

What Must Change in the Party

The defeat of the Union of the Left has seriously confused the popular masses and filled many Communists with profound disquiet.* A 'workerist'—or more precisely sectarian—faction is openly rejoicing at the break with the Socialist Party, presenting it as a victory over the social-democratic danger. But the majority of militants are alarmed, not only at the grave setback itself, but above all at the condition in which this strange defeat took place. Moreover, something new is happening. While they wait for an explanation from the Party leadership, the militants are themselves beginning to analyse the process that led to the defeat: namely, the line actually followed by the Party, with all its somersaults, and the vagaries of its practice. What they seek from the leadership is an assurance that it will respect the material conditions without which the analysis cannot be pursued or its conclusions discussed. In particular, they are demanding an open forum in the party press and genuinely democratic preparation of the Twenty-Third Congress.

Faced with this movement, the party leadership is progressively establishing a dual system of defence: at once dictating the conclusions in advance, and

channelling discussion in order to defuse it. On 20 March 1978, the Political Bureau declared: 'It will of course be necessary to draw all the lessons of the battle that has just been waged.' They speak in the future tense, as befits the opening of an investigation; but they do so only in order to provide *advance-conclusions*. *First conclusion*: 'The Communist Party bears no responsibility for this situation.' Apart from anything else, this formula has the advantage of sheltering the leadership, which took all the decisions, behind the Party, which suffered all the consequences. *Second conclusion*: 'The guiding line [of the Party] has remained consistent during the last six years.' Thus, in his report of 29 March, Fiterman could emphasize the Party's heroism in conducting a battle, under difficult conditions, that was lost through the fault of the socialists: 'We did not want a defeat . . . We must reflect upon it, discuss it, and draw all the necessary lessons. But it is clear that, given the basic facts which I have just recalled, there was no other serious and responsible orientation than the one we took. Of that the Political Bureau is very firmly convinced.'

Thank you for the very firm conviction. The Political Bureau must be very 'firmly convinced' indeed, if it can dispense with any proof, offering us 'conclusions without a premiss' and a judgement without an analysis. This reveals in its true light the call launched by the Political Bureau: the analysis has to be made . . . only on the basis of the leadership's 'conclusions without a premiss'. And when Georges Marchais calls for analysis on the grounds that the situation requires 'discussion and reflection' (*L'Humanité*, 4 April), he indicates that 'party units dispose of *important material* . . . with which to develop this examination'. What material? 'In particular, the Political Bureau statement of 20 March, and the report which Charles Fiterman presented to regional secretaries on behalf of the Political Bureau.' The circle is completed, then, the ground is staked out. On the basis of such rich material, the discussion can proceed in all freedom—that is, it can lock itself up in the conclusions presented beforehand.

Communists know what is *really* meant by Georges Marchais's appeal 'We must discuss, that is quite right.' Discussion in *partitioned* cells, at the most a branch conference, but no more. And so, there will not be a generalized, free exchange of analyses and experiences among militants from different sectors, or between manual and intellectual workers—the kind of discussion which strengthens and sharpens. You will discuss freely, but on the basis of the conclusions contained in 'important documents' and exclusively in the framework of your basic organizations (cells, branches).

Such is the official response to a rising Party-wide demand for open forums in the Party press to make possible such exchange and comparison. The leadership has already said no: *out of the question*, not for a

* The text that follows was published in four parts in *Le Monde*, on 24, 25, 26 and 27 April 1978. Publication was timed to coincide with the first Central Committee meeting after the elections (first round 12 March, second round 19 March), which was held on 26, 27 and 28 April. A slightly revised version of Althusser's text has since been published by François Maspéro in book form, with a foreword commenting on Marchais's report to the April cc meeting. All footnotes to the English translation have been added by NLR.

single moment. At first, Marchais even justified this refusal by talking of a clause in the statutes, according to which open forums are only organized in order to prepare a congress. But, in reality, *no such clause exists*. There is not a single reference to discussion forums in the statutes. It would be hard enough, in the present circumstances, to accept that a workers' leader should invoke 'the law' against Party militants. But Marchais does more than that: he makes it up!

It is necessary to know of this outright refusal in order to understand why Communists are writing articles in *Le Monde* and elsewhere: for the Party daily and weeklies have been closed to them, by order of the leadership. More than anything, the leadership fears an exchange of experience and analysis among militants at the base. More than ever, it is in favour of *partitioning*—the number one technique for stifling rank-and-file reaction, through a three-tier system of delegation (cell—branch, branch—region, region—Central Committee).

As for that 'broad discussion' which will follow Marchais's own appeal, we can turn to Paul Laurent for a clarification of its real meaning: 'Evidently, the setback of 19 March calls for deep reflection *in order to decide on the course to be pursued in the new stage* opening before us.' One thing is quite certain and evident: on the basis of the Political Bureau's 'very firm conviction', the analysis will very quickly be 'called upon' to leave behind examination of the past and concentrate entirely on the future, on 'the path of fresh advances' (Political Bureau statement, 4 April). This is an old leadership practice, kept in perfect working order: an appeal to the tasks ahead very quickly serves to *bury the past*, together with its contradictions, mistakes and enigmas. As for those who dwell on past errors, they of course will turn aside 'from life', and so 'from the struggle', and so 'from the line', won't they comrades?

Strategy: the Disguised Turn

The more the future opens up, the more the past closes on itself. Already it is no longer a question of the CP, but only of the SP: 'The disastrous, suicidal strategy of the SP *and that alone* is the direct cause of the fact that the Left did not achieve victory.' While the militants reflect, the leadership slams down its conclusions: the CP's lack of responsibility for the outcome logically passes into the SP's total responsibility. Thus hemmed in between a sweeping judgement on the past and 'tasks for the future', reflection and discussion on the role of the Party can be in no doubt of their destiny. They will be left a few 'blemishes', but the line will be proclaimed to have been 'consistent' and 'correct'. The mechanism of structuring and stifling discussion is in place and fully operative.

