC2, 25 March 2000.

⁵² David S. Bell, ‘Communism and French Intellectuals’, *Modern and Contemporary France* (1993), 28.

⁵³ Pierre Daix, *J’ai cru au matin* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1976), pp. 445-6.

⁵⁴ Marchais, ‘Intellectuels et ouvriers: l’alliance capitale’.

l'art.⁵⁵ [Nous nous interdisons de] distribuer de bonnes ou mauvaises notes.⁵⁶ There was no discord in this respect. No discord, no dissidence, the Party wanted to be open in the 1970s. But in practice, things were not as simple for the French Communist Party. Tied up by the CPSU, it was difficult for the FCP to accept openly the critical writings of communist intellectual dissidents, even more when they dealt with the Soviet Union. Pierre Daix's book, *Ce que je sais de Soljenitsyne*,⁵⁷ and Jean Elleinstein's *Histoire de l'URSS*⁵⁸ proved it.

It was in 1973 that the Solzhenitsyn Affair reached its full extent in the USSR, after *L'Archipel du Goulag*⁵⁹ had been published abroad. Violently pilloried for having exposed the world of Soviet prison camps, Solzhenitsyn was arrested in 1974, deprived of his citizenship, and expelled from the country. In France, reactions were quick and antagonistic. On the one hand, the FCP was forced to play its diplomatic card. On the other hand, Pierre Daix asserted his 'intransigence intellectuelle'⁶⁰ by publishing in 1973 his indictment against the Stalinist character of the Russian and French Communist Parties in *Ce que je sais de Soljenistyne*, and by leaving the Party in 1974.

Pierre Daix, who had discovered as early as 1953 the full horrors produced by the Stalinist terror thanks to Elsa Triolet,⁶¹ Aragon's companion, could no longer contain his indignation at the time of the French publication of *L'Archipel du Goulag* in 1973. Solzhenitsyn's book proved to be the final straw and pushed Daix to declare:

Je découvris [...] qu'en croyant défendre l'honneur de la cause [communiste]

⁵⁵ Guy Hermier quoted in Conseil National du PCF (9 et 10 février 1980), *Les intellectuels, la culture et l'avancée démocratique au socialisme*.

⁵⁶ Lucien Sève quoted in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 15 June 1979.

⁵⁷ Pierre Daix, *Ce que je sais de Soljenitsyne* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1973).

⁵⁸ Jean Elleinstein, *Histoire de l'URSS*, 4 vols (Paris, 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1975).

⁵⁹ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *L'Archipel du Goulag*, French Translation (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974).

⁶⁰ Daix, *J'ai cru au matin*, p. 448.

⁶¹ Daix, *Ce que je sais de Soljenistyne*, p. 12; in 1949, Pierre Daix, and other communist intellectuals and fellow travellers, testified against the Russian renegade civil servant Kravchenko, arguing that 'il n'existe pas de camps de concentration en Union soviétique', in Michel Winock, 'L'âge d'or du communisme français', p. 63.

j'avais hurlé avec les loups,⁶² [et je décidais] enfin [de mettre] mes actes en rapport avec ma vie et ma conscience,⁶³ [et] de me conformer à la vérité [...]. C'est, me semble-t-il, l'honnêteté d'un intellectuel.⁶⁴

He considered indeed that he had a moral obligation, as a man of letters, not to remain silent. The Solzhenitsyn Affair was the last straw. However, if as an individual it was possible for him to detach himself from what he called 'le mensonge',⁶⁵ and to adhere to the truth, the margin of manoeuvre of the FCP was, by contrast, rather limited.

As a political organisation, the French Communist Party could not allow itself to repudiate the Soviet model, which represented the Socialist ideal, without risking collapse. This preservation of Communist ideology was not only vital for the Party, but also relatively important insofar as the year of the Solzhenitsyn Affair was also that of the presidential elections. It is thus understandable that the Party criticised Pierre Daix's book, *Ce que je sais de Soljenistyne*, so pointedly, given that it cut to pieces the very reason for the existence of the FCP. Daix recognised this with the benefit of hindsight. In 1978, he wrote:

[L'] idéologie [du Parti] lui commande [...] de maintenir que l'URSS est la preuve du socialisme. En somme, il doit conserver au socialisme les charmes absolus de l'utopie, en le lavant de ses souillures temporelles, et convaincre qu'il n'a rien d'utopique.⁶⁶

The FCP was thus forced to moderate its remarks and to be two faced. In public, the

⁶² Daix, *Ce que je sais de Soljenistyne*, *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶³ Daix, *J'ai cru au matin*, p. 443.

⁶⁴ Daix, *ibid.*, p. 449.

⁶⁵ In *Des voies sous les décombres* ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], 1974), Solzhenitsyn asked communists 'not to live in a lie', quoted in Claude Durand, 'Le choc Soljenistyne', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 68.

⁶⁶ Pierre Daix, *La crise du PCF* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 63.

Party had no other option but to follow the USSR. In private, it could criticise the Soviet government's repressive grip on literature. Pierre Juquin proved the moderation and the realism which the Party could show in private by declaring in March 1974:

Voilà notre problème: comment faire comprendre aux intellectuels français que le fait de ne pas mettre 'S' en prison, c'est un progrès [...] Pourquoi 'ils' ne le publient pas? Il faut dire qu'en Russie, la littérature a toujours été une arme politique [...]. Et puis, il n'y a aucune tradition libérale dans ce pays. Les poètes en prison, c'est une donnée historique. Enfin, espérons qu'ils ne finiront pas par [...] mettre [Soljenitsyne] en taule. Je nous vois mal expliquer cela dans les universités.⁶⁷

However, if Literary Realism created a feeling of general discomfort within the French Communist Party, historical writings about the Soviet Union placed the spotlight firmly on the FCP. This rather unstable position, which was also rather uncomfortable for the FCP, was illustrated by Jean Elleinstein's book, *Histoire de l'URSS*. Published in several volumes up to 1978, this historical work could only embarrass the French Communist Party. Written by a communist historian, it gave an historical context to literary works like *L'Archipel du Goulag*. If it had been written by a non-communist historian, the political consequences of this history book would certainly have been relatively minor. Such an individual would have been presented as '[un] idéologue bourgeois'⁶⁸ who could only be expected to slander the USSR. But coming from a historian who was not only communist, but also a dissident, the criticisms were intolerable for the CPSU, and for the FCP which was forced to follow the stance adopted by his fellow party. In *Temps*

⁶⁷ Pierre Juquin quoted in André Harris, and Alain de Sédouy, *Voyage à l'intérieur du Parti Communiste* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1974), p. 12.

⁶⁸ Youri Sedov, 'Une falsification au lieu d'une étude objective', *Temps Nouveaux*, January 1977, p. 12.

Nouveaux, a Soviet magazine translated into French, several articles published between 1976 and 1978 by Youri Sedov attacked Jean Elleinstein violently. It is thus possible to read that '[son] ouvrage est émaillé d'erreurs de faits⁶⁹ [...] [et d'] énormités tout à fait déplacées de la part d'un homme qui se donne pour communiste.'⁷⁰ And on top of that, not content with having 'une imagination débridée',⁷¹ 'Elleinstein s'élève déjà carrément contre son parti'.⁷² This last argument could not have hit home any better with the FCP, and the reply was not long in coming. Obligated to protect the myth of the homeland of socialism, insofar as the FCP based its ideological and political action on it, Georges Marchais also accused the historian Elleinstein of 'falsifications' and 'ignorance'.⁷³ The position of communist historians was thus relatively difficult to sustain, their writings helping to revisit the history of the USSR, and also to expose skeletons in the Party's cupboard. This was why Elleinstein, who was acutely aware of the precarious position in which communist intellectuals found themselves, called for a diplomatic approach, while advocating independence of judgement. He wrote in 1976:

J'ai un problème de responsabilité. J'écris en mon nom personnel, pas au nom du PC. Mais il est naturel qu'en faisant ce travail j'aie quelque souci de la façon dont j'écris peut être reçue ou interprétée (sic.). C'est pourquoi je suis astreint non pas à l'art de la litote mais à une certaine prudence de vocabulaire.⁷⁴

No matter whether it was about 'verbal cautiousness', or 'literary verve', the problem

⁶⁹ Sedov, *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ Sedov's article, *ibid.*, mentioned in Jean Elleinstein, 'Continuons la discussion', *France Nouvelle*, 1976, p. 20.

⁷¹ Sedov, 'Une falsification au lieu d'une étude objective', p. 12.

⁷² Youri Sedov, 'Revenir à Eduard Bernstein? Elleinstein découvre son jeu', *Temps Nouveaux*, May 1978, p. 15.

⁷³ Jean Elleinstein, 'L'avenir des communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 September 1978, p. 50.

⁷⁴ Jean Elleinstein, 'Un communiste juge les communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, p. 74.

faced by communist intellectuals was to measure precisely the impact of their writings. Overseen by the FCP, they risked exposing themselves to the wrath of the Party at the slightest faux pas. Overseen by the CPSU, the FCP risked, in turn, hearing the Russian bear roar if it granted too much freedom of critical expression to its intellectuals. And it was precisely this domino effect which suffocated communist intellectuals. Quartered in their cells, confined to their own specialisms,⁷⁵ and relegated to the role of legitimists of the Party's policies, communist intellectuals only desired one thing. They wanted to contribute actively to policy making within the French Communist Party.⁷⁶

Outside the French Communist Party, communist intellectuals had at their disposal a large area of expression which allowed them to assert their roles as instructors, analysts and critics. They could, therefore, develop a personal and intellectual vision of their surroundings, whether in the political, economic, social or cultural fields. This proliferation of ideas, this capacity to adapt themselves to various situations, and to analyse them, constituted the very richness of the intellectuals. It was precisely this liberal practice which was proposed for the Party by dissident communist intellectuals. They wanted to replace the compartmentalization of ideas with open discussion.⁷⁷ They aimed to dispense with ideological conformism and to substitute their own personal contributions. In so doing, they hoped to make communist ideology more relevant to modern conditions. Numerous expressions were used by communist intellectual dissidents in the 1970s to show their desire to break free from the shackles that the Party had imposed upon them. The writer Raymond Jean wrote in 1979:

[Les intellectuels doivent être] profondément liés aux luttes du peuple et à sa vie réelle, capables d'analyse et d'écoute. Donc des intellectuels critiques qui, par

⁷⁵ Gérard Belloin, *Nos rêves camarades* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p. 183.

⁷⁶ Belloin, *ibid.*, p. 183

⁷⁷ Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts; cf. our ch. 1.

définition, ne sont pas la docilité même.⁷⁸

In addition, Althusser warned the Party against the risk of losing its intellectuals if it did not give them a more active role to play. He wrote in a manuscript:

Dans tous les domaines [culturels et intellectuels], le bilan de l'activité du parti est maigre ou négatif malgré quelques réussites provisoires. Ce n'est pas un hasard. Car le propre des intellectuels dans le parti français est de traverser le parti rapidement sans y demeurer.⁷⁹

This condemnation of the Party was beyond appeal, for the only ways for communist intellectuals to regain their freedom of expression were either to leave the Party or to enter into dissent and face expulsion. This was precisely what happened in 1980. Althusser left the Party and Elleinstein was expelled, for their only faults were that they refused to transform their works into political and ideological instruments placed in the hands of the FCP. They refused to adhere to the mystification of the Soviet Union⁸⁰ and they refused to conform to the Socialist Realism which was tacitly applied within the ranks of the FCP. In the 1970s, both Althusser and Elleinstein confronted the Party in order to keep their intellectual independence and to give a greater role to communist intellectuals within the Party. But at the end, if they were right to enter into dissent, they both lost and found themselves outside the Party. Despite this failure, Althusser and Elleinstein had a profound impact on the Party in the long term.

⁷⁸ Raymond Jean quoted in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 15 June 1979, p. 15.

⁷⁹ Louis Althusser, *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e congrès)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A24-01.01/02 to -02.01, unpublished manuscripts.

⁸⁰ See ch. 6.

To conclude, in the 1970s, the French Communist Party juggled with two very distinct policies. On the one hand it centred its action on *l'ouvriérisme* by appealing to the class consciousness of its activists.⁸¹ On the other hand, faced with either a haemorrhage from its ranks of communist intellectuals or open criticisms from them, the Party tried to bind the intellectuals more closely to it. The leaders of the FCP walked therefore on a tightrope. They risked making a faux-pas at any time. Too much *ouvriérisme* could provoke a feeling of marginalization among communist intellectuals. Too much intellectualism could have led in turn to a feeling of frustration among the workers. A balance between the two was thus desirable, although relatively precarious. It became even more precarious as a national inquiry showed in the mid 1970s that intellectuals were more inclined to vote for the Socialist Party than for the FCP, and a new wave of intellectual discontent swept the Party at the end of the 1970s.⁸² And it was precisely these two blows given to the Party which pushed the Leadership of the FCP to make a partial retreat to its old *positions ouvriéristes* and to distrust communist intellectuals. Intellectuals were those who the Leninist-Stalinist practice of the Party traditionally placed in the same ranks as the 'bourgeois'. They were also those who were often the cause of internal conflicts.⁸³ Workers therefore represented a positive value in the eyes of the Party, which was and wished to remain the Party of the working class.

It would have been in the interest of the FCP to have continued to attract intellectuals. It would have been desirable for the Party to have retained its appeal to large numbers of fellow travellers. These intellectual figures made it a different party, which was unique in its own way, and which certainly captivated many other people. By the 1970s, the gradual strengthening of the Brezhnev regime's grip over its satellite

⁸¹ See ch. 4.

⁸² François Hincker, *Le Parti Communiste au carrefour: essai sur quinze ans de son histoire, 1965-1981* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), pp. 158-9.

⁸³ Jean-Pierre Gaudard, *Les orphelins du PC* (Paris: Belfond, 1986), pp. 103-4.

countries, such as Czechoslovakia and Poland,⁸⁴ and the French economic crisis, pushed the FCP to bind its troops more closely to its Leadership in the name of international proletarianism and class struggle. In this context, the FCP could not accept the criticisms of communist dissidents — even if they were pertinent — without risking internal desintegration, and political intervention by the Soviet Union. However, it was this suppression of internal discussion which ended up harming the Party in the long term, as for communist intellectuals, this position was unacceptable. Althusser noticed it around 1982-83. At that time, he wrote:

Et nous mêmes, tout les premiers il [le Parti] nous remettait à notre place, nous qui avions eu la prétention de dire ce que nous pensions savoir, il nous rendait à notre silence définitif. Oui, définitif, car maintenant plus rien n'est possible comme avant.⁸⁵

The conclusion of Althusser was far-sighted, for even after the opening up of the FCP in the 1990s, some former communist intellectual dissidents who had left the Party still refused to come back.⁸⁶ Even the 30th Congress of the Party in March 2000, which presented itself as marking the advent of a 'new' reformed Communist Party, and which definitely buried its past Stalinist practices, did not deal with the question of the role of communist intellectuals within the Party.

⁸⁴ Examples include the suppression of dissent in Poland, after the strikes by Polish workers in 1970, and the undermining of opposition to the Husak regime in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. The other satellite countries were the GDR, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungaria and Albania.

⁸⁵ Louis Althusser, *Sur la mort du PCF (Mort et survie du PCF)*, (1982-83?), Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A29-01.05, unpublished manuscripts.

⁸⁶ Claude Llabrès (a former French communist dissident), 'Retourner au PCF? Je suis mieux dehors', *Libération*, 30 December 1998, p. 4.

CHAPTER 4

The social role of the FCP
and its failure to adjust to social change

The French Communist Party established itself as the party of the working class as from its foundation in 1920.¹ Bolshevised by the Third Communist International and placed under the domination of the USSR, the first ‘proletarian state’, the FCP became an *ouvriériste* party as much in its structure as in its ideology. Thus, in 1925, workers started replacing middle-class members as communist Congress delegates² — as an attempt by the Party to wipe away any perverse ‘bourgeois’ element from its organisation — and in 1936 the Party launched a campaign against the rich, ‘who ate the bread of the workers’.³

As a result of this *ouvriériste* orientation, an increasingly larger number of French workers started seeing the Party as the sole defender of their economic and social interests, the only organisation to frame and shape their lives, and the only political party they could call their own. They started seeing it as a party worth fighting for — and for good reasons. The FCP not only promised them *des lendemains qui chantent*⁴ at the image of the USSR, the socialist heaven.⁵ The FCP also swore that ‘défendre les

¹ The creation of the FCP, then called the SFIC, resulted from the scission of the SFIO at the Tours Congress of December 1920 over the adherence to 21 conditions of the Third Communist International; cf., among others, Georges Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste sous la troisième république (1975-1940)*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963), pp. 228-35; see our ch. 1.

² At the time of the FCP’s 5th Congress; cf. Stéphane Courtois, ‘PCF: le parti de Moscou’, *L’Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 43.

³ 8^e Congrès du PCF, *Quatre années de lutte pour l’unité, pour le pain, la liberté et la paix (rapport d’activité du Comité Central)*, (Villeurbanne, 22-25 January 1936).

⁴ Expression used by Paul Vaillant-Couturier in the 1930s. Vaillant-Couturier was a French journalist and a politician who joined the Central Committee of the FCP in 1921; see our ch. 3.

⁵ See ch. 6.

travailleurs est la raison d'être du Parti communiste'⁶ and granted workers a leading role in its policy-making process.⁷

In this context, French communist intellectuals did not hesitate to recognise that workers deserved to occupy '[une] place prépondérante'⁸ within the FCP and consequently to remain in the shadow of communist workers — out of guilt at being too 'bourgeois', out of pure *esprit de sacrifice*, or simply in order to feel more at home in the Party of the working class. Roger Garaudy, the communist intellectual who became a pariah within his own Party in 1970,⁹ justified this position in 1945. He wrote then that

[la] classe ouvrière a prouvé [...] qu'elle avait le sens le plus aigu des responsabilités nationales. Il lui incombe une responsabilité spirituelle: 'La relève historique de la lumière et de la grandeur.'¹⁰

At that time, this view could only have pleased the leaders of the French Communist Party and if, from a non-communist point of view, it seemed both too extreme to be completely genuine and too religiously phrased to be taken seriously, Garaudy's view was nonetheless broadly shared by communist intellectuals — that is, until the 1970s.

In the 1970s, communist intellectuals like Louis Althusser and Jean Elleinstein started reproaching the FCP for going too far in its *ouvriérisme*. For them, the Party fell into the pit of miserabilism by associating workers with paupers, and consequently made

⁶ Georges Marchais quoted in 'Renforcer notre Parti en qualité et en quantité — Les réponses de G. Marchais aux journalistes', *L'Humanité*, 22 June 1978.

⁷ Isaac Aviv, 'The French Communist Party from 1958 to 1978: Crisis and Endurance', *Western European Politics*, 2, no. 2 (1979), 179.

⁸ Expression used in 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

⁹ In 1968, Garaudy criticised the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia which was approved by the FCP.

¹⁰ Roger Garaudy, 'Une classe montante exige la grandeur nationale', *Cahiers du Communisme* (August 1945), quoted in Winock, 'L'âge d'or du communisme', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 61.

the mistake of running an extreme *ouvriériste* policy which, although adapted to an industrial era, had become anachronistic in the post-industrial 1970s.

In this context, the first part of this chapter will define the social role of the French Communist Party as a counter-society and as a protector of the interests of the working class. The second part will examine the criticisms expressed by Althusser and Elleinstein in relation to the Party's extreme *ouvriérisme*.

In the 1970s, the French Communist Party played an important social role in France insofar as it was the only political party which incarnated the working class.¹¹ This representation of the popular class could be found at two levels. First, the FCP's internal structure and satellite organisations allowed its members to evolve in a world dedicated to them and seemingly created in the image of their communist idealism. Second, the Communist Party marked itself out from other French political parties, insofar as it was the Party which always placed itself in the forefront when it came to protecting and defending the interests of the working class.¹²

First, French communist society formed a world which was apart from the rest of society, structured, and organised into a hierarchy. Communists were involved in this counter-society as much in their daily lives as professionally for some of them.

Daily, the FCP was the party of the *camarades*¹³ who had to stick to the obligatory *tu* form, who joined various communist clubs,¹⁴ distributed propaganda leaflets, put electoral posters up and sold *L'Humanité*. It was the party of workers, of

¹¹ Régis Debray, *Lettre ouverte aux communistes français et à quelques autres* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), pp. 44-5; Etienne Fajon, *L'Union est un combat* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1975), p. 45; Jean Dru, 'Perspectives sociales et politiques', *Politique Aujourd'hui*, February 1979, p. 67.

¹² 22^e Congrès, *Ce que veulent les communistes pour la France (document adopté par le 22^e Congrès)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); Georges Marchais, *Vers le changement démocratique (rapport au Comité Central des 31 mars et 1^{er} avril 1977)* and in *L'Humanité*, 1st April 1977.

¹³ The term 'camarade' has been replaced by 'copain' in the last few years.

¹⁴ Winock, 'L'âge d'or du communisme français', p. 61: FCP's clubs included among others 'les Vaillants et les Vaillantes,' for teenagers, 'les Jeunesses Communistes' and women's clubs.

those living in council houses or in deprived areas, and of those who were members of the CGT.¹⁵ Being communist meant belonging to a tightly knitted, and admittedly very cocooning family.

This picture of the communist counter-society was very rosy for some communists — but for others, it had a darker side. Indeed, it ostracised those communists who did not want to live in a purely communist world, those who rejected this form of marginalisation from the rest of French society, and those who preferred to move in broader circles. It ostracised those communists who legitimately asserted their independence of thought and action¹⁶ precisely because the FCP associated the harmony of its counter-society with uniformity of thought and action among its members when, by contrast, it should have based this group harmony on an enriching and more forward looking diversity. Indeed, only a diversity of communist thought and action could have opened up the Party to the rest of French society and led it to break with the rigidity of its structure and of its ideology.¹⁷ However, FCP leaders would never have allowed this: a closed-up communist counter-society was easier for them to manipulate and to mould according to their own changes in strategy.

Professionally, the FCP represents the working class at every single grade of its organisation, including at the highest levels of its decision-making body.¹⁸ Georges Marchais, who himself took advantage of that system as both a former metal worker and

¹⁵ Ariane Chemin, 'Intimités communistes', *Le Monde*, 19 December 1996, p. 13: Gérard, a communist and a former metal worker/tool-maker, declared that in the 1970s he gave everything to the Party: 'Pour la CGT, pour le parti, Gérard a gardé toutes ses soirées. Quand il voulait prendre une journée pour aller à la pêche, le parti disait non.'

¹⁶ Patrick Apel-Muller, Pierre Barbancey, Dominique Bègles and Alain Raynal, 'Six communistes, six opinions', *L'Humanité*, 26 June 1996, p. 3: Jean-Michel Turmel, a communist since 1978, admitted having a right-wing friend, '[mais] je n'ai pas toujours été comme cela', he declared, 'j'avoue que j'ai parfois fait du suivisme, un peu écrasé par les adhérents plus expérimentés'; see our ch. 3.

¹⁷ See previous chapters.

¹⁸ Ronald Tiersky, *French Communism, Eurocommunism and Soviet Power*, in *Eurocommunism and Détente*, ed. by Rudolf L. Tökés (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1978), pp. 146-7; Hughes Portelli, 'La voie nationale des PC français et italien', *Projet*, no. 106 (June 1976), 667.

the General Secretary of the Party,¹⁹ justified this situation by declaring in his report to the Central Committee meeting of 1976:

C'est dans le Parti communiste que se retrouvent les ouvriers, et qu'ils y occupent à tous les échelons la place prépondérante qui correspond à leur rôle dans la société, à leur responsabilité d'avant-garde dans le combat pour le socialisme, à leur fermeté dans la lutte de classe.²⁰

Viewed from that angle, it is certainly true that in contrast to other French political parties, which had a more elitist form of representation, and to French society, in which the social mobility of the working class was relatively limited,²¹ the Communist Party's organisational ladder had the merit of being both meritocratic and upwardly mobile for workers.²² However, viewed from a different angle, what looked like a very attractive system presented two problems.

On the one hand the FCP's promotional system was flawed: the communist who wanted to go up the Party's ladder had to fit in like a piece in a jigsaw. Ideological conformism was the price to pay for that. In that sense, an ambitious conformist worker had excellent chances of going high up in the Party's organisation, whereas any independently minded worker — notwithstanding any white collar employee or 'bourgeois' intellectual for that matter — had no chance of going anywhere at all. In all

¹⁹ It is also worth noting that Marchais' predecessors, Thorez and Waldeck-Rochet, had respectively occupied the posts of employee in a mining company and of market garden worker before leading the FCP.

²⁰ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France*; Portelli, 'La voie nationale des PC français et italien', 667.

²¹ Claude Thélot, *Tel père, tel fils?* (Paris: [n. pub.], 1982), p. 46, in Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 116: in 1977, 58% of sons of workers became workers, 14% became white-collar employees, 11% middle-managers, 7% became artisans or shopkeepers, 6% worked as senior managers, 2% were in liberal professions and 1% became farmers; Serge Bernstein and Pierre Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle: de 1974 à nos jours*, vol. 5 (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1994), p. 216.

²² Aviv, 'The French Communist Party from 1958 to 1978: Crisis and Endurance', 179; Maurice Goldring, *L'accident* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1978), p. 165.

accounts, the consequences of such a system, which tended to clone its leaders over and over again, and then stereotyped their attitudes and reactions towards the ‘outside’ world, were negative for the long-term evolution of the Party. Indeed, even if communist leaders could call this self-reproducing system a ‘consistent’, or even a ‘constant’ Party line over the years, the fact remains that in order for the FCP to be ‘plus fort’ and ‘plus influent’²³ in the French society and political scene, it had to create a ‘new breed’ of leaders able to rejuvenate its ideology and its practice — and in the 1970s, this was not the case.

On the other hand, by granting ‘[une] place prépondérante’²⁴ to the workers within its organisation, the Party ironically reproduced on a smaller scale the inverted class structure of the capitalist society it kept denouncing as being class ridden, and thus unequal. As Althusser put it, in a rather bold and unexpected manner for a communist, ‘le parti est, dans sa structure et son fonctionnement hiérarchique, exactement calqué sur l’Etat bourgeois.’²⁵ Indeed, the social fragmentation of the capitalist system — which relegates the working class to the bottom end of the social ladder while placing intellectuals in the middle, or even in the upper strata — was inverted in the FCP’s world, thus creating a two-speed communist counter-society, and even a ‘regime of castes’²⁶ within its organisation. In this context, the worker was the Party’s ‘worthy’ who was served by ‘valets’,²⁷ as Althusser put it when referring to the other communist white collars and intellectuals like himself.

Second, in the 1970s, the French Communist Party made the defence of working

²³ Expression used by André Vieuguet in ‘Pourquoi un parti communiste plus influent, plus fort, plus actif?’, *Cahiers du Communisme*, February-March 1976.

²⁴ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France*.

²⁵ Louis Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A27-01.05, unpublished manuscripts

²⁶ Louis Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980): A portée de la main peut être le communisme*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07, unpublished manuscripts.

²⁷ Expression used by Althusser in *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts.

class interests its Trojan horse. This decision was motivated by two factors. On the one hand, under the leadership of François Mitterrand, the Socialist Party forced the Communist Party to move towards the left by biting into its middle-strata voters.²⁸ The CP was, therefore, cornered into an *ouvriériste* entrenchment which, from a communist point of view, both protected the Party's specific identity²⁹ and guaranteed that the Tours Congress of 1920 would not be reversed — meaning that the SP and the CP would remain distinctly different. On the other hand, the French economic crisis which resulted from the 1973 oil crisis, allowed the Party to strengthen its position as the defender of the working class.³⁰ Indeed, if Marx had written that 'when society is in decline, the workers suffer most severely,'³¹ the Party was ready to come to their rescue. In that sense, it can be argued that if, as from 1973-74 onwards, the 1970s looked both socially and economically dark for France in general, for the FCP, by contrast, these were golden times — and for a good reason. The Party's rhetoric was perfectly adapted to a situation of crisis, which meant that it did not have to adapt its strategy to a new or unknown situation. It just had to apply the Marxist analysis and discourse to the then contemporary period. Besides, this also explains why the Party could avoid looking for diversity of thought among its members and its leadership. Everything was pre-established in Marxist texts, and consequently the Party's ideology was perfectly in step with France's economic situation in the 1970s, and with its social condition.

On economic grounds, the Party took the view that workers were crashing headlong into industrial restructuring — and in a context of delocalisation, development

²⁸ See ch. 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Jacques Chambaz, *Réalités et stratégie: le PCF, une démarche nouvelle* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions Sociales, 1990), p. 45.

³¹ Karl Marx, *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. English translation (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 71.

of automated production lines and computerisation of tasks,³² this was a perfectly legitimate observation. Indeed, this was the case, for instance, in traditional sectors such as the textile industry, and in motor industries like car manufacturing and building trade, in which the FCP had a stronghold³³ — and thus, from a rather cynical point of view, a strong interest in keeping these workers going as they fed the Party's numerous *cellules d'entreprises* as well as its agitator on the ground for the workers' social and economic claims, that is to say the CGT trade-union. However, one has to admit that, by fighting for the creation of jobs, the reduction of working hours and the improvement of working conditions, the Party played a positive role in French society.³⁴ Indeed, the section of the working class, which was the most threatened by industrial restructuring, could find a legitimate voice in the FCP. The Party provided their only voice on the French political scene. It was the only resort they had to make themselves heard on a national level, for right wing parties were not interested in them and the Socialist Party had left this *ouvriériste* corner to the CP.

On social grounds, the French Communist Party based its strategy on the *prolétarianisation* and the marginalization of the working class in the 1970s. Arguably, at that time, this conception was correct, for on the one hand the economic crisis threw a section of the working class into the innermost depths of unemployment,³⁵ underemployment and low breadwinning,³⁶ while on the other, the modernisation of production systems created new job demands for specialised workers. Forgotten by

³² Jean Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme* (Paris: Julliard, 1979), p. 86; cf. Emmanuel Todd's analysis of the 1970s economic crisis in Arnaud Spire, 'Emmanuel Todd: révolte et décontraction', *L'Humanité*, 26 June 1996, p. 6.

³³ Bernstein and Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle*, p. 206; Emmanuel Todd, *La nouvelle France* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988), p. 190; Jean Dru, 'Perspectives sociales et politiques', *Politique Aujourd'hui*, no. 7-8 (1979), 67.

³⁴ Alain Duhamel, in 'Un nouveau communisme, est-ce possible?', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, 25-26 March 2000.

³⁵ Bernstein and Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle*, p. 218: workers made up about 62% of all unemployed.

³⁶ Jean Fabre, 'La crise de la société française, la crise de l'impérialisme' (report to the Party conference on 'La crise de la société française et la crise dans le monde capitaliste'), *L'Humanité*, 24 May 1975.

traditional parties, which preferred to centre their strategy on a more numerous middle class,³⁷ and marginalized by a capitalist society basing its values on money and on the possession of material goods, the workers would have fallen through the net of the system³⁸ if the FCP had not drawn attention to their daily problems.³⁹ The French Communist Party fulfilled, therefore, a useful function for the working class. It was indeed thanks to the Party that those who were at the bottom of the social ladder had access to the political world.⁴⁰ It was thanks to the Party that a certain balance was reached in terms of political representation, whether it was within the Union of the Left,⁴¹ that is to say by contrast to a non *ouvriériste* SP, or at the level of the general parliamentary spectrum.

In this 1970s context, communist intellectuals found the FCP's role, as defender of the economic and social interests of the working class, perfectly justified: as communists first and foremost, they were in complete agreement with their Party — and this was even the case between the Party's left and right guard, meaning between the Marxist Althusser and the Eurocommunist Elleinstein. Althusser — who was all too happy to be given the opportunity to expand on Marx's ideas, to attack the 'bourgeois' state and to show why the notion of dictatorship of the proletariat should have been kept by the Party⁴² — thus wrote in 1977 that 'les travailleurs font chaque jour l'expérience concrète de l'intervention de l'Etat bourgeois dans l'exploitation économique [...]'.⁴³ As

³⁷ Sofres survey mentioned by David S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 208: in 1978, the FCP's electorate was made up by 49% workers, 20% unemployed, and 19% white-collar employees; François Platone, 'Les électors législatifs sous la Cinquième République', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, no. 42 (1992), 301-14.

³⁸ Duhamel, 'Un nouveau communisme, est-ce possible?'.

