Francois Mitterrand's victory in May, 1981 Presidential elections, the overwhelming triumph of the Left (primarily the renascent French Socialists) in the June legislative elections which followed, and the subsequent inclusion of four Communists in the government constitute, together, an extraordinary success for the Left in France and in Europe. After 23 years of consecutive power, manipulating institutions specifically designed to perpetuate its rule, the French Right had come to regard France as its personal property. After nearly two decades of struggle the Left broke this stranglehold in 1981 and used these same institutions to its own advantage. The result is that the Left is now solidly established with a workable majority for at least five years in Parliament, while the Presidential term of Mitterrand will continue for seven. From what most observers considered to be extreme weakness the French Left has, almost overnight, come to control the country. Henceforth the Left will be responsible for the policy destiny of France.

Explaining why this seemingly extraordinary turn of events occurred will be our first major task. In effect, two complex and intersecting processes created the events of May-June 1981 in France. The first was the progressive rejection by the French people of the economic and social strategies of the Right in power and the simultaneous disaggregation and division of this Right in the 1970's. The second was the complicated trajectory of the Left—Socialists and Communists—which ultimately led to victory. The first two parts of this essay will examine these processes. Our second, and more speculative, task (in Part Three) will be to answer the questions 'Who are these Socialists and what are they likely to do with their new power?'

I. The Defeat and Division of the French Right—The 'Rightward Drift' Thesis Confounded

In recent years successive defeats of social democratic and liberal Keynesian governments (Sweden 1976, the UK 1979, the USA 1980), together with the frightening rise of new 'bash the welfare state' and 'return to free market capitalism' ideologies have nourished a belief, even on the Left, that the end of the long post-war boom was feeding a massive 'shift to the Right'. The electoral success of the Left in France should dispel this
belief. For what happened in the French events of May-June 1981, more than anything, was a resounding rejection by the French people of the right-wing economic policies of Valery Giscard d'Estaing and his Prime Minister Raymond Barre. Thus if there is a predominant electoral trend in Western capitalist democracies, it is not 'to the Right' so much as towards the rejection of governments which have failed to cope with the contemporary economic crisis, whether the methods used were Keynesian/social democratic or neo-conservative. In France a Right-Centre majority had, of course, been in power since the arrival of crisis in the early 1970's, and its electoral base began to shrink considerably thereafter. Then, in response to economic events, it shifted to a French version of neo-conservatism which failed to bring relief from crisis. As a result, it was dismissed from power.

It has often been overlooked in media analyses of the Left victory in France that the economic policies promoted by Giscard and Barre after 1976 were, in fact, the first 'New Right' responses to crisis implemented anywhere in the advanced capitalist world. In pursuit of the twin goals of regenerating profitability and enhancing the competitive positions of French multinational corporations in the international market, the government liberated prices, cut off subsidies to industrial 'lame ducks' and used state power to pump up sectors and firms which promised to do well internationally. While constantly hammering home a 'return to the free market' ideological line, Prime Minister Barre, in fact, was victimising the weak—workers, small and middle-sized vulnerable firms—and helping the strong, especially the strong who were in a position to increase their exports. At the same time—out of fear of inflation 'and wishes to defend the franc, maintain national currency reserves and preserve the country's international payments position—Barre held growth down to very low levels. The logic in all this was clear. To Giscard and Barre, the international crisis of the 1970's created space for national economies to alter and improve their positions of comparative advantage in the international division of labour, provided that governments were willing and able to proceed to major economic and social surgery. Therefore the regime chose, in the short run, to promote exports and international solvency at the expense of the domestic market. This choice was part of a longer-term strategy of increasing the profits and, if all went well, the investments, of those few sectors of French capital which were in a position to make breakthroughs to new international power. The rhetoric of the regime could not have been clearer: 'Unless we all make sacrifices and accept austerity in order to help make certain branches and firms more competitive internationally, we will all go under.'

After nearly five years of such policies, the results were mixed. Internationally the French economy held its own. Exports were sustained, the franc was solid, reserves remained adequate and (excepting the period following the second oil shock in 1979-80) the balance of payments
hovered around equilibrium. Other indicators were less satisfactory, Profits were only slowly regenerated and, even when this did occur, they were rarely reinvested in new productive plant. Inflation proved virtually intractable, never falling below 10-12% and flashing upwards at the slightest provocation. Most notably, however, the Giscard-Barre line brought with it dramatic increases in unemployment—from 1.1 million in early 1977 to nearly 2 million in 1981, from 3-4% to nearly 8% of the workforce. Moreover, it was evident to all that such unemployment was not merely cyclical, but structural—jobs were disappearing which would not be replaced. The government's goal was the surgical amputation of firms which could not survive international realities. Record numbers of bankruptcies and plant closures pushed up the unemployment statistics. Moreover, as the casualties mounted it became clear that the government had only one criterion for the shape of any future French economy—survival of the internationally fit. It had no intention of sparing sectors which many people considered to be essential and basic parts of France's economy—steel, textiles and shipbuilding, to name only the most important.

The balance sheet of the Giscard-Barre stewardship, then, went a long way towards explaining why the Left won in 1981. The French had been promised that the government's policies were the only way to face crisis, that austerity and sacrifice were necessary to ensure future prosperity. Yet, even though the French people did undergo a great deal of sacrifice, the crisis persisted. Moreover every day brought news of new firms and industrial branches which were being sacrificed to the government's `rigour', with prospects for more of the same in the near future. The success of the Giscard-Barre policies depended upon the existence of deep political support from the regime. Yet the very implementation of these policies destroyed any prospects for such support.

Thus far, however, our narrative has been too simplified. In fact, the policies of Giscard and Barre created a coalition of opposition which faced in two very different political directions. They vastly expanded support for the Left, to be sure. Industrial workers and state employees reacted to rising unemployment and cutbacks in government services by reinforcing the Left, as did sizable portions of the 'new middle classes', together with parts of small business. But the regime's policies also created opposition on the Right, from sectors of capital either directly threatened by the government's economic strategy or in more general disaccord with the logic of restructured economic life which accompanied the strategy. Right-leaning groups were sensitive to the likely social consequences of ever-growing massive unemployment, for example. And they were extremely sensitive to what increasingly appeared to be a willingness to dismantle vital parts of the French economy in the interests of integration into an international division of labour whose benefits for France were uncertain. In effect, what was happening, as the 1981 election approached,
was that the French Right, which had been unified in the 1960's by General de Gaulle, was coming apart. As a result Giscard found himself squeezed politically from both the Left and the Right. If the success of the Left was the most important consequence of new political volatility in France, this split within the once-unified ruling political and social bloc was, in turn, an important factor for Left success.

If one takes a very long view of French history there is very little new about divisions on the Right between fractions of capital (plus their allies) and, consequently, between political forces representing them. The great success of the politics and institutions of the Fifth Republic had been, however, in overcoming such divisions. What observers had called previously `the stupidest Right in the world' seemed to have rapidly acquired new intelligence. In fact, General de Gaulle, intervening at a moment of extreme social and political crisis, had been able to impose himself and the Presidentialist institutions which he had long advocated because he could unify the Right and generate popular support for it. The political solution of 1968 had subsequently allowed the more dynamic sectors of the French bourgeoisie to liquidate legacies of colonialism and protectionism and move forward towards modernised industrialism. The General's success, and that of the more advanced sectors of the French bourgeoisie, was substantial. For more than ten years of unprecedented economic growth de Gaulle managed to rule—rather imperiously—backed by a solid and compliant Right-Centre parliamentary majority. French social and political elites, and even parts of the Left, began to believe that the situation of Right unity and Right rule might be permanent.

May-June 1968, exposed the first cracks in the Gaullist edifice, however. The 'events' of 1968 were a knot of contradictions which followed from the very character of Gaullist economic and political success. First of all, as a massive revolt of the French 'new middle classes' they were a collective expression of unsatisfied needs and demands by social groups whose very presence was the product of Gaullist economic success but who had been granted little or no space for democratic political and social expression within the Gaullist order. Secondly, they were an explosion of working-class mobilisation due to changes in the shape of the labour market brought about by Gaullist modernisation combined with the belligerent refusal of the regime and the patronat to deal with workers and their unions in the face of such changes. May-June 1968 was, therefore, the first enunciation of the coalition of workers and new middle class groups which would bring Left victory in 1981. At the time, however, the events seemed simply to have created a succession crisis within the otherwise solid context of Gaullist institutions and unified right-wing hegemony. In 1969 Georges Pompidou replaced de Gaulle in the Presidency and things went on as before. The economy continued to expand and, despite a high level of strikes and unorthodox behaviour from younger members of the
new middle classes, the regime held.

It would be tempting, although misleading, to assert that the re-emergence of strategic divisions on the French Right in the 1970's was a function of the disappearance of the impressive Bonapartist figure who had unified the bourgeoisie and pushed it down new paths after 1958. It is more likely that the emergence of new contradictions in French society, as they touched different fractions of the French bourgeoisie, made the continuation of such Bonapartism itself impossible. Three major processes of change became apparent in the first years of the 1970's. The first two are easy to summarise. In the aftermath of May-June 1968 the different components of the Left, spurred on by the working class and new middle class revolts to which we have alluded, moved towards unity-in-action. The Left Common Programme signed by Communists and Socialists in 1972 signified the emergence of the first major political challenge to the regime from the Left. The second process was the economic crisis of the 1970's, announced in France in 1971-72 by rising inflation and unemployment, and sharply felt in the aftermath of the 1973 oil shock.