However, between the leadership's concept of 'reflection' and the Party militants' method of reflecting, there is a 'slight contradiction' that will not easily be removed. The militants do not agree to discussing on the basis of the 'important documents' mentioned by Marchais (Political Bureau statements; Fiterman Report). They do not wish *to begin thinking* with a conclusion that assigns responsibility or non-responsibility to a particular party, or with the argument that if the CP is responsible for nothing, then the SP is responsible for everything. They are fed up with that kind of Manichean thinking—one, moreover, which is both

legalistic and moralistic and which does not correspond to what they have experienced and observed.

They know that the Union of the Left is a necessity, and that the current represented by the SP must be won to it. But they have never had any illusions about the SP or about the composite nature of its militants (old SFIO cadres; the nucleus organized by CERES; and many members with no real political formation). They see its function as an electoralist bloc, at the mercy of struggles for influence arbitrated by an authoritarian 'historic leader', who orients the Party according to his personal fancy—which is far from hostile to the social-democratic International or to modern forms of class collaboration—and has declared his cards well in advance: to take three million votes from the CP.

However, Communist militants do not understand the 'logic' according to which the SP's overwhelming responsibility is supposed to exhaust the matter. Why should it not, on the contrary, *also pose the question of the CP's responsibility?* After all, the policy of the CP was very closely bound up with that of the Socialist Party; and it is really to confuse dialectics with paranoia to think of responsibility as a question of all or nothing. Besides, *such a method rebounds on those who use it.* For how is it that the Communist Party, after it had been enlightened by Mitterand's Vienna declaration (the three million CP votes to be 'taken') and by Marchais's secret report of June 1972,¹ still opened that enormous political credit for the SP which gave it so much strength; made of Mitterand the United Left candidate in the 1974 presidential elections; and put the SP in a position where it could dominate the Left? In its 4 April statement, the Political Bureau spoke of the SP strategy as having been exposed by recent events: it spoke of 'what has been its real strategy ever since the 1972 Common Programme'. But in those five years 'since the Common Programme', who else if not the CP leadership provided the SP with the means needed for its strategy—before deciding to combat it?

In reality, the militants reflect in a different way: as materialists seeking to reach a dialectical judgment on the basis of evidence—not in the mode of all-or-nothing but in that of contradiction. They start at the beginning, by analysing their own experience as women and men well placed to hear the workers' reactions and reflections, and to gauge the effect produced on them by the somersaults in the Party line, by Marchais's style of intervention, and by the (often unexpected) election results. With regard to these 'important documents' (this time genuinely important), they try to reflect as Marxists—in other words, as women and men who are both capable of 'thinking for themselves' (Marx) and careful to think through what they have experienced and observed, as a function of the character and contradictions of class relations. They have had enough of pragmatism and empiricism. They want to understand why the Party could attain none of the objectives which the leadership set five years ago. And they know that, in order to understand, it is necessary to go beyond the simple 'facts' (so dear to Fiterman) and to grasp what Lenin called their 'inner connection'; in our class society, this always involves economic, political and ideological class *relations* of extreme complexity

¹ Marchais's June 1972 report was only made public three years later, by Political Bureau member Étienne Fajon in *Le Monde* 9 July 1975.

which are quite simply ignored by the leadership. *The fact that such an analysis is coming spontaneously from the base could really mark an epoch in the political history of the French Party.*

However, there is a very high chance that the leadership will use the might of its apparatus to break this 'slight contradiction'—the contradiction between a concept of 'reflection' structured and controlled from above, and the real practice of 'reflection' resting on concrete analysis of the material contradictions experienced by the Party base. But the militants know the leadership's polished expertise in smothering disagreements, its technique of 'recuperation', and its skill in putting off 'until later' (until the Twenty-Third Congress) the vaguely promised reforms that are so badly needed. So the leadership can be assured that many will follow with the greatest vigilance and interest all the methods—including the most 'liberal' in appearance—which it will introduce in order to resolve this 'slight contradiction': that is, in order to crush the grain of sand that could jam its gigantic machine.

Hidden Motives

One of the oldest maxims of political practice (Machiavelli, even Napoleon!) states that it is never advisable to treat people as imbeciles. In common with the French people, most Communist militants were not really 'taken in'—either by the endless debate on nationalization figures, or by the solemn and short-lived comedy of election percentages (25 per cent would be good, but 21 per cent is not enough!), or by the blustering about 'Communist ministers' or other such productions. Most militants, and not only they, know the truth of what Marx said about the 18th Brumaire: namely, that history is a theatre and that, in order to understand it, we have to look behind the masks and speeches of leaders, and above all behind the stage itself; we have to seek the political stakes of the class struggle, as well as its causes and effects. Isolated as it was in its positions of power, the leadership did not wish to sense this unease. But the militants clearly sensed that, behind the 'consistent' invoking of the Union of the Left, behind the divergences and the split, and behind the farcical agreement of 13 March when the Party abandoned all its previous positions, *something serious and strange was going on—something that remains a secret.*

At the heart of all the questions raised lies a certain conviction and a certain interrogation. *The conviction:* party strategy was not always 'consistent'; it was changed for a time at the Twenty-First Congress, then returned to its previous course from the Twenty-Second Congress until shortly after the Nantes SP Congress (June 1977), when it was precipitated into the line that was to bring about the September break with the SP and the defeat of the Union of the Left. *The interrogation:* why, then, has the leadership never accounted for its change in strategy? What did it have to hide? This is indeed the question of questions: *what was the leadership hiding, when it kept quiet about the change of strategy which it was imposing on the Party?*

At this point 'hypotheses' appear in swarms. To be brief, I shall only consider the most likely one, which goes as follows. The leadership

wanted to reduce the audience of a Socialist Party that had risen almost from nothing through its signature of the Common Programme. For this party might threaten the very core of the CP's own electorate, or even one day follow the 'social-democratic' tradition by supporting a Giscard majority. In trying to reduce the SP's audience, the leadership therefore wanted to strengthen the Party against the dangers of the future (the crisis, the Chirac threat, and so on). Why keep silent about this strategic turn? *In order to hide the contradiction between the line of the most recent period—struggle against the SP—and the line followed during the previous five years: close collaboration with the SP, from the joint Mitterrand candidacy of 1972 through the 1976 cantonal elections to the municipals of 1977.*