³⁹ Report of René Piquet to the Central Committee, *L'Humanité*, 30-31 March 1976; Georges Marchais, *Pour gagner et changer vraiment, un seul moyen, votez communiste le 12 mars (rapport présenté à la conférence nationale des 7 et 8 janvier 1978)*, p. 27; Marchais, *Vers le changement démocratique (rapport au Comité Central des 31 mars et 1^{er} avril 1977)*.

⁴⁰ Duhamel, 'Un nouveau communisme, est-ce possible?'; Jean Burles, Roger Martelli and Serge Wolikow, *Les communistes et leur stratégie* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1981), p. 213.

⁴¹ Duhamel, *ibid.*

⁴² See ch. 5.

⁴³ Louis Althusser, *22^e Congrès* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), pp. 40-1.

for Elleinstein, he explained, with directness, in 1981 that

[le PCF] est le porte-voix des travailleurs, la caisse de résonance de leur mécontentement. Ils ne votent pas pour qu'il gouverne, mais pour affirmer leur volonté de voir s'améliorer leurs conditions de vie. Ils ne sont ni marxistes ni communistes, mais ils votent pour le Parti qui les défend.⁴⁴

Elleinstein's statement was blunt and risky for a communist, but as a well-established intellectual dissident, he had nothing to lose by putting the Party's patience to the test one more time — and he certainly did that. The FCP leadership could only disagree with Elleinstein's statement for, as far as it was concerned, the Party had done everything in the past ten to fifteen years to be perceived by the general public as a future party of government. Its slow, but secure acceptance of the institutions and practices of the Fifth Republic,⁴⁵ as well as its involvement in the Union of the Left⁴⁶ and its *Programme Commun de Gouvernement* proved this. However, Elleinstein's point was well founded. Part of the communist vote was a protest vote⁴⁷ against economic and social conditions, as well as against the established institutional power — and this vote was volatile,⁴⁸ thus unreliable.

Anyway, whatever these points of contention were in the 1970s, the fact remains that at that time, Elleinstein and Althusser did agree in general terms with the communist

⁴⁴ Jean Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!* (Paris: Belfond, 1981), p. 159.

⁴⁵ The FCP officially accepted political pluralism in 1964, political alternance in 1972 and democratic passage to socialism in 1976; cf. Jean Baudoin, 'L'assimilation progressive de la Constitution de 1958 par le Parti Communiste Français', *Revue française de science politique* (1986), 802-3; see our introduction.

⁴⁶ Baudoin, *ibid.*, 805; see our ch. 7.

⁴⁷ It is also worth noting that protest votes can also go to the French National Front; cf. Todd, *La nouvelle France* : 'Le Front National est certainement la droite la plus prolétarienne jamais observée en France', p. 269.

⁴⁸ In 1926, Pierre Sémard already called the FCP 'un parti-passoire'; quoted in Annie Kriegel, *Les communistes français* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p. 32; Kriegel also wrote in her book that 'la fluctuation des effectifs [...] est [...] particulièrement forte dans le parti communiste', p. 32.

leadership's analysis of the economic crisis and with the importance of the Party's social role on the French political scene. However, when it came to the way the Party acted towards the working class, the pattern was completely different: Elleinstein and Althusser were no longer in tune with their Party leadership.

For Elleinstein and Althusser, the Party leadership made two fatal mistakes, first by adopting an extreme *ouvriériste* attitude towards the working class, and second by failing to recognise the state of *déprolétarianisation*, or even relative *embourgeoisement*, of the working class in the 1970s.

First, for Elleinstein and Althusser, the *ouvriériste* attitude of the French Communist Party was illustrated by its campaign 'against the poverty of the working class'.⁴⁹ This campaign was officially launched at the Party's 22nd Congress of 1976 by Georges Marchais who did not hesitate to assert, in front of his fellow delegates, that 'les travailleurs ont le sens de la dignité. Ils n'aiment pas "tendre la main." Pour eux, la misère, la pauvreté ne s'affichent pas. Elles se cachent'.⁵⁰

Marchais' statement was blunt, it sounded heartfelt, and in all accounts it was correct to some extent. Indeed, as we have seen previously, in the 1970s, certain categories of workers were pulled down the social ladder both by industrial mutations and by the economic crisis which hit France as from 1973-74. However, Marchais' statement had to be put in perspective. Considering Mitterrand's strategy of cornering the FCP in the left of the political spectrum, by biting into a large section of its middle of

⁴⁹ This campaign was coupled with another one aimed at 'faire payer les riches': cf. Georges Marchais, *Parlons franchement* (Paris: Grasset, 1977), p. 53 and *L'espoir au présent* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1980), p. 77; *L'Humanité*, 27 January 1978.

⁵⁰ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France*; cf. 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979); Paul Laurent, 'Regards pour 1977', *France Nouvelle*, 1977, p. 7: it is also worth noting that, in 1976, Marchais contradicted himself. On the one hand, he associated the working class with the 'proletariat' in his campaign against poverty. On the other hand, he partly justified the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat by stating that the 'proletariat' was far too limited a term to be kept insofar as it referred exclusively to the poorest core of the working class; see our ch. 5.

the range electorate, the French Communist Party had no other alternative but to adopt an *ouvriériste* policy. Marchais' statement was, therefore, far from being gratuitous. On the contrary, it was a very interested act. Indeed, in order to promote its *ouvriériste* policy, the Party had to make the workers believe that French society and the other political parties vilified them whereas, by contrast, the FCP praised them and was their natural representative. But whatever the motivations of the Party leadership, Elleinstein and Althusser strongly disagreed with its *ouvriériste* policy, and they did not hesitate to voice their criticisms.

On the one hand, the criticisms expressed by Elleinstein and Althusser were based on the fact that in the 1970s, there was not one working class, which was so-called 'poor' for that matter, but that there were rather several different working classes. Althusser thus asserted in 1978 that 'la classe ouvrière n'est ni un tout, ni homogène, ni dépourvue par on ne sait quel miracle de contradictions internes'⁵¹ — a statement Elleinstein expanded on in 1979 by writing:

Il faut distinguer naturellement les différentes catégories d'ouvriers [...]. Or, pendant la campagne électorale de 1978, on a entendu Georges Marchais dénoncer avec force les dix-sept millions de pauvres, c'est certain, mais ce n'est pas le cas des ouvriers qualifiés ni même la plupart des ouvriers spécialisés.⁵²

The remarks expressed by Althusser and Elleinstein were, by all accounts, correct. Indeed, contrary to what the FCP leadership thought, not all communist workers could be considered as being 'poor'.⁵³ If some of them did live below the poverty line, most of

⁵¹ Louis Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le Parti Communiste* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), p. 98.

⁵² Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, p. 29.

⁵³ François Hincker, *Le Parti Communiste au carrefour: essai sur quinze ans de son histoire, 1965-1981* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), p. 156.

them did not. Consequently, communist leaders made the mistake of putting all workers in the same basket. They considered that the working class was united⁵⁴ and uniform — meaning that it formed one single homogeneous group — when, in reality, it was heterogeneous. In the 1970s, there was, broadly speaking, a lower working class — whose members could, admittedly, fall through the poverty trap at any time, even more so in a period of recession like the one which hit France after the 1973 oil crisis — a middle and an upper working class which was relatively close to the bottom end of the middle classes in terms of income and behavioural patterns.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the criticisms expressed by Elleinstein and Althusser were based on the Party's parallel between the workers and 'the poor' — an association they found both irrelevant, from a 1970s perspective, and detrimental to the workers' dignity. Elleinstein thus wrote in *Le Nouvel Observateur* that 'la composition de la classe ouvrière n'est plus celle du prolétariat [de] Marx [...] ni celui [de] Lénine'⁵⁶ and Althusser asserted in *Le Monde* that

la classe ouvrière [...] ne se reconnaît pas spontanément dans la 'pauvreté', notion qui vient du XIX^e siècle et en deçà, avec sa surcharge de philanthropie ou d'assistance.⁵⁷

Their remarks were, again, correct. By referring to the workers as the 'poor', and by lowering them to the rank of the down-and-outs, communist leaders made the mistake of

⁵⁴ Chambaz, *Réalités et stratégie: le PCF, une démarche nouvelle*, p. 124; A. Insel, 'La prise du pouvoir par les travailleurs', *Luttes et Débats*, March 1979, p. 25; Guy Hermier, 'Rapport introductif', in *Les intellectuels, la culture et la révolution*, ed. by Conseil National du PCF (Bobigny, 9 and 10 February 1980), (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1980).

⁵⁵ Such as, among others, consumption habits and hobbies.

⁵⁶ Jean Elleinstein, 'Un communiste juge les communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, p. 64 and *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 212; Jean-Marie Domenach, *Enquête sur les idées contemporaines* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), pp. 25-6.

⁵⁷ Louis Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste*, pp. 63-4; cf. letter written by a worker to his federal section in Michel Cardoze, *Nouveau voyage à l'intérieur du PCF* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1986), p. 149.

looking at the 1970s from a late nineteenth century point of view. They fell back on a Marxist analysis which not only turned the clock back nearly a century, by viewing the workers as an industrial proletariat, but which was also incompatible with the *deprolétarisation*,⁵⁸ or even the relative *embourgeoisement*⁵⁹ of the working class in the 1970s. Consequently, the French Communist Party remained a party of the past, a dinosaur of *ouvriériste* politics, precisely when it should have tried to become a more modern, flexible and adaptable party. Arguably, this was in some ways a more comfortable, and rather less risky, position for communist leaders than trying to keep up to date with the social transformations that were being experienced by the working class. Indeed, in order to keep up to date with the *déprolétarisation* and the subsequent *embourgeoisement* of the working class, communist leaders would have had both to put the *ouvriérisme* behind them and to move towards the right, meaning where most of its voters could be found, and also where the Socialist Party was looming. This strategy would have been risky for the FCP — but, in the 1970s, communist leaders were neither ready to confront the SP on that ground, nor willing to move away from their *ouvriériste* policy.

Second, in the 1970s, both Althusser and Elleinstein criticised the *passéiste* attitude of the French Communist Party. Althusser warned communist leaders that

you have to pay the most careful attention to what the masses [...] have in their minds as a result of their material, ideological and political conditions of existence [...] the masses [must be] able to recognise their own will in the line proposed to them.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ronald Tiersky, 'Le PCF, parti du passé ou parti d'avenir?', in Olivier Duhamel and Henri Weber, *Changer le PC?* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1979), pp. 236, 238.

⁵⁹ Domenach, *Enquête sur les idées contemporaines*, pp. 25-6.

⁶⁰ Letter from Louis Althusser to the Italian communist Maria Macciocchi, in Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Letters from inside the Italian Communist Party to Louis Althusser*. English translation (London: [n. pub.], 1973), p. 300.

and Elleinstein wrote:

Le PCF [...] a adopté une attitude de défense immédiate des travailleurs touchés par le chômage [...]. [Mais] ce n'est pas en sautant sur place et en criant 'De l'emploi! De l'emploi!' qu'on réussit à en créer et à résoudre les problèmes qui se posent aux travailleurs. En fait, trop nombreux sont les militants de gauche qui adoptent face aux problèmes des transformations technologiques une attitude passéiste et volontariste, fondée en fait sur le refus de les prendre en considération. Intellectuellement et moralement, ils se mettent dans la situation des employés des sociétés de transports à cheval qui, dans les années 1820-1830, cassaient les voies ferrées parce que l'essor des chemins de fer les privait de leur travail.⁶¹

In all accounts, Elleinstein was right as it can be argued that what was true at the time of Marx and Lenin, during the golden age of industrial mechanisation, Fordism, Taylorism and the breakdown of production work into individual operations, no longer reflected reality in the 1970s. Indeed, at that time, France was entering a post-industrialist era which was marked both by the phenomenon of de-industrialisation to the benefit of the service sector, and by the development of a leisure and mass-consumer society.⁶² On the one hand, de-industrialisation created a need for specialised workers⁶³ and the expansion of the service sector created some precarious, if not poorly paid, jobs in areas such as tourism and large retailing. On the other hand, the development of leisure activities and

⁶¹ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 147.

⁶² Domenach, *Enquête sur les idées contemporaines*, pp. 25-6; Alain Amicabile quoted in Cardoze, *Nouveau voyage à l'intérieur du PCF*, p.150.

⁶³ Gildea, *France since 1945*, p. 103; Bernstein and Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle: de 1974 à nos jours*, p. 207.

mass-consumption contributed to a narrowing of the gap between the working class and the other strata of French society,⁶⁴ as life styles became more and more homogenous. Consequently, the working class became less and less *ouvriériste*, which of itself severely threatened the very identity and the electoral base of the Party of the ‘exploited’ working class.⁶⁵ Even the term ‘working class’ became an anachronism, as society divided itself more and more into two camps: a small upper class made up of, among others, businessmen and *Enarques*, and a large middle class, ranging from the supermarket cashier to the ‘petit-bourgeois’ *cadre d’entreprise*. In that sense, instead of narrowing its strategy to ‘the poor workers’, the FCP could have broadened its horizon to include all elements of the *classe moyenne* who, after all, shared the same concerns about employment, social welfare and purchasing power as the old working class.

In the 1970s, therefore, the Party’s misfortune was its inability both to keep up with the times and to ask communist intellectuals to adapt a Marxist-Leninist theory, based on the exploitation of industrial workers, to a society which was richer, more bourgeois as a whole, and less and less proletarian. As we have seen previously, this misfortune was consistently identified by communist intellectuals like Althusser and Elleinstein in the 1970s — but at that time, the FCP could not listen to these ‘bourgeois’ and furthermore dissident intellectuals. Moscow would not have allowed it.⁶⁶ Althusser and Elleinstein were, consequently, preaching in the Party’s wilderness, which gave

⁶⁴ Georges Lavau, *A quoi sert le Parti Communiste Français?* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), p. 79.

⁶⁵ George Ross, ‘Party Decline and Changing Party Systems — France and the French Communist Party’, *Comparative Politics*, 25, no. 1 (October 1992), 47.

⁶⁶ In the 1970s, the FCP and its General Secretary, Georges Marchais, were under Moscow’s grip. On the one hand the FCP depended on the Soviet Union to finance its activities, and on the other hand, as Christopher Andrew has observed, ‘le KGB a sérieusement envisagé de faire publier les documents sur le passé de Marchais en Allemagne pendant la guerre’ if Marchais had gone ‘too far’ in opening up the FCP; Christopher Andrew, interview of, ‘Le KGB en France’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23-29 September 1999, p. 145; cf. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London: Penguin, 1999); Althusser acknowledged this in *Sur la mort du PCF (Mort et survie du PCF), (1982-83?)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A29-01.05, unpublished manuscripts: ‘Tout ce beau monde vit sous la direction d’un Georges Marchais tenu par les soviétiques et ses propres camarades pour avoir eu un jour vingt ans et avoir commis la bétise de partir dans la production de guerre allemande’; see our ch. 1.

them, arguably, a certain leeway: they could push their train of thoughts even further by demanding that the Party make major changes not only to its general conception of French society, but also to its internal *ouvriéristes* practices. Althusser thus wrote:

Le parti communiste doit changer. Non seulement dans ses pratiques internes (rendre le centralisme démocratique enfin démocratique) mais aussi dans ses pratiques politiques externes, c'est-à-dire dans sa ligne. Car il ne suffira pas de beaux discours pour gagner à l'union du peuple de France, et à plus forte raison au parti, les gens [des] couches intermédiaires, aussi ébranlées soient-elles par 'la crise'.⁶⁷

To which Elleinstein, who fully agreed with Althusser's point of view, replied:

La fonction tribunitienne du Parti communiste français subsiste, mais elle ne peut suffir à assurer les bases de son propre développement, dans la mesure où elle ne se renouvelle pas en direction des nouvelles couches sociales, de ces millions de salariés que les transformations techniques ont fait naître et prospérer.⁶⁸

In the 1970s, however, it was easier for the FCP to continue to follow the same *ouvriériste* route, insofar as it knew it by heart, and insofar as it did not involve making major organisational readjustments. As the Party's ideology, internal organisation, and even daily routine evolved around the working class in the 1970s, it would have been indeed very difficult for the FCP to do away with an *ouvriériste* discourse and replace it with a more moderate discourse. For the Party, it would have meant questioning the

⁶⁷ Louis Althusser, *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e congrès)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A24-01.01/02 to -02.01, unpublished manuscripts.

⁶⁸ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, p. 32.

validity of its entire ideological system — from its social role to its dedication to the working class, its conception of socialism and the role of its intellectuals. It would have also meant questioning the caste system of its internal organisation, which propelled, by a sort of ‘communist divine right’, a former worker like Georges Marchais to the very top of the Party. These changes were desirable, but unrealistic in the 1970s, even more so since this decade was marked by electoral battles not only against the Right, but also against a Socialist Party which was making ever increasing inroads into the communist electorate.⁶⁹

To conclude, the French Communist Party was misfortunate in failing to adapt itself to social and economic change⁷⁰ precisely when communist workers and intellectuals pointed out these developments, and when some of them started openly criticising the Party’s *ouvriériste* attitude. Cornered in the *ouvriérisme* by the Socialist Party and ideologically contented by the 1970s economic crisis, the Party could not move away from its *ouvriériste* retreat: it was an ambivalent situation to be in, but admittedly the Party managed to find a certain stability by harmonising its actions to its ideology. Nothing could question the Marxist-Leninist theory’s emphasis on the exploitation of industrial workers. Nobody in the FCP could open the eyes of a communist Leadership which was at the mercy of Moscow — a fact that neither Althusser nor Elleinstein fully took into account in their criticisms of the Party. Althusser thus wrote rather unfairly that ‘quand on méprise à ce point et les travailleurs manuels, et les travailleurs intellectuels, il ne fait pas de doute qu’un jour on ne se casse les dents’.⁷¹ The Party’s misfortune had, indeed, fateful consequences in the long-term — consequences which were already

⁶⁹ See ch. 7.

⁷⁰ Ironically, André Vieuguet, a communist official, stated at the Party’s 22nd Congress that ‘la classe ouvrière, par sa place dans la société, est la plus apte à prendre en charge les idées de changement,’ in André Vieuguet, ‘Pourquoi un parti communiste plus influent, plus fort, plus actif?’.

⁷¹ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts; cf. Philippe Robrieux. *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste (1972-1982)*, vol. 3 (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 439.

visible in the late 1970s. As Elleinstein put it in 1979,

le PCF n'a pas mordu sur les couches moyennes salariées ni sur les intellectuels, mais, au contraire, il a perdu très nettement par rapport à 1973 [...] il perd chez les ouvriers très qualifiés, et cela principalement dans les régions où le développement culturel est le plus grand [...]. C'est le retard mis par le PCF à se transformer et à prendre en compte les problèmes posés par l'évolution de la société française depuis vingt-cinq ans qui [...] [en] est la cause.⁷²

Elleinstein's comment was right in general term, but he overestimated the Party's margin of manoeuvre: Moscow called the tune until 1984.

In this context, one might have thought that after its opening up in the early 1990s — which was an encouraging sign — the French Communist Party would have wiped away its *réflexes ouvriéristes* and opened itself to other classes. However, although the Party was, in the 1990s, conscious of the urgency to review its class position⁷³ — as concentrating on the working class no longer paid electoral dividends — it still went on focusing on the 'poor' workers in the same manner as in the 1970s. This situation was reflected by the Party's 30th Congress, which was held in Martigues at the end of March 2000.

On the one hand, this Congress marked a crucial step forward in the history of the FCP by stating in its conclusions that:

Parmi les ouvriers eux-mêmes, le sentiment d'appartenance de classe a beaucoup

⁷² Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, pp. 81-2; Bell and Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic*, p. 202: at the 1978 legislative elections the FCP got 20.7% of the votes, 16.1% in 1981, 9.6% in 1986, 11.4% in 1988, and 9.1% in 1993.

⁷³ Francette Lazard wrote in 1993 that '[le PCF] ne se définit plus à priori par son rapport à la classe ouvrière ou à la théorie marxiste' in *Rapport introductif au Comité Central des 28, 29 et 30 septembre 1993* (*L'Humanité*, 29 September 1993).

reculé. [Le monde du travail] est aujourd'hui marqué par la diversité, l'intellectualisation, y compris du travail ouvrier, la féminisation, le poids plus important de la recherche et des activités créatives. Ce mouvement appelle une autre conception du rassemblement et de notre regard sur les classes sociales [...]. La lutte des classes est une réalité [...]. Elle s'étend à de nouveaux terrains et acteurs.⁷⁴

For the first time, a communist Congress emphasised both the imperatives for the Party to be fully integrated into French contemporary society and the diversification of the working class — imperatives which were identified by Althusser and Elleinstein back in the 1970s, and which were finally acknowledged by a Party still refusing to mention its sources. Anyway, these decisions were warmly received by the Congress delegates, who saw in them not only a reversal of the eulogy of the workers,⁷⁵ but also a broadening of the FCP's social role to other strata of French society.⁷⁶ But it was not counting on what could have been perceived as a small 'detail'.

If the document of the 30th Congress seemed to close an era defined by class struggle, and if it allowed the FCP to further integrate itself into French society, it nonetheless kept a firm foot in the past. Indeed, when addressing itself to the destitute, the Party kept the same 'misérabiliste'⁷⁷ discourse which was denounced as being both patronising and inappropriate by Althusser back in the 1970s,⁷⁸ thus proving that not all criticisms expressed by Althusser and Elleinstein had made a positive impact on the

⁷⁴ 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000), *L'Humanité*, 27 March 2000.

⁷⁵ François Perriné, a delegate from the Essonne to the 30th Congress, quoted in Alain Beuve-Méry and Béatrice Gurrey, 'Le 30^e congrès du PCF prend ses marques avant de sauter le pas du "nouveau communisme"', *Le Monde*, 25 March 2000, p. 12.

⁷⁶ Dominique Gador, an organiser of the 30th Congress' debate on the mutation of the communist organisation, in 'Un nouveau communisme, est-ce possible?', *L'Humanité Hebdo*, 25-26 March 2000.

⁷⁷ Word used by Althusser in *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁷⁸ "'Le retard de notre parti à se mettre à jour ne saurait, sans grave dommage, s'accroître'", déclarent plus de trois cent communistes' (*Pétition d'Aix-en-Provence* signed, among others, by Althusser and Elleinstein), *Le Monde*, 20 May 1978.

Party's strategy. In this context Robert Hue, the same one who succeeded Georges Marchais as leader of the FCP in 1994, the same one who embodied the opening-up and the destalinisation of the Party, as well as its insertion into modern French society, went back in time when talking about '[le] respect de la dignité de celles et ceux qui sont privés de droits [...]'⁷⁹ [face à la] dictature de l'argent'.⁸⁰ The same sentence could have been pronounced at the 22nd Congress of the Party in 1976 or at its 23rd Congress of 1979.

One has to judge the actions of the French Communist Party as a whole, however, in order to assess the impact made by Althusser and Elleinstein's criticisms on their Party's *ouvriérisme* and lack of adjustment to social change. The facts are that the Party replaced its regimented and *ouvriériste* type of internal organisation by a pluralistic representation which took into account the different characteristics of the whole spectrum of its grassroots, and this not only in class terms, but also on age, sex and religious grounds.⁸¹ The Party substituted its *ouvriérisme* by an opening up to all social strata. It wiped away its *passéistes* habits by adapting both its discourse and its strategy to the mutations of the economic and social landscape.⁸² We can, therefore, argue that the Party's endorsement of Althusser's and Elleinstein's suggestions demonstrate that their analysis of the situation was correct. However, in the 1970s, anyone free to analyse the situation would have reached a similar conclusion.

⁷⁹ 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités*.

⁸⁰ 30^e Congrès, *ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

The abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat
at the time of the 22nd Congress (1976): reality or caricature?

In 1976, the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, sparked off an unprecedented and most meaningful controversy within the Party. It was indeed on this precise issue that Althusser and Elleinstein not only drew closer together on certain points, but also opposed each other the most — thus revealing the flexible mechanism of attraction and distancing of tendencies which evolved inside the Party in the 1970s.¹ The controversy over the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat centred around three main axes: the Party's decision-making system,² the question of Soviet practices,³ and the role of the state.

First, according to Althusser and Elleinstein, the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat was made unexpectedly and unilaterally by the leadership of the French Communist Party. It was unexpected because the decision to drop 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' from the FCP's official literature was announced by Marchais on national television on 7th January 1976, a month before the forthcoming 22nd Congress which should have drawn up future Party orientations.⁴ It was unilateral because the decision was imposed by the Party leadership upon the communist base without any preliminary consultation or vote. This blatant lack of internal democracy at the decision-making level

¹ See ch. 2.

² See ch. 1.

³ See ch. 6.

⁴ Marchais made his decision official on Antenne 2, at the current affairs programme *C'est-à-dire* and at the FCP's 22nd Congress, which took place in St Ouen, from 4 to 10 February 1976; 1500 delegates approved the decision to abandon the dictatorship of the proletariat: cf. Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste (1972-1982)*, vol. 3 (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 254; Jean Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!* (Paris: Belfond, 1981), p. 86; Elleinstein, 'Ce qui dure encore dans le PC français — Le temps des glaciations', *Le Monde*, 23 February 1979.

thus prompted Elleinstein and Althusser to react with anger. Elleinstein spoke of an abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat which the Party leadership made ‘à la sauvette’⁵ and ‘dans des conditions politiques pitoyables, sans même ouvrir un débat de fond,’⁶ to which Althusser added bluntly in one of his manuscripts:

Sous prétexte d’une opinion personnelle [de Marchais], c’est en fait une directive politique destinée à l’ensemble du Parti qui se trouve ainsi exprimée: en l’espèce, par-dessus la tête du Comité Central et du Bureau Politique [...] [empêchant ainsi] les nombreuses cellules [...] qui avaient délibéré avant l’intervention de G. Marchais, de prendre position sur la question de la dictature du prolétariat.⁷

The conclusion reached by Althusser and Elleinstein was thus both right and beyond reproach: by refusing to open a large and in-depth debate on the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat — the central theme of Marxist-Leninist theories — and by jamming the cogs of an already too rigid, too vertical and too compartmentalised democratic centralism, the leaders of the FCP behaved in a dogmatic, if not despotic manner.⁸ The criticisms expressed by Althusser and Elleinstein, regarding the lack of internal democracy, therefore started taking shape and germinating in activists’ minds as from the 22nd Congress of 1976. However, at that time, this was a minor point compared to the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which was a bigger bone of contention. On the one hand, the Eurocommunist historian Elleinstein was pleased with the Party’s decision to abandon a concept he judged both inadequate and

⁵ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 87.

⁶ Elleinstein, *ibid.*, p. 86; it is also worth pointing out that the abandonment of the term and concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was proposed by Elleinstein in the communist weekly magazine *France Nouvelle* as far back as 1975, cf. Elleinstein, *ibid.*, p. 86.

⁷ Louis Althusser, *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e congrès)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A24-01.01/02 to -02.01, unpublished manuscripts.

⁸ See ch. 1.

anachronistic — a decision which in the end allowed him to run with the pack and by the same token to set himself up against Louis Althusser and his disciple Etienne Balibar.⁹ Talking about the two *althussériens* who dared to refuse to comply with a decision taken supremely by the Congress, Elleinstein wrote:

Critiquer le rejet du concept de ‘dictature du prolétariat’, comme le font L. Althusser et E. Balibar, depuis le 22^e Congrès du PC, c’est bien évidemment aller contre une décision politique du Congrès, contre une ligne politique.¹⁰

On the other hand, marginalized by the lack of any internal debate — which, if it had been opened, would have given them a much stronger voice and support — the *althussériens* stood up against the abandonment of the term ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, for the concept remained in any case present, the philosophical Marxist theory commanding a preliminary passage to the dictatorship of the proletariat before reaching socialism. However that may be, the problem raised by the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not merely restricted to the non-use of a term and/or a concept. The implications were much deeper. As Althusser wrote soundly, ‘on peut “abandonner” la dictature du prolétariat: on la retrouve dès qu’on parle de l’Etat et du socialisme.’ And on that precise point, Elleinstein was in complete agreement with Althusser.¹¹

Second, according to Elleinstein and Althusser, the French Communist Party symbolically dropped the term ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in order to distance itself

⁹ Balibar studied under the supervision of Althusser at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (Paris) and subsequently became not only Althusser’s disciple, but also a fervent *althussérien* along with other intellectuels such as Guy Bois and Georges Labica.

¹⁰ Jean Elleinstein, *Le PC* (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p. 149.

¹¹ Jean Elleinstein, ‘Eurocommunism and the French Communist Party’ (lecture given at Oxford University in 1978), in *In search of Eurocommunism*, ed. by Richard Kindersley (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 72-3.

both from the dictatorial forms taken by the dictatorship of the proletariat in so-called 'socialist' countries, and from the all too poor Russian model of 'socialist' society.¹² Indeed, to a violent, anti-democratic and single party road to socialism, the French Communist Party substituted a new passage to socialism which was pacific, parliamentary and pluralist with the Union of the Left.¹³ To the Soviet model of 'socialist' society, the Party substituted a socialism 'in the colours of France' which was both original and adapted to French national characteristics.¹⁴ Consequently, the French Communist Party chose to move away from the path traced by the Soviet model and to follow a road which was pioneering, independent,¹⁵ but also full of theoretical pitfalls.

Third, the concept of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' automatically brings back the role of the state. Abandoned, the concept left a theoretical vacuum which the Party leadership and Elleinstein intended to fill with a new communist conception of state power implying that the French state should be democratised at all levels before disappearing. Preserved, it implied a withering of the state leading ultimately to the creation of a free and egalitarian society, a communist society — the thesis sustained by Althusser and Balibar.

In this context, the first part of this chapter will establish the position adopted by the Party and Elleinstein regarding the abandonment of the terminology and concept of

¹² See ch. 6; Louis Althusser, *22^e Congrès* (Paris: Maspero, 1977).

¹³ Althusser, *ibid.*, p. 25-6.

¹⁴ Althusser, *ibid.*, p. 33; Jean Kanapa, 'Une voie originale, une voie nationale', *L'Humanité*, 27 October 1976; Marchais quoted in *L'Humanité*, 22 October 1976.

¹⁵ This strategy was fully inserted into the Eurocommunist movement which was advocated, among others, by the French, Italian and Spanish Communist Parties; broadly speaking, Eurocommunism can be defined as 'a trend or process leading to an independent, pluralistic concept of socialism, embracing respect for individual liberties', cf. Jiri Valenta, 'Eurocommunism and the USSR', *Political Quarterly*, 51 (1980), 127; see also, among others, Carl Boggs and David Plotke, eds., *The Politics of Eurocommunism: Socialism in Transition* (London: Macmillan, 1980), Kevin Devlin, 'The Challenge of Eurocommunism', in 'Communism in Europe', *Problems of Communism*, 16 (January-February 1977), 1-20, Richard Kindersley, ed., *In Search of Eurocommunism* (London: Macmillan, 1981), Hughes Portelli, 'La voie nationale des PC français et italien', *Projet*, no. 106 (June 1976), 659-72, George Schwab, ed., *Eurocommunism: the Ideological and Political-Theoretical Foundations* (London: Aldwych, 1981); joint declaration (or 'Eurocommunist manifesto') issued by Georges Marchais and Enrico Berlinguer, the General Secretary of the ICP, in Rome on 15 November 1975, and published in 'PCF-PCI: la déclaration commune — "Toutes les libertés devront être garanties et développées"', *Le Monde*, 19 November 1975.

dictatorship of the proletariat. The second part will throw into relief the criticisms expressed by Althusser, for whom the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat was a pure caricature.

According to the French Communist Party and Jean Elleinstein, the dictatorship of the proletariat was formally abandoned at the 22nd Party Congress of 1976 for both terminological and conceptual reasons. Indeed, the Party considered that if the Marxist concept of dictatorship of the proletariat had firm grounds in 1917-18 Russia — as at that time the Bolsheviks had no other option but to assert their precarious authority by resorting to a ‘popular’ dictatorship which abolished the previous tsarist regime and stamped on any opponent — it had become both inadequate and antiquated in 1970s France.¹⁶ But in order to reach these conclusions, the Party had to proceed to the dissection of the dual expression ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.

