THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY
AND FEMINISM

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Introduction
In France, as in the rest of the advanced capitalist world, the women's movement has come to stay. The movement's demands for changes in the status of women and the new content which it has brought to politics cannot be ignored. The political context which the French women's movement faced in the past decade was a Left revitalised around an alliance of parties, Union de la Gauche. This has meant, in contrast to Britain or North America, that a lively and socialist Left already existed with which the movement had to deal. And the parties of the Left, with their own analyses of advanced, monopoly capitalism could not ignore the women. A confrontation was inevitable; a resolution of benefit to both was more problematic.

The mobilisation of women was only one of the many new social movements which characterised politics in the late 1960s and 1970s. Ecologists, students, consumers, anti-war activists, homosexuals, women, came together, in more or less formal organisations, to press their demands for social and political change. These 'single-issue movements' posed profound questions about traditional left practices of mobilisation and activism. In earlier years the parties of the Left were frequently the carriers of some of the concerns which later motivated the social movements. In recent times, however, the movements have developed their own organisations which are, or attempt to be, autonomous of the parties. This autonomy plus the social base of many of the most important movements—in the 'new middle class'—has raised important strategic questions for the left parties. The classic left problem of making alliances with non-working-class strata is posed in new terms. Will the existence of such movements reinforce the political parties in their projects, or will they draw activists and supporters away from the more general work of political change toward an issue-focused and more short-time intervention in political action? How the French Communists tried to cope with these new problems, as manifested in their changing relationships with the French women's movement, is the subject of this article.

Coping with social movements has always been complicated for the PCF. Theoretically, the Party has been able to choose from among three
possible approaches. The PCF could accept the legitimacy of a social movement and allow it to flourish outside the control of the Party; the Party could attempt to direct the movement itself (by creating front organisations and/or using mass organisations as transmission belts for Party policy and mobilisation needs); or the PCF could wage war on the movement, as unprogressive. While these are three logical possibilities, the latter two are by far the most common in PCF history.

The PCF, in its earlier history, dealt with social movements according to the strict criteria of the Party's ouvrieriste theoretical perspective. Such movements had to be fitted into the class reductionism of this ouvrierisme—if the movement's goals could be reduced to 'the interests of the working class', or its allies as defined by the Party, especially with reference to wages, working conditions, and living standards, then that movement was eligible for PCF attention and support. If the movement's goals did not conform to these strict criteria, it might be banned to the pale of 'petite-bourgeois' distraction from the real goals of class struggle. Using these criteria, the PCF focussed much of its work on mass organisations like La Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), Le Mouvement de la Paix, and Le Mouvement de Défense des Exploitants Familiaux, for example. The traditional pattern of work with social movements was to develop an organisation closely connected to the PCF—composed only of Communists or of Communists and non-Communists (with control over strategic decisions assured by the Communist leadership).

The Eurocommunist changes of the last two decades seemed to call this traditional pattern into question. The PCF developed a new economic theory and class map, along with the strategy of Union de la Gauche and notions of a 'revolutionary-reformist' transition to socialism. The Party's goal in all this was to create an alliance between a plurality of progressive political formations, animated by the PCF, which would open the way to a peaceful and democratic transition to French socialism. Such changes in theory and strategy also implied new approaches to autonomous social movements. In the words of the XXII Congress of the PCF, le socialisme, c'est la démocratie jusqu'au bout (socialism is democracy to the fullest). This slogan implied that, as the monopoly capitalist state became less able to guarantee democratic forms and relationships, struggles for democracy would also be struggles against the state, against capital and for socialism. It also implied that the Party would seek to find new ways of working with the democratic struggles of groups which arose outside the Party's own orbit, if those groups were involved in expanding the limits of democracy.

By the 1970s then, which were the years in which the women's movement in France was increasing its influence, the PCF was simultaneously changing its perspective on social movements. Clearly the women's movement was a struggle for greater democracy—in the work-
place, in society, in the family—and as such should have been a prime candidate for PCF support and encouragement. However, the real history of Party reaction to the movement was much more complicated than one might have expected from simple knowledge of the Party's doctrinal changes. The reasons for this complexity are found in the contradictory ways that the PCF 'Eurocommunised'. Its *Eurocommunisation* was incomplete because the Party had advanced more in some spheres of Party practice than in others. The incomplete nature of the PCF 'Eurocommunisation' and the contradictory processes which underlay this incompleteness were perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the Party's efforts to cope with the women's movement.

**The Pre-Eurocommunist Analysis of the Situation of Women**

Prior to 'Eurocommunisation', the PCF had a well worked out analysis of women in capitalist society and it was from this beginning that a new analysis and alliance strategy came. The earlier approach to *la condition féminine* and blueprint for liberation was derived from the Marxist classics and the example of the socialism of the Soviet Union. The participation of women in the wage labour force was the most important step to change. Only such participation would begin creating the personal independence and political consciousness which would engage women in the struggle for socialism. Only socialism could bring their full liberation from the exploitation of capital and of men. Following Marx, Engels and Lenin, as well as Bebel and Fournier, the PCF's analysis of the situation of women in capitalism included recognition that formal equality of rights did not automatically entail real equality. Women were doubly exploited because they played a dual role—in production and reproduction—in capitalism. However, capitalism refused to recognise the social character of maternity. The analysis continued to note that the division of labour within the family resulted in women being saddled with the suffocating daily round of domestic labour. Moreover, women had become a source of cheap labour—part of the reserve army of labour—for industrial capitalism. Thus capital had every reason to attempt through various institutional legal and ideological mechanisms to reproduce the subordinate status of women. The PCF's model for the reforms necessary to begin changing women's situation was always the Soviet Union Communists' efforts in favour of women in capitalist society would win women to the long-term struggle for socialist transformation by drawing them to the PCF, as *militantes* and as voters.

In the 1950s, while the theoretical analysis of the condition of women was the one outlined here, most mobilisation of women, *qua* women, was done through the *Union des Femmes Françaises* (UFF), a mass organisation of primarily non-salaried women. The UFF campaign foci were usually bread and peace and appeals were directed to women as mothers, as
housewives, and as peace-lovers by nature. However, in a 1961 reevaluation of the work of the UFF and the success of campaigns directed towards women, a change occurred. This change in focus (or a recognition of an earlier gap in mobilisation) corresponded to an understanding of the restructuring and modernisation of the French economy which the post-war years had brought. PCF campaigns throughout the sixties always emphasised that women were super-exploited and that they must demand to be treated as the equals of male workers, not accepting capital's claim to pay them less because they 'needed' less.

Therefore, the PCF appealed to women as working mothers, forced by capital to perform a double journée du travail under conditions of great hardship, and subject to an ideological campaign which claimed that the real function of women was as mothers at home, so that, if they did work, it was only to earn a supplementary income or to fill a few hours of free time. Against this view of women's work, the PCF counterposed another. The picture of the ideal woman painted by the PCF was that of an independent woman, involved in her work and the struggle for socialism, who returned to her family with the interests and enthusiasms inherent in such involvement. At a time when the dominant ideology celebrated la femme au foyer, even while the reality was higher levels of salaried employment for women, this position of the PCF was dramatically different and not unprogressive.