The third process of change, upon which we must dwell more, followed from the very unfolding of the Gaullist economic success of the 1960's. In their economic policies General de Gaulle and his entourage had aimed at creating a national economy which would be competitive in the increasingly harsh and interdependent international market which was emerging apace in the 1960's. In the General's mind, French economic strength was a necessary resource base for the diplomatic power of a resurgent France. De Gaulle, it should never be forgotten, was first and foremost a nationalist. Thus Gaullist planning in the 1960's promoted mergers and amalgamations of French capital to produce French firms of 'international' size and capabilities. Unfortunately for de Gaulle's dream, the dynamics of capital accumulation would not allow important fractions of French capital to stop moving once France had achieved an internationally-viable, yet nationally coherent, economy. Gaullist success, therefore, led directly to a growing split in French capital between fractions pushing towards the creation of true multinational corporations, oriented towards world production and distribution and towards promising niches in the international division of labour, and fractions, centred nationally, which were weak internationally and/or primarily oriented to the domestic market.

As this bipolarisation of the bourgeoisie became more pronounced and especially with the arrival of international economic crises after 1973, it became progressively more difficult to find state economic policies which could unite both groups. French multinationals and internationally-competitive national industries sought policies which were functional to international trade (international 'openness', internationally comparable social overhead expenses, low inflation, etc.) and which guaranteed the possibility of moving investment and employment across national
boundaries. From the point of view of this fraction of French capital, weaker firms should be obliged to face the true costs of their weakness and workers should be persuaded to make great sacrifices in the interests of French international success. 'National' capital, on the other hand, increasingly longed for some protection from the ravages of the international market, shelter from foreign competition, governmental subsidies, and limits on the penetration of foreign multinationals into the French market. For national capital, rising unemployment represented not only a threat to social order but also a dead loss of purchasing power in the domestic market. It therefore tended to be more expansionist and less concerned with international 'rigour'. Thus while important areas of agreement persisted between different bourgeois groups in France, they tended to develop almost mirror-image views of preferred economic policy as the 1970's went on.

The 1974 Presidential elections announced things to come. Jacques Chirac, who had gradually taken control of the Gaullist party machine, threw the support of this machine behind a non-Gaullist candidate, Valery Giscard d'Estaing, to block the success of the reformist-Centrist Gaullist Jacques Chaban-Delmas, whose political line had already been rejected by the core of the Gaullist Right during his brief term as Pompidou's Prime Minister. The deal struck looked, on the face of it, somewhat opportunistic on Chirac's part since Giscard, once elected, appointed Chirac his Prime Minister. However, the manoeuvre represented more than Chirac's personal ambitions. Caught between a strong desire to rule out Chaban's reformism and fear that Giscard might wrest state power away from Gaullism, Chirac and the Gaullists felt that the latter risk was smaller, and could be minimised by the presence of Chirac in the Prime Minister's chair. This perception came easily to the Gaullists, since Giscard lacked a real political base and a supporting party machine in 1974. He would be obliged, thought the Gaullists, to rely on them, and therefore be controllable.

Giscard, it turned out, had other, more 'internationalist' ideas. What subsequently developed in the years after 1974 was a fight to the finish between political clans on the French Right, each representing different interests and alliances. In the first two years of his Presidency, despite Chirac's presence, Giscard went methodically to work dismantling Gaullist control over the different apparatuses of the French state, substituting his own people. Then, while using the seductions of power to coopt certain pliable Gaullist politicians over to his side, he simultaneously began to build his own party of the Right out of his coterie of earlier followers, the broken remains of French Christian Democracy and assorted notables. Accompanied by some hollow reformist rhetoric, this effort culminated in the creation of the Giscardian Union pour la Democratie Francaise (UDF) just before the 1978 legislative elections.

Since Giscard's self-assertion after 1974 was clearly at Gaullist expense,
the Gaullists had a choice of responses ranging between acquiescence and resistance. Acquiescence meant giving up hegemony on the Right to Giscard. This, of course, would have been a difficult process for any group of politicians long accustomed to control of the levers of power. As it happened, however, the issue was not simply one of political places, but also of policies. Jacques Chirac's resignation as Prime Minister in 1976 indicated, first of all, that the Gaullists' 1974 gamble to control Giscard had not paid off. The policies initiated by Raymond Barre, Chirac's successor, indicated that more was at stake than jobs and power. Giscard and Barre had decided to rule primarily in the interests of the cosmopolitan internationalist wing of French capital, multinationalising groups whose primary focus was more on France's place in the international division of labour than on the consequences of this division for French society itself. Chirac, in contrast, increasingly came to represent 'national' capital ('nationalise as well) concerned with defending a certain vision of French capitalist economic integrity in the face of an ever more menacing international order. Therefore Chirac's announcement of the creation of the \textit{Rassemblement pour la Republique} (RPR) in 1976 indicated the further consolidation of the French Right into two different camps. Both were attempting to unify and represent alliances composed, more or less, of the same class fractions and allies. Each had its own, and different notion, however, of the strategies which the Right should follow. Unity would ultimately prove elusive—to the point where the Right would lose power in 1981—because the interests underlying the split on the Right were irreconcilable.

Conflict between the Gaullists and Giscardians was complex and unremitting. Giscard had the institutional upper hand, given the enormous powers of the President to staff and define state strategies. But he was also vulnerable. The Gaullists maintained considerable local and parliamentary power, for example. And the twin threats of serious political challenge from the Left and the intractability of economic crisis meant that Giscard's strategic choices were open to constant sniping and increasing public attack from the Gaullist Right. Warfare between factions of the Right became particularly bitter just prior to electoral occasions, when the relative balance between the two major camps was tested. The Gaullist position faced one very fundamental constraint, however. Attacks on the President and his strategic choices could only proceed to a certain point before they risked sapping the power of the Right-Centre majority, which was, of course, a coalition between the warring camps. At certain moments, when ideological polemics were the order of the day, the exact location of this point of no return was hard to pin down. At other moments, however, its location was crystal clear. The Gaullists, however much they griped and grumbled, had to support the President on critical issues in Parliament and in any future Presidential election or risk turning
The first major skirmish between Right fractions occurred in 1976-78 over the proper strategies to defeat the political threat of Union de la Gauche. Giscard tried to downplay Left-Right polarisation, a strategy which implicitly counted on the ultimate disruption of the Communist-Socialist alliance (which was 'contre nature') and on a possible future opening of the regime to the Centre-Left. The successful implementation of this plan would, of course, have left the Gaullists isolated and out of power on the extreme Right. Jacques Chirac, in contrast, promoted a hard-line Left-Right polarisation strategy which played on anti-Communist fear and portrayed the Socialists as subordinate accomplices of the PCF in plans to 'collectivise' France. In this strategic conflict Giscard took a severe political beating up until summer and fall of 1977, when the Left alliance seemed headed for certain victory (the weak showing of the Giscardians in the March, 1977 Municipal Elections when Chirac was elected Mayor of Paris, was Giscard's low point). As the Gaullists made electoral gains, Giscard's supporters appeared irresolute and passive. But the self-destruction of the United Left in the fall of 1977 made Giscard's passive strategy appear brilliant, post hoc, when the existing majority managed to be reelected in the March, 1978 legislative elections.

Round Two was essentially about the Giscard-Barre economic policies. Here the issues were basically those which divided the cosmopolitan and internationalist fraction of French capital from the national and nationalist one—issues which we have already discussed. Much of Chirac's attack on Giscard resurrected General de Gaulle's call for a strong French economy possessing a reasonable degree of economic integrity and not completely dependent upon the vagaries of the international market. Giscard and Barre inevitably responded that their policies were the only ones which made any sense if France hoped to remain in the first rank of industrial nations. However true this assertion might have been, it was not received as reassurance by those sectors of French capital which faced failure in crisis (small, medium and even some large firms) and by Bien peasant right-wing voters who foresaw social chaos at the end of what was a vertiginous rise in unemployment. By 1979 conflict within the Right had nearly reached the point of no return, with Gaullists beginning to threaten to withdraw support in Parliament (Barre was obliged to promulgate the 1980 budget before Parliament had approved it, for example).

In all this Giscard himself may have made some serious strategic mistakes. Comforted by some signs of Gaullist electoral decline (in the June, 1979 elections to the European Parliament, for example) he refused to take the placating step of firing Raymond Barre to appoint a less controversial, more credible, Prime Minister, perhaps an available renegade Gaullist. This step, of course, would have meant moderating the regime's economic policies, which Giscard was very reluctant to do. He was also
advised, as Gaullist fractiousness in and outside Parliament intensified in 1979-80, to advance the date of the Presidential election itself in a way which would have caught the Left, involved in its own problems, unaware, and which would have allowed him to present the Gaullists as saboteurs of the coherence of the majority and of France's economic position. He refused to do this, however, and thus set the stage for the springtime of 1981.