First, at its 22nd Congress of 1976, the FCP — adopting Elleinstein’s and Althusser’s points, and contradicting its own *ouvriériste* strategy based on the *prolétarianisation* of the working class¹⁷ — worked on the principle that the ‘proletariat’ was far too limited a term insofar as it referred exclusively to the poorest core of the working class, and not to all workers, white-collar employees and intellectuals who were *prolétarisés* by the 1970s crisis,¹⁸ and in whose interests the Party and its allies of the Union of the Left should take the reins of state power.¹⁹ For what the FCP contemplated

¹⁶ Jean Elleinstein, ‘The Skein of History Unrolled Backwards’, in *Eurocommunism, its Roots in Italy and Elsewhere*, ed. by George Urban, (London: Temple Smith, 1978), p. 76; Marchais quoted in *L’Humanité*, 20 January 1976; 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

¹⁷ See ch. 4.

¹⁸ See ch. 3; Georges Marchais, ‘In order to take democracy forward to socialism, two problems are decisive’ quoted in Etienne Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, English translation (London: NLB, 1977), p. 184; Marchais at the FCP’s 22nd Congress and quoted in *Le Monde*, 5 February 1976; Bernard E. Brown, ‘French Communism’, in *Eurocommunism: the Ideological and Political-Theoretical Foundations*, ed. by George Schwab (London: Aldwych, 1981), p. 98.

¹⁹ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, pp. 212-3; ‘Un communiste juge les communistes’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, p. 64; M. Adereth, *The French Communist Party: a Critical History (1920-84) from Comintern to ‘the Colours of France’* (Manchester: Manchester University

for France was a state power which would be shared, consensual, democratic and adapted to the French social and economic environment, and no longer a state power despotically dominated by a Communist Party representing only a restricted section of the population. Therefore, the FCP's decision to abandon the term 'proletariat' came directly within the scope of the 'plural' policy paved by the Common Programme as from 1972, when the term 'proletariat' effectively lost all the meaning Marx and Lenin had attributed to it. The restricted core of the 'proletariat' was enlarged to include other social strata covered commonly or separately by the FCP and by the Socialist Party. The commanded hegemony of the sole 'proletariat,' which was dictated by the Marxist-Leninist code of conduct, gave way to a will of domination expressed by a greatly enlarged working class through its Party. In these conditions, the heretical French Communist Party could only be warned by the Soviet Mother Church. The Russian historian Zarodov thus reminded the FCP in 1975, that

the hegemony of the proletariat emerges in Lenin's analysis as a factor of constant, profound and all-round influence exerted by the working class on the development and prospects of revolutionary process [...].²⁰

In 1976, however, in the middle of the debate sparked by the abandonment of the dictatorship of this 'proletariat', newspapers like *Pravda* remained silent, limiting themselves to the broad description of the 22nd Congress of the FCP, for the CPSU had more contentious issues to deal with: the dissection of the term 'dictatorship' and the

Press, 1984), p. 210; Jean Fabre, François Hincker and Lucien Sève, *Les communistes et l'Etat* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1977), p. 146; Jean Kanapa, 'Les caractéristiques de l'eurocommunisme' (speech delivered on 18 November 1977 for the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques), *France Nouvelle*, 18 September 1978, pp. 43-4.

²⁰ K. Zarodov, 'Lenin: Democratic to Socialist Revolution — Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution', *Pravda*, 6 August 1975; Manfred Spieker, 'How the Eurocommunists Interpret Democracy', *Review of Politics*, no. 42 (1980), 433.

evacuation of the whole concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

As far as the term ‘dictatorship’ was concerned, the analysis made by the French Communist Party was unambiguous and legitimate. As Georges Marchais asserted at the 22nd Congress of 1976, in a tone which was admittedly categorical, but also relatively reassuring for the non communist electorate — which could potentially be won over by the FCP,

la ‘dictature’ évoque automatiquement les régimes fascistes de Hitler, Mussolini, Salazar et Franco, c’est-à-dire la négation même de la démocratie. Ce n’est pas ce que nous [communistes français] voulons.²¹

For the facts were clear: by accepting political pluralism,²² and consequently electoral rules of power alternation, the French Communist Party definitely turned the page on a dictatorial method of passage to socialism in order to step firmly onto a road which was both democratic²³ and ‘plural’ with the Socialist Party at its side.²⁴ However, for the

²¹ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); Marchais at the 22nd Congress quoted in *Le Monde*, 5 February 1976; it is also worth noting that the reactionary communist magazine *Prolétariat* wrote that ‘[Marchais] se sert crapuleusement de l’Histoire pour assimiler le mot “dictature” ainsi tronqué à “l’évocation automatique” des régimes fascistes’, May 1976, p. 5.

²² The FCP accepted political pluralism in 1964, at the 17th Congress of the FCP which was held in Paris from 14 to 17 May; cf. Annette Stiefbold, *The French Communist Party in Transition: PCF-CPSU Relations and the Challenge to Soviet Authority* (New York: Praeger, 1977), p. 67.

²³ Elleinstein, who agreed with Enrico Berlinguer’s statement at the 15th Congress of the Italian Communist Party, in *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, pp. 200, 209; Elleinstein, interview of, ‘L’apport de Trotsky au Marxisme’, *Critique Communiste*, no. 25 (25 November 1978), 71; Elleinstein, ‘Ce qui dure encore dans le PC français — Deux pas en arrière’, *Le Monde*, 21 February 1979, and *Histoire du phénomène stalinien* (Paris: Grasset, 1975): Thorez declared to *Times*, on 19 November 1946, that ‘[on peut] envisager pour la marche au socialisme d’autres chemins que celui suivi par les communistes russes’, pp. 127-8, and Khrushchev said that ‘les formes de passage au socialisme seront de plus en plus variées’, p. 238; Kautsky, Enrico Berlinguer and Marchais are also quoted by John H. Kautsky, ‘Karl Kautsky and Eurocommunism’, *Communist and Post-communist Studies* (1981), 4; Marchais quoted in *L’Humanité*, 20 January 1976; Marchais, ‘La bonne voie’, *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 2 (February 1977), 9.

²⁴ A pacific and pluralistic passage to socialism was suggested by the FCP at the beginning of the 1960s: cf. George Ross, ‘The PCF and the End of the Bolshevik Dream’, in *The Politics of Eurocommunism: Socialism in Transition*, ed. by Carl Boggs, Carl and David Plotke (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 31; joint FCP-ICP declaration (Rome, November 1975), quoted in Devlin, ‘The Challenge of Eurocommunism’, 9-10.

Communist Party, this path was relatively adventurous insofar as, in the declarations made by the General Secretary to the 22nd Congress of 1976, democracy was incompatible with the dictatorship of one party and of one person, on the assumption that it would be from the extreme-right, but which in fact could well be communist.²⁵ Georges Marchais did not say so explicitly, but he did not exclude it either, for he had good reasons not to make any link between socialist popular ‘democracies’ and dictatorships. His margin of manoeuvre was indeed both narrow and full of pitfalls. In public, he could not risk characterizing the Soviet system as a dictatorial regime — insofar as the Russian bear could call him back to order by pulling the right strings in a rather cynical way.²⁶ In private, by contrast, he could freely condemn the very negation of democracy in countries advocating ‘socialist’ civil liberties under the Red Flag.²⁷

In this context, it was Elleinstein — the public man, and more to the point the *bête noire* of Moscow since the serialisation of his book *Histoire de l'URSS*²⁸ — who could allow himself to go further than the FCP in criticising the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ as a concept. And it was with an implacable intransigence that the communist historian dealt with it, for as far as he was concerned, there was not any shadow of a doubt about it: in the Eastern Bloc, the dictatorship of the proletariat merged with the dictatorship of the Communist Party in power, and ‘socialist’ countries were in fact ‘states-parties’ practising fervently a semblance of Marxist religion. Elleinstein thus went much further than the FCP in his criticisms of the Soviet regime. In 1978, he wrote:

[Le modèle soviétique] c'est la voie d'un mouvement de masse débouchant sur la

²⁵ Pierre Daix, ‘Marchais n'est pas maître de ce qu'il fait bouger’, *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 8 October 1976.

²⁶ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London: Penguin, 1999), ch. 18 on Eurocommunism.

²⁷ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *ibid.*; see our ch. 2 and ch. 6.

²⁸ Jean Elleinstein, *Histoire de l'URSS*, 4 vols (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1975); see our ch. 3.

prise de pouvoir par la force, sur la guerre civile et sur l'exercice d'une dictature du prolétariat fondée sur l'absence de légalité, et sur des méthodes répressives. C'est une voie dictatoriale au sens propre du terme.²⁹

Then in 1981, when he had nothing to lose as an incurable enemy of the USSR, an 'antisoviétique' and an 'anticommuniste'³⁰ in the eyes of Moscow, he hammered it in by attacking the exercise of state power in 'socialist' countries directly. He wrote:

La dictature du prolétariat s'y [les pays socialistes] est exercée par l'intermédiaire du Parti communiste, parti unique ou dirigeant qui s'identifie avec l'Etat. Le marxisme y est devenu philosophie d'Etat.³¹

The statements made by Elleinstein had a strong meaning, for more than a simple criticism of an antidemocratic exercise of power in so-called socialist regimes, it was the very preservation of the Soviet model within the French Communist Party which lay behind the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The decision taken at the Party's 22nd Congress of 1976 went much further than the mere rejection of a terminology deemed maladjusted to 1970s France. Symbolically, it was a way for the Party to reject a road to socialism which proved contrary to its democratic aspirations.³² Concretely, it was a way for the Party to imply that if there could be a democratic route to socialism — which would be different from that of the Eastern Bloc — there was nevertheless a dictatorial route to socialism. But more importantly, for the French Communist Party, it was a way to show itself under a good light to the left-wing

²⁹ Elleinstein, 'L'apport de Trotsky au marxisme', 71.

³⁰ Youri Sedov, 'Revenir à Eduard Bernstein? Elleinstein découvre son jeu', *Temps Nouveaux*, May 1978, p. 14.

³¹ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 210, and 'Un communiste juge les communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, p. 61.

³² Elleinstein quoted in *France Nouvelle*, 19 January 1976, p. 20.

electorate in anticipation of the 1978 legislative elections, to insert itself even more into the political life of the French nation, and consequently to go astray from Moscow. In that respect, the Russians were not mistaken: they got the message and they reacted swiftly.

In 1976, the Soviet press was relatively calm. Newspapers such as *Pravda* in Russia and *Temps Nouveaux* in France made do with reminding readers of the importance of the dictatorship of the proletariat,³³ while underlining the fraternal links which united the FCP and the CPSU. However, behind the scenes, the game which started in 1976 was completely different, as the Mitrokhin Archives have demonstrated. From angry letters to slanderous allegations, and references to a shameful past, the CPSU used its heavy artillery in order to bring Marchais back into line.³⁴ Moscow indeed judged the step made by the FCP to be intolerable, contrary to Soviet interests, and potentially contagious to East European countries in search of a milder form of socialism.³⁵

Faced with this display of weaponry, the French Communist Party reacted in a way which was inevitably diplomatic, but nevertheless firm. The FCP's official Paul Laurent courageously reiterated the position of his Party in the middle of Soviet land, at the CPSU's Central Committee held in November 1977. He declared:

In our decision of the 22nd Congress, our party offered the French people a democratic, original and independent path [...] toward socialism that accords with our country specific features [...]. [At the same time] we have not forgotten a

³³ François Hincker, *Le Parti Communiste au carrefour: essai sur quinze ans de son histoire, 1965-1981* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), p. 161; cf. the Russian Zagladin quoted in Leonard Schapiro, 'The International Department of the CPSU: the Key to Soviet Policy', *International Affairs*, no. 32 (1976-77), 52.

³⁴ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin archive*, ch. 18 on Eurocommunism.

³⁵ Pierre Hassner, 'L'Eurocommunisme, stade final du Communisme ou de l'Europe?', *Commentaire*, no. 2 (1978), 135.

single task of the international solidarity [...]. Fraternal ties have always existed and continue to exist between the CPSU and the FCP. Granted, on certain questions our views differ. But this in no way diminishes our desire to develop our relations both on the basis of independence in opinions and actions and on the basis of co-operation [...].³⁶

The attitude adopted by the French Communist Party after the 22nd Congress was, therefore, resolute and constant in the long term. Having been abandoned, the dictatorship of the proletariat would never appear again in the FCP's official literature. Nothing could make the FCP go back on its decision, not even the generous arguments — embellished with rosy pictures such as 'the interests of the people we hold to our heart' — which the CPSU put forward in 1978 in order to show the major advantage of the dictatorship of the proletariat.³⁷ The divorce between the CPSU and the FCP on such a central point of Marxist-Leninist theory definitely strengthened the 'independence in opinions and actions'³⁸ of the French Communist Party, and thus widened its margin of manoeuvre. But more importantly, launched on its own trajectory, the FCP could readapt, or even reinvent the conception it had of the role of the state — an approach which could only please Jean Elleinstein.

The Party had to rebuild its conception of the state around an observation which was shared by Elleinstein, and which was certainly obvious, but also relatively foolhardy insofar as it threw away Lenin's view on state power and the very base of Soviet state

³⁶ Paul Laurent quoted in *Pravda*, 3 November 1977; cf. René Andrieu, *Lettre à ceux qui se réclament du socialisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), p. 85; Marchais' speech at the pan-European conference of East Berlin (29 June 1976) quoted in Victor Leduc, 'The French Communist Party: between Stalinism and Eurocommunism', *Political Quarterly*, 49 (1978), 404, and in B.A. Ozadczuk-Korab, 'Brezhnev's Pyrrhic Victory: the Pan-European Conference of the Communists in Berlin', *International Affairs*, no. 32 (1976-77), 191; Neill Nugent and David Lowe, 'The French Communist Party: the Road to Democratic Government?', *Political Quarterly*, 48 (1977), 270-1.

³⁷ L. Brejnev quoted by the historian Vsévolod Ejev in 'Dictature et démocratie', *Temps Nouveaux*, 1978, p. 19.

³⁸ Paul Laurent quoted in *Pravda*, 3 November 1977.

power:

[L'Etat] n'est plus seulement cet Etat embryonnaire, instrument pour l'essentiel, de répression et de domination qu'il était à l'époque de Marx et encore à celle de Lénine [...]. Briser l'Etat, au sens où Lénine utilisait l'expression il y a soixante ans [...], ça n'a pas grand sens dans la France contemporaine [...] notamment parce que l'Etat et la société civile ont noué des rapports nouveaux, très étroits.³⁹

The implications of such an observation were enormous. For the party, the state — meaning the French state — should no longer be destroyed in a Leninist way, by the use of violence, but rather pushed to wither away by the use of popular reforms. The state should no longer be viewed only as the instrument of repression and exploitation of the bourgeoisie, but rather as an actor of liberalism and a social benefactor.⁴⁰

The 'liberal' state was deemed by the Party to play the game of wildcat capitalism by bending to free-market rules and by being 'truffé de représentants directs des monopoles'⁴¹ within its apparatus. Under these conditions, it could only exercise a constraint on the working class, which as a consequence could fear '[une] régression sociale', '[un] recul de civilisation',⁴² all in all, a return to the feudal Middle-Ages, with heads of large corporations exercising their right of serfdom over their workers.

The 'social' state was deemed by the Party to be the guarantor of public interests and social rights such as pension benefits, health care and education. It could have been a

³⁹ Elleinstein, 'Un communiste juge les communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, pp. 64, 67.

⁴⁰ Robert Hue, *Le communisme: un nouveau projet* (Paris: Stock, 1999), p. 119; Jean Elleinstein, 'Un communiste juge les communistes', *ibid.*, p. 64; it is also worth noting that this was a contradictory situation for Christine Buci-Glucksmann, in 'Pour un eurocommunisme de gauche,' in Olivier Duhamel and Henri Weber, *Changer le PC?* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1979), pp. 136-7.

⁴¹ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976): 'On ne compte plus les anciens ministres et leurs "conseillers" qui occupent des fonctions de direction dans des groupes privés.'

⁴² Hue, *Le communisme: un nouveau projet*, p. 119.

rather optimistic vision of France's social situation if the communist argument had not been level-headed: as far as the Party was concerned — and still is, as Robert Hue follows Marchais' steps in that matter — there was no question of a welfare-state in France. The Keynesian theory⁴³ could only be a mere social-democratic adjustment of capitalism, and in any case the state never made any 'gifts'⁴⁴ to anyone, its social and interventionist side being dangerously outweighed by its liberal and non-interventionist side of 'laissez-faire, laissez-passer.'⁴⁵

On balance, the Party's view of the state certainly improved as from the late 1970s, but it was still not very flattering. The communists needed to retain ideological terrain on which to fight, to assert their project of society and to avoid any confusion of identity with the Socialist Party. At the end they did manage to achieve this. As a consequence, the Party's discourse remained the same, its dual and unbalanced vision of the role played by the state allowing it to draw on an all too well-known catastrophic picture of France's situation. From 'la domination toute puissante d'une mince caste de milliardaires sur l'économie et sur l'Etat' denounced in *L'Humanité* in 1976,⁴⁶ to the 'crise du système capitaliste' proclaimed by Marchais at the 1978 Eurocommunist conference in East Berlin,⁴⁷ and to the inauguration of a campaign against the poverty of '16 millions de travailleurs' exploited by the rich 'profiteurs et gaspilleurs',⁴⁸ there was not a shadow of a doubt left for the Party: the French state should be democratised.⁴⁹ In

⁴³ 'La profession de foi de John Maynard Keynes', in 'Mille ans de croissance économique', *L'Histoire*, January 2000, p. 77.

⁴⁴ Hue, *Le communisme: un nouveau projet*, p. 125.

⁴⁵ Expression of the 18th century economist Vincent de Gournay.

⁴⁶ Georges Marchais quoted in *L'Humanité*, 5 February 1976; 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

⁴⁷ Marchais quoted in Jacques Denis, 'Sur l'eurocommunisme et les relations européennes', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 4 (April 1978), 92-108; see among others Georges Marchais, *L'espoir au présent* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1980), p. 20; rapport written by Jean Fabre, 'La crise de la société française. la crise de l'impérialisme' (report to the Party conference on 'La crise de la société française et la crise dans le monde capitaliste'), *L'Humanité*, 24 May 1975.

⁴⁸ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); see our ch. 4.

⁴⁹ Jean Kanapa, 'Les caractéristiques de l'eurocommunisme', *France Nouvelle*, 18 September 1978, p. 43; Marchais, 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par*

that context, the French Communist Party considered that the economic, political and social democratisation of France, which should lead to socialism, had to go through an active and growing participation of the workers in the country's affairs, meaning through self-management.

Imposed with difficulty on the communists by the Socialist Party at the time of the signature of the Common Programme on 27th June 1972,⁵⁰ the notion of self-management consistently appeared in the FCP's lexicon soon after the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in 1976. Whether it was a mere coincidence, or a late recognition of the Socialist Party's good reasoning, or a simple adjustment of vocabulary: the question was open regarding the FCP's real intentions.⁵¹ However, the concept of self-management could only suit the French Communist Party. It fitted the Party's desire to give more power to the workers once at the head of the French state. It would guarantee the democratisation of all political, economic and social institutions. It would make the working class the central decision-making force of the country. And finally it would ensure that the power of the working class and its Party would lead to socialism. In this context, in 1978 the communist Gérard Belloin from *France Nouvelle* explained that 'il s'agit que les travailleurs, les citoyens exercent réellement le pouvoir, puissent réellement organiser leur vie à tous les niveaux et dans tous les domaines',⁵² and in 1990, the former head of the Party's Intellectual Section, Jacques Chambaz, concluded:

Georges Marchais, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979); cf. a telephone conversation between Marchais and Brejnev (8 January 1980) reported in Jean Fabien, *Les nouveaux secrets des communistes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990), p. 55.

⁵⁰ François Mitterrand, *Ici et maintenant* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), pp. 172-3; Jean Elleinstein, *Histoire mondiale des socialismes*, vol. 6 (Paris: A. Colin, 1984), p. 203.

⁵¹ Mitterrand, *ibid.*, pp. 172-3, referred to the 'griot [Marchais] qui s'habillait en chèvre pour mener son troupeau.'

⁵² Gérard Belloin, who was responsible for the cultural section of the weekly communist magazine *France Nouvelle* in the 1970s, 'Autogestion et rôle des intellectuels', *France Nouvelle*, 13 February 1978, p. 36; cf. Anicet Le Pors, *Marianne à l'encan* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1980), p. 220; Georges Marchais, *Le défi démocratique* (Paris: Grasset, 1973), p. 66; Marchais at the *meeting de la fraternité* and quoted in *L'Humanité*, 4 June 1976.

La liberté, la démocratie, une liberté et une démocratie accordées aux exigences contemporaines, sont ainsi devenues l'objectif et le moyen d'un socialisme autogestionnaire. Cette idée clé [...] a justifié l'abandon de la dictature du prolétariat.⁵³

Against this background, the 1970s were of particular significance for the French Communist Party, as it was during that decade that it renewed its conception of state power and launched itself on a new road towards socialism, a self-managerial road which was fully compatible with the concept of the state. However, if the concept of self-management became increasingly popular among workers, if we believe Party officials,⁵⁴ it was nonetheless true that Jean Elleinstein made his dissonant voice heard.

Elleinstein considered that the advanced democratisation of the state had to go through a Third Way, meaning a project of society which would be both inserted into the left-wing workers' movement, and distinct from Western social-democracy and from Soviet socialism. He explained:

Il ne s'agit aucunement de renforcer l'Etat, mais bien au contraire de le démocratiser [...].⁵⁵ Ce qu'il nous faut, c'est un projet qui ne doive rien aux erreurs du communisme traditionnel ni à celles de la social-démocratie [...] [car] historiquement, la social-démocratie a géré le capitalisme. Elle a pu faire, ici et là, des réformes utiles pour les travailleurs, mais elle a constitué une digue contre

⁵³ Jacques Chambaz, who was was a member of the FCP's Central Committee, *Réalités et stratégie: le PCF, une démarche nouvelle* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions Sociales, 1990), p. 79; cf. Philippe Herzog, *La société au pouvoir: pour dépasser capitalisme et communisme* (Paris: Éditions Julliard, 1994).

⁵⁴ Pierre Juquin, 'Démocratisation et voie française au socialisme', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 6-7 (June-July 1978), 42.

⁵⁵ Jean Elleinstein, *Lettre ouverte aux français sur la République du Programme Commun* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977), p. 82.

des transformations plus importantes [...]. Il faudrait [donc] que [...] le PS se livre à une critique rigoureuse des expériences social-démocrates [...] [et que] le PC commence à le faire pour les expériences communistes.⁵⁶

The argument put forward by Elleinstein was convincing. A Third Way would indeed allow the FCP and the SP to break out of their traditionalist shackles — Soviet shackles for the former and social-democrat for the latter — to overstep the Common Programme by putting forward a truly pioneering project of society, and to create a powerful and coherent counterweight to the Right. However, the Party leadership saw things under a different light.

According to FCP leaders, the Socialist Party strengthened itself to the detriment of the Communist Party in the middle of the 1970s. The Socialist Party broke the Union of the Left in 1977 by refusing to modify the Common Programme on the FCP's terms.⁵⁷ And on top of that the break up of the Common Programme led to the defeat of the Left at the legislative elections of March 1978. Under these conditions, the leaders of the FCP could not bring themselves to contemplate any dialectic between the two parties. Georges Marchais was categorical about it: 'Il n'est pas question d'une troisième voie.'⁵⁸ He thus wiped away Elleinstein's idea and closed an important debate on the kind of new road to socialism the FCP should take — a debate he did not even bother opening broadly within the Party, preferring to reduce Elleinstein's arguments to '[des] contrevérités, [des] falsifications et à l'ignorance'⁵⁹ rather than taking the risk of facing a large confrontation of ideas, which could potentially have overthrown the Party's project

⁵⁶ Jean Elleinstein, 'L'avenir des communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 September 1978, p. 51.

⁵⁷ See ch. 7.

⁵⁸ Georges Marchais interviewed on France Inter, *Journal de 13 heures*, 17 August 1978, and quoted in 'Répondant à M. Elleinstein — M. Marchais rejette l'idée d'une "troisième voie" entre la social-démocratie et le socialisme soviétique', *Le Monde*, 19 August 1978.

⁵⁹ Marchais, *ibid.*

of self-management overboard in favour of Elleinstein's Third Way.⁶⁰

However, a strong opposition to Marchais' general scheme remained within the Party, an opposition that the General Secretary could neither control, nor eliminate with anonymous articles planted in *L'Humanité*:⁶¹ that of Louis Althusser. The Marxist philosopher was indeed completely opposed to the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in 1976 and to whatever would replace it, whether it was self-management or a Third Way. He thus made his voice heard, through his books and in the non-communist press,⁶² first by denouncing the hypocrisy of the Party, and secondly by demonstrating why the dictatorship of the proletariat was an essential concept which could not be scrapped.

From the '[chien abandonné qui] n'aboit pas [...] [mais qui] mène la vie dure à ceux qui l'abandonnent',⁶³ to the 'risque [de] jeter l'enfant avec l'eau du bain',⁶⁴ these strong images used by Louis Althusser in his manuscripts showed his anger about the Party's decision to abandon the dictatorship of the proletariat — a decision which he deemed both inconsistent and hypocritical.

Althusser judged the decision of the Party inconsistent, as according to him, it was the one and only foil-word 'dictatorship' which pushed the Central Committee to drop the whole expression of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in 1976.⁶⁵ Like the leper's bell, the word itself sent a warning signal to any non-communist who could hear it. It

⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the concept of Third Way was not fully defined by Elleinstein in the 1970s.

⁶¹ Louis Althusser, *A propos de certains thèmes développés dans la conférence collective sur les intellectuels: lettre à Francette Lazard, lundi 28 juin 1976*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A43-01.01, unpublished manuscripts; Althusser wrote to Francette Lazard: "'Attachement injustifié à la dictature du prolétariat": tu sais que c'est la formule qui a été employée contre moi dans un communiqué anonyme paru dans *L'Humanité* du 14 mai 76.'

⁶² The communist press was closed to him.

⁶³ Louis Althusser quoted in Thierry Pfister, 'Les réactions au changement', *Le Monde*, 26 April 1976; Althusser, *Notes de Louis Althusser sur la dictature du prolétariat*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A24-04.02, unpublished manuscripts.

⁶⁴ Althusser, *Notes de Louis Althusser sur la dictature du prolétariat*, *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

evoked practices which were dictatorial, violent, contrary to the pacifist and democratic intentions of the Party. And it could only embarrass a FCP all too anxious to regain prestige with the left-wing electorate in order to dominate the Union of the Left. Consequently, the Party had to cut itself from dictatorial practices used in ‘socialist’ countries under the Red flag of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ — and Althusser could only endorse this decision. He explained:

Déclarer que le mot dictature est devenu aujourd’hui ‘intolérable’ [...] et [...] que le parti ne veut pas de ‘socialisme made in URSS’, c’est dissocier la dictature du prolétariat des pratiques staliniennes: c’est donc libérer le concept de dictature du prolétariat de la très lourde hypothèque historique et politique qui pèse sur lui depuis 40 ans.⁶⁶

However, for Althusser, it was not enough — and he was right on this point. The Party did not push the logic to its own conclusion by condemning the antidemocratic practices used in so-called communist regimes on an everyday basis unconditionally. The Party’s efforts were mere window-dressing as it did not reject the Soviet model as a whole.⁶⁷ Anyway, all this was a separate issue, as the central problem lay in the abandonment of the term ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.

Althusser judged the decision of the Party to abandon the term ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ as being hypocritical insofar as for him neither Marchais nor the documents of the 22nd Congress of 1976 spoke of a rejection of the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat.⁶⁸ He thus concluded in all good faith that:

⁶⁶ Althusser, *ibid.*; cf. the *althussériens* Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, Georges Labica and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Ouvrons la fenêtre, camarades* (Paris: Maspero, 1979), p. 44.

⁶⁷ See ch. 6.

⁶⁸ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

Le Secrétaire Général n'a pas parlé de l'abandon du concept de dictature du prolétariat, mais de l'abandon de 'la dictature du prolétariat' [...] le concept de dictature du prolétariat n'ayant jamais été abandonné, serait donc maintenu dans sa fonction théorique (et donc politique) par le parti.⁶⁹

And yet, in a public reply to Althusser, Marchais wiped away the philosopher's argument. He spelled the Party's position out by reiterating that the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat had really been abandoned, and he finally concluded in a cutting way: 'Le marxisme n'est pas un dogme, c'est un guide.'⁷⁰ This should have put an end to the debate about the real or not-so-real abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It should have cleared up any discussion about the matter. But this time, the trick did not work. No matter what Marchais could say, no matter if the General Secretary was right and if the premises of his argument were wrong, Althusser preferred to stick to his original position. For him, there was no doubt about it: the concept could only remain as such, for any Communist Party worth the name could not dispense with such a central and essential Marxist concept as the dictatorship of the proletariat — and he proved his point.

According to Marxist-Leninist theory, 'general' state democracy does not exist in capitalist countries as it is not the people as a whole who exercise their sovereignty, but rather a bourgeois minority joined by the middle class.⁷¹ As a consequence, the state is a

⁶⁹ Althusser, *ibid.*; cf. Auguste Lecoœur, *Le PCF: continuité dans le changement* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1977), pp. 85, 87.

⁷⁰ This answer was given by Marchais on Friday 23 April 1976, at a major sale of Marxist books in the former Bastille railway station (Althusser was also there before Marchais arrived), cf. Pfister, 'Les réactions au changement'.

⁷¹ Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *Lenin's Thesis on Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship*, English translation (Glasgow: Socialist Labour Press, 1920), pp. 1, 14; Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: [n. pub.], 1964), p. 80, quoted in Henri Weber, 'Eurocommunism, Socialism and Democracy', *New Left Review*, no. 110 (July-August 1978).

mirror of 'irreconcilable' class conflicts which agitate society.⁷² The state is a tool of exploitation and alienation used by the bourgeoisie against the workers.⁷³ The state is, therefore, a class dictatorship dominated by the bourgeoisie.⁷⁴ In this context, workers only have one solution to overcome this power and win the class struggle: they must conquer the state in order to set up a dictatorship of the proletariat. But if in Russia in 1917-18 Lenin and his Red followers had recourse to a civil war against the White tsarist Russians in order to impose what ought to have been a dictatorship of the proletariat, it is nonetheless true that no definite route to socialism was traced by either Marx or Lenin. The door was, therefore, left open to another passageway to socialism, which could be pacific and politically pluralist.⁷⁵ On that precise point, there was no problem. Althusser accepted the democratic road towards socialism taken by a FCP which was adamant about respecting the rules of the parliamentary game and keeping close ranks with the Socialist Party.⁷⁶ The matter of discord lay somewhere else: at the level of the role played by the state.

For the FCP and Elleinstein, the state had a liberal side, and a social side which meant that it should be preserved, then democratised and consumed by the implementation of self-management or a Third Way. For Althusser, the state acted as an exploiter and as an alienator of the working class, which meant that it should be destroyed and, as the philosopher put it, '[remplacé] par un autre appareil d'Etat qui soit un demi-Etat, un Etat qui soit un non-Etat',⁷⁷ meaning the dictatorship of the proletariat.

⁷² Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, English translation (Glasgow: Socialist Labour Press, 1976), p. 14.

⁷³ Louis Althusser, *Ecrits philosophiques et politiques*, vol. 1 (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1994), p. 436; Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, p. 170; Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *Sur la route de l'insurrection*, French translation (Paris: Librairie de l'Humanité, 1924), p. 137; Brown, 'French Communism', p. 101.

⁷⁴ Althusser, *Notes de Louis Althusser sur la dictature du prolétariat*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁷⁵ Althusser, *22^e Congrès*, pp. 43, 446, 448, even if 'dans nombre de cas, Lénine lui-même identifie la dictature du prolétariat avec le gouvernement violent,' p. 443; Althusser, *Ecrits philosophiques et politiques*, p. 447: the road to socialism can also be pacific 'si les classes exploiteuses acceptent [...] une restructuration des rapports sociaux.'

⁷⁶ Althusser, *22^e Congrès*, pp. 40-1.

⁷⁷ Althusser, *Notes de Louis Althusser sur la dictature du prolétariat*, unpublished manuscripts.