We can see that the PCF position on women, from the years of Thorez up until the late sixties, shared most of the characteristics of other PCF campaigns. The appeal to women was fundamentally economistic, focussing on women as workers, albeit workers with special needs because they bore children, and as consumers, responsible for running a household on an ever-tightening budget.

Before 1968 the PCF had a near monopoly on 'progressive' positions on women. There were few competitors in the field. From its position of strength the PCF could afford to judge autonomous feminist efforts harshly. Communist understanding of the 'women's movement' was drawn from experiences with feminists in the earlier part of the century, who were vilified as a bourgeois distraction from the 'real' issues of class struggle.

Such thinking was bound to lead to difficulties once the modern women's movement arose and once the process of 'Eurocommunisation' was carried forward in the PCF. The Party and the movement would probably never have encountered each other in any fundamental way if the movement for women's liberation had developed before 1968. Before then the PCF's Stalinism held solid and its sense of self-righteous vanguardism was unchanged. Thus the Party and any women's movement would probably have sailed right past each other, with much sound and fury and very little mutually advantageous illumination. However, after 1968 and especially in the 1970s, the PCF encounter
with women was much more nuanced and much more complicated because the PCF itself had begun to change.

**The Women's Movement**

The modern French women's movement followed the events of May-June 1968, as did so much in French politics today. It is worth noting that the women's movement arose, in large part, out of the very process which the PCF had been advocating—the massive entry of women into the salaried workforce. While the PCF's analysis of the status of women called for activity outside the home as a preparation for the transition to true liberation, it was the increasing participation of women in salaried work which led to the confrontation with the inadequacies of the traditional analysis. As women entered the world of the salariat, they encountered inequalities beyond those of lower wages, unequal access to training, and problems of maternity. In other words, the status of women could not be derived only from the desire of capital to have a pool of cheaper, less organised, and more exploitable labour. The experience of women in the modern capitalist system (as industrial workers but especially as service sector, professional, and intellectual workers) raised questions of domination and subordination between men and women in work, in the family, in the couple, and in sexuality—issues which the traditional Marxist analysis of the PCF could not answer and which the PCF could not incorporate into its economic mobilisational approaches.

At the same time, the women's movement which became the carrier of these issues posed a serious problem for the PCF. As the Party developed its Eurocommunist perspectives it specified that democratic mass struggles would be the core of any French transition to socialism. The women's movement looked very much like the kind of democratic struggle which the PCF had in mind. It became impossible, therefore, to disqualify the women's movement as 'mere reformism' or a petit-bourgeois attempt to undermine the class struggle. The couches intermédiaires which were the primary home of the women's movement were also the social groups targeted by the PCF for the expansion of Communist strength upon which the success of Union de la Gauche would depend. Granting to these strata a real interest in socialist transformation, even if that interest were derived from somewhat different concerns than those of the working class, also implied granting a certain legitimacy to the demands of the women of these strata for liberation and for changes in male-dominated, male-constructed French society and the PCF. Thus, the old tactic of dismissing the initiatives of non-working-class women was no longer possible.

The women's movement challenged the PCF to consider inequalities due to the historical workings of patriarchy in addition to the inequalities
of class. This partriarchy was observable not only in the classification of 'women's work' as less important and therefore less remunerative than that of men (a tendency which the PCF had already uncovered and taken on) but also more generally in authority patterns, in relations within the family and the couple, and in sexuality. This emphasis challenged the usual distinction between the private arena and public concerns and raised to the status of the 'political' matters which had previously been 'personal', as much for the PCF as for the rest of French society. The theory of partriarchy, by including all men as its carriers, refused to grant an exemption to the working class, even its Communist vanguard, from participation in the reproduction of patriarchy. Finally, seeing all women as the victims of patriarchy, the theory blurred boundaries between classes, identifying instead the specificity of women's situation, which needed its own movement and organisations.

The attention paid by the women's movement to sexuality, to relations between people and within the couple, to new forms of authority, did not immediately resonate within a Party which for many years had 'understood' the concerns of women (housing, children, better jobs, working and living conditions for themselves and their husbands) and which envisioned a world in which women would be like men, except for the fact that they would also have children. Moreover, while the earlier economistic analysis of women's place in capitalism required no political formation other than the Communist Party to advance the cause of women, partial 'Eurocommunisation' implied that there was room for a progressive social movement, mobilising women, as women, for their own snuggles because the Party could not necessarily encompass all struggle.

In this way, the development of the women's movement, coincidental with Eurocommunism, set up a tension within the PCF. It provided a test of the practical commitment of the Party to its own theoretical change. The tension produced both drama and intense struggle within the PCF. The rest of this paper is a discussion of change and struggle within the PCF around women's issues, focussing on two levels of Party practice—theory and strategy and rank and file life.

The 'Eurocommunisation' of the PCF's Analysis of Women's Situation

These implications of Eurocommunism for the PCF's relationship to the women's movement are derived from an interpretation of the logic of Communist theoretical changes of the late sixties and early seventies. New Communist understanding of the importance of the women's movement did not actually emerge until rather late in the process of 'Eurocommunisation', however. If the report of the XXII Congress of the PCF in 1976 can be read as representing a summary statement of the Eurocommunist position within the PCF, attention paid to women was minimal at that time. Women, as carriers of specific needs and requiring
special efforts to assure their liberation, even into the stage of building socialism, were not mentioned. The only place that women received special reference was with regard to their promotion within the PCF itself. This reluctance to focus on women, as late as 1976, indicates the slowness with which the PCF translated its Eurocommunist innovations into some spheres of Party practice. The XXII Congress showed that the Party was moving ahead in theory and in developing an alliance strategy appropriate to that theory vis à vis political parties. Yet, at the same time, the full implications of such theoretical changes for dealing with new social movements were not yet appreciated.

The absence of attention to women at the time of the XXII Congress meant that the way was left open to continue old-style approaches. In the flurry of explanatory publications directed at special interest groups, around the time of the Congress, one was written for women. Madeleine Vincent, the member of the Bureau politique responsible for women, published Femmes: quelle libération?

This book followed the traditional pattern of emphasising the material gains to accrue to women and their families if a government of the United Left were to come to power. The primary goal was one of promoting equality, which would follow from better training, wages, and working conditions—essentially from struggles for the implementation of the Common Programme and for Union de la Gauche.

Only in the year preceding the 1977-78 electoral campaign did the reasoning of the PCF about women and the women's movement begin to undergo substantial change. Georges Marchais, for example, in December 1977 spoke to Communist women in Paris and talked of the mentalités retardataires (backward attitudes) which existed in the whole of French society, including within the PCF. These attitudes, the Secretary-General claimed, paid too little attention to women's liberation problematic. Thus, changing the status of women was acknowledged to be a more complex matter than the economistic analysis of earlier years would have allowed. At the same time, however, while Marchais provided neither a real analysis of the sources of these attitudes nor concrete suggestions of what to do about them, he expressed a voluntaristic confidence that they would disappear, once exposed for what they were. He engaged in self-congratulation that the PCF had already begun to take steps to ensure that the special needs of women militants were considered.