In effect, the workings of French institutions made it nearly inevitable that the French Right would crack completely around the 1981 Presidential elections, if it was to crack at all. Giscard, whatever his failures, was certain to emerge from the primary round of the election (which was run in two rounds, the second being a contest between the two front-runners of the primary) as the leading Right candidate. For Chirac and the Gaullists, plus the interests which they represented, the prospect of another seven years of Giscardian control was grim. It meant almost certain victory for Giscard in the internecine warfare of the political Right (i.e. the marginalisation, perhaps liquidation, of Gaullism) plus an indefinite continuation of Giscard-Barre type economic policies. Chirac was faced with an ominous choice, then. He could—after appropriate disagreements with the incumbent President—play the game of Right unity once more, and thus see his own political career ended along with the existence of his party. Or he could carry through opposition to Giscard to the end, at the risk of terminating the Right's 23 year-long hold over state power. He was undoubtedly tempted towards the latter choice by a sense that Francois Mitterrand, even if elected, would quickly sink in an economic morass and that a Left majority in Parliament would not necessarily follow a Mitterrand Presidential victory (an erroneous assumption, as we now know).

As it happened, Chirac chose to sink Giscard. First, he carried on a brutal anti-Giscard campaign in the primary round of the Presidential election even though Giscard was certain to come out ahead. This sustained attack—mainly on the Giscard-Barre economic policies—contributed greatly to Giscard's defeat, since the President's economic failures were hammered home from Left and Right simultaneously. The coup de grâce came, however, in the runoff round. Here Chirac would not play the 'save the majority' game, instead refusing to mobilise the Gaullists to support Giscard in the runoff against Mitterrand. Public opinion polls had predicted before the Presidential elections that a substantial minority of Gaullist electors wanted to change away from Giscard—even if the change was Mitterrand. The electoral results made it clear that these Gaullists had meant what they said. About a third of Chirac's first round supporters either abstained or voted for Mitterrand in the runoff (in equal proportions). This infusion of votes, plus the effect on Giscard of the abstentions, did much to give Francois Mitterrand the large victory which he won on May 10.
II. Victory for the Left, Victory for the Socialists

The reader ought not to be misled by what has just been said. The Left won the 1981 elections in France, the Right did not throw them away. The French people voted for change, not simply against the incumbents. 1981 was, in fact, the culmination of nearly two decades of Left struggle against the regime. An understanding of the course of this struggle connected to general social contradictions, changing electoral patterns and strategies of the Left itself will provide us with the second essential key to the events of May-June 1981. The French Left, composed primarily of two very different ideological and organisational currents—Communist and Socialist—had to unify its efforts, against considerable odds, to dislodge the Right from power. Unity on the Left, as it developed over the years, was always unity-in-conflict, however. Each of the two major parties, while seeking to create a Left majority in the country, simultaneously tried to strengthen its own position in relationship to that of its ally in order to have a determinant political influence when the Left came to power. One major factor in the Left's 1981 triumph, as it turned out, was the Socialists' triumph over the Communists in this complex story of unity-in-conflict.

The dramatic decline in Communist votes in the first round of the Presidential elections—in which Georges Marchais got only 15% of the vote, a decline of more than 5% from the PCF's 1978 results—was the signal of Socialist success. This electoral shift—Francois Mitterrand received nearly 11% more votes than his Communist rival—was the culmination of the long battle for relative advantage between the two parties, and granted the Socialists virtually complete power to shape the course of any subsequent Left majority. As a result, 'red scare' electoral tactics, long the ultimate recourse of the Right, could no longer work. Thus in the presidential runoff and the legislative elections following it, Centre voters could vote Left (Mitterrand and Socialist) confident that Communists would not exercise any real influence over a Left government. What brought the French Left to this position? What was the cause of this substantial shift in the balance of power between Socialists and Communists?

When, in 1963-64, the PCF revived its United Front strategy (tried first in the Popular Front, then again in the immediate post-World War II period) to cope with the new conditions of the Gaullist Fifth Republic, it was, far and away, the best organised and strongest formation of the French Left. Thus the party could reason that if it made itself the fervent advocate of Left unity against the ever more solid Right-Centre Gaullist majority, the Communists would reap the political benefits. As support for the regime declined, as the PCF thought it inevitably would, the United Left would grow stronger. At that point the PCF, within this Left, would increase its own relative strength as a just reward for being the most
dedicated partisan of unity. If the PCF could cement this Left coalition together around a tough, if reformist, Common Programme, then, when the Left won a majority, the Communists, by virtue of their relative power advantage, would be able to direct the actions of a Left government towards a transition to Socialism.

In this quest for Left unity the PCF was quite willing to shed some of the more unpleasant doctrinal legacies of its Stalinised past in order to make itself a more palatable ally and to make more credible its claim to be democratic. Important as this was, however, the PCF's destalinising aggiornamento came very slowly and then in ways which were both somewhat opportunist and undemocratic. Doctrinal changes were announced when they seemed politically advantageous in the short run. The party itself never went through the painful and open self-critical debate which its past called for. In particular, since the PCF's centralised and undemocratic party life was never altered, doctrinal changes were decreed from the top, after little debate—democratic or otherwise—from below.

The non-Communist Left was slower to be convinced of the utility of unity than the PCF. In effect, French Socialists and Left-Centrists had first to decide between two quite different strategies for dealing with the new politics of the Fifth Republic. Given their weakness in the 1960's, the persistence of Cold War anti-Communism and the existence of competing projections about the future of the Gaullist regime, there were powerful voices against a strategy of collaboration with the Communists. The suggested alternative was a Centre-Left option in which non-Communist Leftists would ally to their Right and exclude the Communists, much along the lines of the 'Third Force' politics of the Fourth Republic. Stubborn political facts militated against this Centre-Left option, however. The Gaullists proved successful in building a stable majority alliance from Right to Centre. The Centre, in turn, squeezed between the Majority and the Left, rapidly lost the political importance which it had had in the coalition-mongering days of the Fourth Republic. Centre-Left, therefore, offered the Socialists little prospect of forming an alternative majority, and without such a majority there was no viable route to power. Thus the logic of the new Gaullist regime dictated that the non-Communist Left reflect anew on the issue of collaborative arrangements with the Communists. Direct election of the President in the Fifth Republic also prompted the development of new collaboration on the Left, as did the two round single-member constituency legislative elections set up by the Gaullists. Presidentialism dictated Left-Right polarisation, since the runoff round of Presidential elections included only two candidates, one of which was bound to be the candidate of the Right-Centre majority. And unless opposition parties could work out arrangements for a mutual exchange of support for the best-placed candidates in the second round of legislative elections the Right would almost always win.
Throughout most of the 1960's, then, the non-Communist Left vacillated between the temptations of a Centre-Left Third Force strategy and Left unity. The Third Force option tended to come to the fore when a case could be made—usually an overly optimistic one—that the Gaullist regime's electoral coalition might be vulnerable to disaggregation (in the very early stages of the 1965 Presidential campaign and the 1969 Presidential elections, with Gaston Defferre's candidacies, and, more spectacularly, in the political turmoil of May-June, 1968). On other occasions, however, when the Gaullist majority looked solid, tentative moves towards Left unity were undertaken (the 1962 legislative elections, the Mitterrand candidacy in the 1965 Presidential election, and the 1967 Legislative elections). By 1967 the Left was, in fact, coming close to the 'Common Programme' discussions desired by the Communists.

The chief architect of this unity option for the non-Communist Left was Francois Mitterrand. Mitterrand was not himself a Socialist, but a Radical (the Radical party was a Centrist-Reformist French political group which had played a major role in the politics of the Third Republic) who had been many times a Minister in the Fourth Republic and who had been among the few political leaders on the non-Communist Left to oppose the arrival of General de Gaulle in 1958—a fact which gave him very good leftist credentials in the new political setting of the Fifth Republic. Mitterrand, who had become the leader of a small political 'club' after 1958 (the Convention des Institutions Républicaines), had come first to prominence in the 1965 Presidential campaign. The first non-Communist candidate into the lists on this occasion had been Gaston Defferre, whose resolute Third Force line had foundered on the reluctance of the Centrist Christian Democrats to opt for the Left. In the wake of Defferre's failure Mitterrand announced his own candidacy, which was quite Centrist in tone and programme, except for the fact that Mitterrand was willing to collaborate with the Communists. This, despite the vagueness of his positions, was enough to win him the support of a Communist leadership which was especially eager to throw the PCF's weight onto the unitaire side of the debate over strategy occurring in the non-Communist Left. Both Mitterrand's good showing against General de Gaulle in 1965 and his persistent support for Left unity afterwards made him the natural leader of the non-Communist Left in the 1967 legislative elections. But Mitterrand, along with Left unity, foundered dramatically on the shoals of May-June 1968.

Ironically, May-June 1968 both destroyed early movement towards Left unity and was the watershed which ultimately brought Communists and non-Communists together in a quasi-permanent way. To begin with, May-June 1968 demonstrated the very real flaws and vulnerabilities of the Gaullist regime. More important still, however, it also revealed the existence of two powerful oppositional social movements ripe to be
turned to the Left’s advantage. On the one hand French workers displayed greatly enhanced capacities for militancy. On the other hand, vast segments of the French new middle classes rebelled. Translating these new movements into political resources and energy posed a major challenge to existing political formations. Working-class mobilisation had more or less predictable political outcomes, of course. Workers supported and voted for the Left in France and, more often than not, the PCF within the Left. The movement of new middle class groups presented a more complex problem, however. 1968 demonstrated that the Right offered these groups no home, to be sure, because its social and political conservatism was completely out of phase with the temper of the new middle class rebels. A powerful Left, which meant, in essence, a unified Left, would attract them. But which of the Left’s major components would attract them most? The PCF, with its exaggerated ouvrieriste propensities, its strong Stalinist heritage, and its demonstrated insensitivity to intellectuals and their concerns was not a priori very welcoming. And, as of 1968 at least, the broken remnants of the non-Communist Left and Centre with their long records of unprincipled political intrigue to obtain ministerial portfolios, did not seem terribly suitable either.