The fact is, however, that this strategic turn led only to defeat. Quite simply, the Left needed the 'centrist' and petty-bourgeois votes which, given the Party's abandonment of these layers, could only be won by the SP. The wish for a Left victory was therefore impossible to square with refusal to provide the necessary means. And, as if to add farce to drama, the Party leadership *recognized in practice that such 'means' were necessary*, by ceding everything to the SP the day after the first round. It needed a transfer of SP votes in order to win its full number of deputies—and that was the end of the matter. On 13 March, at the very moment when the 'good agreement' was eventually signed (the front page of *l'Humanité* had the banner headline 'It's done!'), many Party militants who had previously been reluctant to believe it suddenly realized that the 'differences' put forward in September might have been mere pretexts for the real motives of the SP and CP leaderships. Thus, in the class battle that opposed an utterly reactionary and discredited Right to the will of every category of workers, *everything was settled within the Left rather than in struggle against the Right; and the CP leadership saw as the number one objective strengthening the Party against the Socialist menace.*

The unity euphoria of 1972 had first been shaken at the Twenty-First Congress, which followed a number of by-election results suggesting a danger to the CP. But under the impact of the Twenty-Second Congress, the previous atmosphere was re-established until the *public* 'right turn' effected by the SP at its Nantes Congress of June 1977. The CP leadership responded with a *secret* strategic turn, giving no explanation of the change but, on the contrary, disguising it beneath the continuity of a single language. To continue speaking the language of the old strategy while practising a new one was to refuse to recognize that a strategic turn had been made. The dual language created unbelievable confusion among the militants: they literally *did not understand any more* what was going on, and they were quite incapable of explaining it to those around them. After the public 'right turn' on the Nantes Congress, the CP leadership does seem basically to have opted for strengthening the Party at any price—that is, for weakening the SP at any price, even if it involved sacrificing the Union of the Left. Although the Left lost, the Party leadership won. But it won *only insofar as the SP failed to achieve* its targets: everything else, including the victory of the Left, was sacrificed to the CP's 'victory' over the SP.

This basic option was kept secret. It is pleasant to imagine a different kind of leadership—one which, possessing sufficient courage, lucidity and sensitivity to our people's intelligence, would have used a frank and open

language to explain before the workers and Party militants the deep reasons for its 'turn'. Indeed, it was perfectly possible for the leadership to do this: and it would thereby have won out against both attacks from the Right and the hesitations of the SP. Undoubtedly the outcome would also have been different. Why then was the basic option kept secret, resulting as it did in an incomprehensible double language? Doubtless because a change in line naturally involves critical examination of the old line, and thus points to errors in orientation. *And once the book of errors is opened, the end is by no means as clear as the beginning.* The new line might also be incorrect, just as it was not known at the time that the old one was wrong; one error may always secrete another.

'The Party is Always Right'

There is no doubt that the old leadership reflex has come out on top: 'the Party (=the leadership) is always right'; 'everything that has happened verifies our line'; 'our line is correct'; 'the Party has followed a consistent line'. It is always a sign of weakness when people dare not face the reality that is called a change of strategy: they prefer denial ('we have not changed our line') to the attempt to understand what is going on. After all, it was Georges Marchais who said on television: 'I shall make a self-criticism . . . We should have published my secret report when it was delivered. Not to have done so was right opportunism.'

Any reader will conclude that such opportunism dominated the leadership line between 1972 and 1975—the date when the secret report was published by Fajon during the first outbreak of polemics with the Socialists . . . So there must have been a first strategy, then a turn, and then a second strategy. It is that strategic turn which was camouflaged from the militants by a single discourse. In fact, there were two modes of speech: one of the old strategy and one of the new. But they intermingled and overlapped beneath the fiction of a single discourse as 'consistent' as Party strategy itself. Just try to cope with the riddles of such double-talk when it falls from above and you are underneath!

At any event, we are now talking of political errors and of the way to handle them. One method of handling errors (or rather *suppressing* them in authoritarian fashion) is to act according to the principle: 'The Party is always right, its line is always correct.' This has the advantage of radically suppressing the question of error, but the drawback of leaving a certain residue: namely, those militants who will not give up speaking of the mistake. They are obviously in error (another!), and yet they persist. In the old days, they used to be driven from the Party. Now the leadership gets out of trouble by stating: 'It's always the same ones!' Thus, Georges Marchais says that they were already opposed to the Twenty-Second Congress—clearly an aggravating circumstance, even though it is a complete falsehood. The key thing is to brand them as 'habitual offenders' and to keep a good eye on them. It is enough that they be given the defamatory title of 'desk-bound intellectuals' or doctrinaire minds. With the help of a dose of workerism, the Party apparatus will close once more around them—and the trick will be done.

However, Lenin showed another way of handling political error: 'Not to

admit a mistake is more serious than to have committed it.’ In this Marxist method of handling errors, they are alarm-signals coming from practice. They always point to a lacuna or failure, either in the structure of thought or in the structure of organization. They may be benign or serious. They are serious when grave contradictions have not been faced, but continue on their muffled path, disturbing political practice. Despite what our leadership does, an error is not just something that is admitted from above as a last resort (‘We are not perfect; blemishes may always appear’), in order to hurry on to the business of the day. According to the Marxist conception, the really important thing is *what the mistake conceals*: namely, the structural contradictions of which it is but the manifestation. As a precise ‘event’, an error eventually passes by: but unless the causes are tackled and reduced, *they will always persist*.