However, in this same statement there were also signs that more fundamental re-thinking had occurred within the PCF and that the voluntarism of Marchais was inconsistent even with some aspects of his own views. In particular, he announced that struggle for women's liberation would be necessary well into the construction of socialism. In other words, there was no longer an assumption that sex-based inequalities would automatically disappear with the elimination of
classes. The women would have to ensure their own equality. This newly-discovered need for a specific women's struggle in building socialism was linked to an analysis of the prehistoric sources of sexual inequality founded on a sexual division of labour. If the inferiority of women and their work pre-dated private property, then sexual subordination, although clearly extended and codified in class society, preceded class society. In addition, while acknowledging the necessity of profound change in the relations between classes in order to do anything fundamental about the situation of women, Marchais stressed the value of women's own political activity and visibility at the present time. The women's movement was a movement which could help to build Left unity and social change.

These remarks by the Secretary-General of the PCF reflected a major theoretical change for the French Communists. The specific parameters of the change were best set out in La Condition Féminine, a book produced by the Party's Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes (CERM) and made up of a series of essays by PCF researchers. One important article, by Maurice Godelier, provided an anthropological examination of sex-based subordination in pre-class societies, rejecting Engels' designation of women as the first class. The political implication of this analysis is that if sexual domination did not arise with classes, it will not automatically disappear as classes disappear. Struggle around specific sexual inequalities will have to continue well into the transition to socialism. Indeed, Godelier's conclusions may have been the source of Georges Marchais' remarks cited above. Such an argument also demanded a re-consideration of the treatment of women in socialist countries.

Other articles in the collection also criticise the situation of women in the socialist countries and argue the need for a separate women's movement throughout the pluralistic process of building socialism. For example, one chapter locates the subordination of women within the needs of capitalism for free domestic labour for reproduction of the labour force. Since women's domestic labour (or more generally, someone's domestic labour, whether women's or couples') is not optional to capitalism, struggles to break down the domestic economy are struggles against capital. Many of the authors stress that it is a separation between public and private economies which provides the foundation for the subordination of women, even in socialist countries. Thus, programmes to re-assign the costs of domestic labour and to break down the ideological forms which reproduce this gift of free labour will both help the liberation of women and advance the cause of socialism.

In the CERM book there are also a number of studies which examine the mechanisms by which the ideology which assigns women a minor status is reproduced—for example, women's magazines, television and school books. Finally, two important articles examine the successes and
failures of the PCF in its promotion of women within the Party and its relationship to the women's movement. Careful documentation of the progress of women within the Party points to areas where the promotion of women has been slow. The same author warns that the mere presence of women in governing positions of the PCF will not solve all problems. In another piece the PCF's new attention to democracy (especially autogestion) is used as the justification for struggles against attitudes which subordinate all women.

The CERM volume was eagerly received by the many militants who had been searching for new positions which they could defend inside the Party connecting Eurocommunism and women's issues. The book legitimated support for an autonomous mass movement, criticism of the Soviet model of the 'liberation' of women, criticism of the past and present treatment of women within the PCF itself, and it provided new ammunition for Communists in their political work with women. Analyses like those of the CERM authors, especially as they were reflected in the pronouncements of PCF leaders, encouraged rank-and-file Communist women to incorporate appropriate parts of the women's movement's understandings of patriarchy into their own theory. They also enhanced pressures to make women more active and vocal within the PCF. However, the changes which the Eurocommunism of the PCF brought to its relationship with the women's movement and to its analysis of the female condition were fragile. As the Party changed again, so might these positions.

The core of the PCF's Eurocommunist strategy was an alliance with other Left parties in Union de la Gauche. However, as the campaign for the 1978 legislative elections approached, the PCF faced a deteriorating balance of forces vis à vis its major ally, the PS. For this, and other reasons, relationships between the two parties strained to the point of division. The disunity which resulted probably cost the Left the election. At the core of the Communists' own pre-electoral anxiety was its failure to convert Left unity into increased PCF support from the French electorate. Its hopes for increased strength in the middle-strata were particularly frustrated. At the same time, Socialist electoral strength, in general and in the middle strata, increased dramatically. The PCF's response to this weakness was to substitute an electoral strategy designed to reinforce its appeal among the part of the electorate it could most count on—the working class. Thus, the PCF's campaign was progressively more marked by ouvrierisme, well-symbolised by the campaign slogan, 'Make the Rich Pay'. Such themes were carried into the immediate post-electoral period. The PS was held totally responsible for the electoral defeat because of its alleged 'right turn'. This shift by the PS back to social democracy, as the Communists put it, made the Socialists an unreliable and unattractive ally.
The ultimate result of the PCF's reflections on the electoral experience was a strategic change—to union à la base. The purpose of 'unity from below' was to demonstrate to French workers that the PCF, and only the PCF, was on their side. Only the Communists could lead their struggles and protect them from the effects of economic crisis. If it worked, unity from below could block the Socialists from further inroads into the Communists' working-class base and expose the Socialists as potential 'managers of capitalist crisis'.

The 'unity' line began to unfold very soon after the election and dominated PCF politics for the following year. It was in many ways a return to older forms of PCF practice. Union à la base had been PCF strategy in the isolated Cold War years, and the 1980s version seemed to share some characteristics of the earlier form. It emphasised the implantation of the PCF in the working class plus economism in mobilisational approaches to workers. Most importantly, it marked a retreat from a number of Eurocommunist perspectives. It was a line which de-emphasised PCF overtures to the couches intermédiaires, and at the same time it retreated from the more ecumenical approach to new social movements of the mid-seventies. Moreover, the return of workerism brought with it attempts to revive older, more centralised and less open forms of internal Party life.

Progress on women's issues was, as has been suggested, closely tied to the general process of 'Eurocommunisation' in the PCF. Any retreat from Eurocommunism would call such progress into question. It was precisely retreat from Eurocommunism which characterised the PCF after September 1977 and especially after the electoral defeat of March 1978. It was not surprising, therefore, that post-electoral strategic change also brought a substantial retreat on women's issues. Older themes were re-emphasised. Women were appealed to primarily as workers, as poor people, and much less often as victims of sex-based subordination. The shift to workerist perspectives on social movements also led the leadership, as part of its campaign to blame electoral defeat on the Socialists and on opportunism, to condemn the women's movement as merely 'feminist' and as dominated by either the Socialists or the Trotskyists.

In general, the abrupt change in Party strategy was difficult for many Communists to accept. Beginning in 1978, the Party was wracked by unprecedented internal conflict. The leadership's retrenchment policies led much of this conflict to focus on issues of democracy. The PCF's position on women's issues were, to some Communists, a vital aspect of democratisation. As a result, some women's groups joined in the chorus of dissent which rocked the PCF in the spring of 1978.

**Rank-and-File Communists and Party Crisis**

To this point this paper has described the changes that 'Euro-
communisation' implied for the relationship between the PCF and the women's movement as well as for the Communists' own understanding of the status of women in capitalist society. However, the analysis has focussed only on the upper levels of the Party and on theoretical and strategic spheres of Party practice. It is useful at this point to shift to the rank and file and to the spheres of Communist mobilisational practices and internal Party life. Doing this will provide new insight into the ways that 'Eurocommunisation' affected one group of ordinary Communists and how they reacted to the Party's retreat away from it. The group in question was a section-level commission féminine (women's commission) which was created to put into practice some of the promise of the XXII Congress. In the months of Party crisis the women's commission quickly became an arena within which the conflict between strategic currents which characterised the PCF in the post-electoral period was acted out in one section of the Party. Its experience documents the fragility as well as the importance of the 'Eurocommunisation' which had occurred. It illustrates the effects on the rank and file of the leadership's move away from the decade-long strategic perspective in several areas, including effects in the areas of internal Party democracy and mobilisational strategies.