It was in the eventual strategic responses of different Left political forces to the revelations of May-June 1968 that the roots of May-June 1981 were to be found, however. If the PCF did become willing, after May 1968, to make further doctrinal changes and to try new appeals to new middle class elements, it did little to change its basic identity and strategy. In contrast, the non-Communist Left moved rapidly to change of a more dramatic kind. In the 1969-71 period a new Socialist Party (PS) was formed, uniting many of the varied remnants of the earlier non-Communist Left, in ways which were to prove an extremely skilful response to change in broader French society. First of all, the reformist yet radical identity of the new party was designed almost explicitly to coopt the new middle class rebelliousness of May-June and thereafter. Secondly, Francois Mitterrand emerged from the fusion of different groups as the First Secretary of the PS. Thirdly, and perhaps most important, the PS decided to terminate its strategic vacillations by adopting Mitterrand’s basic option for Left unity.

From 1971 onwards, then, the two major forces on the Left found themselves fatefully engaged in unity-in-conflict. In effect, each had decided to take its own dangerous gamble on Left unity. For the PCF, the hope was, of course, that unity would bring the Left to power, strengthen the Communists relatively within the Left, and therefore grant the PCF the influence needed to shape the implementation of Left governmental policies. In contrast, the Socialists were betting, first of all, that a resolutely Left-looking, unitaire strategy would allow the PS to fill out its ranks with new middle class recruits. Secondly, and in the longer
run, they were also betting that unity-in-action with the Communists would give the PS the leftist legitimacy and *cachet* which its ancestors—the SFIO and Left Radicals—had lost through their Third Force alliances in the Fourth Republic. If both of these bets paid off, thought the Socialist leadership, then most of the new political resources accruing to a resurgent Left would, in fact, go to the PS rather than the PCF. Change-oriented middle strata were likely to turn to the PS because of long-standing aversion to the PCF. Beyond this, armed with the Left credentials which followed from *Union de la Gauche*, and strengthened by the recruitment of new middle strata, the PS would look ever more like the 'practical' party of change. To the extent that this occurred, the PS would subsequently be able to make inroads into the PCF’s own working-class base. The ultimate result of this, the Socialists hoped, would be the decisive weakening of the PCF and the emergence of the PS as the hegemonic force on the Left.

At the core of these two complex strategic gambles was, in fact, one simple problem. Of the two major Left parties, which would succeed in capturing the leftward moving new middle classes? The PCF felt that its status as the earliest and most fervent advocate of Left unity, its obvious leftist credentials and its initial power advantage in the alliance would give it the edge. The PS, of course, had the advantage of being based in middle strata to begin with (the militants, leaders and much of the electorate of the SFIO and Left Radicals were middle class), and its historic reconstruction in 1969-1971 presented it with the opportunity to erase memories of the shady past of its founding elements and to court new middle class elements in up-to-date ways.

Indications of which party had made the best gamble were not long in coming. Starting from its initial position of strength, the PCF was able to play the major role in writing the 1972 Common Programme, a document which, in its demands for nationalisations, redistribution of wealth and income, planning and industrial democracy, closely resembled the Communists’ own programme. It took only two years, however, for the political dynamics of Left Unity to become clear. After Francois Mitterrand very nearly won the Presidency in 1974, a series of bye-elections the same year demonstrated that the PS had begun to succeed at precisely the two things which the PCF most feared. It had accumulated more new middle strata votes while, at the same time, it had also begun to eat away at the Communists’ traditional working-class electoral base.

These early indices that the PS was defeating the PCF in unity-in-conflict placed the Communists in a strategic quandary. From the mid-1960's when the PCF had shifted to its new United Front line, its leadership had been divided about the wisdom of the new policy. A majority had favoured *Union*, but a substantial minority believed that the party stood to gain more by maintaining and reasserting a hard-line revolutionary
identity, on the theory that new middle class support would come its way eventually, for principled reasons. Post-1974 seemed to support the minority's contentions. The problem, as of 1974, was that time was of the essence. If trends evident in the 1973 legislative and 1974 Presidential elections persisted, the Left alliance was rapidly on its way to majority status—the legislative elections of 1978 seemed the most likely date. In the context of severe conflict between leadership currents in 1974, then, the PCF decided to confront its problems by facing in two directions at once. It attempted, after 1974, on the one hand to reassert its own revolutionary credentials within Union de la Gauche while simultaneously trying to label the Socialists as lukewarm, vacillating reformists. This involved strong attacks on the alleged political unreliability of the Socialists as contrasted with the continuity of purpose of the PCF. On the other hand, in an attempt to break the Socialist monopoly on success with the new middle classes, the PCF entered upon a frenetic period of 'Euro-communisation', taking its distance from Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet model for socialism, opening up its recruitment and organisational styles and, more generally, working on the creation of a newly liberal public image (this was the period of the XXIInd Congress, when the party abandoned commitment to the dictatorship of the proletariat).

By the Municipal Elections of 1977, it was clear that this desperate new gamble by the PCF to be both more revolutionary and more liberal at the same time had also failed. The Left won a large victory in these elections; indeed, for the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, it won an electoral majority, taking control of many city governments in the process. The one projection common to both PCF and PS strategy, that Union de la Gauche would bring the Left to a majority, was clearly proving accurate, then. On all other strategic dimensions, however, the PS was winning and the Communists losing. As the Left attracted new voters—mainly from new middle strata—they gravitated disproportionately to the Socialists. As this occurred, in the context of the Left becoming a majority, the PS emerged as the electorally more successful party. More successful and more moderate, therefore, the PS was becoming a plausible party of change for the critical electoral bloc at the centre of the French political spectrum and the party most likely to assume control over major policy decisions in any Left government. With this new plausibility the PS was also well-placed to make inroads into the Communists' own electorate. Observers had often noted that, if much of the PCF's electorate understood and agreed with the party's goals, substantial minorities voted Communist either to register visceral protests against the system or to vote for 'real change', with neither feeling directly connected to allegiance to PCF programmes. It was these protesters and 'real changers' who were proving susceptible to Socialist appeals as Union de la Gauche went forward.
The PCF thus faced a difficult situation in 1977. Further unity with the Socialists meant risking, first of all, that the PS would continue to make inroads into the Communist vote. This process implied, as well, that the Communists would be the weaker partner in any governing coalition. Conflict within the PCF leadership about what to do at this point was reduced to an extremely simple choice between continuing the United Front gamble, with such risks taken consciously, or pulling out to 'go it alone' with the purpose of recapturing the party's disappearing image as the 'party of real change'. Given the slim majority of PCF leaders for Left Unity all along, the setbacks of 1977 were enough to shift the balance towards 'going it alone'.

As of 1977, then, the PCF's immediate task was to find an opportunity to break the pro-Socialist momentum of *Union de la Gauche* and shift the grounds of Left politics from unity-in-conflict to simple conflict. The opportunity for rupture appeared in the summer 1977 talks to update the 1972 Common Programme for the forthcoming legislative elections. Here the Communists tried to convince themselves and their supporters—they were able to do neither—that the Socialists had taken a 'Right Turn' since 1972 and were preparing to 'manage the capitalist crisis'. Division on the Left ensued, despite the fact that the Left seemed headed for electoral victory in the 1978 elections. In effect, the PCF had decided to take a new and very different strategic gamble. Since the party leadership had judged that *Union de la Gauche* had conferred an undeserved leftist legitimacy on the Socialists, it was important to destroy this legitimacy. Thus the party's posture changed almost overnight from Eurocommunist openness in search of a cross-class alliance to old-style *ouvrièrisme* with incessant attacks on the Socialists for being 'class collaborationist at heart'. The short-run goal of this new gamble was (through excoriation of the Socialists, workerism and Communist-led struggles against the regime and employers) to block any further Socialist inroads into the PCF's traditional electorate. Beyond this, open division on the Left would be enough to keep the Left, or the Socialists alone, from power. The PCF's 'going it alone' line was, in part, a *politique du pire* designed to maintain the Right in power in the medium run, for as long as the PS had a power advantage over the PCF. In the longer run, the PCF's goal was, of course, to recapture predominance on the Left. PCF leaders foresaw several different avenues to this goal. Perhaps Communist workerism and militancy in themselves, in the context of deepening economic crisis, might be sufficiently successful to begin redressing the balance. It was more likely, in Communist eyes, that the Socialists, shut off from power when committed to *Union de la Gauche* would eventually be drawn towards a compromising deal with the Giscardian regime. Were this to occur, Socialist willingness to 'manage the crisis' would effectively dissipate PS credibility as an agent of change and the PCF would be well placed to pick up the pieces from the wreckage which would result.
The PCF's shift in strategy at this point of course placed the PS itself in a new situation of strategic choice. Francois Mitterrand's option for Left Unity had worked to a point, but, as of 1977-78, this seemed a critical point. The PCF was quite unwilling to go any further in a course of action which led to its own subordination and marginalisation. How should the PS respond? There were forces within the PS, grouped after 1977-78 around Michel Rocard, which had never fully accepted Mitterrand's Left Unity trajectory. In the aftermath of the 1978 electoral defeat these forces took the offensive within the PS, advocating a basic change of strategy towards a Centre-Left 'modernist' line which would have left the PCF to its own self-isolating strategy. With their eyes on a Rocard candidacy in the 1981 Presidential elections, these forces made a very serious bid to depose Mitterrand and to turn the Socialists in another direction. Although the outcome was uncertain for some time (we will discuss the precise events in Part III of this essay, where a closer examination of the inner life of the Socialists will be undertaken) Mitterrand and his strategy came out on top. As a result the PS maintained its Left-facing programmatic stance, holding to most of the basic commitments of the 1972 Common Programme, while responding to the PCF's wild vituperation more in the mode of a spurned but devoted suitor than in a counter-polemical way. Mitterrand's central concern during these anxious months was to prevent the PS from acting in ways which might confirm any real 'shift to the Right'. Success at this would render Communist propaganda implausible and, insofar as possible, fix the blame for the 1977-78 split on the Communists. By proceeding in this way Mitterrand hoped to be in a position to tap as many Left votes as possible in the 1981 Presidential campaign. Mitterrand's strategic solution for the PS—continuity rather than change—turned out to be successful. In large part this was because, as Mitterrand undoubtedly suspected, the PCF's own strategic shift turned out to be a colossal mistake, ultimately facilitating Mitterrand's 1981 victory and bringing about all of the consequences which it had been designed to prevent.