Anyway, whatever the debate, Althusser did not linger over it. For him, the answer was straightforward: even if the Party could evacuate embarrassing terms and replace them by a more attractive expression, theoretical and political facts remained as such.⁷⁸ Whether it was a question of the dictatorship of the proletariat or self-management or the Third Way, the result would be the same. The counter-attack to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie could only be a reversal of class domination — a rightful justice in a way — a working class' seizure of political, economic and social power, meaning precisely a dictatorship of the proletariat. Althusser thus explained:

[Le concept de dictature du prolétariat] renvoie toujours à un autre concept: le concept de la dictature de la bourgeoisie. Les deux concepts sont identiques puisqu'ils prennent acte de la dictature de classe dans une société de classe: ce qui change, c'est la classe qui domine. Mais ce qui ne change pas, c'est l'alternative: ou une classe, ou l'autre, ou la bourgeoisie, ou le prolétariat.⁷⁹

Althusser's argument appears at first sight relatively worrying from a democratic perspective, insofar as a French dictatorship of the proletariat would be as constraining on the bourgeoisie as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie was meant to be on the workers — practices which recall all too well early Soviet intentions. However, this sensitive point was quickly dispelled by Althusser. In the long run, far from settling in the bourgeoisie's former exploitative role, the working class would play another role: it would prepare the withering away of the state⁸⁰ by taking democratic measures,⁸¹ by making socialism increasingly popular, and by paving the way for a class-free and

⁷⁸ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁷⁹ Althusser, *ibid.*; cf. Etienne Balibar mentioned in Brown, 'French Communism', p. 99.

⁸⁰ Althusser, *Notes de Louis Althusser sur la dictature du prolétariat*, unpublished manuscripts; also note that the phase of withering away of the state was also called 'somnambulism' by Marx and Lenin.

⁸¹ Althusser, *Les vaches noires*, unpublished manuscripts.

constraint-free society. As Althusser put it emphatically in his Barcelona parabola,

le socialisme [...] c'est une rivière à traverser [...]. Les travailleurs les plus conscients veillent sur la traversée en surveillant le groupe des capitalistes, pour qu'ils ne sabotent pas le voyage. Cela s'appelle dictature du prolétariat [...]. Une fois la rivière traversée, tout le monde descend. Et que fait-on? Ce qu'on veut [...]. [Donc le communisme c'est] quitter définitivement la rive d'une société de classe, pour aborder sur la rive de la société sans classes.⁸²

The argument presented by Althusser was intellectually very attractive — and the communist myth did tempt many intellectuals⁸³ — but concretely it was inconceivable to even think of a classless society, free of any constraint, in a world where national policies and economies were increasingly interdependent.⁸⁴ The communist project of society was a complete utopia, and Althusser was fully aware of it. ‘Le communisme’, he said, ‘on en cause, mais c'est quoi? Un rêve irréalisable [...]’.⁸⁵ But by sticking to his logical Marxist approach, by aiming high and by pushing towards a communist ideal, the philosopher was expressing the achievable need for the workers to play a greater role in political, economic and social circles, meaning a need for more popular democracy — all in all, just like the Party and Elleinstein, which shows that it was more a theoretical debate than a practical one.⁸⁶

To conclude, the abandonment of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not a mere hypocritical tactic, as put forward by Althusser, but a real reversal of strategy

⁸² Althusser, ‘Parabole racontée à Barcelone’ in *Les vaches noires*, *ibid.*

⁸³ See ch. 6.

⁸⁴ Jean-Pierre Chevènement, *Les socialistes, les communistes et les autres* (Paris: Aubier, 1977), p. 33.

⁸⁵ Louis Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07, unpublished manuscripts.

⁸⁶ Brown, ‘French Communism’, p. 109.

— the last word has to go the Party leadership which kept explaining again and again, in France and in the USSR, the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of its new political direction. In that sense, the final years of the 1970s, which were marked by the evacuation of both the term and the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat from official communist texts, were very significant for three reasons.

First, it was on this precise point of the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat that the tendencies, which were formed around the ideas put forward by Althusser, Elleinstein and the Party leadership, differed the most. For Althusser, the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat could only remain as such. For Elleinstein, the concept, having been abandoned, should be replaced by a Third Way. For the Party leadership, the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat was replaced by that of self-management.

Second, if these tendencies apparently seemed completely antagonistic regarding the form to be taken by a new transition to socialism, it was nonetheless true that they were fundamentally closer than previously thought. Indeed, they formed a bloc around central goals, such as the pacific, parliamentary and pluralistic conquest of power by the FCP, the democratisation of state institutions and the progressive withering away⁸⁷ of the state. These tendencies parted primarily when it came to the intensity and the diversity of institutional reforms proposed. For Althusser, once the FCP attained power, political, economic and social reforms had to be radical and constraining for the bourgeoisie. For the Party leadership, they had to be gradual and flexible enough to enable workers to seize any decision-making power and also to placate the bourgeoisie. For Elleinstein, they had to be implemented by the FCP and the Socialist Party, both of which would have been fully reformed — an idea which in the long run would have proved to be the

⁸⁷ Elleinstein, ‘Un communiste juge les communistes,’ *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, p. 67; cf. Henri Malberg quoted in *France Nouvelle*, 6 February 1978, p. 4.

best, as it would have certainly helped the FCP to remain a strong and credible political force within a new left-wing entente.

Third, it was the abandonment of the concept of proletarian dictatorship in 1976 which allowed the Party to distance itself from the CPSU, to integrate itself into French institutions and to trace a pioneering route towards socialism. Even twenty years later, in 1995 and 1999, this fierce claim of independence and innovation remained very vivid within the French Communist Party, for as Robert Hue declared,

[il n'y aura] pas de retour au passé, mais refus des recettes libérales [...]. Il faut donc inventer, explorer d'autres voies⁸⁸ [...]. [Il faut qu'il y ait] affirmation résolue d'une conception neuve de la transformation sociale, qui réponde pleinement aux réalités françaises, qui soit conforme à l'originalité et au génie de notre pays, qui soit [...] l'oeuvre de notre peuple, avançant à son rythme, selon ses besoins, ses aspirations, ses décisions.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Hue, *Le communisme: un nouveau projet*, p. 125.

⁸⁹ Robert Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation* (Paris: Stock, 1995), p. 44.

CHAPTER 6

The Soviet myth

The collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989, and more precisely that of the USSR in 1991,¹ allowed the French Communist Party to free itself from Soviet tutelage and to start criticising the authoritarian nature of these socialist regimes. Launched by Georges Marchais,² who was perceived up to then as the last Stalinist choirboy of a FCP dominated by the Muscovite church,³ these criticisms were pursued as from 1994 by Robert Hue, who was regarded as being both more modern and more dynamic than his predecessor.⁴ But the last General Secretary of the FCP was above all a man who was influenced by the discovery of the real face of socialism as from the 1970s,⁵ a man who was marked by Gorbachev's perestroika in 1985-86, a man who witnessed the subsequent fall of the Soviet empire and withering away of communist ideology in the early 1990s — meaning a man who had both to catapult his Party onto new tracks in order to preserve it and to look back on more than seventy years of Soviet history. For if this turbulent history was made in Russia, it also deeply marked the French Communist Party. 'Parti de l'étranger', 'Parti stalinien', 'Parti à la botte de Moscou' — all these colourful terms showed the kind of grip the USSR had on the FCP. Indeed, the Party's internal organisation stemmed from Moscow.⁶ Its national strategy was dominated by Moscow. Its international orientation was determined by Moscow. Its ideology was

¹ See ch. 2.

² Robert Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation* (Paris: Stock, 1995), p. 43.

³ Hue, *ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴ Pascal Virot, 'Le Parti communiste a fait son autocritique en novembre, mais aucune victime de purge ne souhaite revenir. Les exclus du PCF refusent la main tendue de Hue', *Libération*, 30 December 1998, p. 2; see our ch. 2.

⁵ Grigori Svirski, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: the Literature of Moral Opposition* (Michigan: Ann Arbor Ardis, 1981), p. 429: the author refers to 'documents-official records, open letters and records of minutes'.

⁶ See ch. 1.

modelled on Moscow.

In 1991, the caesura was therefore both brutal⁷ and salutary for the French Communist Party. It was brutal, for the Party suddenly lost its ideological marks and its political references. It was salutary, for it allowed the FCP to act on its own accord and to modernise itself.⁸ Consequently, the Party's take off was not only long, difficult and painful⁹ for French communists, but also exhilarating for the whole Party as everything had to be redone, everything had to be reinvented. In 1995, Robert Hue thus asserted that 'le Parti [...] n'a pas "jeté l'éponge". Au contraire, il relève le défi [face à la faillite du modèle soviétique]'.¹⁰ The FCP faced indeed a real challenge in the 1990s as, to transform its identity,¹¹ it had to dissect its own history, question its own practices and proceed to an unprecedented ideological upheaval. In this context, a text adopted in March 2000 at the Party's 30th Congress admitted without reserve that

les dirigeants [du PCF] ont eu une responsabilité incontestable dans l'aveuglement, les non-dits, les erreurs et les retards [...]. Mais il est vrai aussi que nous avons partagé une même culture politique [que l'Union soviétique] qui a conduit le Parti à se taire, puis à sous-estimer les crimes et les violations des libertés dans les pays socialistes et même à les soutenir à certaines époques. Nous avons été sourds aux critiques même quand elles venaient de communistes.¹²

⁷ Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation*, p. 42.

⁸ See, among others, *Déclaration du Bureau politique du Parti communiste français* (27 October 1993); Francette Lazard, *Rapport de la commission sur le projet de Statuts*, report presented to the 28th Congress held from 25 to 29 January 1994 on the democratisation of the Party's internal institutions; 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000) and in *L'Humanité*, 27 March 2000, pp. ii to xxii, by reference to the rejuvenating, feminization and the multi-ethnicity of the Central Committee.

⁹ Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation*, p. 42.

¹⁰ Hue, *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹² 'Texte de discussion 2: est-ce le communisme qui a échoué?' in 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000), and in *L'Humanité*, 27 March 2000, p. vii.

Some French communists did indeed express criticisms towards Soviet practices and a socialist myth which was both deformed and amplified by the FCP. It was deformed because Soviet practices sent back a sanitised picture of the USSR to Western Communist Parties. Gulags became mere camps where prisoners enjoyed relative freedom.¹³ Siberia ‘enchanted’ French intellectual communists who went to visit the region.¹⁴ It was amplified because the socialist myth reproduced the image of the prosperous and strong Soviet man who smiled in a gigantic corn field or in an over-productive factory. This distortion of the reality suffered no criticism and no doubt.¹⁵ In the USSR, renegades and deviationists were either physically or mentally destroyed in gulags and psychiatric hospitals. In France, communist dissidents fell under the wrath of the FCP,¹⁶ the CPSU and its press.

In the 1970s, this is precisely what happened to Jean Elleinstein — who ended up wondering ironically how many years he should spend in a psychiatric hospital¹⁷ — and what could have happened to Louis Althusser¹⁸ if personal circumstances had been different. The death of his wife, followed by his mental treatment at St Anne’s hospital,¹⁹ prevented him from publishing his manuscripts dealing with the Soviet question, that is to say *Du bon usage des pays socialistes*, *Projet de texte sur le livre de Jean Elleinstein ‘Histoire du phénomène stalinien’*, *Projet de livre sur le communisme*. For if these

¹³ BBC2, ‘*Tourists of the Revolution - The people’s flag*’, 25 March 2000; see our ch. 3.

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir referring to a postcard sent by ‘L.’ from Irkoutsk, in Siberia, in *La force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard 1963), p. 177.

¹⁵ Lise London, quoted in 30th Congress, *Un projet communiste pour s’attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000), and in *L’Humanité*, 27 May 2000, p. v.

¹⁶ See ch. 8.

¹⁷ Jean Elleinstein quoted in ‘En réponse à un hebdomadaire soviétique — M. Elleinstein: combien d’années d’hôpital psychiatrique dois-je subir?’, *Le Monde*, 27 May 1978, p. 10, in reply to the virulent attacks launched by Youri Sedov, who called Elleinstein an ‘ennemi du socialisme’ in ‘Une falsification au lieu d’une étude objective’, *Temps Nouveaux*, 1977, p. 14; also quoted in Daniel Vernet, ‘M. Elleinstein est devenu un “ennemi du socialisme”’, *Le Monde*, 26 May 1978.

¹⁸ It is worth noting that Althusser considered that ‘Elleinstein a eu le mérite d’en finir avec les interdits [...] ridicules [et] [...] néfastes [...] [et] avec les mensonges et les insultes de rigueur’, in *Projet de texte sur le livre de Jean Elleinstein, Histoire du phénomène stalinien (Grasset, 1976)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A22-03.11, unpublished manuscript.

¹⁹ Louis Althusser, *L’avenir dure longtemps*, suivi de *Les faits* (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1992). On 16 November 1980, after unconsciously strangling his wife, he left the Ecole Normale for St Anne hospital in Paris; see our introduction.

manuscripts had been published in the 1970s and 1980s, Althusser could also have exposed himself to severe criticisms from the Communist Party leadership. He could have tarnished the Soviet myth as well. He could have joined Elleinstein in the camp of ‘ennemis du socialisme’.²⁰ Therefore, in terms of analysis and subsequent criticisms of the USSR, these two intellectual communist dissidents were closer — if not complementary — to each other than previously thought.

In this context, the first part of this chapter on the Soviet myth will deal with the French Communist Party’s ambiguous attitude towards the USSR. As for the second part, it will throw into relief the criticisms of Elleinstein and Althusser towards the FCP’s attitude.

In the 1970s, the French Communist Party’s attitude towards the USSR was that of a strategic waltz. Each step ahead, towards greater independence of the Party from Moscow, was followed by a step back which kept the mythical character of the Soviet Union intact. Thus, if the FCP rejected the Soviet model of socialism to launch itself into a ‘socialism in the colours of France’, the USSR still remained its ideological point of reference. If the Party condemned Soviet practices for being antidemocratic, its criticisms were too insipid to expose the dupery of the Soviet system. The mystification of the USSR was too deep rooted and established for far too long within the Party to be expurged, as for French communists the Soviet Union was the object of a whimsical idealisation which had nothing to envy to tales and popular stories. The USSR, the mother land of socialism, incarnated what was good. It was synonymous with equality, abundance for all, happiness and peace, whereas capitalist countries represented what was evil. They incarnated hell, social antagonisms, the oppression of workers and the

²⁰ Sedov, ‘Une falsification au lieu d’une étude objective’, p. 14.

culture of money-making. In this context, the Red Revolution of 1917,²¹ the liberation of 1945, as well as Soviet society and the Soviet economy were lauded by the FCP because it was happy to be able to attach itself to elements of its ideal and to present a concrete work of socialism to the left-wing French electorate.

First, the French Communist Party considered that if the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was of a violent and bloody nature, it was nonetheless mainly a humanistic act insofar as it completed an unfinished French Revolution by giving state power to the workers and their Communist Party. The 1917 revolution thus represented the overthrow of power based on the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie in favour of workers' power. It represented the dismantling of a system perceived by communists as being unequal in favour of a socialist regime claiming to be deeply egalitarian. As a consequence, Russian history was distorted by communists in order to strengthen Soviet power. The October Manifesto of 1905²² was ignored, despite the fact that it had created a state Duma with consultative functions and thus ended a tsarist autocracy whose political structures were too antiquated, and too rigid to favour the take off of a relatively backward society. The capitalist style economic development of Russia, which started under the reign of Alexander III²³ and was extended under Nicholas II,²⁴ was wiped away when it had placed Russia among the four leading world powers between 1900 and 1913.²⁵ Consequently, what happened before 1917 did not count as much as what came after, for 1917 was not only the 'year zero' of the socialist calendar, it not only marked the imposition of socialism in the former Russian Empire, it was also the starting point for what French communists hoped to achieve in France.

²¹ Pierre Daix, *Le socialisme du silence* (Paris: le Seuil, 1976), p. 278.

²² Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (London: HarperCollins: Fontana Press, 1992), pp. 42-4.

²³ 1881-1894.

²⁴ 1894-1917. British, German and French capital (French capital came in after the signature of the Franco-Russian agreements in 1891-1894) allowed Russia to finance its investments. In 1913, predictions maintained that Russia could become the biggest economic power in the world by c. 1950.

²⁵ William C. Wohlforth, 'The Perception of Power: Russia in the pre-1914 Balance', *World Politics*, 39, no. 3 (April 1987), 355.

Second, the Soviet myth was linked to the Second World War.²⁶ The heroic battle of Stalingrad and the Bolshevik liberation of Eastern Europe, which was placed under Hitlerian domination, made the USSR a symbol of struggle against Nazism. In the French Communist Party, the image of the Soviet Union was, therefore, positive insofar as socialism became associated with peace. Everything was contained in what Gaston Plissonnier, the rather ‘russophile’²⁷ Party official, told Elleinstein in 1977: ‘Le Parti soviétique, c’est un parti de héros, ils ont tant fait pour la libération du monde...’²⁸ The remark seemed narrow, but it was certainly well weighted and well targeted at Elleinstein, who was quick to reply that ‘ils avaient pas mal fait également pour [...] conquérir [le monde] et l’opprimer’.²⁹ The Soviet Union was indeed an expert in contrasting actions. The efforts to defeat German forces from 1939 to 1945 were combined with the crushing of Soviet dissidents on the battlefields. The liberation of Eastern Europe by Soviet troops in 1945 led to the sovietisation of the region.³⁰ The victorious Stalin, ‘le petit père des peuples’, the happy ‘uncle Joe’, established his authority over a NKVD³¹ which was comparable to the Hitlerian Gestapo when it came to purging opponents of the regime.³²

Third, Soviet society and the Soviet economy were also magnified by the French Communist Party whose interest it was to present, to the whole French left-wing electorate, a perfectly polished and rather attractive image of what socialism not only

²⁶ Louis Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07, unpublished manuscripts; Marie-Pierre Rey, ‘L’URSS superpuissance: mythe et réalité’, *L’Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 77.

²⁷ Plissonnier worked for the KGB, cf. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London: Penguin, 1999), chapter 17 on ‘The KGB and Western Communist Parties’.

²⁸ Jean Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!* (Paris: Belfond, 1981), p. 48, by reference to a conversation Elleinstein had with Plissonnier in September 1977.

²⁹ Elleinstein, *ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁰ Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became Soviet Republics in 1944 after being occupied by the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1945.

³¹ The NKVD replaced the OGPOu (or GPOu in 1922 and Tcheka in 1917) in 1934. This service took the name of KGB in 1954; cf. Rémi Kauffer, ‘L’ABC du KGB’ in ‘Les secrets du KGB’, *Historia*, August 2000, p. 45.

³² Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Staline: Parallel Lives* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 563.

appeared to be in the Soviet Union, but also could be in France. Each remark made by the FCP was, therefore, carefully calculated, weighted and counter-balanced by the socialist antithesis. If the French Communist Party denounced the crisis which plagued capitalist countries in the 1970s, Georges Marchais did not hesitate to expand on the healthy economic situation which the socialist countries seemed to enjoy by declaring that ‘la croissance économique des pays socialistes [...] demeure largement plus rapide que celle des pays capitalistes en crise’.³³ If the Party asserted that France was socially divided and that French workers had a low standard of living,³⁴ the communist intellectual Antoine Spire brushed up a bright portrait of Soviet workers’ situation by certifying that ‘l’Union soviétique [...] c’est [...] la présence de milliers de travailleurs en bleu à partir de 17h à l’opéra’.³⁵ All in all, as a FCP official publication stated, ‘les réalisations obtenues dans [les] pays [socialistes] constituent un bilan démonstratif [...] un progrès humain sans égal dans l’histoire’.³⁶ According to Marchais, it was even ‘[une] démonstration de la supériorité du socialisme’.³⁷

In this context, Moscow could only approve this perfectly subordinated and tidy attitude from the FCP, as it strengthened the socialist ideal the USSR wished to promote abroad. In 1977, *Temps Nouveaux*, the Soviet magazine which was published in France, even took the opportunity to refine its Soviet propaganda, to elaborate on the Soviet myth and to rebuff the ‘antisoviétique’³⁸ Jean Elleinstein by borrowing the grandiloquent

³³ Georges Marchais at the 23rd Congress of the FCP, quoted in *Le Monde*, 10 May 1979; 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979); cf. Rapport de Jean Fabre, ‘La crise de la société française, la crise de l’impérialisme’ (report to the Party conference on ‘La crise de la société française et la crise dans le monde capitaliste’), *L’Humanité*, 24 May 1975; 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); Jacques Denis, ‘Sur l’eurocommunisme et les relations européennes’, *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 4 (April 1978), 104.

³⁴ See ch. 4.

³⁵ Antoine Spire, *Profession: permanent* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 52.

³⁶ *Les principes de la politique du Parti Communiste Français* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1975), p. 50.

³⁷ 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979).

³⁸ Youri Sedov, ‘Revenir à Eduard Bernstein? Elleinstein découvre son jeu’, *Temps Nouveaux*, May 1978, pp. 12-5.

declaration made by the writer Romain Rolland:

Ce pays [...] n'a pas seulement créé des usines et des machines géantes. Il a encore créé ce qui [...] est plus beau que tout: des milliers d'hommes nouveaux, des générations de gens sans peur, sains, forts, désintéressés, inspirés et mus par une foi ardente dans un monde nouveau.³⁹

Everything was included in this statement to brush up a perfect picture of the Soviet Union: Stakhanovism, gigantism, beauty, happiness and cultural elevation. Every word was here to blow the trumpets of a socialist regime which was seemingly glorious, but which was in reality deeply ill. In the 1970s, the agricultural and industrial productivity of the USSR was weak, its growth was slow and its funds were emptied by the cost of the Cold War as well as by the expansionist policy of the country.⁴⁰ But the reality did not count as much for the Soviet Union as the preservation of its image as an ideal socialist regime and a powerful country. Socially, the Soviet ideal had to go on marvelling, charming and strengthening Western communists' faith in socialism. Politically, the myth was used as a back up for Western Communist Parties.

However, for the French Communist Party, even if '[l'] oeuvre' of the Soviet Union was 'gigantesque',⁴¹ and 'le bilan des pays socialistes' was 'globalement positif',⁴² it was nonetheless true that in the 1970s, the Party was far from being completely tricked by the *trompe-l'oeil* image presented by the USSR. Indeed, the FCP considered that if there was a matter on which it could not compromise, it was that of Soviet anti-

³⁹ Sedov, 'Une falsification au lieu d'une étude objective', p. 15, article mainly directed against Jean Elleinstein's *Histoire de l'URSS*, 4 vols (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1975).

⁴⁰ Rey, 'L'URSS superpuissance: mythe et réalité', p. 78.

⁴¹ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

⁴² 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979).

democratic practices.

Pushed by the Solzhenitsyn scandal of 1974⁴³ and by the broadcast of television pictures of gulags in the mid-1970s,⁴⁴ won round by the accounts of Soviet dissidents who took refuge in Western countries,⁴⁵ the French Communist Party launched into a caustic denunciation of Soviet Stalinism from 1975 onwards.⁴⁶ Siberian camps, Stalinist crimes and Soviet censorship were condemned by the FCP. Breaches of individual and collective freedoms were denounced by the Party. In that sense, the steps taken by the French Communist Party were both laudable and genuine, but the fact remains that it helped the Party to brush up its image. The Party's intentions suddenly appeared to be fully democratic. The Party's values became even more humanistic. And the Party's link with the USSR seemed to be weaker and weaker, even more so as the Common Programme pressed the FCP to assert more strongly its will to work in favour of France's interests. This strategy would have worked if it had arrived years earlier, and not at the last minute, as a matter of adaptation to external circumstances. For a doubt remains: had Solzhenitsyn stayed silent, had French television not shown pictures of gulags, the FCP would certainly not have risked weakening its ideological support from the Soviet Union by denouncing the USSR's anti-democratic practices. But whatever precipitated the French Communist Party's decision to make a U-turn on its idealistic vision of the USSR, the fact was that the Party did distance itself from the USSR from

⁴³ See ch. 3.

⁴⁴ George Ross, 'The FCP and the End of the Bolshevik Dream', in *The Politics of Eurocommunism: Socialism in Transition*, ed. by Carl Boggs and David Plotke (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 32.

⁴⁵ Svirski, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: the Literature of Moral Opposition*, p. 429; Neill Nugent and David Lowe, 'The French Communist Party: the Road to Democratic Government?', *Political Quarterly*, 48 (1977), 278: in relation to the arrival in France of the Soviet dissident Leonid Plioutchitch.

⁴⁶ These criticisms were acknowledged by Elleinstein in 'Un communiste juge les communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 November 1976, p. 64; cf. George Ross, 'The FCP and the end of the Bolshevik dream', p. 32; 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979); 25^e Congrès, *Espoir et combat pour l'avenir (rapport présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St Ouen, 8-10 February 1985); Julius W. Friend, 'Soviet Behavior and National Response: the Puzzling Case of the French Communist Party', *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, no. 3 (1982), 225.

1975 onwards.

In this context, freedom became the FCP's prerogative. Democracy became the Trojan horse of the Party.⁴⁷ As a consequence, in 1976 Jean Kanapa denounced '[les] atteintes aux libertés' as well as 'la substitution trop fréquente de la censure ou de la répression à la lutte d'idées [en URSS]'.⁴⁸ At the Party's 22nd Congress of 1976, Georges Marchais declared with considerable directness that 'l'idéal communiste [...] [est] entaché par des actes injustes et injustifiés'.⁴⁹ At the 23rd Party Congress of 1979, the FCP's General Secretary even toned down his 'bilan globalement positif des pays socialistes' by talking about 'les crimes qui ont endeuillé l'histoire du socialisme à l'époque de Staline' and 'les écarts sérieux et graves qui existent aujourd'hui dans des pays socialistes entre la réalité et ce que pourrait, ce que devrait d'ores et déjà être la démocratie socialiste'.⁵⁰

However, if it was certain that the French Communist Party ventured on a slippery slope by denouncing the USSR's anti-democratic character — as the Russian bear was always very prompt to react — it was nonetheless true that the criticisms expressed by the FCP remained limited. They were limited insofar as it was mainly the Stalinist era which was criticised, and not the whole history of the Soviet Union. From Lenin to Brezhnev, and even from Brezhnev to the first years in office of Gorbachev,⁵¹ Soviet dissidents were crushed by being sent to prisons, camps and psychiatric hospitals. Police surveillance, cross-examinations, searches and repression were common practices. The FCP's criticisms were limited insofar as an extensive and objective analysis of Soviet

⁴⁷ See ch. 5.

⁴⁸ Jean Kanapa, 'Les caractéristiques de l'Eurocommunisme', *Recherches Internationales*, no. 88-89 (1976), 12.

⁴⁹ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

⁵⁰ 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979).

⁵¹ *Background Brief on Soviet Union: Continued Repression of Dissent* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1985).

practices would have broken the myth of the USSR and questioned both the very existence of real socialism in the Soviet Union and the possibility of creating another kind of socialism in France. The FCP's criticisms were also limited for it was its whole history, its whole past and present practices⁵² that the Party would have had to examine, from its relations with the totalitarian Soviet regime to its own treatment of dissidence and its democratic centralism.⁵³ In the 1970s, the French Communist Party was not ready to do this. Superseded by the Socialist Party from 1974-75 onwards as the main left wing party,⁵⁴ and incessantly tested by the various elections which marked the decade, the Party could not have renewed itself fully without provoking too big a swirl of internal dissent, without falling under the wrath of Moscow, without risking an electoral disaster and without putting at stake the already too fragile Union of the Left. However, if the FCP denounced the USSR's anti-democratic practices in too weak a manner, if it deliberately chose to preserve a Soviet myth which proved impossible to cleanse of all its crimes, it was nonetheless true that its criticisms led the Party onto a more independent, and certainly more 'French' road.

At its 22nd Congress of 1976, the French Communist Party officially announced its decision to refuse to apply Soviet socialism to France if or when the Party took power, and consequently to adopt 'socialism in the colours of France'.⁵⁵ Georges Marchais thus declared categorically that 'aucun parti ou groupe de partis ne peut légiférer pour les autres, proposer des recettes universelles'⁵⁶ — an assertion which he repeated in 1979, at the Party's 23rd Congress, by proclaiming that 'nous [communistes

⁵² Hélène Parmelin, *Libérez les communistes!* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1979), pp. 313-4.

⁵³ See ch. 1 and 8.

⁵⁴ See ch. 7.

⁵⁵ Annette Stiefbold, *The French Communist Party in Transition: PCF-CPSU Relations and the Challenge to Soviet Authority* (New York: Praeger, 1977), pp. 91-3.

⁵⁶ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); cf. Marchais quoted in *L'Humanité*, 9 June 1976; Jean Kanapa, 'Une voie originale, une voie nationale', *L'Humanité*, 27 October 1976; René Andrieu, *Lettre à ceux qui se réclament du socialisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), pp. 83-4; Georges Marchais, *Avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 26, 27 et 28 avril 1978)*.

français] ne saurions accepter ni pour nous, ni pour les autres, qu'une grande puissance dicte sa loi'.⁵⁷ The tone was strong and the intention unshakeable. For the FCP, there would not be any socialism 'made in the USSR' in France, but rather a new kind of socialism which would be both independent and adapted to France's political, economic and social environment.⁵⁸

In the long term, the strategic line adopted by the Party proved to be constant: the FCP never endorsed Soviet socialism again, preferring to concentrate on its own project for a socialist society. There is, therefore, no doubt that Georges Marchais did push his Party towards a new kind of socialism, which was in contrast to the existing one. In that respect, the CPSU was not mistaken about the FCP's intentions. On stage, the French Communist Party was called to order in a rather diplomatic way. Brezhnev contented himself with implying that it would be better for the FCP to keep its Soviet guide: 'Un bon chef d'orchestre ne se plaint pas de la diversité de ses instruments,'⁵⁹ declared the First General Secretary of the CPSU, thus echoing the possibility of 'déployer la bannière nationale' which was put forward by Stalin in 1952.⁶⁰ However, behind the scenes, Marchais was strongly blamed by the CPSU — he even risked being

⁵⁷ 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979).

⁵⁸ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); Georges Marchais, *Le défi démocratique* (Paris: Grasset, 1973), p. 180; 'Georges Marchais à Antenne 2: changer et changer vraiment', *L'Humanité*, 19 May 1977, p. 3, by reference to Antenne 2's *Cartes sur tables*, 18 May 1977; 'Joint Statement of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the French Communist Party', *Pravda*, 6 July 1971 and *Izvestia*, 7 July 1971; 'French Communists Hold a Meeting', *Pravda*, 6 February 1976, 'Conference of European Communists and Workers' Parties: Speech by Comrade G. Marchais of the French Communist Party Delegation', *Pravda*, 3 July 1976; Paul Laurent, 'The Beginnings of a Brighter Future', *World Marxist Review*, no. 3 (March 1975), 6.

⁵⁹ Brezhnev at the conference of European Communist Parties, 1976, quoted in Auguste Lecoœur, *Le PCF: continuité dans le changement* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1977), p. 59; cf. Heinz Timmermann, 'Soviet Treatment of Western Communists: a Comparative Analysis', *Communist and Post-communist Studies* (1982), 290: the plurality of forms taken by socialism was tolerated by Moscow as long as its content did not change.

⁶⁰ Staline at the 19th Congress of the CPSU (quoted in *Cahiers du Communisme*, November 1952, 69), in Lecoœur, *Le PCF: continuité dans le changement*, p. 38; cf. the declaration made by Andreï Kirilenko, a Politburo member and the General Secretary of CPSU's Central Committee, in 22^e Congrès, *Salutations aux soirées internationales* (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); 'Joint Communiqué of CPSU and French Communist Party Delegations', *Pravda*, 11 January 1980.

openly condemned and losing his place within the FCP⁶¹ — but he nevertheless whispered in Brezhnev's ear, in 1980, that the FCP and the CPSU had '[des] différences de positions et [des] divergences'⁶² regarding their conceptions of socialism. And it was not without good reason. Socialism was neither a predetermined nor a fixed system of government which had to be set up as such. It could indeed vary not only according to countries, but also according to the international context.⁶³

First, the First World War of 1914-18 contributed to the creation of a lasting Communist regime in the USSR and a Nazi German power⁶⁴ which had completely different ideologies, but which were based on relatively similar mechanisms. State power broke radically with the past: for the Nazis, the past was linked to the defeat of 1918, to economic problems such as a soaring unemployment; for the Soviets, the past incarnated the grandeur of the Tsarist court and the exploitation of poor subjects made to fight for their Tsar in 1914.⁶⁵ As a consequence, the regimes in place in Germany and in the USSR created new kinds of society which depended on the authority of charismatic and supreme chiefs backed by dedicated officials, powerful armies and secret services able to crush opponents of their regimes.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, chapter 18 on Eurocommunism; see our ch. 1 and 5.