This description will draw on the findings of a participant-observation study of a cell and section in the PCF between March 1978 and the XXIII Congress of the PCF in May 1979. The section in question, Paris South, was one of the most committed to Eurocommunism in France. Communists within it were therefore very much caught up in the effort to understand and deal with the changes in the PCF line that followed the defeat of March. An important part of the section's story was the process of learning experienced by its women's commission whose existence was a source of pride for many in the section. In the months after March, the commission was deeply implicated in the effects of closing down the Eurocommunist strategic option and the search for some meaning for union à la base that might satisfy their desire for continued openness and Eurocommunism.

Paris South's commitment to Eurocommunism derived not only from an understanding of the general conditions of European society which made a strategy of a peaceful, national road to socialism desirable, but also from its own sociology. The Paris South area (as all of Paris, in fact) was not primarily working class in social composition and the membership of the section reflected this. Most of the section's Communists were white collar–office workers, a goodly number of lower or middle managers, with a few professionals and intellectuals. Paris South had a long and noble history of Party work, from the Popular Front and the Resistance, and this history was a source of considerable pride. In the 1960s, as Gaullist-inspired urban renewal re-made the social map of Paris, the section
developed an active practice of out-reach toward the changing population. It had also developed a position of autonomy in the Party. The section leadership, from at least 1968 on, had followed a strategy of protecting the section from undue interference from above such that independent initiatives might be taken, both within the PCF and in mobilisation work in the neighbourhood. The section (a large one of about 300 Communists in 1977-78) had developed a certain reputation within the Paris federation for creative and enthusiastic Eurocommunism, for taking the notions of democracy and pluralism very seriously.

The section saw its commission féminine as a very important part of this political position. The commission began as a small group of militants who met to discuss and initiate Party work in areas of concern to women. The group grew from a few young, 'new-middle-class' Communist women to include about fifty people who came with greater or less regularity to the monthly meetings. It included Communists from both the local and workplace cells of Paris South. Its social composition was similar to that of the section. Most of the women were white-collar workers, professionals or intellectuals One aspect of the commission which was of particular note was its willingness to include both Communist women from other sections and non-Communists in its early meetings.

The commission féminine was created after the XXII Congress and took its mandate from the Congress' broad exhortation that Communists be 'creative'. The commission was struggling to be 'creative' in two areas—internal Party life and the mobilisational practices of the PCF, especially as they were directed to women. Although it accepted the traditional PCF organisational form of the women's commission (which exists at most levels of the Party to carry out work among women) the Paris South group was designed to introduce into the section some of the concerns of women who were close to the women's movement. It had two different kinds of goals, therefore. The first was to provide an alternative place where Communist women could come together and reflect on their situation as women and as Communists. The commission was to provide all the familiar support functions of a women's group. The second goal was to develop within the commission new political understandings of what the PCF could and should do in its work with women.

Rapid growth of the PCF in the early seventies, promoted by the Eurocommunist ambition to create a mass Party, had had an interesting effect on the Party's internal life. The 'Eurocommunisation' of French Communists' theory and strategy had been almost directly grafted onto a Party organisation designed for a very different kind of transformational scenario (a Bolshevik-style scenario). A mass membership developed without a re-examination of the part played by that membership in Party life. There had been no real re-evaluation of what it meant 'to be a Communist'. However, a mass Party was a new Party, in effect. The
post-Common Programme militants had been promised 'democracy' in the transition to socialism not only in society but also within the PCF. Yet, the failure to explore the full implications of Eurocommunism for internal Party democracy set up the possibility of crisis While such problems touched most militants, they had special effects on women, especially as they tried to introduce their concerns into the PCF.

With the huge expansion of the PCF's membership in the 1970s, more women became Communists. Their numbers increased both absolutely and in relative percentages. The leadership, in line with its traditional strategy of imposing quotas to produce certain demographic 'profiles' at all levels of the Party, installed more and more women in official organizational slots. As a result, women began to appear almost everywhere in positions of responsibility. These women were more than 'token'; they did become important within the PCF.20 (In Paris South, for example, the section's First Secretary was a woman, while large numbers of women served on the Section Committee and in its bureau.) But the progress of women within the Party brought with it new complexity.

The Party's female comrades confronted a double barrier. First, the PCF's traditional pur et dur style of activism devalued any personal content or consideration in favour of complete and asexual devotion to leading the class struggle, as defined by the Party leadership. Superimposed on this was the society-wide reaction to women. Over the years the PCF had developed certain expectations of its militantes. They were to be as active and committed as men, devoted to 'passing' the Party line to the world by approved top-down mobilisational methods. However, because they were women (the family and maternity was always a big value for the PCF), once they had young children, they were expected to retire from the front ranks of activity and occupy themselves with their families—they were 'honourably' excused. In the past, women with young children had therefore been systematically relieved of their responsibilities or not promoted. In the France of the Napoleonic marriage laws, and thus for the Communists of France, children were the responsibility of the mother. A triple journée—of work, family and Party—was considered beyond the capacity of even Communists. In the past, then, only certain kinds of women—young, without children, or past the age of young families—were eligible to become militantes. However, once women began to refuse this exclusion and to insist that the Party develop a different conception of female activism—more reasonable, less demanding of time and energy, more considerate of children—the PCF's old habits would have to change.

The new demands and interests of women would also challenge the definition of 'politics' and political discourse in the PCF. The old-style PCF had a very clear vision about what constituted political activity and how such activity was to be carried out. Politics was about capital and labour, wages and prices, conditions of work and living, crèches and
schools. One major type of activity within the Party, in cells and elsewhere, was speeches to elaborate on such politics and make a connection between the dynamics of capitalism and state policies and the PCF's programmes. Speeches were formal, often quite long, prepared in advance (almost always for higher instances of the Party; less often in the cell) and had to be clear. Their purpose was to help fellow militants acquire examples and arguments for future use. In the PCF good militants were those who spoke well and clearly about the Party line especially as it touched their own local (but very rarely personal) situation.

Obviously not everyone was a good militant in this way. Of all Party members, workers and women were most likely to have problems with this form of political discourse, both for the same reason. French society is very verbal. Linguistic elegance is highly prized, but it is also unequally distributed. Workers acquired less than their full share because of poor schooling, among other things. Workers, even if they suffered relatively within their own party, had two advantages over women, however. First they could recognise themselves and their needs in the pro-working-class politics of the PCF. Second, the PCF, as a party, bent over backwards to make sure that workers were heard. Particular efforts were made—quotas, special encouragement to speak, acceptance of and real attention to what workers said. Not so for women. There was little in the internal norms of the Party, or its traditions, that encouraged women to speak. If they did it was fine; if they did not, that was fine too. Unlike workers, then, women did not benefit from any special arrangements which might have overcome their difficulties in speaking in public.

There was an additional, and more complex problem, however, which was that when women did speak, they were often not 'heard'. This failure to communicate successfully had two main causes. The first was that their contributions might be presented in a different way than was the norm. Thus, the motivation of an intervention by a 'personal' rather than a 'political' experience, in a briefer form, or even in a different tone of voice might result in not being 'heard'. The second failure to communicate arose from the fact that women did not always recognise themselves or their most pressing concerns in what the Party said about women—issues were often narrowly confined to material and family benefits and the struggle of women to interject new concerns into Party discourse often fell on very deaf ears. These then were the two problems of women within the PCF—to make themselves 'heard' within the Party and to be 'heard' about new and less traditional matters.