The flaws in the PCF's new strategy were immense, as French politics turned towards the 1981 Presidential campaign. The party's new workerism was basically a long-term' perspective—which only a highly disciplined and non-democratic party like the PCF could pull off—which depended, for its success, on the favourable outcome of a number of shorter-term processes. Communist militants were enjoined to 'hold the working class fortress' while awaiting the eventual collapse of the Socialist boomlet. The strategy thus discounted any potential shorter-term counter effects which the party's renewed ouvrierisme might produce, consolidating and explaining the Socialists' new middle class base, for example (since the PCF's new line completely abandoned any attempts to appeal to and be understood by such strata). It also gambled on the longer-term tenure of
the Right in power, thus completely discounting the deep-seated desire for change which progress of the Left to 1977-78 had demonstrated. Most of all, however, it misunderstood the effects of the operation of France's Presidential electoral system.

Nothing untoward dampened the PCF leadership's devotion to its new line in the results of the 1978 legislative elections and the 1979 elections to the European Parliament. The party did not gain any new electors, but it did not lose any either. Both of these electoral occasions were seen, however, as preliminary to the most important test, the 1981 Presidentials. The Communist leaders had decided after 1974 that it had been a mistake to allow Francois Mitterrand to stand alone as United Left candidate for President. Such a procedure, while it had undoubtedly hastened the consolidation of Left Unity, had also amounted to unilateral PCF recognition that a Socialist and not a Communist, candidate could better represent the kind of change the French people really wanted. From this the party leadership reasoned that the party's actions had granted the PS a position of Left primacy, rather than struggling against it. Resolved not to repeat this mistake, it began reflecting upon Georges Marchais' possible candidacy in 1981. The problem with this reflection was that it set up a situation of extreme risk for the party. The Presidential electoral system—a multi-candidate primary followed by a two-candidate runoff—created a context in which an appreciable number of voters were tempted, in the primary round, to vote for the candidate closest to their political position who was likely to make it through to the runoff. This meant, other things being equal, that the Socialist candidate was likely to benefit from such electoral movements, unless the Marchais candidacy itself proved sufficiently plausible, electorally, to cancel out the 'most likely final candidate' advantage. But a Marchais campaign carried out along the sectarian ouvrièriste PCF positions was not likely to achieve this kind of plausibility. The Socialist candidate was therefore likely to benefit, at Communist expense, from Marchais' candidacy, in ways which would confirm the growing superiority of Socialist electoral strength compared to that of the PCF. The only other plausible purpose of Marchais' candidacy was to so thoroughly discredit the Socialist candidate during the campaign as to ensure a victory of the Right. If, however, voters on the Left really desired change, and the Communist candidate seemed to be working against such change, the PCF would be likely to lose here as well.

As potential, and then official, Communist candidate, Marchais voiced all of the PCF's ouvrièriste themes. At first it was abundantly clear that the PCF hoped, through its sectarianism, to push the divided PS to get rid of Mitterrand and nominate Rocard as its candidate. Since Rocard was clearly on the Right of the PS and his anti-unitaire strategic outlook could be caricatured as anti-Communist, his candidacy would then have been useful to the Communists as confirmation of the 'Right Turn' thesis about the PS.
When the PS refused to cooperate by nominating Rocard, Marchais used all of the 'Right Turn' themes on Mitterrand. Mitterrand was 'responsible for the rupture of Union de to Gauche,' he was a fervent partisan of the 'Socialo-Giscardian consensus', he was a member of the 'Gang of Three' (Mitterrand, Giscard and Chirac) working to isolate the only truly 'anti-Giscard' party, the PCF, and so on.

The effect of all this was catastrophic for the PCF. Years of Union de la Gauche and economic crisis had indeed whetted French appetites for real change. Few people could be persuaded that Mitterrand and Giscard were the same politically. Moreover it was clear throughout the campaign that Marchais' main purpose was not to promote change but to sabotage Mitterrand's prospects. As critical change-oriented votes began to shift from Right-Centre to Left, votes also began to shift within the Left. In the primary round of the Presidential elections not only were a number of PCF voters persuaded that a ballot for Mitterrand would be 'useful' whereas one for Marchais would be wasted, a much larger number of previous Communist voters voted for Mitterrand for real political reasons, because of disagreement with the Communists' post-1977 strategy and with the sectarianism and defeatism of Marchais' campaign. The result was an historic defeat for French Communism. The PCF lost a full 25% of the votes which it had received in the 1978 and 1979 elections. Marchais' 15% in the primary was the PCF's lowest electoral tally since before the 1936 Popular Front.

Francois Mitterrand, in contrast, won nearly 26%, only 2% less than Giscard, the vulnerable incumbent. Socialist votes in the Presidential primary rose by almost exactly as much as Communist votes declined. This quite unexpected turn of events meant that Mitterrand stood a very good chance of success in the runoff against Giscard. Not only was the Right divided, but the electoral failure of the PCF meant that the last, and often the best, resource of the Right—promoting anti-Communist hysteria to block Left success—would no longer work. Voters, especially crucial and timid Centre voters, could vote for Mitterrand without fear that, once elected, he would be beholden in any serious way to the PCF.

The PCF's disastrous showing posed the issue of what course to follow for the Presidential runoff. The party's line, to that point, logically would have led the Communists to urge their first-round supporters to abstain, since Mitterrand, Giscard and Chirac were the same, the 'Gang of Three'. The first round results meant, however, that for the PCF to have urged abstention (amounting to de facto support for Giscard) would have placed it on the wrong side of what was obviously an important demand for change and thereby have risked an even more severe defeat as its abstention call was ignored. The PCF leadership had no choice, then, but to endorse Mitterrand. It did so with a remarkable lack of memory for its earlier positions, from one day to the next claiming its rightful place
in 'the Presidential majority'. Even this extraordinary capacity for manoeuvre, which left PCF militants breathless and confused, did not help. In the legislative elections which Mitterrand called after his victory, the Communists' vote stuck at 16%, while the Socialists shot up to 38%, an unprecedented electoral mutation. The PCF was overwhelmed, losing half of its parliamentary seats, while the Socialists, helped by the electoral system, were able by themselves to form an absolute majority in Parliament.

Events had moved very fast since 1978. The Socialists, following the course which had brought them to prominence over the PCF, continued forward. Established as a party based in the new middle classes, on the Left-Centre and as a plausible claimant for power, it was able to attract votes to its Left (from the working class) and to its Right (from traditional middle-class groups). The PCF's post-1977 strategy only helped the PS in its double appeal. The Communists' workerist sectarianism completely abandoned the new middle classes to the PS. It tempted workers interested in plausible change to shift their votes to the PS. And it forced traditional middle-class groups, desiring change but finding nothing in the Communists' offerings, to the Socialists.