It is to this persistence that Lenin was referring when he said that failure to analyse a mistake is more serious than having committed it. For in the strong sense of the term, to recognize and analyse an error involves going beyond the phenomenon itself to seek out and overcome its causes. For every Marxist militant, these causes are rooted in a defective understanding of class relations, of the effects of class relations, or even of phenomena that appear on the fringes of class relations (the troublesome youth question, women, ecology, and so on). The requirement that error be handled according to this Marxist method is pre-eminently of concern to Communists. They know that unless they master the underlying causes of error (whether in the international Communist movement or in the line and functioning of their Party), such errors will persist: that is to say, they will manifest themselves without end, in one form or another. No, it is not ‘always the same ones’ who criticize errors; but left uncriticized, *the same causes* do always produce and reproduce the same errors.

It is necessary to affirm this Marxist requirement, because the leadership has already made its preparations. It will speak of errors and even give some examples on its own initiative to Party militants—as a token of its spirit of independence. But these will always be tactical and localized errors, never affecting the correctness of the line. Those militants who are forewarned will certainly follow with interest this method of verbal concession, in which words are exchanged for hot air.

Organization: a Machine for Dominating

That they should understand the political line, and that they should understand how the Party functions: these are the twin demands being formulated by numerous militants—not only by intellectuals, but just as strongly by worker-militants in the big factories. We can safely assume that the militants were not privy to the secrets of the gods. This goes back a long way. For the 1972 agreement was negotiated and signed ‘at the top’; and the Union of the Left, far from being a policy of popular unity, remained throughout simply one of unity between political formations, controlled each by its respective leadership. After the Twenty-Second Congress, moreover, once things became serious, militants began to have the impression that the Congress was being put in cold storage: that all its promises of democracy and freedom were being sacrificed to the leadership’s pragmatism and authoritarianism. And during the last few

months, that impression was reinforced to a frightening degree. *Nothing was moving any longer from the base to the summit: everything came from above.*

If at least there had been some coherence and clarity in messages from the Political Bureau or Central Committee and in Marchais's televised exhortations! But no: they ceaselessly promised a Left victory, even though the slogans altered or became quite incomprehensible. For example, what on earth could have been the meaning of that pathetic and derisory cry—'Help us!'—which was bannered right across the front page of *l'Humanité* on 23 September? What to make of a cry for help when we know not to whom it is addressed, who is in distress, and exactly what has happened to that somebody? Maybe the leadership thought it was launching a 'mobilizing' call; but at the base, people looked at one another in silence.

Unexplained Turns

As for the key slogans, they fell from on high one after the other: the hour of the great parachute-drops had come. But when the militants opened the containers, they could not believe their eyes or their memories: they were quite simply being asked to abandon objectives with which they had been led into battle for years, and to replace them by their diametrical opposites! Thus, falling from the skies came the news of the dizzying about-face on the nuclear strike-force; the reversal of policy on Europe; the reduction of the wage-spread to a scale from one to five; and the introduction into Party doctrine of the 'despicable' notion of self-management.

From one day to the next, without being either consulted or forewarned, militants who had been in combat for years found themselves being surprised from the rear by their own leadership! If the leadership thought it could get away with this by revealing that 'specialists' (i.e. high-ranking officers) had been 'working' on the nuclear strike-force 'for two years', this is only because it has not the slightest inkling of the militants' view of 'specialists' whose exploits in the division of labour and the field of exploitation are already directly known to them. The rank and file were faced with ready-made decisions: made by sovereign decree. These questions which preoccupied party militants could have been debated at the Twenty-Second Congress. But no, they were dealt with from on high, by the grace of the State, in an authoritarian manner, without consulting the base, outside the congress. Being of a generous and trusting nature, the militants can forget a lot of things. But when they are treated like pawns, only to be led to defeat in a battle to which they have devoted body and soul—well, then they want to know what is going on.

After all, it is they who had to bear the burden of the campaign: its 180-degree turns, the mysteries of the line, its somersaults and fits and starts. It is they who, working in the factories, neighbourhoods and villages, had to explain incomprehensible decisions that often turned upside down everything that was previously certain. Not only were they placed in the quite impossible situation of having to defend the nuclear strike force, the EEC, the 1-5 wage-spread, etc.; they were thrown into further traps when (again from above) a campaign 'for the poor' was launched, to the

inevitable accompaniment of the slogan: 'Make the rich pay!' For the working class (and this goes even for the three million immigrants and other workers paid the official minimum) does not spontaneously recognize its state as 'poverty'—a notion coming from the nineteenth century or earlier, with its overtones of philanthropy and relief. One of the conquests of the workers' movement has precisely been to bring workers to think of themselves not as 'the poor' but as exploited productive workers.

Has the leadership ever anticipated the question: *Who are the rich?* How great an income or how much wealth must a person have to be rich? These are important questions, especially since it has been stated in the past (e.g. at the Twenty-Second Congress) that all but 600,000 of the French population, rich and poor, are victims of the monopolies. How could you expect the militants to find their bearings in this improvised scenario, *which suddenly brought the poor into the foreground without defining the rich?* It scared the middle wage-earners for no purpose, without the most underprivileged wage-earners really feeling concerned by this spectacular initiative. And to add to the confusion of Party militants, what were they to make of the celebrated formula: '25 per cent would be good, but 21 per cent is not enough'. What was that supposed to be? A slogan: for whom? A prophecy? A veiled form of blackmail? Or just a day-dream? No one could make head or tail of it.

It is the militants who dealt directly with the working people, and who really 'felt their pulse': not on the stage, at the kind of giant rally where Georges Marchais can be sure in advance of the impact he will have, but at work, in everyday life, seeing their problems, difficulties, hopes and anxieties. It is the militants who can testify to the deep and moving trust which the workers placed, not so much in the over-long, excessively technical and astonishingly cold Common Programme, *as in the existence of the Union of the Left*. This trust had deep roots in a historical memory which encompasses not only the fraternity of the Popular Front, but all the crushed working-class revolutions in the history of France, going right back to 1848 and to the Paris Commune; the great historical struggles that followed the First World War; and the immense social hopes that accompanied the Resistance.