⁶² Jean Fabien, *Les nouveaux secrets des communistes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1990), p. 58: in relation to a telephone conversation between Brezhnev and Marchais, 8 January 1980.

⁶³ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); Georges Marchais, *Rapport du Comité Central, 22nd Congress, 1976*; Marchais, *Avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 26, 27 et 28 avril 1978)*; Marchais, *Le défi démocratique*, p. 177; *Vivre libre! (Projet de déclaration des libertés soumis à la discussion des français, 1975)*; it is also worth noting that this thesis was accepted by Elleinstein who spoke of 'pluralité de communismes' in *Lettre ouverte aux français sur la République du Programme Commun* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977), p. 75.

⁶⁴ The Treaty of Versailles of 1919 was judged as being unfair by the Germans who considered that its terms were punitive (by reference to reparations, loss of territory and limitations on the size of the armed forces; cf. Matthew S. Seligmann and Roderick R. McLean, *Germany from Reich to Republic, 1871-1918* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 172; Wilhelm II's Reich was replaced by the Weimar Republic, which was opposed both by right-extremists and by communists. Thus in January 1919, in Berlin, an insurrection attempt led by German communists, or Spartacists, was crushed. The communist revolutionaries Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg, who had both created the Spartakist League in 1916, were executed.

⁶⁵ Krzysztof Pomian, 'Communisme et nazisme: les tragédies du siècle', *L'Histoire*, July-August 1998, pp. 100-5.

⁶⁶ Pomian, *ibid.*, pp. 100-5.

Second, the post-Second World War period was marked by the collapse of right-extremist regimes up to 1975⁶⁷ and by the loss of steam of the gerontocratic socialist regime of the USSR in the 1970s.⁶⁸ As a result, any form of totalitarian regime — whether of the extreme-right or communist — became more and more impracticable in a Europe which was relatively peaceful, united by EEC treaties, economically strong, and democratically stable as a whole. This is why the French Communist Party had to reject the model of Soviet socialism which proved both despotic and impracticable. This is why the Party had to create democratic socialism.

If in the 1970s the French Communist Party did launch itself towards a ‘socialism in the colours of France’, which would be both original and independent from Moscow, Jean Elleinstein and Louis Althusser nevertheless did not hesitate to play down the significance of the Party’s new stance. For these two communist intellectuals, there was not the slightest shadow of a doubt in their minds: as the Soviet socialist regime had proved to be totalitarian and tyrannical, the FCP should have broken the Soviet myth which still existed within the Party in the 1970s, and it should have then started rebuilding its identity on new foundations.

In the 1970s, and at the beginning of the 1980s, the criticisms expressed by Jean Elleinstein towards the Soviet regime reached a crescendo. Whether this radicalisation of ideas was due to the surge of more and more damning historical facts about the USSR,⁶⁹ or to the condemnation of his *Histoire de l'URSS* by the CPSU’s press,⁷⁰ the fact remained that Elleinstein’s analysis became more precise over the years. From a mitigated declaration shelling the problems of a Soviet socialism ‘bureaucratique et

⁶⁷ The regimes of Hitler and Mussolini collapsed in 1945. The Greek colonels’ regime fell in 1974. In Portugal, Salazar died in 1970 and his successor, Caetano, was overthrown in 1974. In Spain, Franco died in 1975 and as a consequence his regime was peacefully replaced by a monarchy.

⁶⁸ Rey, ‘L’URSS superpuissance: mythe et réalité’, p. 78.

⁶⁹ Svirski, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: the Literature of Moral Opposition*, p. 429.

⁷⁰ See ch. 3.

despotique, donc [...] inachevé et élémentaire',⁷¹ he went on to assert in a radical way that 'il est impossible de parler de démocratie à propos de l'Union soviétique [...] l'Union soviétique est une dictature'.⁷² But whatever the choice of the words and the nuances of the criticisms, Elleinstein's condemnation was beyond the pale as far as the CPSU leadership was concerned. In this context, the Soviet press reacted promptly in order to counter-act the potential influence Elleinstein's ideas could have on other French communists, who might be eager to listen to the points made not only by a communist like themselves, but also by a prominent historian. As a consequence, Elleinstein became the object of direct attacks in *Temps Nouveaux*. It was thus possible to read in 1977 that

le pays de soviets est le pays de la liberté, de l'égalité en droit et du plein pouvoir des travailleurs [...]. C'est la liberté vis-à-vis de l'oppression sociale et nationale [...]. La vérité sur le socialisme, sur l'Union soviétique, sur la politique du PCUS gagne les coeurs et les esprits, en dépit de tous les efforts de J. Elleinstein et de ceux avec qui il fait chorus.⁷³

However, the propaganda efforts made by Moscow were in vain. Too many revelations from Soviet dissidents came to support Elleinstein's declarations. Too many television pictures came to illustrate his point of view. Too many French communist activists started believing the historian⁷⁴ who had managed to bring Soviet reality out into the open, to make the mythical mask of the USSR fall, and to shake the ideological credibility of the USSR.

⁷¹ Jean Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme* (Paris: Julliard, 1979), p. 45.

⁷² Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, pp. 175, 177.

⁷³ Sedov 'Une falsification au lieu d'une étude objective', pp. 14-5.

⁷⁴ Spire, *Profession: permanent*, p. 136.

The wrath of Moscow could also have fallen on Louis Althusser if he had been able to publish his manuscripts, for the Marxist philosopher did not shirk from criticising the Soviet Union in his papers. Like Elleinstein, he did not hesitate to break all taboos. Althusser thus spoke of ‘[les] pratiques répressives de style stalinien qui existent encore en URSS’.⁷⁵ He wrote that ‘les pays socialistes sont malades [...] de la démocratie’,⁷⁶ and he pushed his French comrades not to fall into ‘[le] piège du socialisme existant’.⁷⁷

As a consequence, the criticisms expressed by Elleinstein and Althusser had considerable impact within the French Communist Party. First, they broke the Soviet myth insofar as they shed light on a Soviet regime which, if it was socialist in its political, economic and ideological form, was nonetheless totalitarian at the level of its daily practices. Second, they created a definitive rupture with the intellectual vision of a deeply human socialism and the violent reality of Soviet socialism. The concrete application of socialism in the USSR merged into the Terror, repression, gulags, and crushing of any person perceived as being an ‘enemy’ of the regime.⁷⁸ The concrete application of socialism became synonymous with the de-humanisation and the ill-treatment of a whole society in the name of Marxist social socialism. As a consequence, contrary to what the FCP thought in the 1970s, it was not only the Stalinist era which had to be questioned on the ground of an extreme dictatorial violence, but the whole history of the USSR — a history to which the FCP was tightly linked at the levels of its own internal organisation,⁷⁹ its treatment of internal dissidence,⁸⁰ its relations with the French state and its ideology. However, it is possible to understand why the French Communist Party only contented itself with criticising Stalinism, and why its condemnation of Soviet anti-

⁷⁵ Louis Althusser, *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e congrès)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A24-01.01/02 to -02.01, unpublished manuscript.

⁷⁶ Louis Althusser, *Du bon usage des pays socialistes*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A26-03.01, unpublished manuscript.

⁷⁷ Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme*.

⁷⁸ Althusser, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ See ch. 1.

⁸⁰ See ch. 8.

democratic practices were toned down by a ‘bilan globalement positif des pays socialistes’. For the FCP, an extensive analysis of the whole of Soviet history would have amounted to a demystification of a country which was both anti-democratic and impossible to emulate, but which nonetheless still fed the dreams of most French communists. An objective analysis of the Soviet Union would also have pushed the Party to examine its own past and present internal practices and hence to de-sovietise itself completely. However, if this move would have completed the Party’s renovation at a time when it was embarking on its own road towards socialism⁸¹ and elaborating its own project of socialism, it was nonetheless the case that the Party was not ready to transform itself in the 1970s. As Althusser put it,

il faut bien voir qu’un des grands profits que nos partis tirent du ‘bon usage’ des pays socialistes, est le plus souvent de se dispenser de s’examiner eux-mêmes [...] l’un des grands profits que tirent nos partis de la reconnaissance de la ‘maladie’ des pays socialistes c’est de faire le silence sur eux-mêmes, et de prendre ce silence pour de la santé.⁸²

Arguably, by rejecting the Soviet model of socialism and by criticising the political regime of the USSR, it was its own identity that the French Communist Party started questioning. The USSR was no longer the ideological mirror it used to be before the 1970s. It was no longer the identity mark that the FCP could brandish in front of a French electorate which was generally aware of Soviet exaction. Elleinstein acknowledged this by writing:

⁸¹ See ch. 5.

⁸² Althusser, *Du bon usage des pays socialistes*, unpublished manuscripts; cf. Althusser, ‘Marx dans ses limites’ (1978), *Ecrits philosophiques et politiques*, vol. 1 (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1994), pp. 360-1.

le Roi était nu, c'est-à-dire que le PCF ne pouvait plus s'adosser à l'expérience soviétique jusque-là sacralisée. Dès lors, il n'y avait plus de point d'ancrage, plus d'utopie soviétique, plus de référence.⁸³

In this context, he concluded that, 'le PCF était condamné à se transformer profondément'.⁸⁴ Indeed, the French Communist Party only had one option: it had to rebuild its communist identity.

In that regard, Elleinstein's ideas were both decisive and logical. French socialism should in no way be inspired by the negative Soviet experience.⁸⁵ The USSR should on the contrary become a counter-model for the FCP's future action.⁸⁶ Consequently, the Party should create a 'new socialism'⁸⁷ which should be pioneering and adapted to the French political, economic and social environment — meaning a 'socialism in the colours of France'. Elleinstein's approach seemed, therefore, to meet that of the FCP. But the Party did not quite see matters from the same angle. For the Party, if socialism in France should be adapted to the country's specificity, it should nonetheless take into account the so-called 'achievements' of the Soviet Union, such as those in the economic domain. As Jean Kanapa asserted, 'il est indispensable de tirer enseignement des expériences déjà réalisées, de leurs succès et de leurs erreurs'.⁸⁸

However, the Party's picture of the USSR was too rosy and its conception of French socialism was not convincing enough to be fully acceptable — and this is precisely what Althusser noted. For this dissident communist intellectual, it was not a

⁸³ Jean Elleinstein 'L'avenir des communistes', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25 September 1978, p. 51.

⁸⁴ Elleinstein 'L'avenir des communistes', *ibid.*, p. 51.

⁸⁵ Jean Elleinstein, 'Ce qui dure encore dans le PC français — Deux pas en arrière', *Le Monde*, 21 February 1979; Elleinstein, 'Du XXII^e Congrès du PCF à l'échec de la gauche — La révolution n'est plus ce qu'elle était', *Le Monde*, 13 April 1978; 'Les accusations contre le PC de Jean Elleinstein', *Le Matin*, 4 December 1979.

⁸⁶ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, p. 84;

⁸⁷ Jean Elleinstein, 'The Skein of History Unrolled Backwards', in *Eurocommunism, its Roots in Italy and Elsewhere*, ed. by George Urban, (London: Temple Smith, 1978), p. 84.

⁸⁸ Jean Kanapa, 'Une voie originale, une voie nationale', *L'Humanité*, 27 October 1976; words underlined by myself.

matter of mere ‘errors’, or slight mistakes which could be easily rectified in France. It was instead a matter of unforgivable and unrectifiable Soviet horrors. As Althusser put it,

on dira sans doute qu’en politique les drames peuvent être considérés comme une suite d’erreurs d’appréciation, et que toute erreur peut être rectifiée. Ce n’est pas faux, sauf qu’on se heurte à une limite absolue: quand une erreur aboutit à [...] des centaines de milliers de suppliciés et de morts, voire à une seule mort physique ou morale, c’est un point de non retour.⁸⁹

In this context, the French Communist Party did not push the logic to its own conclusions in the 1970s: it did not go far enough with its project of French socialism, just as it did not go far enough when criticising the Soviet Union. The Party should have by contrast extricated itself completely from Moscow’s influence, set-up a truly pioneering and independent socialist counter-policy, and renovated itself entirely. In that respect, Pierre Daix declared that ‘il faudrait [que le PCF] définisse avec tous ses militants une politique indépendante, c’est-à-dire, face à l’URSS, une contre-politique’.⁹⁰

As for Althusser, he wrote with anger in his manuscripts that

nul ne prétendra que nos partis communistes puissent se réjouir d’avoir désormais ‘accroché au cul’ [...] cette épouvantable casserole [...] [et] à défaut d’exemple, désormais impossible à promener en plein air, [les pays socialistes] servent du moins de faire-valoir négatif: nous ne ferons pas comme eux, nous sommes différents d’eux, nous ferons un autre socialisme: ‘aux couleurs de la France’.⁹¹

[Mais] le parti ne s’en tirera pas en avançant [cet] argument [...] qui reporte tout

⁸⁹ Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁹⁰ Pierre Daix, *J’ai cru au matin* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1976), p. 457.

⁹¹ Althusser, *Du bon usage des pays socialistes*, unpublished manuscripts.

simplement sur les ‘couleurs de l’Union soviétique’ [...] [sur] les pratiques répressives qui existent encore en URSS [...] et que le parti n’est pas capable d’expliquer.⁹²

The arguments presented by Althusser and Daix were certainly convincing, but the task set for the FCP seemed rather ambitious — perhaps too ambitious to change the face of the Party before the 1978 and 1981 elections, and too big to make the FCP the dominant force of the Union of the Left in such a short period of time. However, in the 1970s, the challenge should have been taken up by the French Communist Party, even if Moscow’s wrath would have fallen on the Party, even if it risked declining for a while under the weight of the ‘revelations’ promised by the USSR.⁹³ The French Communist Party could have won in terms of prestige and support in the long run — and in any case it could have prevented Georges Marchais from regretting in 1985 that

nous [les communistes français] avons pris du retard à dégager notre réflexion sur le socialisme pour la France d’un ‘modèle’ extérieur et à définir une perspective adaptée aux conditions de notre pays et de notre temps.⁹⁴

However, in the 1970s, the French Communist Party did not perceive things from this angle. Classified as ‘dissidents’, critical communist intellectuals were considered wrong whatever they said. Their proposals were inevitably unacceptable. For only the Party was right and knew where to lead its activists, even if it was at the cost of an hesitant

⁹² Althusser, *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e congrès)*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁹³ Unlike the ICP, which was to a large extent financed by its members, the FCP was financially dependent on the USSR in the 1970s. The FCP was also financed, to a lesser extent, by some businessmen, like Jean-Bapiste Doumeng, and by its communist members.

⁹⁴ 25^e Congrès, *Espoir et combat pour l’avenir (rapport présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St Ouen, 8-10 February 1985).

strategic waltz — a ‘socialism in the colours of France’ taking the FCP away from Moscow, and a ‘bilan globalement positif’ bringing the Party closer to the Russian bear, namely one step forward and one step back.

To conclude, in the 1970s, the French Communist Party found itself in an awkward position with regard to its relation with the USSR. On the one hand, the Soviet myth helped the Party to project a positive image of what socialism could be in France, and therefore helped it to strengthen the communist ideology around key ideas such as, for instance, the nationalisation of the means of production and betterment of the masses through culture. On the other hand, the ideological and financial grip the USSR had over the FCP prevented the Party from embarking on an extensive and objective examination of Soviet history, as well as from asserting a new project of socialist society which would not merely be an adjustment of Soviet socialism, but rather a truly pioneering project.

As a consequence, the French Communist Party’s action was too hesitant to have a decisive impact on the Party’s political sphere of influence in the long term — which meant that the Party was caught unaware by the collapse of the Soviet bloc and ultimately lost out. As Robert Hue explained in 1995 and 1999,

on s’est, en fait, des années durant refusé à voir la réalité, à la dire, et à en tirer toutes les conséquences [...]. Tout cela, nous l’avons payé très cher. Dans le domaine politique. Mais aussi dans celui de la pensée, de la culture. Par vagues successives [...] beaucoup d’intellectuels proches du Parti communiste s’en éloignèrent, beaucoup de ceux qui étaient communistes nous quittèrent [...].⁹⁵ Le Parti communiste [...] a beaucoup perdu [d’adhérents] en vingt ans. Au point d’atteindre en maints endroits une taille critique ne lui permettant pas d’apparaître

⁹⁵ Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation*, pp. 122, 128.

ni d'agir suffisamment.⁹⁶

However, warning signals had been sent by Party members, notably in the 1970s by Jean Elleinstein and Louis Althusser. Indeed, both agreed that the FCP had to condemn unconditionally the Soviet leadership, then turn its back on the USSR and go its own way. Both knew that if the FCP's influence within French society was to remain strong, the Party had to change, meaning that it had to wipe away the Soviet myth and de-sovietise its internal practices. The present analysis made by the French Communist Party of its past links with the USSR would suggest that they were right.

⁹⁶ Robert Hue, *Communisme: un nouveau projet* (Paris: Stock, 1999), p. 382.

CHAPTER 7

The Union of the Left:

a rank and file union or a union at the top?

The Common Programme of Government was officially concluded on 27th June 1972 between the French Communist Party of Georges Marchais and the relatively new Socialist Party of François Mitterrand,¹ then ratified two weeks later by the left-wing Radicals of Robert Fabre. Fused by a contract covering a large part of the competence areas of the French State,² the Union of the Left set itself a precise objective: to pave the way to socialism.³ The implication was of great significance. Far from aiming at a mere re-arrangement of the capitalist system in place, the strategy of the Union of the Left was to break with capitalism in the long run — a strategy which was based on the democratic conquest of state power not only thanks to the backing of the united left-wing masses, but also thanks to the polarisation of ‘tous ceux que révolte l’inégalité profonde des conditions sociales’,⁴ of all those who wanted to put an end to the domination of a *pompidoulienne*,⁵ then *giscardienne* Right⁶ impregnated by the powerful Gaullist movement. In that sense, the constitution of the Union of the Left around the Common

¹ The Socialist Party was created in June 1971 at the Congress of Epinay-sur-Seine.

² The Common Programme covered first some aspects of daily life such as employment, health, education and leisure; second France’s economy, like company management, industrial, agricultural and budgetary policy, and third France’s institutions and fourth international relations; cf. ‘Le Programme Commun de Gouvernement — Parti Socialiste, Parti Communiste, Radicaux de Gauche’, in *Changer la vie — Programme de Gouvernement du Parti Socialiste et Programme Commun de la Gauche* (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), pp. 253-340.

³ ‘Le Programme Commun de Gouvernement’, *ibid.*, p. 255; cf. 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976); Georges Marchais interviewed in ‘Cartes sur tables’, *Antenne 2*, 18 May 1977 and quoted in ‘Georges Marchais à Antenne 2: changer et changer vraiment’, *L’Humanité*, 19 May 1977, p. 3; *Les principes de la politique du FCP* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1975), pp. 67-8.

⁴ ‘Présentation de François Mitterrand’, in *Changer la vie — Programme de Gouvernement du Parti Socialiste et Programme Commun de la Gauche*, p. 8.

⁵ Pompidou became President on 15 June 1969, after Général de Gaulle resigned; see our introduction.

⁶ Giscard d’Estaing was President from May 1974 to May 1981; see our introduction.

Programme harked back to three events which marked the social history of France, that is to say the Paris Commune of 1871, the Popular Front of 1934-38 and the revolt of May-June 1968.

If the Paris Commune was born as a result of France's defeat by Bismarck's Prussia and a republican jolt against an Assembly dominated by the monarchists,⁷ if the Commune died in blood,⁸ it nonetheless remained vivacious enough in the long term to mark left-wing formations. The Communard insurrection was, first and foremost, a proletarian revolutionary movement⁹ which was opposed to a relatively new capitalist system¹⁰ and which did not hesitate to put forward pioneering reform projects. One talked about workers' emancipation, about their participation in the management committees of workshops — these were the first fruits of self-management.¹¹ However, the communard insurrection was regrettably, according to the Russian revolutionary Lavrov, a movement which was on the road to ruin from the outset due to the lack of structured organisation, propaganda, and attraction for the peasantry and the whole of the working class.¹² Robert Hue acknowledged this too, in 1999, when he wrote that, 'il y a nécessité, pour être efficace au service de la transformation révolutionnaire de la société, d'une inscription des [partis] révolutionnaires dans cette société, et tout

⁷ Jacques Zwirn, coordinated by L'Association des Amis de la Commune de Paris, *La Commune de Paris aujourd'hui* (Paris: Atelier, 1999), p. 9. Aldophe Thiers (1797-1877) was then at the head of the executive.

⁸ 25,000 persons were massacred and 40,000 others were arrested; cf. Robert Gildea, *Barricades and borders — Europe 1800-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1987), p. 223.

⁹ Zwirn, *La Commune de Paris aujourd'hui*, p. 10: 84% of communards were manual workers and 30% of workers had a seat in the *Conseil de la Commune*; cf. Robert Gildea, *Barricades and borders*, *ibid.*, p. 223. Karl Marx, 'The Civil War in France', address to the General Council of the International Working Men's Association (written in London on 30 May 1871), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume*, English translation (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 295.

¹⁰ Robert Hue, 'Remarque sur l'actualité de la Commune', in Zwirn, *La Commune de Paris aujourd'hui*, p. 125.

¹¹ Zwirn, *La Commune de Paris aujourd'hui*, p. 11. Self-management was advocated by left-wing trade-unions in May-June 1968, imposed by the Socialist Party at the time of the signature of the Common Programme in 1972 and embraced by the FCP towards 1976; cf. Antoine Prost, 'Sept millions de grévistes', *L'Histoire*, February 1998, p. 91; 'Programme de Gouvernement du Parti Socialiste', in *Changer la vie — Programme de Gouvernement du Parti Socialiste et Programme Commun de la Gauche*, p. 69; see our ch. 5.

¹² Gildea, *Barricades and borders*, p. 224.

particulièrement dans le jeu politique qui s'y déroule.¹³ And this was precisely the strategy adopted by the FCP in the Popular Front era.

For the French Communist Party, the Popular Front was a key period. It was indeed the first time since the FCP broke away from the SFIO at the Tours Congress of December 1920¹⁴ that the Party found itself on a common platform with the Socialist Party of Léon Blum.¹⁵ It was also the first time that the FCP was no longer set apart from the other French political forces, as a result of the assertion of its revolutionary Bolshevik character, but was rather at the forefront of the French political scene. Besides, the unitary experience proved to be conclusive in terms of materialisation of social demands:¹⁶ it was an encouraging sign for the future. As Robert Hue put it when talking about the FCP,

le Front populaire [est] [...] marqué par son immersion dans la société, son rôle essentiel dans la définition et la mise en oeuvre d'une stratégie de rassemblement des forces de gauche, qui [a permis] l'entrée de la classe ouvrière, pour la première fois, sur la scène politique et les grandes conquêtes sociales et démocratiques que l'on sait.¹⁷

However, despite the FCP's intentions to play an active role on the French political scene in the 1930s, it did not take part in the Popular Front government. One had to wait for the events of May-June 1968 for the Party to decide to become a party of government.

During the 1968 events, a certain desire to change government, or even regime

¹³ Hue, 'Remarque sur l'actualité de la Commune' in Zwirn, *La Commune de Paris aujourd'hui*, pp. 129-30.

¹⁴ The Tours Congress took place from 25 to 29 December 1920; cf., among others, Ronald Tiersky, *French communism, 1920-1972*, (New York: London Columbia University Press, 1974).

¹⁵ Daladier's Radical Party joined the Popular Front movement in January 1936.

¹⁶ By reference, among others, to wage increases and to the reduction of the working week; cf. Maurice Larkin, *France since the Popular Front*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 45.

¹⁷ Hue, 'Remarque sur l'actualité de la Commune' in Zwirn, *La Commune de Paris aujourd'hui*, p. 130.

and society, was expressed¹⁸ — a desire which could only find an opportunistic echo within the FCP. The Party called for the constitution of a ‘popular government’ with the FGDS, but François Mitterrand preferred to try to gather a government around himself. As a result, these unilateral actions proved fruitless¹⁹ — but they had the merit of making a union of the left-wing forces an imperative. As the FCP’s Champigny Manifesto put it at the end of 1968,

comme l’ont montré avec force les puissants mouvements populaires de mai-juin 1968, les conditions mûrissent rapidement pour une action commune de toutes les couches atteintes ou menacées par les monopoles [...] le Parti communiste français réaffirme [donc] la volonté des communistes de travailler à l’entente de toutes les forces ouvrières et démocratiques sur la base d’un programme commun avancé, susceptible d’être appuyé par la majorité du peuple français et d’ouvrir la perspective du renouveau.²⁰

In this context, the first part of this chapter will establish the Party’s conception of the Union of the Left — a position partly shared by Jean Elleinstein. As for the second part, it will shed light on Louis Althusser’s criticisms towards its Leadership who, according to him, had merely exploited its base in a Union forged at the summit. Althusser’s own perception of the Union will also be discussed.

In the 1970s, the Leadership of the French Communist Party took note of the fact that the union of popular forces behind left-wing parties was not spontaneous,²¹ despite their

¹⁸ Prost, ‘Sept millions de grévistes’, pp. 91-2.

¹⁹ Prost, *ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁰ *Pour une démocratie avancée, pour une France socialiste! (Manifeste du Comité Central du parti communiste français)*, (Champigny, 6 December 1968), pp. 27, 31.

²¹ Jacques Chambaz, ‘Aujourd’hui et demain, des voies nouvelles pour vaincre’, *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 10 (October 1979), 47.

convergence in terms of economic, social and political interests. The Paris Commune and the events of 1968 had proved this. Set against this historical context, for communist leaders, the solution to the problem was obvious. The Party had to stimulate the participative mobilization of its base in order to gather popular forces within the Union of the Left, in order to weld them around the working class and its natural party — i.e. the French Communist Party.

First, in accordance with its *ouvriériste* orientation,²² the Leadership of the FCP considered that it was the communist working class which was the best placed to unite the lower classes.²³ Middle-class, and even *petits-bourgeois* communist intellectuals were admittedly meant to elevate the cultural level of the population and win new adherents to the Party²⁴ — but when it came to creating the very ferments of socialism, there was not a shadow of a doubt in the minds of communist leaders. The communist working class could only occupy a position of supremacy because of its historical role in international revolutionary movements and its specific character.

The working class had not only been at the forefront of the 1848 French, German and Italian Revolutions, but also during the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1917 Russian Revolution.²⁵ Communist leaders thus considered that workers were the carriers of revolutionary seeds which, if they sprouted in more or less spontaneous and successful movements,²⁶ had nonetheless to be catalysed by an ‘alternative legitimacy’²⁷ to present power in order for them to develop effectively — this ‘alternative legitimacy’ being incarnated by the French Communist Party.

As far as the specific characteristic of the working class were concerned, FCP

²² See ch. 4.

²³ Georges Marchais, ‘Vers le changement démocratique’, *L’Humanité*, 1 April 1977.

²⁴ See ch. 3.

²⁵ Allan Todd, *Revolutions, 1789-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 51-7.

²⁶ Todd, *ibid.*, pp. 51-3, 56-7: for instance, according to Todd, in 1917 some communist mass movements, which were independent from Lenin’s control, sprouted during the March Revolution, the July Days, and the land and factory nationalisation campaign.

²⁷ Frédéric Bluche and Stéphane Rials, eds., *Les révolutions françaises* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), p. 23.

leaders did not hesitate to be grandiloquent. For them, ‘[la classe ouvrière incarne la] force vive de l’économie moderne²⁸ [...] la force révolutionnaire²⁹ [...] [et] joue un rôle moteur’.³⁰ Whether it was a sign of egocentricity coming from some of these former workers,³¹ whether it was simply an excess of generosity from these persons dedicated to the communist cause, or whether it was a blunt acknowledgement of the truth — for Party leaders, the proof of their arguments was irrefutable. The working class was the only class to possess a global view of the exploitative perversity of the capitalist system.³² It was the only class to be fully interested in the implementation of socialism in France, and it was the only class actively working towards a change of regime.

This argument is relatively convincing. It is indeed natural to be willing to change one’s condition in a society based on material values rather than moral and intellectual ones, just as it is normal to want to go from an exploited, and therefore submissive and uninfluential position, to a dominant and controlling status. However, what Party leaders failed to understand in the 1970s, was that the working class was not entirely determined to change a regime which had, broadly speaking, improved their life and working conditions,³³ and which had, consequently, diminished the relevance of both a socialist/communist alternative and a communist revolutionary interpretation of the Common Programme. The loss of influence of the FCP, the parallel growing popularity of a Socialist Party more flexible in its approach to capitalism, and beyond it the acceptance of French capitalism and the globalisation of the economy, proved this in the

²⁸ 23^e Congrès, *L’avenir commence maintenant (résolution adoptée par le 23^e Congrès)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979)

²⁹ Georges Marchais, *Vers le changement démocratique (rapport au Comité Central des 31 mars et 1^{er} avril 1977)*.

³⁰ Georges Marchais at the Partys’ ‘fraternity meeting’, quoted in *L’Humanité*, 4 June 1976.

³¹ See ch. 3.

³² 23^e Congrès, *L’avenir commence maintenant (résolution adoptée par le 23^e Congrès)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979).

³³ See ch. 4. In March 1978, 37% of French workers voted for the FCP. In June 1981, this figure fell to 24% and in March 1986 it bottomed out at 15%, in François Platone, ‘Les électors législatifs sous la Cinquième République’, *Revue Française de Science Politique*, no. 42 (1992), 310-2.

long run.³⁴ But whatever the long-term implications, in the 1970s, Georges Marchais knew what all communists wanted: ‘[Ils veulent] rassembler toutes les forces vives de la nation contre les barons du grand capital.’³⁵

Second, for the FCP leaders, the participative mobilization of the communist base had to go further than the mere reunion of popular forces: it had to weld them around the communist working-class vanguard.³⁶ This specification was important, for what was at stake was the strength of the Party’s influence over decisions within the Union of the Left — and therefore its domination over the Socialist Party. However, for the Socialist Party, there was no question of accepting a communist vanguard. There was no question either of accepting that one specific class should dominate the others within the Union. Instead, what the Socialist Party wanted was a ‘class front’ promoting the common, egalitarian and concerted action of the various forces forming the Union, and setting up, as Jean Poperen put it, ‘une “communauté fondamentale d’intérêts.”’³⁷

The idea of a class front was good insofar as it strengthened the unitary dynamic of the Union as well as its ability to make an impact on the French political scene. The battle thus shifted. It was no longer a battle of classes which was fought within the Union, between communist workers and the ‘other’ elements of the Left, as advocated by the FCP. It was a battle which was fought by left-wing parties united under the flag of the Common Programme of Government, against the right-wing power in place.³⁸ It was a battle in which left-wing activists certainly played a major role on the ground, in terms of ideological agitation, but also obeyed the orders launched by their leaderships on a common basis. Consequently, the formation of a class front embodied the idea of a

³⁴ Alain Duhamel and Dominique Gador, in ‘Un nouveau communisme, est-ce possible?’ *L’Humanité Hebdo*, 25-26 March 2000, p. 9.

³⁵ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

³⁶ 22^e Congrès, *ibid.*

³⁷ Jean Poperen, *Le nouveau contrat socialiste* (Paris: Ramsay, 1985), p. 28.

³⁸ Jean-Pierre Chevènement, *Les socialistes, les communistes et les autres* (Paris: Aubier, 1977), p. 231.

Union forged around the contract of the Common Programme, but also at both its base and its summit, according to the socialists.

In this context, if the leaders of the French Communist Party accepted that the Union should be ‘loyale, claire, respectueuse du pluralisme [entre les partis]’,³⁹ it was nonetheless the case that they brushed aside the very idea of a class front⁴⁰ — ‘[ce] fourre-tout dans lequel tous les chats sont gris’ if we believe Marchais.⁴¹ For them, this idea was even more unacceptable since, from the mid-1970s onwards, it was no longer the FCP which was the strongest left-wing political force, as had been the case since 1945: it was the Socialist Party.⁴² Competition was in the air, and communist leaders acted accordingly: they interpreted the notion of ‘loyalty’ in a rather peculiar way — the dominant socialists doing exactly the same thing with their concept of ‘équivalence des forces entre les deux composantes de la Gauche française’.⁴³

The leaders of the French Communist Party refused the strategy of class front for three reasons which were linked to the characteristics of the Socialist Party and to its leader, François Mitterrand. First, communist leaders considered that the social-democrat nature of the SP in general made it less willing to destroy capitalism, in order to replace it by socialism,⁴⁴ and more incline ‘[à] céder à la “fascination” giscardienne⁴⁵ [...] [et à

³⁹ 23^e Congrès, *Pour une avancée démocratique (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979); Georges Marchais, *Plus que jamais agissons pour l’union et le changement (rapport présenté à la session du Comité Central des 4 et 5 octobre 1977)*, quoted in *L’Humanité*, 7 October 1977.