Even the inclusion of four Communist Ministers in the second Socialist government was paradoxical. In any ordinary setting this ought to have been an extremely progressive step, signifying, among other things, the presence of a solid bloc of Left pressure within the French government which would provide a necessary weight in the balance against Socialist timidity and the usual moderation of many Socialist leaders. The actual situation was very far from this, however. Demanding Ministers was part of the PCF's 180-degree turn after its Presidential election defeat, a step taken by the leadership out of strategic desperation. It had no other way to go, no other method of providing some solace to party activists and electors. The four Communist Ministers were, therefore, the sign of PCF political failure. The absolute Socialist majority in Parliament meant that the Socialists did not need PCF support. Thus the PCF Ministers were appointed because of the initiative, and on the sufferance, of Francois Mitterrand, for his own political reasons. The long and complex story which we have already recounted should indicate that Francois Mitterrand is not a man who acts either charitably or gratuitously in politics. Communist Ministers might prove useful to Mitterrand both internationally, giving him broader room for manoeuvre, and inside his government, giving him yet another card to play in the complicated jockeying between Socialist factions now in government. More important, the Communist Ministers provided a guarantee of PCF good behaviour outside—particularly in the labour movement—giving the government space to implement its policies. Finally, and most significantly, the new phase of Socialist-Communist unity-in-action opened up by the inclusion of
Communist Ministers in the government gives Mitterrand and the Socialists a new opportunity to continue their strategy of marginalising the Communists. On the PCF side of the ledger there was little to be said except that, at best, Communist Ministers in government provided the PCF with time and space to regroup, bind its wounds, figure out what went wrong and attempt to devise ways out of the complete strategic impasse in which it found itself.

**III. Who Are These Socialists and What Will They Do With Power?**

The extant vocabulary of Left political analysis is not really very useful for classifying different Left formations. The tendency is to use black-and-white terms, categorising groups either as 'revolutionary' (which, up until very recently, meant Marxist–Leninist) or as 'reformist' (i.e. Northern European Social Democratic). Leaving aside the definitional ambiguities of this conceptual dichotomy, it is quite clear that such vocabulary grossly oversimplifies the varieties of progressive politics. For our purpose, it is important to decide where the French Socialists fit on the Left. They are obviously not 'revolutionaries', indeed they make no claim to be so. And, while they are almost certainly 'reformists', the specific characteristics of their reformism are so different from those of British Labour, the German SPD, the Swedish Social Democrats and the rest of the 'classical' Social Democrats as to render the label misleading. The French Socialist Party is, as we have noted, a new middle class party, without any organic or even strong informal ties to trade unions. This distinguishes it clearly from other Social-Democratic formations which, though new middle class elements in them play important roles, are ordinarily tied to organised labour. Historically, unlike the other Social Democrats, the French Socialists have never had major governmental responsibility for managing a modern Keynesian welfare state. And, as we will see in the latter part of this section, the French Socialists have very different notions of what policies are appropriate to advanced industrial societies from those currently prevalent among Social Democrats.

In fact, the PS, as it moved towards dominance over the French Left in the 1970's, resembled nothing so much, at least superficially, as a university debating society. Young to middle-aged men (with not much more than a token number of women), well-educated and very skilled in the orderly use of words, spent enormous amounts of time jockeying with one another for relative advantage by engaging in highly ideological polemising. This resemblance followed from two things: The backgrounds of most of the participants (they were secondary and university teachers, government officials and technicians of one sort and another; indeed of the 269 Socialist MPs elected in June, 1981, almost 50% were teachers), and the PS's structure, which formally recognised the existence of separate political 'currents' as the basic constituents of debate and
power distribution in the party. Everything, from the analysis of the shape of the social environment to strategy and programme, was fair game for inter-factional competition in the PS. And at statutorily important moments like party Congresses, it was the majority coalition of factions which defined the whole party's policy. From Congress to Congress, then, depending upon the factional coalition which formed the majority, the professed ideology and goals of the party could change markedly. For a party which, after its founding Congress in 1971, was concerned with facing in two directions at once (towards workers and towards the new middle class) this structure was essential. Whether the official balance of the party leaned leftwards or towards the Centre, almost anyone Left of Centre could find a factional voice within the party with which he or she could agree.

Different currents in the PS had two main historical origins, in the old territorial Federations of the SFIO and the explosion of political 'club' activity which occurred in the politically uncertain early 1960's. Starting from the Left of the party, the first major current was the marxisant CERES group (Centre d'études et recherches socialistes) which came out of the club movement. CERES has consistently been quite close to the PCF in its ways of conceptualising the potential for change in France (transcending capitalism by nationalisations, planning and redistribution) and in its organising credo (demanding devoted militancy from its members and placing great stress on building its organisation from the rank and file upwards), if more distant on international politics, rejecting the revolutionary virtues of the USSR and the Soviet model.

Next towards the Centre came currents based on local Socialist Federations with roots in the old SFIO and led, in machine-like fashion, by locally strong Socialist notables. The best examples are Lille-Nord, the Federation of Pierre Mauroy, the Pas-de-Calais, Guy Mollet's former fief, and the Marseilles Federation of Gaston Defferre. These solid organisations came as close as anything in France did to being 'social democratic'. In them, years of municipal socialism in working-class areas led to strongly redistributive Welfare State-type politics. The machine style of these social-democratic pockets meant that their leaders could assume great importance in inner-party negotiations, usually as solid mediating factors between the party leadership and its Centrist and Leftist factions. Gaston Defferre's support of Mitterrand in recent years has been central for PS stability, for example, while the political mobility of Pierre Mauroy (towards Michel Rocard in the leadership fight which developed after 1978, and then back to Mitterrand in 1980) may have determined the recent course of PS politics.

On the Right of the party, and closest to the Centre of the French political spectrum, were Michel Rocard and his supporters. Rocard left the PSU and joined the PS—amidst a great splash of publicity—at the 1974
Assises du Socialisme. The intellectual and physical model of the modern French high civil servant, Rocard has promoted a resolutely 'modernist' technocratic politics. Denouncing the class-oriented and revolutionary vocabulary of the traditional French Left, he has advocated 'rational management' of the mixed economy by the state to maximise benefits for all, a package usually presented in an envelope of decentralising, autogestionnaire rhetoric (Jean-Pierre Chevènement, the CERES leader, once rather appropriately labelled the Rocardians as la gauche américaine-t 'American Left'). The Rocardians were also the only major Socialist current consistently to reject the strategy of Union de la Gauche.

Besides a sprinkling of smaller mini-factions of independent Leftists, the final remaining major PS current was the Mitterrandistes, the followers of the First Secretary himself. Francois Mitterrand and his entourage came to Socialist politics, via the Convention club of the mid-1960's, from the Left of the Radical party. They had all been profoundly marked —Mitterrand most of all—by the Mendes-France experience, retaining from it a commitment to civil liberties, egalitarianism and a belief that 'politicians should keep their promises'. On foreign policy they were pro-European and pro-American. Joined with these predispositions, however, was Mitterrand's Fifth Republic strategic option for Left Unity. The most important consequence of this confluence of Radicalism and Left Unity was a willingness to advocate substantial structural changes, nationalisations in particular, such of those included in the 1972 Common Programme. Mitterrandiste politics, however, were usually very vague and very general, marked more by fluid humanistic slogans and literary allusions than by sharp debate. In part, this came from Mitterrand's own personality, but it had roots in PS politics as well. Given the factional volatility of the PS, Mitterrand had always to be careful to keep options open, either because the balance of currents within the party might shift underneath him or because, for his own reasons, he might wish to promote a change in the party's majority coalition.

From its creation in 1971, then, the inner life of the PS was composed mainly of an endless, fascinating and often obscure series of ideological confrontations between organised currents. Each current had its own pamphlets and organisational tactics, directed both towards target groups outside the party and towards the politics of party Congresses. At such Congresses, through the election of Congress delegates, the weight of each current relative to others was established. And at each Congress complex interfactional negotiations designated the majority coalition of currents which would then direct the party.

Here entered the party's perennial First Secretary, Mitterrand. Although he was the 'historic chief' of the new party, its leader since Epinay in 1971, its principal strategic architect and, for a long time, the party's only figure of Presidential stature, Mitterrand's position was not invulnerable. Indeed,
he was able to maintain it over the years only through complex dealings with different party currents. At different points, Mitterrand was obliged to change his line in recognition of the changing balance between currents. And at other moments he manipulated the factional balance purposively to maximise his own independence. François Mitterrand's—well merited—reputation as a ruthless and Machiavellian infighter derives from his mastery of such processes. There have been moments, however, when Mitterrand came close to losing, as we will presently see.

The PS which emerged from the 1971 Epinay Congress was, under Mitterrand's lead, strongly committed to the strategy of Left Unity. As the party began final negotiations around the 1972 Common Programme with the PCF, it was not accidental that CERES came to the fore as an essential ally of Mitterrand. CERES' prominence derived not only from its grass-roots strength in the party, but also from Mitterrand's judgment that the party had to lean absolutely to the Left as Union de la Gauche took off. At the heart of Mitterrand's unity strategy was, of course, the notion that only a Left-leaning PS could challenge the PCF for left-wing authenticity and therefore engage the battle for superior strength within the alliance. Thus CERES came to play a prominent role not only in writing the party's economic programme, but also in negotiating the economic sections of the Common Programme with the Communists. In retrospect, this particular juncture was of critical importance in establishing the new party's identity. Even though CERES was eventually to be removed from the PS majority, its ideological weight, via party programmes, remained great.