The women's commission of Paris South worked hard to introduce women's voices into the PCF in their area and they had some successes of which they were proud. Several militantes who, despite having been elected to the Section Committee had never spoken out in meetings of that committee, found their tongues after attending the women's commission
where the reasons for such silences were discussed and where they gave each other support and encouragement. Similarly, the woman who was the First Secretary of the section found that she could count on the women's commission as one of the major sources of support for the feedback about her work. She relied upon the friendship of the group as sustenance in her difficult job. Moreover, after a year of experience with the women's commission, a strong feeling of solidarity was created among the group. When they met again outside the commission, in cell or section-level meetings, such solidarity helped the very timid to participate. In addition, the sense of solidarity encouraged women in their cells to raise matters which had previously not been considered within the purview of Communist politics. Several cells in Paris South at this time held both informal and formal meetings devoted to consideration of rape, of sexuality, of relations within the couple. The existence of the women's commission and the solidarity of its membership also encouraged women to confront their male comrades about their sexist expectations and the more blatant expressions of sexism.

Nevertheless, these kinds of activities, while considered important, were not the primary goal of the group. It wanted to work with women in ways which were different from what the Party had done in the past. It was in this attempt that they had the most trouble and the post-electoral events weighed most heavily. The women's commission of Paris South had been caught up in the constant electioneering that had characterised all Party activity in the years leading up to March 1978. The group complained that their efforts to be 'creative' were being stifled by the upper levels of the Party which were interested in them only as propaganda machines for electoral campaigns sent down from above. As the 1978 electoral campaign unfolded in its obvious inappropriateness for the Paris South area (where couches intermédiaires were more numerous than blue collar workers) and as the content of the campaign directed toward women became more and more economistic, the women's commission's sense of being stifled grew.

Before the election the Paris South women's commission had proposed that the Arrondissement organise a day-long session for women in the area to raise and discuss some of the issues they considered missing from traditional Party programmes. In particular they wanted to talk about sexuality. The Arrondissement refused and instead organised a very traditional electoral meeting to discuss the election promises and programmes of the PCF. When a few feminists tried to raise some of their concerns in questions from the floor, they were effectively put down in a series of speeches, especially one from the official of the Arrondissement responsible for work with women. For the members of the Paris South women's commission, this kind of response was another demonstration of the way that the Party was in retreat from its post-XXII Congress position.
It also increased their wariness of any initiatives coming from upper levels of the PCF, the Arrondissement in particular. After the election they were even more discouraged. In June 1978 a very important day-long study session on women was held (at Argenteuil, June 10 and 11) in which the new union à la base strategic perspective, as it related to women and the women's movement, was set out. The most notable events of this session were an attack on the women's movement as an unreliable and therefore unavailable ally, a return to an emphasis on working women and their material situation, and, in the course of the meeting, a criticism of the activities of the Paris Federation of the PCF in its Eurocommunist-inspired work with women. This meeting made it very clear that something of great importance was gone from the old strategy but it was not clear to the women's commission what had been put in its place. However, the anger generated by the campaign and post-electoral analysis of the PCF, could simmer throughout the summer of 1978.

In the fall, the first intimations of what was to be a year-long struggle over strategy, broke out in Paris South and the first focus of difficulty that arose was in the internal life of the Party. What came to be at issue was the extent to which Eurocommunism had brought a more open Party, with room for autonomy of decision-making at the lower levels. The troubles began when the section, inspired by the women's commission, attempted to do what it had done in 1977 (before the rupture with the Socialists) at the Fête de l’Humanité. The commission had devised a Eurocommunist programme for the section's booth at the Fête, organising a bookstall to sell literature about women—both Party publications and other progressive works. In the context of the Fête, probably one of the major social events of the French Left, the women of Paris South helped to contact both Communist and non-Communist women and men for discussion and to display what they, as a group, were doing. The booth had been a success in 1977 and the plan was to continue it in 1978.

However, things were very different in the summer of 1978. Two weeks before the Fête the Arrondissement sent out a directive that the Paris South bookstall was not to sell non-Party magazines. This suggestion was very badly received by the leadership of the section and in a stormy August session, the bureau of the section voted to defy the Arrondissement's instructions on the grounds of democracy and independence. The section's earlier decision to sell the magazines was reaffirmed and battle was engaged. Drama was high at the Fête itself, as the Communists of Paris South waited to see how the Party leadership and other Communists would respond. Initially, the leadership of the higher levels resorted to social pressure alone. The woman who was the Communist deputy in the legislative constituency next to Paris South (and therefore, in many ways, 'their' deputy) refused to enter the bookstall in her rounds of the Arrondissement's booths. The leaders of the Arrondissement followed the
same tactic. In contrast, many Communists from other sections all over France visited the booth and expressed their amazement that the Paris South women's commission could convince the section to focus its booth on women and in this way. Thus, with such responses, the section leaders felt vindicated and the sense of confidence of the women of Paris South (and their male comrades) increased. They put the troubles with the Arrondissement down to its own silliness or backward ideas. That the 'backwardness' might be more widespread was not yet clear.

The events of the Fête provided much of the focus of discussion throughout the section in subsequent weeks. The section's defiance of the Arrondissement had been daring and the section had to be ready for the after-effects of such actions. However, the event of the booth soon came to be overshadowed by something else which had happened at the Fête. Some of the women in the section, including the First Secretary, had given an interview to a leading women's movement magazine, in which they discussed their lives and their experiences within the Party. Most of the comments, although very thoughtful, were critical of the Party and the magazine emphasised the criticisms in its article. Needless to say, at a time when the appearance of Communists in non-Party media was problematic (after the many articles by dissident Communists in French newspapers the previous spring), this interview was explosive in its effect.

For the First Secretary of the section the situation which followed was extremely difficult. She was summoned to the Arrondissement to 'explain' her decision to grant the interview. She defended herself on two fundamental grounds. The first was that she had said nothing which was not true and nothing which was dangerous to the Party. Her argument was that the truth must be exposed rather than hidden away under the facade of unanimity which had always characterised the PCF's democratic centralism. For her, her Eurocommunism implied more open discussion of all questions. Her second defence was that, in the earlier times of expansive Eurocommunism she had spoken to the Arrondissement leadership about an interview requested by a Catholic magazine. The answer given by the leadership at the time was that Communists 'should go about everywhere' to publicise the Party. In fact, she had been told that her checking such a request was really unnecessary and she should use her own judgement. Second time around, however, things had changed. What had previously been possible was now impossible.

The situation of another woman of Paris South was more dramatic. Her part of the interview (which was very prominently played up in the article) emphasised that the PCF reproduced the patriarchy of French (and all) capitalist society. Her position was summarised by the banner used to publicise the magazine in the news stands of Paris—'if I can be a Communist and a woman, that is paradise'. This phrase represents her developing conviction that the Communist position on women and
women's movement position on women were, if not contradictory, at least not being reconciled. She spoke in the interview about the prospect of having to choose between the two positions and was eloquent about the pain involved in such a choice. She was, and had been for almost a decade, a good and loyal Communist. She believed that the Party was leading the historic struggle for change and she feared 'being left out of history' if she failed to participate in the Party's struggles. However, by November, she had left the PCF.