⁴⁰ Hughes Portelli, ‘La voie nationale des PC français et italien’, *Projet*, no. 106 (June 1976), 667.

⁴¹ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

⁴² Jean Baudoin, ‘Le déclin du FCP’, *Regards sur l’actualité* (April 1991), 39; Victor Leduc, ‘The French Communist Party: between Stalinism and Eurocommunism’, *Political Quarterly*, 49 (1978), 407; Neill Nugent and David Lowe, ‘The French Communist Party: the Road to Democratic Government?’, *Political Quarterly*, 48 (1977), 282; Colette Ysmal, ‘Parti communiste: les raisons d’un durcissement’, *Projet*, no. 121 (January 1978), 49; François Mitterrand, *Ici et maintenant* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), pp. 23-4.

⁴³ Jean Poperen, *L’unité de la gauche (1965-1973)*, (Paris: Fayard, 1975), p. 5.

⁴⁴ Georges Marchais’ ‘secret’ report to the Party’s Central Committee of 29 June 1972 quoted in René Andrieu, *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui se réclament du socialisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), p. 101; cf. Jean Elleinstein, ‘PC: Jean Elleinstein s’explique’, *Politique Hebdo*, 23-29 January 1978, p. 8; Elleinstein, ‘Du XXII^e congrès du FCP à l’échec de la gauche — La révolution n’est plus ce qu’elle était’, *Le Monde*, 13 April 1978; in 1959, Maurice Thorez already declared that ‘nous sommes en présence [...] d’une véritable entreprise de liquidation de toute conception socialiste’, in 15^e Congrès

laisser] [...] la porte ouverte à un replâtrage du pouvoir'.⁴⁶ Indeed, as the intellectual communist dissident Maurice Goldring put it — thus proving that his loyalty to the Party was not in contradiction with his dissident outbursts — ‘un Parti socialiste sans le contrepoids d’une influence communiste suffisante prend le sens des vents dominants aussi sûrement qu’un ballon dirigeable mal lesté.’⁴⁷ Second, communist leaders considered that the grassroots of the Socialist Party were far too heterogeneous to make it bend leftwards. For them, if the socialist base did include ‘some’ workers, these were submerged by a real tidal wave of ‘bourgeois’ elements with right-wing tendencies.⁴⁸ However, this argument did not stand up to the fact that, by cooperating with the FCP, the SP actually took a left wing turn in the 1970s,⁴⁹ rather than a right-wing one⁵⁰ as it could have done with the centrists. Lionel Jospin confirmed this in 1991: ‘Ni notre génération [...] ni François Mitterrand [...] n’avaient la tentation de servir d’appoint à la Droite. Notre objectif était de la remplacer.’⁵¹ Third, communist leaders considered that, at the summit of the SP, Mitterrand was a figurehead with rather questionable and destructive ambitions.⁵² His promise to stamp on the Communist Party⁵³ by pumping it

du FCP, *L’union des forces ouvrières et républicaines pour la restauration et la rénovation de la démocratie (rapport d’activité du Comité Central présenté par Maurice Thorez)*, (Ivry, 24-28 June 1959); in 1999, Robert Hue adopted the same discourse towards Jospin’s SP, in *Communisme: un nouveau projet* (Paris: Stock, 1999), pp. 141, 147.

⁴⁵ 23^e Congrès, *L’avenir commence maintenant (résolution adoptée par le 23^e Congrès)*, (St-Ouen, 9-13 May 1979); Guy Hermier, ‘Rapport introductif’, in *Les intellectuels, la culture et la révolution*, ed. by Conseil National du PCF (Bobigny, 9 et 10 février 1980), (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1980), p. 67.

⁴⁶ Georges Marchais, *Plus que jamais agissons pour l’union et le changement (rapport présenté à la session du Comité Central des 4 et 5 octobre 1977)* quoted in *L’Humanité*, 7 October 1977.

⁴⁷ Maurice Goldring, *L’accident* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1978), p. 51.

⁴⁸ André Vieuguet, ‘Pourquoi un parti communiste plus influent, plus fort, plus actif?’ *Cahiers du Communisme*, February-March 1976; Etienne Fajon, quoted in Andrieu, *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui se réclament du socialisme*, p. 101.

⁴⁹ Régis Debray, *Lettre ouverte aux communistes français et à quelques autres* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 30: addressing himself to the communists, Debray declared: ‘Vous [avez effectué] [...] un assez sérieux virage à droite (abandon de la dictature du prolétariat, acceptation des mécanismes européens, de la force de frappe etc.)’

⁵⁰ As Elleinstein thought in ‘PC: Jean Elleinstein s’explique’, p. 6.

⁵¹ Lionel Jospin, *L’invention du possible* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), p. 89.

⁵² Ronald Tiersky, ‘French Communism in 1976’, *Problems of Communism*, 15 (January-February 1976), 36.

⁵³ François Mitterrand, *Ma part de vérité — De la rupture à l’unité* (Paris: Fayard, 1969), pp. 119-20; Jean Elleinstein, *Le PC* (Paris: Grasset, 1976), p. 135; Jean Elleinstein, *Histoire mondiale des socialismes*, vol. 6 (Paris: A. Colin, 1984), p. 204.

‘trois millions de voix’,⁵⁴ meaning by using it as a ‘réservoir à voix’⁵⁵ according to Marchais, proved this — a promise that Mitterrand kept⁵⁶ by making a perfectly legitimate political calculation.

Consequently, there was not a shadow of a doubt in the minds of the leaders of the French Communist Party. Only a communist working class vanguard could contain, at the base, the right-wing and social-democrat drifts of the Socialist Party. Only a communist working class vanguard could ensure a left-wing, or even a communist orientation to the Common Programme. In essence, the communist working class base was the magical key to all problems encountered when opening the Pandora’s box of the SP. In this context, as the following analysis demonstrates, in the 1970s the attitude of the FCP towards the Union of the Left could hark back first to the position of the Bolsheviks in 1905-1907 Russia, which was described by the Russian historian Zarodov, and second to the theory of *union de combat* which was developed by the French communist Etienne Fajon — a theory refuted by Jean Elleinstein.

Zarodov addressed the question of left-wing alliances in 1981, in a book entitled *The Political Economy of Revolution*. Written from a revolutionary Soviet point of view, this book not only established the position of the motherland of Socialism towards what Zarodov called the ‘common front strategy’,⁵⁷ it also demonstrated the extent of Leninist influence on the French Communist Party in the 1970s. In that sense, if Zarodov

⁵⁴ Georges Marchais, interviewed on France Inter, *Petit déjeuner politique*, 6 April 1978 and quoted in ‘Un débat positif et enrichissant, déclare Georges Marchais sur France-Inter’, *L’Humanité*, 7 April 1978: ‘Cet objectif correspondait à celui de M. V. Giscard d’Estaing: ramener l’influence du Parti communiste à 15%’; François Mitterrand at the International Socialist Congress, Vienna, 28 May 1972, quoted in Andrieu, *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui se réclament du socialisme*, p. 103; cf. M. Adereth, *The French Communist Party: a Critical History (1920-84) from Comintern to ‘the Colours of France’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 203.

⁵⁵ Georges Marchais, ‘Notre parti, ni son électorat, ne saurait accepter ce rôle ni cette situation’, *L’étincelle 70*, April 1979; cf. Jean Elleinstein, ‘Un communiste juge les communistes’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6 September 1976, p. 68; André Vieuguet, ‘Un parti communiste influent, fort, actif’, *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 1 (January 1996), 16.

⁵⁶ Michel Winock, ‘L’âge d’or du communisme français,’ *L’Histoire*, July-August 1998, p. 58.

⁵⁷ K. Zarodov, *The Political Economy of Revolution*, English translation (London: Central Books Distributor, 1981), p. 177.

expressed himself in favour of an alliance between the FCP and the SP, insofar as it could lead to a shared, but mainly communist political take-over, he nonetheless did not hesitate to send warning signals relating to the nature of the French Socialist Party — warning signals which were based on Lenin's experience and which were directly addressed to the summit of the FCP. Zarodov thus reported that in the pre-Revolutionary Russia of 1905-1907,

the Bolsheviks [...] were prepared to cooperate with the democratic bourgeoisie in a broad people's political coalition⁵⁸ [...]. Proof of the Bolshevik pursuit of working-class political parties' solidarity lies in the Fourth (Unity) [...] Congress (1906). They were the active organisers and participants in this Unity Congress, while the Mensheviks turned the fruits of their labours to naught, an agreement on paper only, calculated to undermine the Bolshevik Party.⁵⁹

As a proof of his thesis, Zarodov quoted F. Dan, a Menshevik leader: 'It is all over for the Bolshevik now; they'll flounder about for a few months more and then dissolve altogether into the party.'⁶⁰ These declarations could not have hit the bull's eyes any better among French communist leaders. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1980s, they were the formal proof that history repeats itself, and they confirmed the most implacable suspicions of the FCP towards its socialist 'partner'. In the 1970s, the SP had acted like the Mensheviks, and F. Mitterrand revealed himself to be the very incarnation of F. Dan. If the Mensheviks used the Bolsheviks to advance their own aims, French socialists 'set their sights on boosting their own party at the expense of the Communists [...] [and]

⁵⁸ Vladimir Ilitch Lenin, *Que faire?* French translation (Paris: Librairie de l'Humanité, 1925), p. 14.

⁵⁹ Zarodov, *The Political Economy of Revolution*, p. 180.

⁶⁰ Zarodov, *ibid.*, p. 180. The official Soviet historian Zarodov took his quote from A.V. Lunacharsky, *Vospominaniya i vpechatleniya [Memories and Impressions]*, (Moscow: [n. pub.], 1968), p. 40.

planned to resume their right-wing social democratic tradition'.⁶¹ If Dan wanted to weaken Lenin's party, Mitterrand promised that 'sur les cinq millions d'électeurs communistes, trois millions peuvent voter socialiste!'⁶² As a consequence, in the eyes of FCP leaders, all this confirmed the 'right' strategic choice they made in the 1970s: the Union of the Left was certainly essential to allow a left wing government to replace a right wing one and therefore create the ideal conditions for a passage to socialism, but, as Etienne Fajon wrote, this Union was above all a battle.

The title of Etienne Fajon's book, *L'union est un combat*,⁶³ had a double meaning in the sense that, for French communist leaders, the battle for the Union of the Left and against the Right was also a battle within the Union⁶⁴ — a battle led both by the communist base and by the FCP leadership against a SP endowed with so-called right-wing tendencies.⁶⁵ As Fajon justified it sarcastically in 1975, in the middle of the take-off of the SP at the expense of the FCP, 'l'union n'est pas une idylle mais un combat'.⁶⁶ However, for the communist candidate but independently minded Jean Elleinstein,⁶⁷ this was a strategic error. If for him 'il n'est pas scandaleux qu'existe une certaine concurrence à l'intérieur de l'Union [...] un écart trop grand entre le PS et le PC ne [pouvant] qu'affaiblir l'unité',⁶⁸ he nonetheless condemned communist leaders for going too far in their battle⁶⁹ — and on this particular point, Elleinstein was probably correct.

⁶¹ Zarodov, *ibid.*, p. 176.

⁶² François Mitterrand quoted in Andrieu, *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui se réclament du socialisme*, p. 103; cf. M. Adereth, *The French Communist Party: a Critical History (1920-1984) from Comintern to 'the Colours of France'*, p. 203.

⁶³ Etienne Fajon, *L'union est un combat* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1975).

⁶⁴ This was also true for the Socialist Party.

⁶⁵ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

⁶⁶ Fajon, *L'union est un combat*, p. 41; 22^e Congrès, *Ce que veulent les communistes pour la France (document adopté par le 22^e Congrès)*, (St-Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

⁶⁷ Jean Elleinstein was the communist candidate in the 5th arrondissement of Paris at the 1978 legislative elections.

⁶⁸ Jean Elleinstein, *Lettre ouverte aux français sur le République du Programme Commun* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977), pp. 56, 58.

⁶⁹ 'Les accusations contre le PC de Jean Elleinstein', *Le Matin*, 4 December 1979; Auguste Lecoœur, *Le FCP: continuité dans le changement* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1977), p. 42.

The battle led at the summit by communist leaders against the Socialist Party could only be counterproductive for the whole Union. Indeed, each time communist leaders criticised the SP, they gave additional arguments to the Right — arguments which were even more forceful and welcome because they came from the ranks of the enemy. Each time communist leaders attacked the SP, they demolished the unitary work of the base by promoting a secessionist strategy at the summit of the Union. Each time communist leaders tried to push the SP to adopt more revolutionary positions, they narrowed the electoral spectrum of the Union. As Elleinstein put it, ‘nous [communistes] n’avons pas convaincu. Pis encore, nous avons découragé des bonnes volontés, et fait peur bien au-delà de l’électorat socialiste, jusque autour de nous’.⁷⁰ As a consequence, in the 1970s, the Union of the Left should not have been *une union de combat, stricto sensu*,⁷¹ fought both at the base, thanks to the participative mobilization of communist activists, and at the summit by FCP leaders. It should have rather been a more moderate Union based on a constructive approach to political and ideological divergence, meaning, as Elleinstein proposed it at the end of the 1970s, a ‘union of debate’ forged both at the base and at the summit. As Elleinstein explained:

La forme du combat pour l’union doit être le débat [...] il faut entre socialistes et communistes un véritable débat sur les grands choix stratégiques, sur la conception même du socialisme, sur les étapes des transformations qu’un gouvernement de Gauche devrait mettre en route, sur les moyens de la victoire.⁷² [Mais] il ne s’agit pas seulement d’organiser l’union au sommet. L’union, pour être durable et créer les conditions de la victoire, doit être une union populaire

⁷⁰ Jean Elleinstein, ‘Du XXII^e congrès du FCP à l’échec de la Gauche — La mutation nécessaire’, *Le Monde*, 14 April 1978.

⁷¹ Elleinstein, *ibid.*

⁷² Jean Elleinstein, ‘Du XXII^e congrès du PCF à l’échec de la Gauche — La révolution n’est plus ce qu’elle était’, *Le Monde*, 13 April 1978; Elleinstein, ‘Pour une alliance historique entre le FCP et le PS’, *Le Monde*, 24 August 1978.

[...] [réalisée] par les partis et en dehors des partis, à la base comme au sommet.⁷³

However, for the leaders of the French Communist Party, there was no way a union of debate could be forged with the Socialist Party. The socialists proved it themselves: they refused to debate constructively with the CP in 1977 — they refused the communists' revision proposals for the Common Programme.⁷⁴ For the leaders of the FCP, the only voice they could hear was that of a battle within the Union, against the Socialist Party — a view Louis Althusser did not hesitate to challenge.

In Althusser's mind, there was not the slightest doubt. The leadership of the French Communist Party did not try to cooperate closely with the communist base in order to strengthen the Union of the Left. The leadership of the FCP did not mobilize its base in a fully participative manner in order to bring the forces of the Left to victory in March 1978. The Party leadership rather instrumentalized its base in order to assert its own decisional power within the Union. The action of communist activists, which should have been placed at the very heart of the unitary movement of the Union of the Left, was, therefore, pushed into the background, behind that of their leaders who directed the Union at the summit.⁷⁵ Jacques Chambaz could swear that 'conscient que l'accord au sommet ne suffit pas [...] [le PCF] en a toujours appelé à la classe ouvrière, à l'ensemble des forces populaires pour qu'elles ne s'en remettent pas aux états-majors'⁷⁶ — for Althusser the conclusion remained the same. The Union of the Left was a contractual

⁷³ Jean Elleinstein quoted in *Le Monde*, 9 May 1979.

⁷⁴ The negotiations which took place between the FCP and the SP on the updating of the Common Programme were suspended in the night of 22-23 September 1977; cf., among others, Annie Kriegel, 'PC-PS: les causes de la rupture', *Commentaire*, no. 3 (1978), 317.

⁷⁵ Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, Georges Labica and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Ouvrons la fenêtre, camarades* (Paris: Maspero, 1979), p. 123; Didier, an employee of the SNCF, in 'Entretien avec deux membres de comités de sections d'entreprise (SNCF)', *Luttes et Débats*, January 1979, pp. 8, 17; Raymond Jean, *La singularité d'être communiste* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979), p. 97; Raymond Jean, 'La gauche de la gauche', *Le Monde*, 1 November 1977.

⁷⁶ Jacques Chambaz, 'Aujourd'hui et demain, des voies nouvelles pour vaincre', *Cahiers du Communisme*, no. 10 (October 1979), 44.

policy concluded at the summit, between the leaderships of the signatory parties of the Common Programme of Government. It was therefore a policy which was flawed for two reasons.

First, for Althusser, communist leaders focused too much on the contractual aspect of the Common Programme — and on this ground, his criticisms were fully justified. Indeed, this contract became the pivot of the Party's strategy from 1972 to 1977. In a first stage, the communist leadership focused on the need for the Socialist Party to respect the clauses of the Common Programme which had been defined in 1972. Then, in a second stage — when the Socialist party started dominating the Union of the Left from 1974 onwards — FCP leaders changed their strategy⁷⁷ by starting to insist on the necessity of reviewing the clauses of the contract because the 1973 oil crisis had struck France, causing a change in the economic and social landscape,⁷⁸ and thus changing the background against which the Common Programme had been originally defined.⁷⁹ However, what should have constituted the pivot of the Party's strategy was not the contract in itself, but the Union of popular forces, for according to the communists only the Union could have ensured a victory at the 1978 legislative elections and the consequent successful implementation of the contract.⁸⁰ The Party's priorities were, therefore, wrong. A contractual strategy, based on the respect or the non-respect, or even on the maintenance, or the modification, of such and such clause could only lead to a destructive polemic between the two leaderships, and thus to a secessionist policy within the Union. This was exactly what happened in 1977. The contract should have been kept in the background until after victory at the 1978 elections had been secured. After the victory of the Left, the contract could have been renegotiated. But the period

⁷⁷ Louis Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), p. 51.

⁷⁸ See introduction.

⁷⁹ Paul Boccard, interview with, 'Le programme commun au présent', *France Nouvelle*, 1977, p. 42.

⁸⁰ It is worth noting that, at that time, a majority of polls indicated that the French did not wish to change society.

before the elections was not the moment for the FCP to feed the polemic with the SP not only on a contractual basis, but also on electoral grounds.

Second, for Althusser, the attitude of communist leaders was too sectarian, too focused on electoral matters, and certainly rather hypocritical. Indeed, FCP leaders were poor preachers: their acts did not follow their sermons. While vituperating against Mitterrand's attempts to steal votes from the Party, they themselves tried to strengthen the FCP at the expense of a SP which was, admittedly, in Althusser's view, too social-democrat and too bourgeois,⁸¹ but which was also able to bolster the Union with centrist votes.⁸² Communist leaders thus divided the heart of the battleground into two fronts. The battle was not only fought between the Left and the Right — as communist activists thought, and as should have been the case in order to win the 1978 elections⁸³ — but also between the allied forces of the Left,⁸⁴ over the influential domination of one single class, which was not even fully representative of the whole Union, that is to say the communist working class. As Althusser explained in one of his articles published in *Le Monde* in 1978, by hinting at Fajon's expression *L'union est un combat*,

en fait, la direction [du PCF] a substitué au combat dans les masses⁸⁵ [...] le combat entre organisations, sous couvert de la fidélité au programme commun. Elle a ainsi réussi à remplacer l'électoralisme unitaire [...] par un électoralisme sectaire, qui prétendait faire passer la domination d'un parti sur un autre pour une hégémonie réelle, une 'influence dirigeante' de la classe ouvrière dans le mouvement populaire.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Louis Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

⁸² Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste*, p. 47; Althusser also wrote that 'réduire l'audience du PS était renoncer à la victoire de la gauche', in *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, ALT2.A27-01.05, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, unpublished manuscripts.

⁸³ Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

⁸⁵ Gérard Molina agreed on this notion in 'Se battre contre ce qui divise', *Le Monde*, 4 November 1977.

⁸⁶ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 28 April 1978.

Althusser's criticisms were strong and rather cutting — but he did not express them without offering an alternative. For him, if the Union of the Left should, to some extent, rely on a contract establishing future action plans, if the Union should inevitably be sealed at the summit by the signatory parties to the Common Programme, it should nonetheless be mainly based on the large scale action of the popular masses, on their unitary drive⁸⁷ and on their revolutionary initiatives.⁸⁸ Althusser thus explained in 1978:

Il eût été [...] parfaitement possible de concevoir cette politique d'union comme une politique de masse et de lutte: comme une politique d'union populaire, associant le contrat signé 'au sommet' à une lutte unitaire à la base, dans laquelle le parti eût pu étendre son audience au-delà du 'butoir' [représenté par la seule classe ouvrière] [...]. On aurait [ainsi] cessé de [...] manipuler [les masses] [...] pour créer les conditions d'une politique ouvrière et populaire d'unité populaire.⁸⁹

However, despite what Althusser thought, the Party leadership did not deny the importance of the masses: it kept emphasising it. In this context, in theory, Althusser and the FCP leadership seemed to agree on the unitary and core function the working class should play within the Union of the Left — but in practice, the pattern was completely different. For Althusser, a popular Union should not only extend to other social classes,⁹⁰ it should also go beyond the frontiers of political parties⁹¹ — a strategy communist leaders could not bring themselves to implement. Their decision to fall back on

⁸⁷ Althusser, *Projet de texte de la cellule Paul Langevin*, unpublished manuscripts.

⁸⁸ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 28 April 1978.

⁸⁹ Althusser, *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste*, p. 98.

⁹¹ Louis Althusser, *22^e Congrès* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), pp. 44-5.

ouvriéristes positions proved this in the 1970s.⁹² However, in the context of the Union of the Left, this withdrawal to an *ouvriériste* position was not completely unfounded. The French Communist Party had to mark its social and ideological difference with the Socialist Party while inserting itself into the unitary political dynamic of the Common Programme.⁹³ The FCP had thus to find a balance between its role in the Union of the Left and its own identity.

This position was uncomfortable and, little by little, the Party's assertion of its own distinctive identity took precedence over the need for coherent political, social and, to some extent, ideological unity within the Union of the Left. However, it would have been desirable if the Leadership of the FCP had been able to make the reverse choice — a reverse choice which presupposed a transformation of the Party.⁹⁴ Indeed, in the 1970s, a fully participative mobilization of the communist base and, broadly speaking, of the popular masses, could not be effectively implemented if the Party did not introduce a more flexible vertical organisation.⁹⁵ Nor could it be effectively implemented if the Party did not change its strategy of *union de combat* with the Socialist Party, its political partner for better and for worse. However, in the 1970s, the leaders of the French Communist Party were not ready to accept these transformations. As Althusser concluded,

Marx disait: 'La conscience est toujours en retard.' La Direction du parti applique imperturbablement ce principe à la lettre, sans en soupçonner l'ironie: elle est sûre d'être consciente parce qu'elle est en retard.⁹⁶

⁹² See ch. 4.

⁹³ Georges Marchais asserted that 'nous [communistes] tenons à notre originalité' in *Parlons franchement* (Paris: Grasset, 1977), p. 127.

⁹⁴ Louis Althusser, *Les vaches noires, interview imaginaire (Le malaise du 22^e Congrès)*, ALT2.A24-01.01/02 to -02.01, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, unpublished manuscripts.

⁹⁵ See ch. 1.

⁹⁶ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 28 April 1978.

To conclude, by signing the Common Programme of Government in 1972, the French Communist Party assumed a new role of potential governmental actor. The momentum had been given. There was no question of the FCP retreating to the political margins. There was no question of the Party remaining the silent witness of a game played without its active participation.

At the base of the Party, there was a real commitment to cooperation with Socialists and Radicals in the Union of the Left. They worked with activists of the other left-wing parties on the basis of a Common Programme which they thought was theirs.⁹⁷ They attracted new members who were seduced by the perspective of a political, economic and social revival.⁹⁸ They put all their efforts towards what they thought would be a victory of the Left in March 1978 — until the Union's defeat when the elections took place. The efforts of the rank and file proved to be in vain, and the summit of the FCP became a prime target. As a communist employee of the SNCF put it bluntly,

l'échec [de mars 1978] réside dans la nature même de l'union (union au sommet) [...]. Il faut [aussi] savoir que la moitié des membres du parti a adhéré entre 1972 et 1978 dans l'objectif d'une victoire électorale de la gauche.⁹⁹ Frustrés de cette victoire, sans aucune perspective rapprochée, les militants ne voient plus l'utilité de continuer à militer [...]. Les directions PC/PS se sont foutus (sic.) de nous.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Debray, *Lettre ouverte aux communistes français et à quelques autres*, p. 24.

⁹⁸ Didier, in 'Entretien avec deux membres de comités de sections d'entreprise (SNCF)', p. 10.

⁹⁹ Jean Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme* (Paris: Julliard, 1979), p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ Didier, in 'Entretien avec deux membres de comités de sections d'entreprise (SNCF)', pp. 8, 10; it is also worth noting that André Lajoinie, who was a member of the FCP's *Bureau Politique* in the 1970s, declared in 1979 that 'cet accord [le Programme Commun] signé au sommet a été "un facteur de démobilisation populaire"' quoted in Patrick Jarreau, 'Le FCP et la démobilisation populaire', *Le Monde*, 21 April 1979. This fact was also recognised by Georges Marchais in his report to the Party's 23rd Congress of 1979 which was published in *Le Monde*, 10 May 1979.

Pushed into a corner by mounting discontent, Georges Marchais admitted in 1980 that ‘avec le programme commun la forme “de sommet” dans laquelle s’est réalisée l’union [...] a [...] favorisé une confusion, des illusions, des faiblesses’.¹⁰¹ His words were carefully chosen, but they were mere hints compared to what he declared in 1985, at the Party’s 25th Congress:

Notre réflexion et notre action se sont orientées en fonction d’un accord au sommet, nous avons favorisé le sentiment selon lequel la solution de tous les problèmes viendrait d’en haut [...]. La critique que nous [dirigeants communistes] effectuons de notre propre démarche, de nos propres actes politiques, est sans complaisance.¹⁰²

Georges Marchais therefore did not hesitate to blame the Party leadership for the failure of the FCP’s policies in the 1970s.

However, Marchais’ utterances and actions in the 1980s arrived too late, for it was at the beginning of the 1970s that the Union of the Left should have been constructed at the base, around a contract signed at the summit. It was during the 1970s that the Party should have acknowledged the need for a fully participative mobilization of its base, which would have involved their systematic consultation and their regular approval for the Party’s policies. But in the 1970s, the leaders of the French Communist Party were not ready to put this strategy into practice. Their mistrust of the masses, and even ‘[leur] réflexe de refus devant tout ce qui n’est pas contrôlé par l’appareil, devant

¹⁰¹ Georges Marchais, *L’espoir au présent* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1980), p. 51.

¹⁰² 25^e Congrès, *Espoir et combat pour l’avenir (rapport présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St Ouen, 8-10 February 1985).

les forces nouvelles qui peuvent inquiéter les certitudes et l'ordre établi',¹⁰³ as Althusser put it, were far too deeply rooted for them to give power of action to the communist base. After all, 'une direction, c'est fait pour diriger' as Marchais asserted it in 1978.¹⁰⁴

Consequently, in the 1970s, Elleinstein could propose *une union de débat* and Althusser *une union populaire* combining, in both cases, a contract signed at the summit and a participative mobilization of the masses — with the difference that for Althusser the base should be the core element of the Union — but the leaders of the French Communist Party had no intention of listening to them. In the eyes of the Party leadership, they were purely and simply wrong, and in the long run, the French Communist Party ended up losing everything. It cut itself from its base and, as a result, as Althusser and his fellow *althussériens* put it unambiguously, 'c'est, à terme, l'influence et l'existence même du parti qui sont en cause'.¹⁰⁵

In the 1990s, however, Robert Hue was determined not to repeat the same mistake as his predecessor: *la Gauche plurielle* would actively involve both the summit and the base of the Party,¹⁰⁶ thus giving concrete expression to the ideas expressed by Elleinstein and Althusser back in the 1970s.¹⁰⁷ In 1995, two years before the start of communist participation in Lionel Jospin's government, Hue asserted:

Nous voulons dialoguer avec le Parti socialiste. Dans un style nouveau. Je le

¹⁰³ Althusser, 'Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste', *Le Monde*, 28 April 1978.

¹⁰⁴ Georges Marchais interviewed on France Inter, *Petit déjeuner politique*, 6 April 1978, and quoted in 'Un débat positif et enrichissant, déclare Georges Marchais sur France-Inter', *L'Humanité*, 7 April 1978.

¹⁰⁵ Louis Althusser, Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, Georges Labica and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, 'Des intellectuels signent une lettre demandant "une véritable discussion politique"', *Le Monde*, 6 April 1978.

¹⁰⁶ By reference to the *actions citoyennes* put in place by the Party in the late 1990s, and to the opening up of its organisation to non communists.

¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that in the 1980s, although the FCP took part in the government of the Socialist Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy from 1981 to 1984, it very much followed the same strategy as in the 1970s. The FCP continued to oppose the SP and to back the Soviet Union; cf., among others, Armen Antonian and Irwin Wall, 'The French Communists under François Mitterrand', *Political Studies*, no. 33 (1985), 254-73.

répète: dans la clarté et la transparence. Sans esprit de querelle, mais sans 'arrondir' artificiellement quoi que ce soit. En disant franchement à l'opinion ce sur quoi nous sommes d'accord, et ce sur quoi nous ne le sommes pas. Pour que chacun puisse être juge. Pour sortir la politique d'entre les 'murs' des directions politiques et des secrets d'états-majors.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Robert Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation* (Paris: Stock, 1995), p. 319-20; my emphasis.

CHAPTER 8

On how to deal with internal dissent

It was at the end of the 1970s that Jean Elleinstein and Louis Althusser fell under the wrath of the French Communist Party which considered them to be too free from communist ideological shackles, too inclined to contest the Party's political orientations, and too critical towards its Leadership.¹ Held tightly by the Party's 'diabolical tongs'² and locked up in its dissent-crushing machine, Elleinstein and Althusser could have decided to tow the line. They could have renounced their critical writings and discourses. Instead, precisely the reverse happened. The sting of the Party Leadership only pushed them to denounce the attitude of the Party towards those who had simply dared to express themselves freely on subjects which mattered to them directly, towards all the communists who had refused to see their intellectual thought become sclerotic under the ideological grip of the Leadership, that is to say communist dissidents. In that sense, the methods which were used, as a way to deal with internal conflicts, by the French Communist Party recalled both the procedures employed by the former Soviet Union and the respect for the diversity of opinion which was recognised by the FCP in 1993.

Stalin wrote in 1924 that 'the Party is strengthened by purging itself of opportunist elements'³ — an assertion that he put into practice as soon as he arrived in power, thus modelling his actions on Lenin's, who had emptied the towns and the countryside of any individual deemed opposed to the new Bolshevik regime, and set the

¹ See previous chapters.

² Jean Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!* (Paris: Belfond, 1981), p. 115.

³ Stalin quoted in Martin McCauley, *Stalin and Stalinism* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), p. 90; cf. Jean Burles, *Le Parti communiste dans la société française* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1979): he quoted the 13th condition of adhesion to the Communist International, p. 137: 'Les partis communistes [...] doivent procéder à des épurations périodiques de leurs organisations, afin d'en écarter les éléments intéressés et petits-bourgeois.'

tone for his successors. In this context, the whole history of the Soviet Union was marked by a totalitarian socialist power exercised by CPSU dignitaries who feared the corruption of their closed system by the infiltration of so-called 'enemies in the pay of the capitalists'. In 1973, the Soviet scientist Yury Orlov became one of these pariahs. After sending a letter to Brezhnev, in which he asked the General Secretary of the CPSU to consider proceeding to democratic reforms, and after backing the dissident Sakharov publicly,⁴ Orlov was crushed little by little by the Soviet system's repression of dissent. Dismissed from his job, unable to find another, and constantly warned against his continuing dissident activities, Orlov ended up being arrested in 1977.⁵ Consequently, in the Soviet Union, the end of the 1970s marked not only the quelling of Orlov's liberal ideas, but also the systematic crushing of dissident movements which proved to be too divided to push Brezhnev to democratise his regime,⁶ and too weak in front of the powerful system even to survive.