This time, after a century and a half of defeats and painful advances bringing no genuine liberation, the hope was there and victory was at last assured, at arm's reach. Is it really understood what this means: *the possibility or near-certainty that, for the first time in history, an age-old tradition would be broken and victory secured?* Tenaciously and stubbornly, rooted in the revolt against exploitation and daily oppression, this confidence in unity as the pledge of victory was maintained despite the breakdown of the Union. It is hard to grasp the magnitude of the historical intelligence and political maturity underlying this confidence, which had to surmount the workers' stupor at the brutal character of the break, even though no one seems to have worried about the demobilizing and demoralizing effect which the latter could not ultimately fail to provoke.

It was these same militants who were able to observe that, however well-founded it may have been, the campaign against the SP did not go down

well, at least in its current form, except with sectarians, but deeply offended and discouraged all people of good will. They could have testified that, once the Party's first wind was exhausted, cell meetings were becoming smaller and smaller and the Party's activity going into decline. In the end, its policy came to focus entirely on a massive recruitment drive and on Georges Marchais's television 'spectaculars'. (The whole of France watched these, admiring his talent; but the bourgeois State, which is shrewder than many people think, knew what it was doing when it gave Marchais priority on national and regional channels.)

Who will believe that all these are just details? It is obvious that there are close links between *on the one hand* Georges Marchais's tv monopoly, the parachuted slogans that completely reversed the Party's fighting positions, the settling of issues by leadership 'specialists' or advisers rather than by the militants or a congress, the authoritarian treatment and indeed manipulation of Party members, and *on the other hand* the secrecy that still surrounds the nature and motivation of the change of strategy.

The Tradition of Secrecy

The leadership found itself obliged to reveal two of its secrets: Georges Marchais's report to the June 1972 Central Committee following the signature of the Common Programme, and the range of possible concessions to be made to the SP after 22 September (disclosed in the Fiterman report).² It resigned itself to making these known, because it needed to give a semblance of continuity to its positions and to prove that it had not changed its strategy. But it only let out what it wished: everything else still remains secret. It can safely be wagered that unless the militants intervene to alter these practices, the leadership will keep silent on the essential questions. Of course, it will give the well-known traditional explanations for the election results: we will get studies of political patterns, demography, population shifts, electoral sociology, and skilful balancing of gains and losses. But will it go beyond superficial analysis of election results to the heart of the matter: namely, *political analysis of its change in line and of its disquisition of that change?* As the leadership is today, that is virtually unthinkable.

Silence on the key questions is unfortunately an organic part of the leadership's habits, which are rooted in the whole Stalinist tradition surviving within the Party apparatus. Despite the inadequacies and contradictions of the Twenty-Second Congress, it did arouse the great hope that an end would be made to this autocratic tradition. But things had to be toned down. Freedom of discussion at the base had already been achieved before the Twenty-Second Congress, which did nothing to change the leadership's practices. The apparatus had already made the discovery—as old as the bourgeois world itself—that it could offer itself the luxury of allowing the militants to discuss freely in their cells without being punished or expelled, since in any case such discussion had no practical consequences: 'It gives them so much pleasure and costs us so

² 22 September 1977 was the date of the open rupture between the partners in the Union of the Left.

little', as a marchioness generous with her charms says in one of Chamfort's works. In fact, the secret discussions and decisions of real import always take place above regional level, in the Political Bureau and Secretariat; or rather, in a small group not recognized by the statutes that comprises the Secretariat, a part of the Political Bureau, and some Central Committee 'experts' or collaborators. That is where the real decisions are made. Afterwards, the Political Bureau makes them known and the Central Committee ratifies them to a man, because it is—or thinks it is—in the confidence, or at least the proximity, of truth and power.

Many militants say that '*things can't go on like this*', and that it is necessary to denounce and change from top to bottom the way in which the '*machine*' that is the Party actually functions. They say this not only for themselves and their freedom as militants (that is, for the Party, which is its militants), but for the mass of the workers of France, who cannot be victorious in the class struggle without the CP, but who cannot win with *this* Communist Party as it is today. These same militants do not want the Party to be 'a party like the rest'. They know all too well what 'the rest' are like—those oligarchic bourgeois parties in which complete domination is exercised by a caste of professionals, experts and intellectuals clearly linked to the higher state administration. These militants think that what is needed is a revolutionary party basing itself on the class struggle of the exploited. They think that such a party needs a leadership and responsible officials. They think that democratic centralism can and should be preserved, on condition that deep changes are made to its rules and still more to its practice—not only to constitutional rights, but to that which decides the fate of every right, namely, the political life and practice of the Party.

We should beware of a certain temptation now that we have come to the heart of the matter: the Party. In order to understand the way in which the Party functions, we are here obliged to uncover the mechanism *for itself*, and thus to abstract from the Party's peculiar place in the history of the class struggles of the people of France and in that of the international Communist movement. In fact, the mechanism that we shall now outline rests upon a *specific history*: the history of the forms of bourgeois and working-class struggle peculiar to France. It is this which has made the Party what it is today, marking it with characteristic features and assigning it a clearly defined place in French society. Bearing these points in mind, then, we must answer the question: what is the Party?

The Model of the Bourgeois State

I have used the word 'machine' on purpose, because it is the term by which Marx and Lenin referred to the State. Indeed, everyone can observe an astonishing fact: although the Party is evidently not a State in the true sense, it is exactly as if its structure and mode of functioning were closely modelled at once on the bourgeois State apparatus and military apparatus.

Here we come to the parliamentary aspect of the Party. At one extreme lie the mass of militants, who can discuss freely in their cells and branches. This is the 'sovereign people'. . . only its sovereignty stops dead at the level of the regional secretariats, run by full-timers. That is where the break

comes; after that, the apparatus takes precedence over the rank and file. This is where things start to become serious (for the leadership). If the popular will of the base finds expression in elections, it is in the most reactionary forms (a three-round majority vote for congresses), and under the close watch of 'nominations committees' which, although recognized by the statutes for the election of 'officials', have been illegally extended to the election of congress delegates.