To her cell she explained that she was making a personal choice, but a choice nonetheless. Her choice was not to be interpreted as the necessary one for all Communist women, even those deeply committed to the women's movement. But it was a personal decision also because she could no longer, as a person, live within a Party which reproduced the patriarchy of capitalist society and within which she felt like an appendage. Her explanation of her leaving the PCF contained two important themes, then. The first was a criticism of the Party's stance on women's issues and its failure to get to the roots of patriarchy. The second theme was a more general assessment of the authority structure within the PCF. Her argument was founded on a political criticism of the way the PCF used its ordinary members—both female and male. In her opinion all Communists were reduced to the status of minors in a Party which was authoritarian in its structures and its operation. She felt that the independence of Communists, the possibility of exercising their own creative powers, was severely curtailed by the internal working of the Party. The reaction of the upper levels of the Party to the initiatives of the section at the Fête, the criticisms of her interview in the magazine of the women's movement, and the critiques of the activities of the women's commission itself had forced her to a choice. She had concluded that it was no longer possible for someone like her to do what she judged most likely to advance the cause of the Communist Party. Now one had to be cautious, to calculate the balance of forces within the Party and to play a careful political game within the PCF, in ways which meant that the original purpose of the action was sometimes lost. For this camarade, The Eurocommunist past, and its promise, had gone. The new situation demanded fundamental compromises which she was unwilling to accept. Whereas it had been, for a time, possible both to support the women's movement and to be a Communist, this possibility was fragile. The PCF's opening to the woman's movement was dependent upon its Eurocommunism and this was in retreat after March 1978. With the retreat, some individuals were forced to choose between the Party and the movement, and institutions like the women's commission of Paris South had to re-think their possibilities.

The cell's, and then the section's, consideration of this dramatic resignation of a camarade went a long way towards clarifying the situation within the PCF at the time. The women's commission and its
activities were caught in the general evolution of the Party's strategy and the conflicts which surrounded it. As the PCF as a whole moved away from *Union de la Gauche* towards *union à la base* and as a more 'workerist' strategy replaced the Eurocommunist perspectives of the previous decade, all spheres of PCF activity were affected. In other words, it was not only the internal life of the Party—democracy and the creativity of militants—that caused problems but also questions of mobilisation practices of the PCF. In the case of Paris South, these questions came to focus on the work of the women's commission as it attempted to continue its search for new forms of contact with women and the women's movement. However, in this sphere of Party practice, and in contrast to its work within the PCF, the women's commission was quite at a loss. The members knew what they did not want—traditional electioneering, top-down campaigns directed toward women, exclusively economistic discussions of women's situation—but they had not yet developed, in their own work, any suitable substitutes. Their search, moreover, came to an abrupt end as the PCF as a whole moved towards its post-electoral version of *union à la base*.

The Paris South women's commission was at a disadvantage because it had not been able to delineate clearly its own mobilisational activities prior to the shift in strategy. Most of its efforts had gone into providing support for women Communists within the PCF or into electioneering. Thus, when confronted with the leadership's instructions to proceed to *union à la base* in the context of a return to *ouvrierisme*, it was at a loss about what to do. Other parts of the PCF faced the same problem, in particular cells which had no clear idea of what to do in the absence of any elections and without the possibility of joint actions with the Socialists and other Left political formations. The retreat into isolation that *union à la base* seemed to represent was impossible to countenance for an institution like the women's commission whose activity was premised upon a more open strategy.

Therefore, in the autumn of 1978 the women's commission of Paris South found itself vulnerable to the efforts of the leadership of the PCF to 'take in hand' the Party and close down the discontent which had been rampant since March 1978. This taking in hand involved the leadership organising the rank and file's work around a series of specific campaigns, the purpose of which were to keep the ordinary militants constantly occupied with tasks approved by the leadership of the Party. One of these campaigns focussed on the Party's work with women and all levels of the PCF were expected to undertake new action to expose to French women the policies and programmes that the Communists advocated for them. This was to be done in the new context of *union à la base* and was supposed to demonstrate the effect of *union* on women.

Two initiatives in this campaign affected the women's commission of Paris South—one local and one national. The local campaign was directed
by the leadership of the Arrondissement and was designed to publicise Communist policies *vis à vis* women. The technique chosen to contact women was a 'questionnaire' to be filled out by Communist and non-communist women asking for their views on a series of matters like 'equality', discrimination, relations within the family and the couple, child-care, etc. This 'questionnaire' technique was familiar to the women's commission of Paris South because in reality it was little more than a political tract with a few 'questions' attached. The format was the following: it began with a bold title statement that women 'want to live better'; continued with a listing of Communist policies, both past and present, to show that the PCF knew what to do for women; and concluded with the 'questions', which were of the most banal sort (for example, Do you feel that you are treated unfairly? Do you want more for your family?).

In the meeting called to consider this initiative the women of the Paris South women's commission reacted with verbal violence. The questionnaire was analysed as nothing more than another effort by the Party to contact women from the outside, to impose an agenda of change on them, and, in that agenda, to emphasise the most workerist of positions. The major criticism was, however, directed at the style of the approach—it came from the outside without an effort to engage the women themselves in thinking about change and it neglected to solicit their feelings about the change that they wanted. What was being rejected, then, was a reversion to the PCF's traditional mobilisational practices. As was clearly stated at the meeting, the grounds for the rejection of the questionnaire initiative was the need to develop Eurocommunist practices which would make women (and all people) responsible for the changes in their lives and not leave the definition and implementation of change to politicians and parties.

In framing their objections to the questionnaire, the Communists of the *commission féminine* insisted upon the need to develop new methods to approach women, new ways of engaging them in conversation and analysis of their lives, and the responsibility of the women's commission to discover such methods in its own work. They looked upon the questionnaire as both a diversion from this more important task and as a way of undoing any work which they might already have accomplished in their contacts with women. Since they were determined not to play the Arrondissement's game, they therefore refused to have anything to do with the questionnaire. As the section had done earlier on the issue of the booth at the *Fête de l'Humanité*, the women's commission of Paris South decided to ignore an instruction from above and not to carry out the tasks assigned to it.

At issue next was a 'national campaign for women', essentially a call for several demonstrations organised around the slogan 'live better, equal and free'. One demonstration was to take place in Paris and to focus on questions of women's employment, working conditions, and opportunities.
The call for a massive demonstration was supposed to point to the Communists' continuing concern about women's problems and to stress that Communists could advance the cause of women without resorting to an alliance with the women's movement. The demonstration clearly indicated, then, the return to an economistic perspective of emphasising only issues of employment, taxes, prices, and living and working conditions. The official tract distributed by the PCF said little about backward attitudes which might retard the liberation of women nor did it encourage any thought of the legitimacy of the women's movement as an ally in the construction of socialism. The Paris South women's commission recognised the manif (demo) for what it was and refused to attend, they refused to make a banner (or some other identification of the section's presence) and they preferred to indicate their objections by abstention. This absence was noted! Later, the behaviour of the women's commission—its failure to participate in the questionnaire distribution and its absence from the demonstration—provided ammunition for those who wanted to see the elimination of what was considered to be the undue influence of 'feminists' within the section.