Within the French Communist Party, if the treatment of dissent never assumed the Soviet Union's extreme forms of physical and moral liquidation, of imprisonment and internment in psychiatric hospitals, it nonetheless had a considerable impact on the life of those French communists who were labelled as 'dissidents'. The FCP officially recognised this at the end of the 1990s, after drawing its conclusions from a report established by an Arbitration Commission specially set up to examine the Party's past practices. As a result, in 1998, Francette Lazard spoke of '[le] tort fait aux personnes [...] par des pratiques d'exclusion, de suspicion ou de mise à l'écart qui ont été utilisées comme mode de règlement du conflit politique', of 'blessures faites aux personnes

⁴ Walter Parchomenko, *Soviet Images of Dissident and Non Conformists* (New York: Praeger, 1986), p. 110.

⁵ Parchomenko, *ibid.*, p. 110.

⁶ John Gooding, *Rulers and Subjects: Government and People in Russia, 1801-1991*, pp. 162-3.

accusées à tort’, and of ‘[un] gâchis politique et humain considérable’.⁷ In March 2000, a document of the Party’s 30th Congress admitted without reserve that ‘nous [communistes français] avons pratiqué dans nos rangs des mises à l’écart et provoqué des douleurs irréparables’.⁸ These declarations were clear-cut, unequivocal, and in any case fully justified. Indeed, until the 1990s, the Party’s methods of dealing with internal conflicts were carbon-copied on the Soviet model.⁹ The copy was certainly not completely accurate, but it was substantial enough to be denounced by Elleinstein and Althusser.

In this context, the first part of this chapter on the FCP’s approach towards internal conflicts during the 1970s will establish the Party’s official and dual position towards communist dissidents, which was both that of tolerance and struggle against ‘free-minded spirits’.¹⁰ As for the second part, it will underline Elleinstein’s and Althusser’s critical analysis of the situation.

In the 1970s, the official position of the French Communist Party was that of tolerance. Indeed, for the Party, there were no strong critics within the revolutionary organisation of the working class.¹¹ There were instead communists who freely discussed at the base, in cells, sections and federations, and who thus opened a serious, but animated and fraternal debate on certain aspects of the Party’s strategy.¹² In this context, Paul Laurent

⁷ Francette Lazard, *Réflexion de la commission d'arbitrage sur la portée, au regard de l'histoire, de la mutation des pratiques du débat dans le parti (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 16 et 17 novembre 1998)*, (*L'Humanité*, 19 November 1998).

⁸ 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000), (*L'Humanité*, 27 March 2000).

⁹ Jean Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme* (Paris: Julliard, 1979), p. 71.

¹⁰ ‘Avec les intellectuels communistes pour le 22^e Congrès’, *L'Humanité*, 3 May 1978.

¹¹ Georges Marchais quoted in Thierry Pfister, ‘La fête de *L'Humanité* — M. Marchais: il n’y a pas de contestataires au PCF’, *Le Monde*, 12 September 1978 (the ‘fête de *L'Humanité*’ was held from 9 to 10 September 1978 in La Courneuve).

¹² Georges Marchais interviewed on France Inter, *Petit déjeuner politique*, 6 April 1978 and quoted in ‘Un débat positif et enrichissant, déclare Georges Marchais sur France-Inter’, *L'Humanité*, 7 April 1978; see our ch. 1.

could only express his joy to see ‘une tolérance dans le débat’,¹³ and Georges Marchais congratulated himself on the scope of the debate¹⁴ by declaring, his hand on his heart, that ‘la discussion nous réjouit [...] ce qui me peinerait le plus, ce serait qu’il n’y ait plus de débat’.¹⁵

For the Party, there was no atomisation of ideas into trends and tendencies fighting over French communist policy. There was rather a unity of thought which predisposed the Party to unity of action.¹⁶ Communists were indeed deemed to be united around their Leadership, and fused together not only by the decisions supremely taken at Party Congresses, but also democratically by the Party’s decision-making bodies.

As a consequence, the French Communist Party certainly tolerated a profusion of discussions at the base, but it tolerated them only insofar as they remained subordinate to the decisions taken at the summit of the organisational ivory tower of the Party, and insofar as they did not cut a tendential fault in the ideological bloc of communist thought. In that respect, Georges Marchais declared in plain language that

ceux qui ont émis un avis différent ont le droit de conserver leur opinion, nous [dirigeants communistes] ne violons pas les consciences. Mais ils ont en même temps le devoir de se conformer à la volonté de la majorité, ce qui est une règle démocratique élémentaire.¹⁷ En toute circonstance, c’est le parti qui doit conserver la maîtrise du débat nécessaire en son sein.¹⁸

¹³ Paul Laurent, ‘Centralisme démocratique: tenir les deux termes’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, 1977, p. 3.

¹⁴ Marchais quoted in ‘M. Marchais: il y a quelques contestations’, *Le Monde*, 15 April 1978, by reference to an interview given by Marchais at a press conference, French National Assembly, 3 April 1978.

¹⁵ Marchais quoted in Thierry Pfister, ‘La fête de *L’Humanité* — M. Marchais: il n’y a pas de contestataires au PCF’, *Le Monde*, 12 September 1978; cf. Marchais, *Le défi démocratique* (Paris: Grasset, 1973), p. 202.

¹⁶ See ch. 1 and 2.

¹⁷ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

¹⁸ Marchais quoted in ‘Le PCF et les intellectuels — M. Marchais: une véritable guerre idéologique est aujourd’hui conduite’, *Le Monde*, 12 December 1978, by reference to the declaration made in his

For the Leadership, this attitude presented definite advantages. On the one hand, the internal debate could be both contained and mastered. Any dissent was drowned at the base, in the innermost depths of Party organisation.¹⁹ Any criticism, which was deemed too caustic, or which touched too sensitive a cord of communist policy, was ignored on the ground of ‘respect for decisions taken by the majority’.²⁰ Any dissent was eradicated by the simple fact that the Leadership ignored dissidents in all good faith — in principle, what did not exist did not pose any problem. On the other hand, the Party could pride itself on a strong and coherent image which strengthened its credibility of action in the French political sphere. No external force could either divert it from its struggle against capitalism, or prevent it from protecting the interests of the working class. No other political party, even the Socialists, could deter it from exercising a major influence within French society.

However, if the Leadership of the French Communist Party did try to present a face tinged with tolerance and indulgence not only to all the communists, but also to the other French left-wing voters who the Party wanted to attract into its web, it was nonetheless the case that there was one issue on which it refused to compromise — that of the debate being brought into the public arena by what it called ‘[les] esprits libres’,²¹ the communist intellectual dissidents. Minimised by the Party Leadership, the number of the dissidents’ protests that were publicly revealed to the non-communist electorate was limited,²² thus giving these voters the false impression that the FCP was a homogenous

‘Information’ speech at the opening of the meeting held in Vitry with 400 communist intellectuals (9 and 10 December 1979).

¹⁹ ‘L’affaire du comité Lariboisière’, *Luttes et Débats*, January 1979, p. 28.

²⁰ 22^e Congrès, *Le socialisme pour la France (rapport du Comité Central présenté par Georges Marchais)*, (St Ouen, 4-10 February 1976).

²¹ ‘Avec les intellectuels communistes pour le 22^e Congrès’, *L’Humanité*, 3 May 1978.

²² Marchais quoted in ‘M. Marchais: il y a quelques contestations’, *Le Monde*, 15 April 1978.

and united Party.²³ Having been demonized, the destructive potential of the dissidents' actions took on enormous proportions within the Party, which did not hesitate to dissect their faults one by one. Georges Marchais therefore spoke in a rather straight manner of 'meneurs',²⁴ of intellectuals who wrote '[des] articles péremptoires qui trouveront facilement preneur [auprès de la bourgeoisie]',²⁵ and of opponents to the 22nd Congress of 1976²⁶ who weakened not only the Party's internal balance, but also its influential position on the French political scene.

First, communist intellectual dissidents were considered to endanger the Party's internal balance insofar as their criticisms towards the Leadership's political orientations could snowball. Indeed, the dissidents' determined actions and their refusal to keep the debate at the base of the Party's organisation could only encourage other communists to express themselves freely too — which was precisely what a dogmatic Leadership feared, but exactly what communist intellectual dissidents desired. Reporting a conversation he had with Georges Marchais, Elleinstein wrote: '[Il me dit] non sans logique que s'il me donnait la parole il faudrait la donner à des centaines d'autres. C'était vrai et c'est précisément ce que je souhaitais.'²⁷ But at the end, Elleinstein failed and Marchais won the match by playing a card — the legitimacy card — aimed at preventing communist intellectual dissidents' actions from snowballing both within the Party and outside its organisations. Any attempt from dissidents to infiltrate the Party with 'subversive' ideas, any communist dissenting view expressed in the 'bourgeois' press, any criticism against decisions taken by democratically elected communist leaders and

²³ Michel Barak, *Fractures au PCF — Des communistes parlent* (Aix-en-Provence: ÉDISUD; Paris: Karthala, 1980), p. 125; Jean Baudoin, 'Les phénomènes de contestation au sein du Parti Communiste Français (avril 1978-mai 1979)', *Revue Française de Science Politique*, no. 30 (1980), 100.

²⁴ Marchais quoted in 'Renforcer notre Parti en qualité et en quantité — Les réponses de Georges Marchais aux journalistes', *L'Humanité*, 22 June 1978.

²⁵ Marchais quoted in 'Georges Marchais: avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès', *L'Humanité*, 28 April 1978.

²⁶ Marchais quoted in 'M. Marchais: il y a quelques contestations', *Le Monde*, 15 April 1978.

²⁷ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, pp. 11-2.

any condemnation of strategic orientations supremely adopted at the various Party Congresses were deemed illegitimate, that is to say contrary to the rules of democratic centralism.²⁸ For the Leadership, such acts could not be tolerated. Not only did they represent a blatant intellectual superiority over the working class and its representatives, but they were also an obvious attempt to jam the cogs of the Party's democratic centralism, to blow its unity of thought into a multitude of antagonist opinions, and therefore to cut to the bone the Party's credibility and freedom of action on the French political scene.²⁹ The words were strong, but they were measured, and the warning signals were perfectly targeted. Consequently, any communist dissident could be identified, isolated³⁰ and denounced as a heretic to the flock of '630,000'³¹ communists who, at least, made an effort to conform themselves collectively to the rules of democratic centralism.³²

Second, communist intellectual dissidents were considered as striking a blow to the FCP's balance insofar as they expressed their anticonformist ideas out on the public stage.³³ And for communist leaders, this kind of attitude was both unacceptable and dangerous. It was unacceptable, for any internal quarrel only concerned the Party, any friction should only be dealt with by the Party. It was dangerous, for any political and

²⁸ 'Préserver et développer la vie démocratique du parti — Résolution du Bureau Politique du PCF', *L'Humanité*, 20 May 1978, by reference to the resolution adopted by the Political Bureau regarding the petition signed by over 300 communists; cf. "Le retard de notre parti à se mettre à jour ne saurait, sans grave dommage, s'accroître", déclarent plus de trois cent communistes' (*Pétition d'Aix-en-Provence* signed, among others, by Althusser and Elleinstein), 20 May 1978; see our ch. 1.

²⁹ Marchais, interviewed on France Inter, *Petit déjeuner politique*, 6 April 1978 and quoted in 'Un débat positif et enrichissant, déclare Georges Marchais sur France-Inter', *L'Humanité*, 7 April 1978; Marchais interviewed on Antenne 2, *Question de Temps*, 9 August 1978, and quoted in 'Comprendre pour construire l'union — Le texte complet des réponses de Georges Marchais à l'émission d'Antenne 2, *Questions de Temps*', *L'Humanité*, 11 August 1978; 'Préserver et développer la vie démocratique du Parti — Résolution du Bureau Politique du PCF', *ibid.*; see our ch. 1 and 2.

³⁰ Jean-Pierre Gaudard, *Les orphelins du PC* (Paris: Belfond, 1986), p. 129.

³¹ Georges Marchais, *Avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 26, 27 et 28 avril 1978)*.

³² Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, Georges Labica and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Ouvrons la fenêtre, camarades* (Paris: Maspero, 1979), p. 184.

³³ Lucien Sève in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, n°2639, 15 June 1978, p. 21.

ideological gash made to the communist carapace³⁴ could potentially be exploited both by the bourgeois right-wing class enemy³⁵ and the one which swore to take three million votes from the FCP,³⁶ the one which competed with the Party in terms of influence within French society and inside the Union of the Left, namely the Socialist Party.³⁷ As a consequence, there was not a shadow of a doubt in the minds of communist leaders: criticisms expressed by communist intellectual dissidents in the ‘bourgeois’ press, ‘au nom d’un vague anarchisme petit-bourgeois’ according to Georges Marchais,³⁸ could only weaken the Party in the class struggle and reduce its sphere of influence to the benefit of the Socialist Party.³⁹

In this context, communist leaders were neither entirely wrong, nor completely right. They were not entirely wrong, for criticisms expressed by communist intellectual dissidents were even more likely to be exploited by other French political parties because they came from within the FCP, and because they were put forward by front-line communist intellectuals such as the historian Elleinstein and the philosopher Althusser. These so-called bourgeois parties could, therefore, draw their anti-Communist arguments from within the FCP, which in any case could only strengthen their freedom of action against the Party and reduce the communist striking force.

They were not completely right either, for communist intellectual dissidents never wanted to weaken their Party by expressing themselves outside communist platforms.

³⁴ Jacques Ralite talked about ‘[une] fêlure dans le métal du parti’, in Etienne Balibar, Guy Bois, Georges Labica and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, *Ouvrons la fenêtre, camarades*, p. 182.

³⁵ Christian Colombani quoting, among others, Guy Hermier, Roland Leroy and Georges Marchais, in ‘M. Marchais: nous ne souhaitons, nous ne voulons exclure personne’, *Le Monde*, 6 June 1978; ‘Préserver et développer la vie démocratique du parti — Résolution du Bureau Politique du PCF’, *L’Humanité*, 20 May 1978; Paul Laurent, *Le PCF comme il est: entretien avec Roger Faivre* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1978), pp. 146-7.

³⁶ François Mitterrand at the International Socialist Congress of Vienna, 28 May 1972. quoted in René Andrieu, *Lettre à ceux qui se réclament du socialisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), p. 103.

³⁷ Marchais, interviewed on France Inter, *Petit déjeuner politique*, 6 April 1978 and quoted in ‘Un débat positif et enrichissant, déclare Georges Marchais sur France-Inter’, *L’Humanité*, 7 April 1978.

³⁸ Marchais, *Avancer sur la voie du 22^e Congrès (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 26, 27 et 28 avril 1978)*.

³⁹ Charles Piroux, (manual worker), ‘Pour une démocratie révolutionnaire’, *Luttes et Débats*, January 1979, p. 26; Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 115.

They never wanted to marginalize themselves from the rest of the communist counter-society by becoming dissidents ‘certified non-conformists’. Elleinstein said it: ‘[Je ne me suis jamais considéré] comme un contestataire mais comme un communiste à part entière discutant d’un certain nombre d’aspects de la politique du parti.’⁴⁰ In fact, communist intellectual dissidents did not have any choice. Turned down by the communist press, they could only express their opinions in the so-called bourgeois press.⁴¹ Teased by a communist Leadership acting as a psychic stimulus, they could only react by defending their ideas even more strongly.

However, in the 1970s, the leaders of the French Communist Party did not see things from this angle: their approach was much more definite. For them, communist intellectual dissidents formed ‘un petit groupe gagné par le vertige’⁴² which had to be brought back down to earth. But if in other times the Party did eradicate movements of dissident by expelling purely and simply their more active members,⁴³ at the end of the 1970s, by contrast, this was not really possible any more.⁴⁴ As Paul Laurent wrote in 1977,

le développement de la vie démocratique du parti fait qu’un désaccord momentané sur un problème mérite [...] une patience dans la discussion [...] qui

⁴⁰ Jean Elleinstein quoted in Thierry Pfister, ‘La fête de *L’Humanité* — M. Marchais: il n’y a pas de contestataires au PCF’, *Le Monde*, 12 September 1978.

⁴¹ Louis Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le Parti Communiste* (Paris: Maspero, 1978), p. 36, also published in *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978; Jean Elleinstein, ‘Du XXII^e Congrès du PCF à l’échec de la gauche — La révolution n’est plus ce qu’elle était’, *Le Monde*, 13 April 1978; Henri Fiszbin, *Les bouches s’ouvrent* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), p. 36; Jane Jenson and George Ross, *View from Inside a French Communist Cell in Crisis* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 36-7: “Le retard de notre parti à se mettre à jour ne saurait, sans grave dommage, s’accroître”. déclarent plus de trois cent communistes’ (*Pétition d’Aix-en-Provence* signed, among others, by Althusser and Elleinstein), *Le Monde*, 20 May 1978.

⁴² Colombani quoting Marchais in ‘M. Marchais: nous ne souhaitons, nous ne voulons exclure personne’, *Le Monde*, 6 June 1978.

⁴³ Francette Lazard, *Réflexion de la commission d’arbitrage sur la portée, au regard de l’histoire, de la mutation des pratiques du débat dans le parti (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 16 et 17 novembre 1998)*, (*L’Humanité*, 19 November 1998).

⁴⁴ Marchais quoted in ‘M. Marchais: il y a quelques contestations’, *Le Monde*, 15 April 1978; ‘Avec les intellectuels communistes pour le 22^e Congrès’, *L’Humanité*, 3 May 1978.

fait que, effectivement, le problème de l'exclusion se pose de plus en plus rarement. Ça ne veut pas dire qu'il soit impensable aujourd'hui qu'il y ait des gens qui soient exclus du parti.⁴⁵

From Paul Laurent's statement, it was clear that the French Communist Party definitely wanted to project an image of indulgence and diplomacy to the general public.

The Party wanted to be more understanding not only by acknowledging the relative freedom of expression of any communist, but also by expressing its respect for the plurality of opinion of its members.⁴⁶ This was on the basis that such discussion would merely be about minor and ephemeral disagreements, kept private within the Party's organisations. The Party also wanted to be more diplomatic by doing away with a mode of treatment of dissent which was too imprinted with Sovietism to reflect fully its will to detach itself from the Soviet model, and by opting for the argumentative strength to bring its stray sheep back into the flock, instead of physically ejecting them from the Party.⁴⁷

If the FCP's approach was initially sensible, however, it was unfortunately not pushed far enough at the end of the 1970s. Old methods used to crush movements of dissent were reintroduced. Rehabilitations of formerly expelled communist dissidents, or even simple words of excuse towards them, were never pronounced. The internal democratisation of the Party, which was promised at the 22nd Congress of 1976, did not take place until the 1990s. As Althusser wrote towards 1980, in one of his unpublished manuscripts:

Je sais bien que les choses ont changé et que Marchais a eu le courage et la

⁴⁵ Paul Laurent, 'Centralisme démocratique: tenir les deux termes', *La Nouvelle Critique*, 1977, p. 3.

⁴⁶ 'Avec les intellectuels communistes pour le 22^e Congrès', *L'Humanité*, 3 May 1978.

⁴⁷ Laurent, *Le PCF comme il est: entretien avec Roger Faivre*, pp. 146-7.

sagesse politique (mais pouvait-il faire autrement) de dire: ‘Dans le parti, on n’exclut plus.’ D’accord, mais un mot comme ça, n’efface pas le passé [...] [il n’est toujours] pas question de discuter, pas question de réhabiliter qui que ce soit.⁴⁸

Indeed, the Party’s refusal to expel its most critical members did not wipe off the past, just as it did not erase the mechanisms of crushing dissent, nor the dramatic consequences such methods had on communist dissidents — and this was precisely what Elleinstein and Althusser condemned.

In the 1970s, Elleinstein and Althusser did not hesitate to denounce the methods of crushing dissent which were used by the Leadership of the French Communist Party in order to force communist intellectual dissidents either to tow the line, or to leave the Party. Victims of these very Soviet-like methods, which contrasted with the Party’s public strategy of openness adopted in the 1970s, Elleinstein and Althusser left behind them sufficiently precise writings to understand the two main stages through which any determined communist intellectual dissident inevitably went, namely progressive blacklisting and definitive condemnation.

In the 1970s, progressive blacklisting included three stages which aimed to exercise increasing pressure on the dissident who was guilty of having hit a different note from that of the Party Leadership, guilty of having pinpointed problems inherent to the Party, condemnable for having criticised French and Soviet communist policies.

First, the communist intellectual dissident was generally called to the summit of the Party’s organisational pyramid to hear a cold and cutting sermon to which he could

⁴⁸ Louis Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07, unpublished manuscripts.

only yield like a child at Sunday school.⁴⁹ ‘Tu répondras après tant que tu voudras. Pour le moment, c’est moi qui parle. Prends des notes et tais-toi’⁵⁰ the dissident was firmly told. Any answer back was useless, any way out was impossible: the dissident could only sit there and listen to the enumeration of his sins against the divine order of the FCP. And this was precisely what happened to Elleinstein. The historian, who was summoned by Georges Marchais after the publication of a series of critical articles in *Le Monde* in April 1978 reported that:

C’était le Georges Marchais des mauvais jours que j’avais en face de moi [...]. Il parla [...] plus d’une demi-heure [...]. [Il] me reprocha d’affaiblir le Parti en le critiquant publiquement et de dénaturer le sens même des travaux du 22^e Congrès [...]. Je critiquais trop l’URSS [...]. J’aidais trop le Parti Socialiste [...]. Je voulais désintégrer le Parti et l’empêcher d’exercer une influence dirigeante et le transformer en club de discussion⁵¹ [...] il me sommait de me rétracter, faute de quoi il me ferait condamner par la direction du Parti [...].⁵²

From Elleinstein’s statement, it appears clear that the Party Leadership was haunted by fears. These concerns were to some extent blown out of all proportion, for it was certainly not in the interest of the intellectual communist activist to express destructive criticisms in order to weaken a Party he believed in. However, the Party’s concerns could be justified if we look at them from the Leadership’s perspective. Because of its content,

⁴⁹ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, pp. 67-8.

⁵⁰ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, pp. 12-3.

⁵¹ Laurent ‘Centralisme démocratique: tenir les deux termes’, p. 2: ‘Le parti communiste n’est pas un club où s’affrontent des opinions fondamentalement opposées.’

⁵² Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, pp. 12-13; it is worth noting that the same type of treatment was applied to communists, other than intellectuals, cf. Raymond Jean, *La singularité d’être communiste* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979), p. 126: ‘Un communiste [...] qui posait de nombreuses questions et soulevait beaucoup de problèmes dans sa cellule s’entendait dire [...] par un responsable fédéral [...]: “[...] tu mélanges tout, tu ferais bien de prendre un peu de recul, et même d’aller passer quelques jours à la campagne!”’

any criticism expressed publicly by a front-line communist intellectual automatically took much more weight, not only among other communists keen to hear what some of their comrades had to say, but also among other left-wing voters who could legitimately cast a suspicious glance at the FCP's internal functioning and strategy. In this context, the Party Leadership could not afford to take any risk — and it did not shrink from the methods needed to curtail the 'risk effect' sparked by communist intellectual dissidents, for ideological and psychological pressures on the communist intellectual dissident followed next.

Second, the Leadership of the French Communist Party could call on a sense of pressing duty among communist intellectual dissidents. In the 1970s, as the communist fortress was attacked by class enemies and the interests of the working class were threatened by Giscardian power, they had to help the Party.⁵³ The Leadership's call came from the heart, and if this method did not produce the expected 'tow the line' response, communist leaders did not hesitate to embark on the next stage, which was a public denunciation of their dissident activities.

Third, if the Leadership's public denunciations of dissidents activities started in a rather impersonal and general manner,⁵⁴ they were nonetheless rapidly transformed into precise attacks which allowed the Party to name and put the spotlight on communist intellectual dissidents, to brand them as outsiders and to isolate them from the rest of the group. Only the psychologically strongest and the most determined resisted, for this technique of quasi-rejection from the tightly-knit communist group played on fears — the fear of being cut off from one's old comrades, the fear of being the only one to be wrong against the others,⁵⁵ the fear of being rejected from the very cocooning

⁵³ See ch. 3.

⁵⁴ Althusser, *Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le Parti Communiste*, p. 12; Jean Rony, 'Le PC au quotidien' in Olivier Duhamel and Henri Weber, *Changer le PC?* (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1979), p. 57.

⁵⁵ Claude Roy, *Somme toute* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 25.

communist counter-society. However, these fears were in any case fully justified, for this was precisely what an unconditional condemnation from the Party could lead to.

The unconditional condemnation of communist intellectual dissidents often started with infamous accusations being launched by the Party Leadership against the dissidents in order to discredit them in the eyes of their comrades.⁵⁶ Althusser thus spoke of moral torture ‘par l’accusation d’être un “policier”, un “escroc” ou un “traître”’.⁵⁷ Elleinstein declared that he was accused of being ‘[un] maître-penseur d’Hersant’.⁵⁸ The historian Philippe Robrieux⁵⁹ even asserted that the Party did not hesitate to publish the amount of the royalties Elleinstein made from his publications dealing with the Party.⁶⁰ Consequently, the accusations of the Leadership were not only limited to strong words: they came pretty close to defamation. But communist leaders knew what they were doing, for from then onwards, they could invite other communists to condemn the intellectual dissidents.⁶¹ In this context, the Leadership not only played on the long-trying opposition between workers and ‘bourgeois’ intellectuals,⁶² nor did it content itself with hanging Damocles’ sword over the head of their close entourage,⁶³ which could be suspected of the same heresy,⁶⁴ it went further than that. It encouraged other Party intellectuals to establish an indictment against fellow intellectuals who were too critical.⁶⁵ If all this did not work, as a last resort, communist leaders could purely and simply

⁵⁶ Philippe Robrieux, *La secte* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1985), p. 54.

⁵⁷ Louis Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

⁵⁸ Jean Elleinstein, ‘23^e Congrès du PCF — La paralysie’, *Maintenant*, 7 May 1979; Hersant was a right-wing newspaper owner.

⁵⁹ Robrieux was close to Servin and Casanova (see introduction) in the 1960s. He left the FCP in 1968.

⁶⁰ Philippe Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste (1972-1982)*, vol. 3 (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 324.

⁶¹ Robrieux, *ibid.*, p. 522.

⁶² Victor Leduc, ‘The French Communist Party: between Stalinism and Eurocommunism’, *Political Quarterly*, 49 (1978), 409.

⁶³ Althusser, ‘Ce qui ne peut plus durer dans le parti communiste’, *Le Monde*, 25 April 1978.

⁶⁴ Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste (1972-1982)*, p. 324.

⁶⁵ Pierre Daix, *Les hérétiques du PCF* (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1980), pp. 269-71: following the publication of his book *Ce que je sais de Soljenitsyne* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1973), Daix was publicly condemned at the *fête de l’Huma* by Roland Leroy, Louis Aragon and, ironically, Elleinstein and Althusser.

dismiss⁶⁶ or push the communist intellectual dissidents to resign from their Party posts⁶⁷ in order to replace them with more fervent acolytes⁶⁸ — a technique whose aim was to degrade the dissidents both professionally and psychologically.

As a consequence, the leaders of the French Communist Party won all the time:⁶⁹ dissidents could only leave the Party. In communist language, they ‘excluded themselves’, as the Party no longer expelled its members, who were too critical. In common language, by contrast, they had no other option but to leave a Party which had launched a powerful, and certainly effective ‘riposte politique’⁷⁰ against them, and which could anyway ‘forget’ to renew their membership cards. The dice were loaded, but the trick was well-known among communist intellectual dissidents who could only play a game they were bound to lose. This prompted Elleinstein to write bitterly in 1981:

Heureusement que nous ne sommes pas en Union soviétique! Georges Marchais et Lucien Sève ne pourront pas me faire interner en hôpital psychiatrique, mais je me suis auto-exclu du Parti, paraît-il, et l’on ne me redonne pas ma carte!⁷¹

In this context, the FCP ignored these ‘problems’ — i.e. communist intellectual dissidents — and all the criticisms against democratic centralism and French communist political orientations. Communist dissidents were no longer ‘dissidents’ as such, for they did not belong to the Party anymore. Their criticisms no longer put internal pressure on the Party, for they became externalised in the realm of bourgeois party politics. In the

⁶⁶ Jean, *La singularité d’être communiste*, pp. 128-9.

⁶⁷ Antoine Spire, *Profession: permanent* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), p. 236.

⁶⁸ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, pp. 67-8, ‘Ce qui dure encore dans le PC français — Le temps des glaciations’, *Le Monde*, 23 February 1979, and ‘23^e Congrès du PCF — La paralysie’, *Maintenant*, 7 May 1979.

⁶⁹ Gaudard, *Les orphelins du PC*, p. 130; Bureau Politique, *Après les travaux des 26, 27 et 28 avril*, (*Cahiers du Communisme*, March 1978).

⁷⁰ Piraux, ‘Pour une démocratie révolutionnaire’, p. 23.

⁷¹ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 132.

Soviet Union, dissidents were airbrushed out of official photographs, as if they had never existed. In France, within the FCP, a similar ‘normalisation process’ took place. Elleinstein called it ‘[une] pince diabolique’⁷² used to crush dissidents, and Althusser spoke of ‘[des] machinations à écraser un homme’⁷³ not only morally, but also physically. Indeed, from the moment a French communist became a dissident, he no longer counted in the eyes of the Leadership — he was depersonalized. The person was eclipsed.⁷⁴ The human being was put aside only to become all too irritating to be kept intact. As Althusser wrote in one of his manuscripts, addressing himself to communists who did not dare to express any criticism, or objection towards their Party for fear of its dogmatic Leadership,⁷⁵

il y a les êtres humains qui se taisent non seulement parce qu’ils se réfugient de temps en temps dans le silence, mais tout simplement parce qu’ils sont des animaux humains et n’ont pas pu franchir la barrière du langage, donc de l’humanité.⁷⁶

Consequently, freedom of expression, or even the right to be a unique human entity, which are taken for granted in a country like France, were flouted by the FCP, which was paradoxically keen to assert its will to put freedom at the very heart of the communist project of society.⁷⁷ Therefore, the methods of dealing with dissidents which were used

⁷² Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, p. 115.

⁷³ Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, unpublished manuscripts.

⁷⁴ Spire, *Profession: permanent*, p. 234: ‘Très régulièrement, *L’Humanité* annonçait ma participation au Panorama [de *France Culture*] en disant quelques mots du ou des livres dont il allait être question. Après mon article dans *Témoignage Chrétien*, ce fut le silence. Bien plus, quand *Panorama* était annoncé, on en citait tous les participants, sauf moi.’

⁷⁵ See ch. 1.

⁷⁶ Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, unpublished manuscripts.

⁷⁷ Gérard Belloin, *Nos rêves camarades* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p. 136.

by the French Communist Party in the 1970s could be compared to those of the USSR,⁷⁸ whose Communist Party also resorted to double-talk. In this context, if we could read in *Temps Nouveaux* in 1978 that ‘le PCUS est attentif aux critiques des citoyens, il s’applique à remédier aux insuffisances qu’ils dévoilent. Dans la liberté de la critique, notre parti voit une manifestation authentique de la démocratie’,⁷⁹ behind the scenes the CPSU did not hesitate either to scorn its dissidents in its publications in Russian,⁸⁰ or to stamp on them. The example of the physician, father of the H bomb and 1955 Nobel Prize Winner, Andrei Sakharov, illustrates this.

Accused in 1980 of ‘direct betrayal of the interests of [the Soviet] motherland and the Soviet people’⁸¹ then assigned to residence in Gorky,⁸² the dissident Sakharov fell under the fire of the CPSU in the 1970s for having asked publicly for the democratisation of the Soviet state, and for having sent directly a letter to Brezhnev requesting the implementation of liberal reforms.⁸³ Sakharov described the methods of intimidation used by the Soviet Union to push him back into line:

In recent years I have carried on my activities under conditions of ever-increasing pressure on me, and especially my family⁸⁴ [...] we were harassed by anonymous phone calls, with threats and absurd accusations [...]. [In an article entitled ‘A supplier of slander’ which was published in February of 1973] I was characterised

⁷⁸ Elleinstein, *Une certaine idée du communisme*, p. 71.