These elections produce the hierarchy of officials: members of branch committees and bureaux, the regional committee, the Central Committee and, at the top, the Political Bureau and its Secretariat. Elected by hand-picked regional delegates, the Central Committee is supposed to be the sovereign Party body—its legislature and its executive. In reality, however, this sovereign body serves to ratify and put into practice leadership decisions, rather than to propose anything new. No one has ever heard of the Central Committee taking the slightest initiative. It is more the leadership's executive than its legislative body: it is a kind of *general assembly of prefects* whom the leadership sends all over France to 'follow' (i.e. keep close control of) the regions, to appoint regional secretaries, and to settle delicate matters. Moreover, the leadership bases itself not only on the members of the Central Committee, but also on the formidable, and often hidden, power of its diverse functionaries: those unknown full-timers and Central Committee advisers, never elected but recruited through co-optation on the basis of competence or clientelism, and specialists of every kind.

This then is the military aspect of the Party. But all that has just been said would be incomplete if we did not also mention the basic and absolute principle of *vertical partitioning*. Reminiscent of the forms of military hierarchy, this partitioning has a dual effect. On the one hand, it encloses every rank-and-file militant in a narrow column ascending from his cell through the branch to the regional and Central committees. This 'upward-moving traffic' is dominated by full-time officials, who carefully filter the rank-and-file contribution in the light of decisions made at the top. On the other hand, unless he is delegated to branch or regional conferences, the rank-and-filer has no contact with militants from other cells, each of which belongs to a different ascending column. Any attempt to establish a 'horizontal relationship' is still today held to be 'factional activity'.

One might really believe oneself to be in a military formation, whose operational efficiency involves not only strict obedience and secrecy, but rigid partitioning of combat units. There is nothing defamatory in this comparison. It recalls the period when the Party had to resort to military forms of organization and security in order to defend itself and conduct activity (Lenin's underground party, the clandestine character of the Party during the Resistance, and so on). But just as conditions then justified partitioning measures, so do present-day conditions render them defunct, anachronistic and sterilizing—not only for the militants but for the masses, and even for the leaders themselves.

In so combining the military model of partitioning with the model of parliamentary democracy, the Party cannot but reproduce and strengthen

the bourgeois mode of politics. From the parliamentary model it derives a well-known advantage: just as the bourgeoisie succeeds in having its forms of political domination reproduced by free 'citizens', so does the Party leadership have its forms of domination reproduced by the militants. From the military model it derives, among other things, the not insignificant advantage of being able to disguise co-optation of officials as their election. The combination of the two allows reproduction not only of the leadership's political domination, *but of the very leadership corps itself.* The narrow range of reproduction makes the leaders practically irremovable, however great their failures or, on occasion, their political bankruptcy. (One thinks here of the line of 'legalization' at any price operated in autumn 1940.)³ In such conditions, the 'play' of Party democracy leads, as it does in the bourgeois State, to the miracle of transubstantiation. The popular will changes into ruling-class power; and in the same way, the will of the Party rank and file changes into the power of the leadership.

Has anyone given thought to the fact that there is another side to this reproduction mechanism, whereby the leadership stays fixed through all strategic and tactical reversals and errors? I am referring to the *membership-drain*: the constant haemorrhage of militants and their replacement by 'new generations' who have not experienced the battles of the previous five, ten or twenty years and who are, in turn, launched into the fray with 'theories', slogans or promises, only to be 'burned up' in a few years? Why is the number of ex-Communists greater than the current Party membership, even according to official figures? Why have so many existing members given up activity? Why is it that whole generations of militants, battle-tested in the Resistance, the Cold War, Vietnam, Algeria, 1968 and so on, are now absent from the Party's activities or from positions of responsibility? The Party, that miniature 'state apparatus', has found a solution to the famous problem mentioned by Brecht after the bloody riots in East Berlin: 'Has the people lost the trust of the leaders? Another one will have to be elected—that's all!' From time to time, through its periodic recruitment drives, the Party leadership 'elects' a new 'people'—that is, another rank and file, other militants. But the leadership itself remains in place.

The Pact of Unanimity

In order to assert its legal claim to self-reproduction, the leadership recently dug up the imposing moral theme of *collective leadership*. This has allowed it, for several years now, to do without the periodic purges of old (the 'affairs' involving Marty-Tillon, Lecoeur, Servin-Casanova, and so on).⁴ Collective leadership is fondly represented as the antithesis of 'the personality cult'. But what is the truth of the matter? The theme of collective leadership actually covers over a pact among the leaders—a pact which separates them as a body from the membership and helps to

³ In the autumn of 1940, after the Franco-German armistice concluded in June and the establishment of Marshal Pétain's quisling Vichy régime, the policy of the PCF was to seek the legalization of its existence in Vichy France—hence to have no truck either with armed resistance to the Nazis or with De Gaulle's Free French movement launched in October 1940.

⁴ These occurred in 1952, 1954 and 1961 respectively.

perpetuate their power. The leaders are thus held together by the 'solidarity' of power. In plain language, nothing that takes place in the Political Bureau and Secretariat (or rather in the tiny leading group) will ever be made known to the militants unless that group so decides. In plain language, you can never detect any nuance of formulation distinguishing one leader from another—a situation for long unthinkable in Italy. Differences and disagreements are settled according to the law of absolute discretion: and it is understood beforehand that anyone 'in a minority' will carry out the policy of the others without betraying any reticence in public. (Georges Marchais has sometimes given the impression of speaking against his inner convictions.)

In this way, the end of all objective personal responsibility, the end of recognized contradictions, and the concerted silence of the leadership are *presented as the very perfection of leadership unity*. Such vaunting of collective leadership is an avowal that Power and Truth are exclusively held by those few 'men in the shadows' whom television viewers could see creeping mockingly and silently behind Georges Marchais on the evening of the first round. *Mockingly*, because they *knew* what was going to happen. *Silently*, because silence sets the seal on the collective leadership pact, and because you do not have to speak when you hold power and knowledge. Silence really is the barrier between men: between, on the one side, those who treat men with silence because they have the power and the knowledge; and on the other side, those who are left in silence so that they may acquire neither knowledge nor power. These 'men in the shadows' were so identified with their function that they did not even have the foreboding that the hallucinatory stage-production might not only frighten some people but offend the tact, dignity and sense of freedom of the workers. No one will dare believe that this 'scene', this 'scene-setting' was just an accident: it was a spectacular symptom that revealed the degree of insensibility and cynicism with which the leadership now manipulates its militants and the working people.