The women's commission of Paris South was vulnerable to the critiques of the Arrondissement and other members of the section who disagreed with its stance on women's issues in part because it had not succeeded in finding its own programme and tactics for working with women. Having been completely absorbed in the electioneering of the campaign period and the discovery of the commonality of its members' experiences as women, it had not yet undertaken any real work of its own. In the fall of 1978 the commission's members had two plans about how to proceed. The first was that the commission would continue to raise and discuss general questions which Communist women had not yet adequately addressed. The first of these questions was that of children. A meeting was devoted to general discussion of the women's feelings and reactions to children—their own children and their lives as children. The meeting was interesting and thought-provoking, but it did not lead to any immediate conclusions or programmatic proposals. It was, rather, a time of collective reflection. However, by the fall of 1978, the ability of the women's commission to sit back and reflect together had been curtailed by events in the section and the Party-at-large. In the context of controversy which surrounded the commission, it had to do something which would get it back into the good graces of the rest of the Party. Therefore, the discussion of children which a year before would probably have been termed a great success in itself, was in the new situation seen as little more than 'wheel-spinning' even by the strongest supporters of the commission.

The second plan for action seemed somewhat more promising. The women's commission dusted off its idea of a day-long meeting of the section to discuss the situation of women in general and to talk about the
Party's reaction to the militantes and its work among women. However, for all the generally acknowledged successes of the women's commission in helping women within the PCF, its members did not know how to approach their camarades (for the purpose of the meeting was to engage men as well as women in commitment to the commission's work) on these issues. Discussion of the proposed study day was begun by the women who had the most experience in the Party (35 years) who argued that it was essential to link explicitly the situation of women and the class struggle. Only if this articulation were made could the men be engaged in discussion because class struggle was what they understood. Beginning there it would be possible to raise other matters—of ideology, of patriarchy, of non-economic questions.

However, the planning of this study meeting soon dissolved in a swamp of desultory conversation because, for the first time, the divisions which had appeared throughout the PCF, between Eurocommunists and those advocating a return to the ouvrieriste strategy, began to penetrate the commission feminine itself. The presence of a woman, not ordinarily an attender, who advocated more 'workerist' positions, caused the fragile unity of the women's commission to collapse into inaction. The meeting of the commission turned into a head-on conflict between 'feminists' and 'workerists', each of whom had very clear ideas of how to cope with women's needs in Paris South. The member of the group who was most committed to the analyses of the women's movement (and who eventually left the PCF, as described above) began by proposing that the planned meeting, instead of following the traditional Party format of beginning with a report by someone, should call on the men to testify about how they lived with the pain which they caused themselves by participating in the subordination of women. Most everyone at the meeting realised that such an initiative would fall flat. Indeed, it boggled the imagination to think of how the camarades of Paris South might react to such an open-ended proposal! While meetings in Paris South were less structured and more democratic in their proceedings, such testimonials were far beyond the realm of the conceivable. Beyond this, however, the proposal drew the fire of the 'workerist' woman who had come to the meeting especially to monitor the discussion of this matter. She announced passionately that the 'women in her cell' were not concerned about the pain of their subordination but rather how they were going to put food on the table.

This 'workerist' critique had its intended effect. It did in fact touch a weak spot in the work of the women's commission. Its members were aware that they had not succeeded in making contact with working-class women in the section and in finding out their interests and needs. In fact, they had tried in the past to approach these women and met with embarrassing failures. Therefore, while not granting the validity of the argument that women were only interested in 'getting food on the table',
the women of the commission realised that their work was vulnerable to criticism. Added to this vulnerability was the fact that, with the leadership's several campaigns to 'take the Party in hand' in full swing, there were no dates available for the meeting to be held. In the atmosphere of tension and disagreement which surrounded the women's commission, the lack of a date was seized upon by those present as somehow indicating that there was no longer any commitment within Paris South section to the work of the commission.

The result of the combination of time pressures, attack from the 'workerists', and the failure of the women closest to the women's movement to translate their concerns into a usable formula was that the day-long study session was never held. The idea was shelved and the women's commission never did develop a forum for presentation of its work to the rest of the section. Ultimately this proved to be the downfall of the group. More broadly, the commission was a victim of the general taking in hand of the Party in the fall of 1978. Because the commission refused to accept the leadership's direction, it was vulnerable to criticism. Because it did little effective work of its own (because of its lack of experience with being 'creative') it had nothing successful to counterpose to such criticism. Gradually the women's commission closed down. In a context in which the Party's line moved rapidly towards ouvrierisme the women's commission was unable to find a viable place for itself. It limped through the winter of 1979 in a crippled state and virtually disappeared in the months of preparation of the XXIII Congress.

**Conclusion**

The last part of the year following the electoral defeat of March 1978 was taken up with the preparation of the XXIII Congress scheduled for May 1979. The attention paid to women in the Congress document was much greater than in the past. Women's concerns for equality, for dignity, were placed on the agenda of struggles to be supported by the PCF as part of the Party's union à la base activities. However, at the same time as stressing the importance of struggles by women, the document reasserted traditional PCF attitudes towards women. Women were described as especially susceptible to the appeals of the bourgeoisie, appeals playing on the supposed fears of women of real social change. Thus despite its efforts to single out the significance of women's issues, the PCF was placing women in a 'minor' status again, implying that they, more than other social categories, did not know their minds and could not recognise the need for struggle to achieve real change. Such an emphasis of course, would make it difficult to promote joint actions with the women's movement in the context of union à la base. In fact, in the months after the Congress, the PCF became even more isolationist in its relationship with the women's movement, to the point where it refused full participation in national
actions around the extension of French abortion legislation (*loi Veil*) in the fall of 1979.

What we see from this examination of the activity of the PCF, both at the highest level of the Party and in the rank and file, is the impossibility of considering the reaction of the PCF in one sphere in isolation from others. The PCF does not have a 'position on women' separate from its general strategic and theoretical stance. To the extent that these stances evolve, change, or develop, the relationships with mass movements and positions on their issues will change. The PCF was forced to do something 'about' women because of the changed social climate of the post-68 years. However, what it did (whether to be supportive or dismissive), how it was done (in alliance or isolation), and its successes and failures were determined not by the specific problems of women, but by PCF general strategy. With Eurocommunism, the PCF opened to 'new' women's issues and to the women's movement for a time. In the retreat to *ouvrierisme* after 1977, the Party began to back-track on women's issues too, as the old responses of dismissal, fear, and challenge re-emerged.

More generally, the processes which we have examined in this paper underline two central dilemmas which not only the PCF but all formations of the Left must confront. The first is a crisis of militantisme. It is no longer possible to count on completely devoted and single-minded militants, ready to serve the cause, in ways defined by the leadership, at any cost. In mass parties especially, many militants have developed new expectations about their role in the Party. They expect to be able to participate in strategic decision-making and to design their own contributions to political action. Party democracy means, for these militants, that their own creative abilities are honoured and their political judgements respected. The Left can either encourage such democratic creativity or it can confine the rank and file to the instrumental role of merely implementing the directives of the top leadership. For the PCF in 1977-78, the return to *ouvrierisme* brought a re-imposition of traditional controls over the actions of the rank and file of the Party, after the experience of earlier years when some practice had been more open and democratic. There were women in the PCF who expected their Party to support their struggles, to be more democratic, to listen to their voices. When these expectations were frustrated, the women provided a focus for discontent and challenge to those who would return to workerism. The story of Paris South demonstrates that these women were discouraged—either leaving the Party or moving on to other concerns. However, the legacy of the women's commission—as an effort towards the implementation of a *Eurocommunist* strategy—remains. Whether the effect will continue depends on how the general strategic conflict within the PCF evolves.