⁷⁹ Vsévolod Ejov (Russian historian), ‘Dictature et démocratie’, *Temps Nouveaux*, 1978, p.19.

⁸⁰ Gooding, *Rulers and Subjects: Government and People in Russia, 1801-1991*, p. 269. He quotes *Pravda* (1977): ‘Dissidents [...] [are] “unconcealed enemies of socialism” who “exist only because they are supported, paid and praised by the West.”’

⁸¹ Gooding, *ibid.*, p. 269.

⁸² From 1980 to 1986; Gooding, *ibid.*, p. 270.

⁸³ Andrei Sakharov, ‘Progress, coexistence and intellectual freedom’ (June 1968) and ‘Manifesto II’ (March 1970), *Sakharov speaks*, English translation (London: Collins Harvill Press, 1974); Marshall S. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 181-2: letter sent in March 1970 by Andrei Sakharov, Roy Medvedev and Valentin Turchin; Gooding, *Rulers and Subjects*, p. 271.

⁸⁴ Jean Chiama and Jean-François Soulet, *Histoire de la dissidence: oppositions et révoltes en URSS et dans les démocraties populaires de la mort de Staline à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 375.

as an extremely naïve person who [...] ‘willingly accepted the compliments of the Pentagon’ [...]. I was summoned to the KGB [...] [and] by the deputy prosecutor of the USSR, Malyarov. The basis content of the talk was threats [...]. Next came a nation-wide campaign in which I was condemned by representatives of all strata of our society.⁸⁵

In his telephone conversation with Malyarov, Sakharov was among other things accused of publishing articles in the foreign ‘anti-Communist’ press and of rallying to forces hostile to the USSR — accusations to which the physician answered: ‘I would be very glad to have my writings published in the Soviet press [...]. But that is obviously out of the question.’⁸⁶

This conversation, these Soviet methods, definitely recall what happened in the 1970s in the French Communist Party which was always all too keen to emulate its Soviet big brother, and too inclined to try to create a micro-society of the USSR within its own French communist counter-society. Consequently, personal losses were heavy — they were certainly heavier for Soviet dissidents like Sakharov, who effectively put their own lives at stake when fighting for democracy, but they were, nevertheless, far from being negligible for French communist intellectual dissidents.⁸⁷

If the intellectual life of French communist intellectual dissidents was relatively active, in the sense that they incessantly refined their arguments in order to have an impact on the Party, their social existence within the FCP was, by contrast, more and more difficult. The historian Philippe Robrieux thus wrote of Elleinstein, ‘[il n’y avait] plus de réveillons de Noël et plus aucun de ces déjeuners ou de ces dîners en famille’, but

⁸⁵ Sakharov, *Sakharov speaks*, pp. 49-51.

⁸⁶ Sakharov, ‘Interview with Mikhail P. Malyarov, first deputy Soviet prosecutor’ (August 1973). *ibid.*, pp. 181-4.

⁸⁷ Louis Althusser, *L’avenir dure longtemps*, suivi de *Les faits* (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1992), pp. 231-2: Althusser spoke of ‘[des] expériences souvent révoltantes sinon personnellement effroyables.’

instead ‘la distance, le froid et, à l’occasion, de rares propos soigneusement retenus et calculés’⁸⁸ — statement which Elleinstein confirmed when talking about ‘des mains [qui] se ferment, des sourires [qui] disparaissent, des amitiés, pourtant anciennes, [qui] se dénouent’⁸⁹ — practices which prompted Althusser to thunder against the Leadership in such a way that he was unable to finish his sentence:

Pour ce qui est de reconnaître ses propres erreurs, que dis-je, et je pèse mes mots, ses propres mensonges, calomnies, machinations à écraser un homme, ses procès de Moscou⁹⁰ [...]: ses propres crimes ne se terminant pas à la manière stalinienne certes, mais se terminant dans la misère morale, la torture de la solitude par l’abandon de tous [...] par la misère tout court, par l’impossibilité de trouver du travail, et le tout s’additionnant, se terminant par la mort tout court survenue de désespoir [...] ou d’un geste ultime de désespoir, le suicide⁹¹

Althusser’s analysis was right in the sense that some communist dissidents, like the former Party worker Antoine Spire, who resigned from the Party’s *Editions Sociales* in 1978, were suddenly thrown into a more brutal and less cocooning non-communist world which they had previously not only rejected, but also fought against. Spire even confessed that ‘il faut avoir vécu ces jours d’incertitude où tout disparaît: activité et surtout statut social. Angoisse indescriptible. Peur. On parle de chômage.’⁹² However, Althusser forgot to mention cases like Pierre Daix, who did not live his deliberate

⁸⁸ Robrieux, *Histoire intérieure du Parti communiste (1972-1982)*, p. 324.

⁸⁹ Elleinstein, ‘Ce qui dure encore dans le PC français — Le temps des glaciations’, *Le Monde*, 23 February 1979.

⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that Elleinstein did not hesitate to talk about ‘[une] chasse aux sorcières’ in *Une certaine idée du communisme*, pp. 67-8; cf. Elleinstein, ‘23^e Congrès du PCF — La paralysie’, *Maintenant*, 7 May 1979.

⁹¹ Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980)*: A portée de la main peut être le communisme, unpublished manuscripts.

⁹² Spire, *Profession: permanent*, p. 244.

departure from the Party as a slow death, but rather as an intellectual rebirth. ‘Non seulement cette décision [de quitter le Parti] ne me coûtait pas’, Daix wrote in 1976, ‘mais elle m’a brusquement libéré. Enfin je mettais mes actes en rapport avec ma vie et ma conscience.’⁹³

The major difference between Spire and Daix was on the ground of anticipation and realism. Spire failed to understand the power of the Party’s mechanism for crushing dissidents and critics which had been running steadily for years on end. He also failed to understand that nobody could win against a Leadership too sure of its own Knowledge and Truth, and too opposed to any form of persistent objection, even if it was a justified one. In the 1970s, either you surrendered to the Leadership and you stayed in the Party, or you persisted in your criticisms and you left it. There was no room for compromise. Daix realised this. He left just in time, for he would have been ejected had he not chosen to leave the Party. However — to Spire’s credit — Elleinstein and Althusser’s experience also shows that communist intellectual dissidents kept hoping for things to change. If the Party no longer expelled its most critical members, then maybe, maybe they could express themselves freely despite the Leadership’s vituperative attacks against them, while remaining inside the Party as long as possible. Althusser was fully aware of this. He wrote:

Il est trop clair que je réalisais [...] dans le Parti mon désir d’initiative à moi, mon désir d’opposition farouche à la direction et à l’appareil, mais aussi au sein du Parti même, c’est-à-dire de sa protection [...] je pensais [...] qu’en restant [...] sur une position si ouvertement oppositionnelle [...] je pouvais faire la preuve, au moins formelle, qu’une action d’opposition à l’intérieur du Parti était possible sur des bases théoriques et politiques sérieuses, et donc qu’une transformation du

⁹³ Pierre Daix, *J’ai cru au matin* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1976), p. 443; see our ch. 3.

Parti était, à long terme peut-être, possible.⁹⁴

A long term transformation of the Party was indeed possible on the basis of ideas launched commonly by communist intellectual dissidents. The reform of democratic centralism, the condemnation of Soviet practices and the constitution of a Left-wing alliance in the 1990s proved this point — although the Leadership took all the credit for these renovations. However, at the end of the 1970s, a short term transformation of the Party was impossible on an individual basis. Indeed, apart from the petition of Aix-en-Provence which was signed by over 300 dissidents in 1978,⁹⁵ communist intellectual dissidents were divided, and therefore relatively weak, in front of a united, and therefore powerful, Leadership.⁹⁶ In that context, if communist intellectual dissidents had differences on certain aspects of the FCP's strategy, they nevertheless had a solid base of common ideas on which they could have relied in order to disseminate their critical views within the Party, to render them acceptable and to accelerate the transformation of the Party. In fact, the key to counteracting the Leadership's mechanism for crushing dissent was to turn this dissidence into a widespread, common and ordinary action within the Party — meaning into an action which could have been too strong for the Leadership to break. However, as Elleinstein wrote,

face à une direction résolue, il aurait fallu une grande résolution, mais ce n'était pas possible dans l'état d'esprit de la plupart des camarades. Nous n'osions pas franchir le pas et créer un véritable front de résistance contre la direction du Parti.

Nous étions prisonniers des mécanismes du centralisme démocratique, tels que

⁹⁴ Althusser, *L'avenir dure longtemps*, pp. 191, 227-8.

⁹⁵ "Le retard de notre parti à se mettre à jour ne saurait, sans grave dommage, s'accroître", déclarent plus de trois cent communistes' (*Pétition d'Aix-en-Provence* signed, among others, by Althusser and Elleinstein), *Le Monde*, 20 May 1978.

⁹⁶ 'M. Marchais: il y a quelques contestations', *Le Monde*, 15 April 1978.

nous les avons nous-mêmes appliqués pendant des années durant [...]. Face à une direction à peu près unie, résolue, nous ne faisons pas le poids [...] l'action ne pouvait qu'être individuelle.⁹⁷

To conclude, if the treatment of internal dissent by the French Communist Party was in all aspects reprehensible, it was nonetheless the case that FCP leaders acted under the forceful influence of the Soviet Union. Indeed, if at times intellectual dissidents such as Althusser and Elleinstein seemed to be *de doux rêveurs*, it was nonetheless the case that they expressed ideas which were admittedly ahead of their times, but which were also challenging, 'revolutionary', and thus too dangerous in the eyes of Moscow. The system in which communist parties evolved had to be preserved and, consequently, intellectual dissidents had to be eradicated.

As a result, in the 1970s, the French Communist Party alienated itself little by little not only from its mere sympathisers, or ardent defenders of the communist cause, but also from its intellectuals, thus causing a de-intellectualisation of the FCP — a de-intellectualisation the Party never wished to have, as intellectuals gave it a certain prestige. Robert Hue acknowledged this in 1995 by writing: 'Par vagues successives [...] beaucoup d'intellectuels proches du Parti communiste s'en éloignèrent, beaucoup de ceux qui étaient communistes nous quittèrent'.⁹⁸

However, in the 1990s, it was all very well for the French Communist Party's General Secretary Robert Hue to acknowledge and abandon the Party's old methods of treating internal dissident, which had proved to be contrary to the Party's democratisation. The fact remained that the FCP did not and still does not try to look

⁹⁷ Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!*, pp. 119-21.

⁹⁸ Robert Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation* (Paris: Stock, 1995), p. 128.

closely at the motivations of communist intellectual dissidents like Elleinstein and Althusser. nor at the validity of their actions, nor at their impact on long-term Party politics. On the contrary, for 1990s communist leaders, Elleinstein and Althusser were remote and eccentric figures who belonged to the past. This made the Party's analysis of their dissenting actions relatively simple: *Althusser, c'était un rêveur... Et Elleinstein — il va bien, à ce qu'il paraît, on peut parfois le croiser dans la rue.*⁹⁹

⁹⁹ By reference to an informal conversation I had with Francette Lazard at the *Espace Marx* in July 1999.

CONCLUSION

Marked as heretics by the French Communist Party in the 1970s, defeated by the Great Inquisitors of the communist Holy Office at the beginning of the 1980s, Jean Elleinstein and Louis Althusser nevertheless managed to put their imprint on the Party on two levels. First, as from the 1980s, dissident movements became the norm within the FCP — even if communist leaders refused to talk about tendencies, preferring to adopt the concept of diversity of opinion among the Party's members.¹ Second, the Party started transforming itself as from 1985, both in terms of internal organisation and political orientation.

It was under the influence of the communist intellectual dissidents Elleinstein and Althusser that dissenting movements, and beyond them the formation of tendencies, became the norm within the French Communist Party from the 1980s onwards — and nothing seemed to predict this. Nothing seemed to predict it for, towards the end of the 1970s, the FCP had apparently made a clean sweep of any internal dissent by eliminating Elleinstein and Althusser, consequently beheading the Eurocommunist and neo-Marxist tendencies of their figureheads.² Towards the end of the 1970s, the FCP had apparently rediscovered a relative unity of thought by eliminating any major and internal opposition to the Leadership which had become public knowledge.³ However, the phenomenon of tendencies, which was exacerbated by Elleinstein and Althusser in the 1970s, was bound to have a long-lasting effect on the French Communist Party for three reasons.

First, the criticisms made by Elleinstein and Althusser in the 1970s proved to be

¹ See ch. 2.

² See ch. 8.

³ David S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 111.

relatively popular among many other FCP activists. Instead of remaining limited to a few communist intellectuals, dissent spread to all the levels of the Party, penetrating the grassroots in particular. Dissent thus became widespread and normal. For this reason, it became durable.⁴

Second, the very character of Elleinstein and Althusser transformed the traditional, and relatively brief, pattern of dissenting movements. Indeed, their determination to make their Party evolve, as much in its form as in its ideology and political orientation, was unshakeable. Their intellectual intransigence was implacable.⁵ Their will to remain an integral part of the Party, despite all the obstacles set by communist leaders, was inflexible. A new form of thought thus developed within the French Communist Party. Collective thought, for ‘the Party’, and beyond it for international communism, gave way to a more original, nonconformist and individualistic way of thinking. Elleinstein and Althusser, however, were not solely responsible for this mutation. The economic crisis which shook France in the 1970s changed the mode of social perception of the French in general: the ‘me-first’ mentality became a more and more central theme among individuals.⁶ In this context, the communist leadership could only have more difficulty in disseminating a collective way of thinking and imposing mass action.

Third, the dissenting movements launched by Elleinstein and Althusser in the 1970s were relatively structured — although they were much more centred around key personalities than ideological groups capable of forming strong opposition fronts to the Leadership.⁷ These movements were structured insofar as they were divided into ‘left-wing’ and ‘right-wing’ communist tendencies, and insofar as they encompassed

⁴ Raymond Kéroch, a communist activist, quoted in the section ‘Point de vue’, *Luttes et Débats*, June 1979, p. 56.

⁵ See ch. 3.

⁶ Serge Bernstein and Pierre Milza, *Histoire de la France au XX^e siècle: de 1974 à nos jours*, vol. 5 (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1994), pp. 223-4, 230.

⁷ Jean Elleinstein, *Ils vous trompent, camarades!* (Paris: Belfond, 1981), pp. 119-21; see also our ch. 8.

communist ideologies ranging from neo-Marxism to Eurocommunism.

In this context, it was not surprising that the phenomenon of tendencies could develop. In the 1980s, the progressive groups *Rénovateurs*, *Gestionnaires* and *Reconstructeurs* were formed.⁸ In the 1990s, dissenting movements became even more widespread, ranging from *Ultra-orthodoxes*, *Orthodoxes* and *Conservateurs* to *Refondateurs*.⁹ 1980s and 1990s dissenting movements within the FCP would have been unlikely to happen without Elleinstein and Althusser. However, if on the one hand these movements became a constant phenomenon within the FCP from the 1970s onwards, on the other hand, communist leaders' attempts at eradicating them became systematic.¹⁰ Indeed, the Leadership's intolerance of any contradiction within the Party, denial of any criticism, and elimination of any opposition by means of purges were more than a Leninist and Stalinist tradition: over time, they became a reflex.

In any case, this reflex went against the Leadership's pledge to democratise the Party's internal organisation and to recognise the diversity of opinion of its members. It demonstrated, instead, the Leadership's instinct of preservation. Indeed, communist leaders were — and still are — perfectly aware of the slow, but steady, loss of popularity of the FCP since 1974:¹¹ this decline was far too blatant to be ignored.¹² In this context, the Party could not afford to scatter its resources uselessly by fighting an internal battle

⁸ In the 1980s, Pierre Juquin and Marcel Rigout were, among others, *Rénovateurs*; Philippe Herzog was a *Gestionnaire*; Claude Poperen, Félix Damette, Charles Fiterman, Jacques Ralite, Anicet Le Pors and Guy Hermier (who became a *Refondateur* later on) were *Reconstructeurs*; cf., among others, Bell and Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic*, pp. 113-114, 223, 225; Ronald Tiersky, 'Declining Fortunes of the French Communist Party', *Problems of Communism* (1988), 10.

⁹ Pascal Virot, 'Hue, un marathonnier contre l'euro', *Libération*, 19 January 1998, p. 14; Ariane Chemin, 'La lutte des classes remplacée par l' "intervention citoyenne"', *Le Monde*, 19 December 1996, p. 6; Ariane Chemin, 'Les "conservateurs" du PCF mènent une bataille d'amendements', *Le Monde*, 23 December 1996, p. 6 (article written at the time of the 29th Congress of the FCP, Arche de la Défense, 18-22 December 1996).

¹⁰ By reference to the elimination of the *Rénovateurs* in 1988 and to the *Reconstructeurs* in 1987 (at the time of 26 Congress of the FCP); cf. Jean Baudoin, 'Le déclin du PCF', *Regards sur l'actualité* (April 1991), 43.

¹¹ See ch. 7.

¹² Robert Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation* (Paris: Stock, 1995), p. 128.

for two reasons.¹³ First, the Party could not split up into factions. It would be on the road to ruin and, to some extent, it could also weaken the whole of the Left.¹⁴ Second, the Party could not allow tendencies to enter into an open contest for the Leadership. If any conservative branch of the FCP came to dominate the Leadership, it would put a definitive halt to the Party's reforms — in terms of the modernisation of its ideology, democratisation of its institutions and governmental participation¹⁵ — which it had been carrying out since the 1960s¹⁶ and, to a greater extent, since the 1970s.

However, if this argument is relatively convincing nowadays, it was not valid in the 1970s: the pattern taken by the dissent was different. Tendencies were not as openly polarised as in the 1980s and 1990s. The Party's neo-Marxist left-wing branch, represented by Althusser was relatively close to the Party's Eurocommunist right-wing branch incarnated by Elleinstein. Indeed, although these tendencies had basically different ideologies, they were both progressive when it came to the democratisation of the Party's internal organisation,¹⁷ the unlocking of Stalinist practices, adaptation to social and economic change,¹⁸ rejection of the Soviet model,¹⁹ and participation in a left-wing alliance.²⁰ They were more progressive than their Leadership — although Marchais did not have any choice but to succumb to Soviet pressures, as the KGB threatened him with the prospect of revealing his war record.²¹ However, as from 1985, everything changed.

¹³ See ch. 2.

¹⁴ By reference to Lionel Jospin's government of 'Gauche plurielle' which includes, since 1997, ministers from the Socialist Party, Les Verts and the FCP. It is also worth noting that, without the FCP, the SP cannot reach a majority vote at the National Assembly.

¹⁵ For instance, in the late 1990s, the *Orthodoxes* and the *Conservateurs* were against the participation of the FCP in Lionel Jospin's coalition government; cf. Viot, 'Hue, un marathonien contre l'euro'.

¹⁶ By reference to the FCP's move towards the Union of the Left; see ch. 7.

¹⁷ See ch. 1, 2, and 8.

¹⁸ See ch. 4.

¹⁹ See ch. 6.

²⁰ See ch. 7.

²¹ Christopher Andrew, interview of, 'Le KGB en France', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23-29 September 1999, p. 145: 'le KGB a sérieusement envisagé de faire publier les documents sur le passé de Marchais en Allemagne pendant la guerre'; Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive* (London: Penguin, 1999), ch. 18 on Eurocommunism; Althusser, *Sur la mort du PCF (Mort et survie du PCF), (1982-83?)*, Paris, IMEC, fond Althusser, ALT2.A29-01.05, unpublished manuscripts: 'Tout ce beau monde vit sous la direction d'un Georges Marchais tenu par les

Under Marchais' influence, the FCP leadership became more progressive than some of the Party's dissenting movements²² and consequently pressed for reforms leading to the transformation of the Party.

From the mid-1980s onwards, the transformation of the French Communist Party was made possible by the *déstalinisation* of the USSR, by its move towards a market economy — that is to say, by its *déssoviétisation*, which was played in two rounds. First, the programme of reforms launched by Mikhail Gorbachev from 1985 to 1991 encouraged the FCP to resume the progressive vision of socialism²³ it had adopted in the 1970s, in its Eurocommunist phase. Second, the break-up of the USSR and the successive advent of a capitalist-style CIS freed the FCP from its ideological shackles.²⁴ The FCP was free to reject the Soviet model of socialism and to determine its own strategy — but it was also forced to analyse its Leninist and Stalinist practices,²⁵ forced to demonstrate that socialism could survive the fall of the USSR and take other forms than those previously applied in the East.²⁶

The task set by the French Communist Party was relatively large, but it was not insurmountable — far from it. In the 1990s, the FCP started democratising itself progressively by abandoning the principle of democratic centralism,²⁷ by recognising 'la

soviétiques et ses propres camarades pour avoir eu un jour vingt ans et avoir commis la bétise de partir dans la production de guerre allemande'; see our ch. 1.

²² By reference to the *Ultra-orthodoxes*, the *Othodoxes* and the *Conservateurs* who are, to a greater or lesser extent, hostile to the Gauche plurielle and to the reforms carried out by Hue within the FCP.

²³ It is worth noting that if Gorbachev had a progressist vision of socialism which suited the FCP, he was nonetheless condemned by French communist leaders for giving too capitalist an orientation to his policy; cf. Bell and Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic*, p. 119; Martin J. Bull, 'The West European Communist Movement in the Late Twentieth Century', *West European Politics*, 18, no. 1 (January 1995), 85; this progressive vision of socialism did not, however, fully extend to the treatment of Soviet 'dissidents'; cf. *Background Brief on Soviet Union: Continued Repression of Dissent* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1985).

²⁴ See ch. 6.

²⁵ 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités (textes adoptés par le 30^e Congrès)*, (Martigues, 23-26 March 2000); *L'Humanité*, 27 March 2000, p. vii; see our ch. 6.

²⁶ In that respect, Jean Baudoin talked about '[la déstabilisation du] poumon du système' in 'Le déclin du PCF', 41; Robert Hue, *Le communisme: un nouveau projet* (Paris: Stock, 1999), p. 125; Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation*, p. 44; Hue quoted in 30^e Congrès, *ibid.*, and in *L'Humanité*, *ibid.*, p. xx; see our ch. 5.

²⁷ Following a decision taken by the Central Committee in September 1993, the 28th Congress of the FCP wiped away the principle of democratic centralism by replacing it with the concept of

souveraineté des adhérents,²⁸ by encouraging horizontal contact at all levels of its organisation,²⁹ and by taking away the sacred aura of the Leadership.³⁰ In the 1990s, the Party questioned the Stalinist practices it had used previously to treat internal dissent³¹ and officially accepted the right of its members to differ in their opinions³² — without recognising tendencies, as wished by Althusser in the 1970s.³³ In the 1990s, the Party reshaped its strategy to take account of France's social and economic environment by updating its analysis of social classes and by acknowledging the diversity of the working class.³⁴ In the 1990s, the Party was determined to build a constructive political union with Lionel Jospin's Socialist Party.³⁵

These transformations were those demanded by Elleinstein and Althusser back in the 1970s. They did not exactly match their demands, but they answered them to a large extent.³⁶ However, they came too late — too late to prevent communist activists from fleeing the Party,³⁷ too late to attract again a large number of prominent and influential

'souveraineté des communistes'; 28^e Congrès, *Rapport de la commission sur les statuts (rapport présenté par Francette Lazard)* suivi de *Les statuts du PCF* (St-Ouen, 25-29 January 1994).

²⁸ Francette Lazard, *Rapport introductif au Comité Central des 28, 29 et 30 septembre 1993*, (*L'Humanité*, 29 September 1993); 28^e Congrès, *ibid.*; see our ch. 1.

²⁹ 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités*; see our ch. 1.

³⁰ Paul Lespagnol quoted in *L'Humanité*, 27 March 2000, pp. 8-9; see our ch. 1; according to a 2000 Sofres poll, 82% of French communists found the FCP democratic; poll mentioned in Gérard Courtois, 'Le 30^e congrès du PCF prend ses marques avant de sauter le pas du "nouveau communisme"', *Le Monde*, 25 March 2000, p. 12.

³¹ Francette Lazard, *Réflexion de la commission d'arbitrage sur la portée, au regard de l'histoire, de la mutation des pratiques du débat dans le parti (rapport présenté au Comité Central des 16 et 17 novembre 1998)*, (*L'Humanité*, 19 November 1998); 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités*; see our ch. 8.

³² 29^e Congrès, *La politique du Parti Communiste Français (document adopté par le 29^e Congrès)*, (Arche de la Défense, 18-22 December 1996); *L'Humanité*, 23 December 1996; see our ch. 2, 3, and 8.

³³ See ch. 2.

³⁴ 30^e Congrès, *Un projet communiste pour s'attaquer aux inégalités*; see our ch. 4.

³⁵ Hue, *Le communisme: la mutation*, p. 319-20; see our ch. 7.

³⁶ It is worth noting that according to a 2000 Sofres poll, 73% of French communists found the FCP reformist, but 54% of them thought that '[le Party a] un peu changé, mais sans modifier l'essentiel'; poll mentioned in Courtois, 'Le 30^e congrès du PCF prend ses marques avant de sauter le pas du "nouveau communisme"'.
³⁷ Marc Lazar, 'Communism in Western Europe in the 1980s', *Journal of Communist Studies*, 4 (September 1988), 245-6; Lazar talked about the decline in the number of workers and young people belonging to the FCP. According to the author, FCP membership numbers went down from 520,000 in 1978 to 380,000 in 1984. In 'Party Decline and Changing Party Systems — France and the French Communist Party', *Comparative Politics*, 25, no. 1 (October 1992), 44, George Ross noted that 'the PCF's retreat has opened up important ideological and electoral terrain upon which France's two important new partisan aspirants, the National Front and the Greens, have been busily hunting new

intellectuals to its ranks,³⁸ too late to curb the spiral of decline in which the Party found itself trapped from 1974 onwards. In that sense, it would have been desirable if the FCP had transformed itself in the 1970s, when it was carried by the dynamics of Eurocommunism, the Union of the Left and its 22nd Congress of 1976. Unfortunately, this transformation was impossible: as has been demonstrated, the margin of manoeuvre of Georges Marchais was too limited. On the one hand Moscow had appointed him as the head of the Party — an appointment which acted as a guarantee of his docility and which could be revoked at the slightest faux pas. On the other hand Moscow knew enough about him and his past in Germany during the Second World War to exercise constant pressure over him.³⁹ Consequently, Georges Marchais could be considered as the weak link within the FCP, despite all his goodwill.

As a result, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the French Communist Party is no longer the *Grand Parti* it was after 1945. It is rather a complementary political force — a position Robert Hue accepts stoically when declaring that ‘il n’est écrit nulle part qu’il doit y avoir nécessairement un Parti communiste fort et influent dans le France du XXI^e siècle’,⁴⁰ and a position Althusser predicted back in the early 1980s when he wrote: ‘[Le Parti Communiste Français est] voué à mourir sur pied dans une histoire que d’autres font désormais à sa place et en leur nom.’⁴¹

support’. This was denied by Claude Poperen’s ‘Rapport à la session du Comité Central des 26 et 27 juin 1984’: ‘Nous [communistes] sommes essentiellement touchés par l’abstention et non par un glissement de nos voix sur un ou plusieurs partis’, quoted in Michel Naudy, *PCF: le suicide* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986), p. 194.

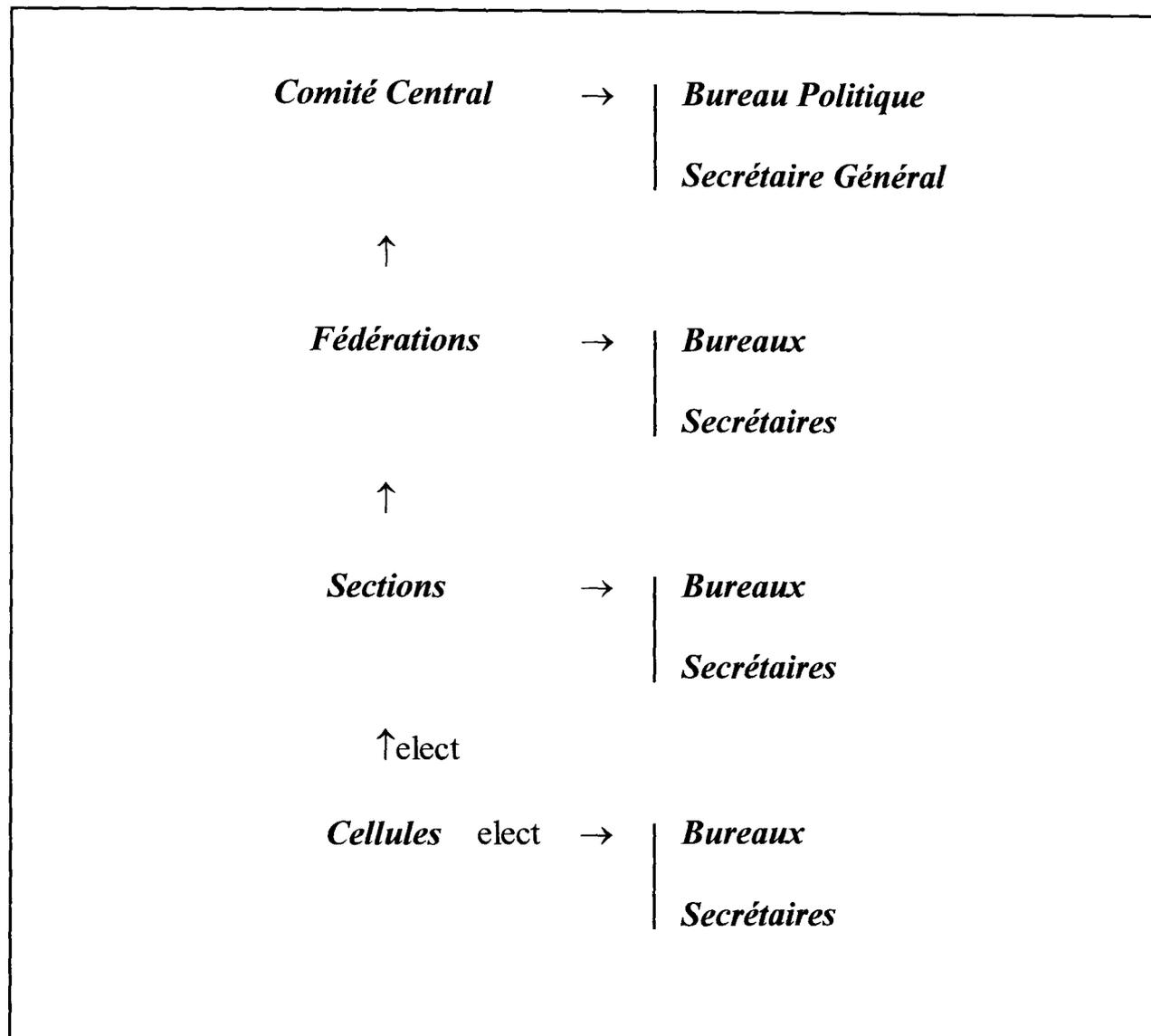
³⁸ David S. Bell, ‘Communism and French Intellectuals’, *Modern and Contemporary France* (1993), 34; Zbigniew Brzezinski, ‘The Grand Failure: the Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century (New York: [n. pub.], 1989), p. 207, quoted in Frank L. Wilson, ‘Communism at Crossroads: Changing Roles in the Western Democracies’, *Problems of Communism* (1992), 96; Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, *Le réveil des somnambules: le parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture (1956-1985)*, (Paris: Fayard, 1987), p. 45.

³⁹ By reference, for instance, to the biographies held by the KGB; cf. Andrew and Mitrokhin. *The Mitrokhin Archive*, ch. 18 on Eurocommunism

⁴⁰ Hue quoted in Alain Beuve-Méry, ‘Le Parti communiste est en panne d’idées, d’animation et d’argent’, *Le Monde*, 21 November 2000, p. 7.

⁴¹ Louis Althusser, *Sur la mort du PCF (Mort et survie du PCF)*, (1982-83?), Paris, IMEC. fond Althusser, ALT2.A29-01.05, unpublished manuscripts.

APPENDIX:
 DIAGRAM OF THE FCP'S INTERNAL ORGANISATION
 (UNTIL 1993)



Sources: Jean Elleinstein, *Le PC* (Paris: Grasset, 1976), pp. 42-78, and Annie Kriegel, *Les communistes français* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), ch. X.

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