This machine for dominating, controlling and manipulating the Party militants is nowhere exhibited better than in *the type of militant* which it quite literally *produces* as its specific and indispensable effect. I am thinking of the *life-long full-timer* who, riveted to the Party by an iron law, has to show unconditional obedience in return for his daily bread. The full-timer (who is often recruited straight from the Party youth or student organization) cannot give up this means of livelihood, because he has either never had a trade or has fallen out of practice. And most of the time, he does not even come into any real contact with the masses, since he is too busy controlling them. A fine consolation (and mystification), to write on one's voting slip: 'labourer', 'postman' or 'metalworker', when one has in fact exchanged the condition of worker twenty or thirty years ago for that of functionary-intellectual, with a greater or lesser degree of 'responsibility'! The situation is thus in most cases highly fraught. In the lower echelons, where the compensations of higher power do not exist, it can only be lived and borne by making at all costs a sublimated rationality out of the Party's irrationality—the full-timer being well placed to observe the latter phenomenon at close quarters. But he can do this only on condition that he keeps quiet or resigns himself to a position without hope. To be loyal and submissive, out of conformism or necessity, that

is—unless he is an out-and-out fanatic—all the freedom left to the full-timer: none.

Ideology: a Caricature

Since we have talked in terms of a 'machine' and a State, we must also speak of ideology. For there has to be an ideology with which to 'cement' (Gramsci) the unity of the Party.

On the one hand, this ideology is based upon the militants' moving trust in their leaders, as those who embody the unity and will of the party inheriting the national and international revolutionary tradition. And behind that trust there generally lies a class bond, which finds expression among the workers in the ending of isolation; in the warmth and fraternity of a common experience in struggle that is quite unlike their common experience of exploitation; in pride that the Party exists as a conquest of working-class struggles; in the consciousness that it is led by workers like themselves; in the assurance provided by this class leadership, and so on. But there are also aberrant forms of this trust: forms which abstract from all history and involve entirely uncritical acceptance on the part of the militants, or even the expectation that the leadership will do their thinking for them. That kind of self-renunciation produces the category of blind sectarians, who end up having only a single reflex: to throw all their passion and devotion into serving the leadership and defending it on every point—'The Party (i.e. the leadership) is always right'. Such blindly trusting members are naturally suitable for all the thankless tasks, but also for all the responsibilities. The leadership makes abundant use of them, rewarding them for their submissiveness and, in practice, encouraging the most narrow-minded conservatism.

On the other hand and conjointly, this trust is exploited by an ideology that is skilfully formulated and modelled by the leadership and its functionaries. This ideology has as its function to identify Party unity with the leadership and the line which it adopts. Contrary to what may be thought, there is nothing spontaneous in this. It is the ideology itself that conforms to and justifies Party policy.

We have now come to a crucial point in the explanation of what is happening in the Party. In Marxist theory and tradition, neither Party unity nor the Party as such is an end in itself. The Party is the provisional organization of working-class struggle: it exists only to serve this class struggle, and its unity is required only to serve action. That is why we cannot remain content with the idea that the ideology of the Party serves to 'cement' its unity: such a conception tells us nothing about the nature of the ideology or about the function of unity. If a party is withered and hardened, its unity may yet remain intact; but it will then be formal and unreal, and the party itself will be literally 'cemented' by a withered and hardened ideology. If, however, a party is alive, its unity will be contradictory; and the party will be united by a living ideology which, while it is bound to be contradictory, is yet open and fertile. Now, what is it that gives life to a party? *Its living relationship to the masses*: to their battles, discoveries and problems in a class struggle traversed by two

major trends of which one points towards superexploitation, the other towards the liberation of the exploited.

We can see at once that the question of Party ideology is a particularly complex problem. For it involves not only the confidence of the militants, not only the (more or less formal) unity of the Party, but above all the entire relationship between Party and masses. This relationship assumes a dual form: the form of the Party's political practice, its style of leadership and activity in organizing and orienting the mass struggle; and the form of *Party theory*, which is indispensable if we are to reflect upon the experiences of political practice and situate them in the perspective of the contradictory tendencies of the class struggle. Party ideology is thus like a condensate of the Party's condition and unity, and of its relationship to the masses and to theory.

The Era of Official Platitudes

Do we still have to recall the lamentable state of Marxist theory in the French Party? It is not only that the Party has inherited the old French working-class tradition, which did not want to hear of theory. But after the meritorious theoretical efforts of Maurice Thorez in the pre-war period, the Party geared itself for years of Stalinist hard labour and even added its own contribution to the age of official platitudes. Marxist theory became an international State dogma or a kind of evolutionist positivism, while dialectical materialism became the 'science of sciences'. Marxist theory, which was barely alive within the Party, has never recovered from this voluntary servitude. And just as everything that is officially produced in the USSR merely serves to stifle Marxist theory, so in France all those who have been employed for twenty years in tinkering around with Soviet productions have helped to finish off what was left of Marxist theory. It is enough to read the programmes of Party schools: apart from a few original ideas, which are due to their authors' courage in thinking and investigating by themselves, Marxist theory has reached zero-point in the Party. It has disappeared.

There is no reason for us to think that the leadership is concerned about this. The world-wide crisis of Marxism leaves it as cold as did the world economic crisis during the years of the Common Programme. It is even indifferent to the form taken by the crisis in France: namely the disappearance of Marxist theory within the Communist Party. The abandonment of Marxist theory certainly denotes theoretical blindness and thus political blindness (for theory is highly political). We have just seen the truth of this in the few years leading up to 13 March. But do you think that the leadership will make the link?