By 1974, in the aftermath of the Presidential elections, it seemed clear that the PS had indeed achieved the Left authenticity which the unity strategy sought and that it might be well on its way towards overshadowing the PCF in Union de la Gauche. The next step was to come to power, in 1978. Since Francois Mitterrand conceived of the exercise of power in different terms from its acquisition, it was not surprising that he promoted a coalitional shift in the Socialist leadership. Because managing a capitalist economy in crisis with a cantankerous and difficult Communist Party was different from electoralist unity-in-conflict with it, it became essential for Mitterrand to remove the CERES leftists from the PS majority so as not to have his hands tied leftwards within his own party. In consequence Mitterrand forced CERES into opposition and constructed a new Centrist majority composed of his own forces, the 'municipal Socialists' and the newly arrived Rocardians. From this point until 1978, Rocard played a prominent role as one of Mitterrand's most important economic advisors (and, rather prematurely, was labelled as the dauphin by the press). This shift in the Socialists' internal balance was not lost on the PCF in its 1977-1978 search for evidence of a PS 'Right Turn'.

The defeat of 1978 following the PCF's change of heart about Union de
*la Gauche* presented a serious barrier to Mitterrand on his road to Presidential power. It was also an important point in Socialist internal politics. First of all, Mitterrand's political identity and career in the PS were tied to the *Union* strategy as an avenue towards increasing Socialist strength and, eventually, to power. The PCF's shift to sectarian *ouvrièrisme*, plus its clear intention to sponsor an anti-PS Presidential campaign by Georges Marchais in 1981, indicated that the Communists would no longer cooperate in *Union*. Secondly, after 1978 the next possibility for Socialist success would be the 1981 Presidential campaign, for which the PS would need its strongest candidate. In the light of these new circumstances Francois Mitterrand appeared not only as the architect of an obsolete strategy, but also as a three-time loser in major electoral campaigns (the Presidential campaigns of 1965 and 1974, plus the 1978 Legislative campaign). These facts in themselves made Mitterrand vulnerable. In addition, however, there were already strong elements in the PS arguing that the party needed a new face for 1981, someone running for President along completely new strategic lines.

Indeed, not long after the 1978 defeat Michel Rocard and his supporters launched an internal party offensive to change PS strategy and to promote Rocard's 1981 Presidential candidacy. The goals of this offensive were to depose Mitterrand as First Secretary and dispose of his strategic legacy. When Pierre Mauroy and his current moved towards support, the Rocard threat became more serious. Rocard's aims for the PS were very different from those of Mitterrand. He made no pretence of affinity with the positions which Mitterrand had adopted to 'anchor' the party on the Left to do battle, through *Union de la Gauche*, with the PCF (nationalisations, redistributive schemes). Rocard, a declared 'revisionist' with no roots either in the rhetorical Marxism of the new PS or in traditional social democracy, favoured instead a Centre-Left 'modernism'. Old Left notions of dispossessing capital and changing the structures of accumulation were foreign to Rocard. Instead, Rocard believed that 'ideology' was foolish, superstitious and deservedly dying, giving way to the 'science' of progressive, skilled, problem-solving, technocrats. Moreover Rocard believed strongly that *Union de la Gauche* should be discarded in favour of complete PS autonomy on the Left.

Rocard's initiatives led to great acrimony and agitation within the PS. Mitterrand was obliged to fight for his political life in ways which involved, yet again, a change in the balance between currents in the party. The CERES faction was brought back from exile to become the most active and vocal opponent of the Rocardians. The change became official at the 1979 Metz Congress. The Rocard and Mauroy currents were pushed into the minority, while the majority shifted Leftwards, with CERES joining the *Mitterrandistes* and Gaston Defferre.

However obscure such comings and going may seem at first sight, in
retrospect it is clear that they were of great significance in the unfolding self-definition of the PS on the road to power in 1981. The course urged upon the party by the Rocardians would have involved a major change in programme and political location, from Left to Centre. In order to defend himself against this challenge, Mitterrand was obliged to reassert his own strategic position in a leftish way. As a result, the need for extensive nationalisations, the desirability of serious measures to redistribute income and wealth and the goal of stimulating the domestic market to counteract crisis were all underlined anew, as was the Socialists' devotion to Left Unity (the absence of PCF cooperation notwithstanding). In short, the factional conflict within the party led to a leftward shift in the party's official positions. The 1980 Projet socialiste (a new programme written mainly by CERES) may well have been the most aggressively Left document in PS history. The 1981 PS Manifeste, its Presidential programme, was less strident and more limited, but still profoundly 'anchored to the Left'.

Ultimately, as we know, Mitterrand defeated Rocard. To win, Rocard had to convince Socialists in the majority coalition that Mitterrand was a loser, that Rocard stood a better chance of being elected President. Many different reasons caused Rocard's failure to do this. Important Socialists came to believe that fratricidal conflict within the party, were it to get out of control, would destroy the party's chances, no matter which side won. There was also considerable fear that a Rocard candidacy would play into Communist hands, confirming the 'Right Turn' thesis and thereby conceding Left votes to Marchais, perhaps enough to ensure Rocard's defeat. Rocard's methods upset many Socialists as well. Rocard felt obliged to go outside normal party channels to pursue his goals, in particular towards the media and public opinion at large, an approach which many interpreted to be in conflict with party rules. Perhaps most important was the case of cold feet developed by Pierre Mauroy, Rocard's most important ally (undoubtedly a malady which followed from promises of a brilliant future made to Mauroy by Mitterrand). By November, 1980 Rocard was forced to withdraw, but not before pushing the PS leftwards in reaction to his actions. Francois Mitterrand was to be the PS's candidate, and next President of France.

Before May 10, 1981, the French Socialist Party was a coalition of competing, often warring, factions given to high ideological disputation and complex infighting about who should control party leadership and strategy. Francois Mitterrand, by dint of skilful manoeuvring designed not only to maintain a majority behind his policies, but also to grant himself a maximum amount of freedom, held the whole operation together. Mitterrand, in turn, was a vieux routier in French politics who had constructed a new identity for himself from a combination of old-fashioned
Radicalism and programmatic leftward moves necessitated by his choice of a Left Unity route to power. With the exception of the CERES firebrands and a smattering of independent Leftists, most of the leaders, militants and supporters of the party were considerably further to the Right than the party's official politics. Yet, as of the evening of April 26, 1981 when Francois Mitterrand acquired a better than even chance of becoming the next President of France, this querulous and moderate lot of politicians were on the road to power.

What would the Socialists do with power? The composition of the first two Socialist governments (the first was a 'transition team' until the legislative elections, when the second took over) seemed to confirm that the Socialist future would be much like its past. The governments consciously reproduced the internal factional divisions of the party—the Prime Ministership and highest ranking Ministries were systematically doled out to the reigning leaders of different PS currents (Mauroy, Defferre, Rocard, Chevènement). And, from the general political tenor of the governments plus the choice of incumbents for the most important functional ministries (Finance, Defence, Interior, Foreign Affairs), it seemed that France would be run, henceforth, with great moderation and caution.

The first Pierre Mauroy government—the 'transition team' between Presidential and Legislative elections—did tread carefully. It promoted a modest stimulation of domestic demand, raised the minimum wage slightly, promised new public-sector jobs, moved to limit future industrial shutdowns and to subsidise new investment and intervened to protect the franc in the international currency market. All of this was mild, social-democratic Keynesianism, wrapped up in the rhetoric of 'restraint' and 'responsibility'. It was not necessarily a very good indicator of Socialist intentions, however, since it was primarily electoralist in inspiration, designed to comfort workers without frightening the middle classes. The real test of the political mettle of the Socialists was to come after their massive victory in the legislative elections. The Socialists had run on a very ambitious manifesto for both 1981 elections. Almost all reformist parties, however, go to the electorate with ambitious lists of proposed changes. And almost all, once elected, subsequently implement only a limited number of the changes which they had earlier promised, usually pleading the exigencies of economic management for their timidity (if, indeed, they bother to account at all for the shortfall between their promises and actions). What was extraordinary about the French Socialists in 1981—despite their internal divisions and despite the moderation and caution of many of their leaders—was their determination to implement all of their programme. As Francois Mitterrand often made clear, 'we intend to keep our promises nothing more, but nothing less'.

Social democratic reformism or not? In fact, the Socialist programme was a complicated collage of different Left-of-Centre political ideas and of
different moments in the Socialists' history. There was considerable
evidence of the PS' Radical roots, for example, in the regime's efforts to
expand civil liberties—ending the death penalty, eliminating a number of
special military courts, abrogating a harsh law-and-order programme
legislated by Giscard, suspending wiretapping, making the electronic media
more open and pluralistic in content, moving to make both the courts and
the police less repressive. This same Radicalism plus long-standing demands
of powerful regional Socialist Federations could be seen in the regime's
plans for decentralisation. In what amounted to a genuine attempt to
reverse the Napoleonic legacy of hyper-centralisation, the regime proposed
to devolve administrative and political authorities, plus many essential
public services (utilities, for example) from Paris to regional and local
levels. Moreover, the immense weight of the prefects over the daily life of
French communities was to be removed.

Perhaps more classically social democratic were the regime's programmes
for 'solidarity' and 'new citizenship'. The living standard of France's
poorest was to be raised. Welfare state practices were to be fine tuned to
provide better and more services for different groups (families, women, the
elderly). The retirement age was to be lowered. Negotiations were begun
between unions, employers and the state to reduce the length of the
working week (35 hours was the target) and to add a fifth week of paid
vacation. Unions were to be given new rights on the shopfloor, while the
public sector was to serve as a pilot area for the development of a more
contractually-based industrial relations system. Reducing unemployment—
indeed, establishing the 'right to employment'—was the new regime's
major preoccupation. In this realm the government proposed Keynesian
measures such as fiscal pump-priming and public-sector job creation
while, at the same time, speaking of the need for 'rigour' and 'respon-
sibility' to prevent inflation.