The second dilemma confronting the Left is a crisis of mobilisation.
In advanced capitalist societies a revolutionary strategy which relies exclusively on the working class has become less and less plausible. Some kind of alliance strategy is essential. A series of changes in post-war capitalism—universal education, consumerism, omnipresent electronic media, for example—have homogenised society to some extent, such that the boundaries between the industrial working class and other social categories are more blurred. Moreover, as the traditional industrial working class has either stagnated or decreased in size, changes in the occupational structure of the modern industrial system have created new work and workers with variable connections to that working class. A revolutionary party must design an alliance strategy, with the working class at its centre, which can engage these new social forces in a movement for radical change. Such forces may have an interest in profound social change. But this interest will be theirs, and not the working class's, at least to begin with. The strategic task of a revolutionary party must, therefore, involve the articulation of these different perspectives on change into a greater whole. This will not be easy. Not only do such new social groups develop their own notions of what kind of change they want, but also the kinds of organisational forms with which they feel most comfortable. Modern 'single-issue movements' (women, ecologists, students, consumers) seem to be characteristic forms of protest of such groups. The Left cannot afford to ignore or dismiss such movements. It must develop, with parts of these movements, a connection which is consistent with the Party's political goals and strategy for transition to socialism. The PCF currently faces this crisis of mobilisation, a crisis whose evolution and resolution depend upon the strategic choices that Party makes. The PCF is engaged in the process of choosing—choosing whether to push forward with a strategy which accommodates, based on understanding, the modern social movements of advanced capitalism (which are likely to be located outside the control of the party of the working class) or whether to dig into ouvrierisme and wait for the 'final crisis' of capitalism.

NOTES


2. The single best collection of the pre-Eurocommunist PCF thinking about women is Les Communistes et la condition de la femme (Paris: Editions sociales, 1970). This is a revised edition of La Femme et le communisme (Paris: Editions sociales, 1950). Another useful summary, especially because it lists the demands of women for reforms, is 'Le Role des femmes dans la nation', the report of the study session of February 1968 at Ivry, supplement to Cahiers du Communisme, Vol. 44, March 1968. The 1970 pamphlet publication, Le Femme aujourd'hui demain, the report of the study session of May 23-24, 1970, at Vitry, gives the
PCF's position as the Party entered the pte-Common Programme stage of Eurocommunism.

3. A rationale for the shift of attention toward working women, including an evaluation of the success of the UFF, is reported in Jeannette Thorez-Vermersch, 'Pour la défense des droits sociaux de la femme et de l'enfant', report of a study session, October 24-25, 1964. The UFF did not disappear after this shift in attention, however. It remained the primary mass organisation for contacting women, except for the CGT unions See, for example, Madeleine Vincent, 'Aller aux masses', Cahiers du Communisme, Vol. 45, December 1969, pp. 51ff.

4. One of the most problematic stances of the PCF vis-à-vis women in this period was taken on birth control. For more than a decade the Party campaigned against birth control, which was presented as a malthusian plot developed by the bourgeoisie against the working class. Internal opposition to this stand broke out in 1956, at the same time as the XX Congress of the CPUSSR and Hungary and was a major factor in deepening and sustaining the internal Party crisis of that time. Even in the mid-sixties antagonism to planning familial contraception was accepted as legitimate but the PCF always hastened to warn that no individual solutions could substitute for profound social change which would give all women the right and ability to bear children willingly. See, Jeannette Thorez-Vermeersch, 'Faut-il choisir entre la paix du monde, l'interdiction de la bombe atomique ou le contrôle de la natalité?: Contre le néo-malthusianisme réactionnaire' in Les Femmes dans la nation (Paris: PCF, 1962); Jean Baby, Critique de base: Le Parti communiste français entre le passé et l'avenir (Paris: Maspero, 1960), pp. 75-86; Femmes de XXe siècle, La Semaine de la pensée marxiste (Paris: PUF, 1965); and 'Les Communistes et la famille' in La Femme aujourd'hui demain, op. cit.

5. The PCF was always very critical of the 'feminists' who were characterised as petit bourgeois, concerned only with legalistic improvements, or actually involved in diverting women from the real questions of class struggle. As late as 1970 the PCF reproduced Lenin's exchange with Clara Zetkin on the 'proper' type of work among women for revolutionaries. This violent critique of discussions of love and sexuality as an aspect of Party work, formed part of the PCF inheritance on the 'women's question'. There was usually an expressed fear that 'feminists' would mislead women, especially working-class women, into a mistaken judgement of the enemy and away from an understanding of the need for fundamental social change. Women were seen as particularly susceptible to promises by the bourgeoisie that change could come without overturning the established order of things. See, Les Communistes et la condition de la femme, op. cit., pp. 107ff; 77-80; 120.


7. On the question of the strategy of the PCF in expanding into these couches intermédiaires see Jenson and Ross, op. cit.


10. After the XXII Congress of the PCF in 1976 there was a certain disparity between the tone adopted by Georges Marchais, Secretary-General of the PCF, and Madeleine Vincent, the member of the Bureau politique responsible for work with women. Such differences emphasise the only partial acceptance of Eurocommunism within the PCF. Marchais stressed the fundamental change
involved in women assuming greater roles in society, which he called an historic movement. He spoke of women's desire for dignity, for meeting their own aspirations to escape from the status of a minor in society. He emphasised that the PCF should do more, including bringing more women into the Party. Vincent, in contrast, was careful to draw attention to the fact that 'feminists' attacked men as the enemy and that they were easily victims of the majority's campaigns to trick women into thinking that real change could follow from the bourgeois parties' policies. He stressed that women were not all the same and that putting all women's concerns together 'under the same "female condition" so as to erase the realities of class would falsify the problem and mask the real solutions' See 'Pour la femme: une vie heureuse, libre et responsable dans l'égalité'. Report on the Central Committee of the PCF, November 9-10, 1976.


12. Centre d'Études et Recherches Marxistes, *La Condition féminine* (Paris: Editions sociales, 1978). While the book was published in 1978, after the electoral defeat, some of the themes and work had been in circulation for a number of years, some since *La Semaine de la pensée marxiste*, in 1975, which had taken as its theme, 'Femmes, aujourd'hui, demain'.


16. Yvonne Quilès, 'L'Idéologie sexiste, ça existe, je l'ai rencontrée' and Yann Viens, 'Femmes, politique et Parti communiste français', in *La Condition féminine*, op. cit.


20. The CERM book, *La Condition féminine* indicated that the PCF federations had not all equally taken the advice of the leadership to promote women. See Viens, op. cit.

21. For important new information about the problems created by Eurocommunist women's expectations at another level of the Party—the Paris Federation—and the crack-down on women at this meeting, see Henri Fiszbin, *Les Bouches s'ouvrent* (Paris: Grasset, 1980).