In the realm of foreign policy it was more difficult to label the exact
trajectory of the Socialists—perhaps since general declarations about
international affairs are usually couched in very vague language while the
directions of practical diplomacy take years to be hammered out in inter-
action with other nations. 'Left social democratic' was probably the best
early characterisation of Socialist international declarations. From the
outset the regime announced its pro-European and pro-American biases—
it was the 'best ally' of the US. On issues of East-West relations its intent-
ions seemed consistent with such announcements. Mitterand, for example,
supported the introduction of 'theatre' nuclear weapons in Western
Europe (of course, not in France, whose own nuclear deterrent force was
to be modernised and made more effective) while agreeing that Soviet
SS-20 missiles had indeed upset the strategic balance. There was evidence
of strong anti-Sovietism on other issues as well, such as Afghanistan and
Poland. These orthodox posturings, however, were not devoid of hints of
contradiction. The inclusion of the four Communist Ministers, if it occurred for mainly domestic reasons, was not approved of by the US, to say the least. And the new regime did not hesitate to lambast, in stridently public ways, American foreign economic policies (high interest rates, which made economic recovery difficult for everyone except, perhaps, the Americans). There were indications, as well, that the new regime hoped to slow down the introduction of 'Euromissiles' and speed up disarmament negotiations. It was also extremely wary of American intentions to use the Euromissile scare to shift the strategic balance in America's favour. Perhaps the largest area of disagreement was around the so-called North-South problem. The USA insisted upon viewing Third World events through prisms of anti-Sovietism and free enterprise. Mitterrand and his party (along with the Left of the Socialist International) refused anti-Soviet reductionism and suggested that a significant increase in 'northern' state economic aid to 'southern' developing countries was in the longer-run economic interests of the advanced capitalist world. To be sure, there was little of a radical or neutralist flavour in all this. But there was more than a hint that the French Socialists saw the possibility of serious conflicts between French and American national interests—even if there were also major areas of agreement—and would not be shy in confronting such conflicts.

Up to this point Socialist France looks very much like a hybrid Radical-social democratic version of classical reformism, quite as one might have anticipated from knowledge of the historical roots of the French Socialists. The core measures of economic change undertaken by the government completely undermine such a complacent evaluation, however. France, along with most other European nations, already possessed a substantial public sector (parts of banking, public utilities, coal mines, aeronautics and Renault) dating from the reforms of the post-World War II years. After June, 1981, however, the Socialists moved to nationalise not only those banks remaining in private hands, but eleven of the most important industrial combines in the country's economy. Armaments came first (Dassault and Matra) followed by iron and steel, the only 'lame duck' in the lot. Next came five monopolistic, profitable and successful conglomerates—CGE (French General Electric), Pechiney-Ugine-Kuhlman (metals), Rhone-Poulenc (France's largest chemical firm), St. Gobain-Pont-i-Mousson (glass/metal) and Thompson-Brandt (Europe's third-largest electronics group). Another cluster of firms, where foreign interests were significant, was to be taken over after negotiations with their foreign owners, including CII-Honeywell-Bull (computers), ITT-France and Roussel-Uclaf (chemicals/pharmaceuticals).

By now it should be clearer why we have hesitated about prematurely labelling the politics of the new French regime. For, on top of a long list of welcome and important Radical-Social Democratic reforms, there comes a package of structural economic changes the like of which has
rarely, if ever, been undertaken in a capitalist democracy. It is true that, across a wide range of Western nations, major elements of economic infrastructures were brought under public ownership, largely because of the popular upsurge immediately following World War II. Subsequently, of course, this public sector was used as an important lever for states in pursuit of Keynesian economic management in mixed economies whose ultimate goal was monopoly profitability. Nowhere, however, has the state nationalised, in wholesale fashion, these profitable private-sector monopolies. Yet this is precisely what the French Socialists set out to do after June, 1981. What does this all add up to? Not social-democratic reformism, to be sure. But not a 'revolutionary transition' either.

It may, indeed, be too early to know where the new French situation is leading. There are, however, important clues in the remarks of Socialist leaders indicating that they themselves do not see their endeavours as a simple pastiche of reforms drawn together ad hoc from the stocks of proposals of different families of the French Left. We would be wise, for example, to pay heed to the words of Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy as he introduced the government's massive nationalisation programme:

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\text{. . . The central objective of our industrial policy is simple. It seeks to create conditions for regenerating productive investment. . . for there cannot be a prosperous economy without powerful industry land\[ no powerful industry without an investment and research effort.}
\]

\[
\text{We want the State, through nationalisations, to acquire control over those industrial 'poles' which appear to us to be the key to a dynamic investment and employment policy...}
\]

Advanced capitalism is in profound crisis. The postwar consensus—the state using Keynesian techniques to promote growth and full employment in mixed economies where private sector monopolies were the motors of accumulation—had disappeared by the end of the 1970's. Its demise was the result of high inflation, high unemployment, low growth, declining profits and the high degree of international vulnerability which followed the extraordinary new articulation of the international division of labour (which, in turn, was the structural outcome of the long postwar boom). With the advent of crisis, all advanced capitalist societies faced the same agonising puzzle: How to promote new national economic activity which would allow both for domestic prosperity and increased international competitiveness. Answers were not easy to find. The dissolution of Keynesian consensus, in fact, created fundamental conflicts over the shape of state economic policy and, barely hidden, what relationships between different social groups should become. Two major groups of protagonists emerged. The first was the 'bash the welfare state' and 'return to the free market' school. This position, whose different national advocates mixed their specific remedies from ingredients such as 'deregulation', cutbacks
in state expenditures, monetarism and anti-unionism, postulated that, because the essential problem was a profits squeeze, the time had come to grant private capital every conceivable opportunity to increase profits, even if this meant a return to pre-Great Depression policies and social arrangements. The other position was social democratic. While, once again, the problem was diagnosed as a profits squeeze, the remedy was different. Workers and unions, rather than being beaten down by market forces, ought to accept some form of open or de facto corporatism involving self-imposed limits on wages and improvements in living standards in order to allow the growth of productivity and profits. So far, neither solution has worked very well. 'New Right' policies have either been rejected by the electorate—as in France—or deepened economic problems (often through accelerated de-industrialisation), as in the UK. Social-democratic corporatism, on the other hand, has either provoked class conflict, as under British Labour or, when maintained, failed to achieve the desired economic results, as in West Germany.

The 'French Road', projected by Mitterrand's Socialists, while it may partake of some aspects of the social-democratic solution, is essentially different, and strikingly new. The French regime has decided to nationalise France's most important basic industrial monopolies. Yet, if we are to credit the French Socialists' own explanations for creating the largest, most articulated and economically most vital public sector in the capitalist world, it is not because they are dedicated to ending capitalism. Rather they are seeking to endow the French state with the public policy tools needed to regenerate the investment and technological change needed to get France out of crisis while preserving, even enhancing, social justice and democracy.

A rather unusual analysis underlies this 'Third Road'. At its core is basic agreement with other schools of crisis thought. France can only escape from crisis by regenerating investment and economic activity in ways which will enhance its competitive position in the international capitalist market. The French Socialists resolutely refuse measures to extract and shield French industry from this market. Yet, according to the Socialists, French capital had proved completely unequal to the tasks at hand. Moreover, it had also proved itself quite unwilling even to try without inflicting intolerable social costs on the French people, massive unemployment, heightened repressiveness, together with substantial de-industrialisation. Because of its incompetence and its malevolence, private capital had to be deprived of its coordinating and initiating roles in investment and industrial policies. Major nationalisations necessarily followed in the Socialists logic. We must underline yet again that these arguments were not advanced in the name of revolution, but rather in the name of national economic rationality. To the Socialists, French monopoly capital was simply no longer capable of such rationality. Thus, for France to
survive and thrive in the contemporary international division of labour while, at the same time, preserving social dignity and justice, such capitalists have to be replaced by the state as major levers of economic power.

An important question follows. If French monopoly capital is no longer competent to redress the French economy in crisis, then who does possess the requisite skills and foresight? The Socialist answer is neither `the workers' nor 'the people', even if there is ample evidence of the Socialists' commitment to enlarging workers' rights and democracy. Instead, the new PS seems bent on what can only be called a modern and left ` Colbertism of the new middle classes'. Those who are to take on the task of bringing France out of crisis, of regenerating investment and technological progress, are Socialist Ministers, technocrats and Left-leaning state administrators.

Anyone familiar with the ideology and mentality of the new middle class elites who run the Socialist Party—the Enarques, polytechniciens and assorted other products of the modern Grandes Ecoles—will recognise that imputing such ambitions to them is not implausible. Moreover, the leftward-moving historical trajectory of such groups, from opposition to the Algerian War, the events of May-June 1968 and into the Union de la Gauche Socialist Party, is easy to trace. Where does a modern and Left ` Colbertism of the new middle classes' fit in the conceptual lexicon of the Left? The answer, obviously, is that it does not. What is happening in France, however, may attest more to the inadequacy of this lexicon in the face of contemporary social change than anything else.