The leadership will get over it easily enough. For the Party has its own 'theory': the so-called 'theory' of CME,⁵ which is simply the French version of the Soviet theory of state monopoly capitalism adorned with some Boccarian⁶ considerations on the over-accumulation/devalorization of capital. So great is its (theoretical) scope that it has appeared in print

⁵ *Capitalisme monopoliste d'État*.

⁶ Paul Boccara is a Central Committee member and one of the editors of *Économie et Politique*.

under the title *Manual of Political Economy*—an eloquent title indeed, given that it was this discipline which Marx subjected to his ‘critique’. It may be very little appreciated, or even openly disdained, by such large fraternal parties as the PCI. But never mind; at least it is *our* theory. The proof is that it was manufactured to the order of *our* leadership by *our* economic department ‘attached to the Central Committee’—although, of course, the department was first purged of all those who did not agree. A theory made to order! Why not, after all? Many great musical works were commissioned in that way! What is more, not everything in the *Manual* is without interest. But as a whole, this colossal work was apologetic in character: it had to prove a conclusion which already existed in political form before its ‘economic’ demonstration. CME, then, was intended as a sort of theoretical warranty backing up the anti-monopoly policy of the Common Programme.

The two major conclusions of this work are fairly well known: 1. We have entered a new phase, the ‘ante-chamber of socialism’, in which monopolist concentration penetrates the State and forms together with it ‘a single mechanism’; 2. France is dominated by ‘a handful of monopolists’ and their assistants. The political conclusions to be drawn from these propositions are clear: 1. The ante-chamber of socialism and the ‘single mechanism’ of monopolies/State *change the question of the State*; the State tends to assume a form that will render it capable of being directly utilized by people’s power; there is no longer any question, then, of ‘destroying’ the State; and already on the horizon appears the ‘abandonment’ of the dictatorship of the proletariat. 2. If the State is nearly ready, the forces are also there nearly ready to occupy it; for facing the ‘handful of monopolists’, *the whole of France* stands as the victim of the monopolies; apart from a tiny clique (later extended to 600,000 ‘big bourgeois’), the entire French people has *an objective interest* in suppressing the monopolies.

This notion of *objective interest* is itself a minor theoretico-political wonder—such as even d’Holbach and Helvetius were not so bold as to conceive, well versed though they were in the theory of interest. For what distinguishes objective interest from its realization? *Nothing but consciousness*. As retarded Marxists, we thought that such realization might depend on something like the class struggle. But no, it depends on consciousness alone. Well then, all that need be done is to awaken it! As everyone has known since Kautsky, consciousness *comes from outside*. It certainly does not come from within. So it will be awakened from outside by propaganda, the press and the mass-media: ‘You have an *objective interest* in struggling against the handful of monopolists who exploit you: *only become conscious of this*, and you will act accordingly!’ There is no reason to doubt the success of the project. Or would you cast doubt on the omnipotence of objective interest, and the omnipotence of ideas in relation to consciousness? What a vulgar materialist you are!

Nor is this all that is involved in the fate of Marxist theory within the Party. For whoever talks of the abandonment of Marxist theory must also be talking about the abandonment of concrete analysis. This assertion may seem curious to those who construct an *abstract* idea of Marxist theory and, for that very reason, readily counterpose it to the idea of

concrete analysis. However, for Marx and Lenin ('The living soul of Marxism is concrete analysis of a concrete situation'), *they are one and the same thing*. All that differs is the scale of the object. Now, the whole Marxist tradition is stamped with the demand for concrete analysis. And this demand corresponds to a political necessity. The concrete analysis of all the elements involved in the complex class relations or effects of a given situation means at once *discovery* of the real (which always contains surprises, 'something new') and *determination* of the line to be followed in order that the goals of struggle may be attained.

But this infinitely valuable practice also has disappeared from the Party. Before the war, Maurice Thorez still had the courage to present concrete analyses of class relations in France. Since the war, that tradition has gradually been lost. There was nothing about class relations in France at the Twentieth, Twenty-First or Twenty-Second Congresses. We can understand why: the leadership had 'its' CME theory; and since it considered the theory to be true, it used it as an advance-substitute for concrete analysis. If you wanted to make it 'concrete', you had only to *apply* it from above to anything that moves. Here too, the Party revived an old Stalinist tradition of dogmatic/speculative interpretation of Marxism: concrete truth is when you *apply* theory; theory is therefore the truth of truths, and in the end, concrete analysis becomes superfluous since it is only the truth applied. This schema of concrete truth as the 'application' of a higher truth had already wrought havoc in the Second International. The havoc reappeared under Stalin and did not leave the French Party untouched. Conceiving concrete analysis as the *application* of theory leads—unless one is diverted—into complete political dead-ends, which are still more serious than the effects of manufacturing a 'theory' to order.

The Buffer

Our national history provides us with an edifying illustration: that of the 'buffer'. A few years ago, a regional secretary used this astonishing word to refer to the fact that the Party's vote had not increased at recent by-elections. This is a truly topical question, when we consider that, for a very long time now, the Party has been 'hovering' around 20–21 per cent of the vote: any further advance is . . . blocked. This time, it even treated itself to a reduction of 0.8 per cent in the level of its historical 'buffer'. But who has ever taken the term seriously and made an analysis of the facts? Who has ever tried to determine the real limits, or the economic, social and ideological class reasons for this standstill? In short, who has made a *concrete analysis of the class-political situation* of the French Party itself?

The leadership had its answer in the 'theory' of CME—which, as it happens, is completely silent on the point in question. It was enough that someone should *apply* the theory—as some in fact tried to do. But the leadership never posed the problem in terms of concrete analysis. For that would have been to discover quite a few unseemly realities—not least, the fact that the 'buffer' mainly lies not in the petty bourgeoisie (as many like to think) *but in the working class itself*. Only 33 per cent of the working class gave their votes to the Party: 30 per cent voted for the SP, 20 per cent for the Right, and the remainder took refuge in abstention or in fierce

rejection of all politics (the tradition of French anarcho-syndicalism). Quite an object-lesson, when one thinks of Georges Marchais's peremptory declaration of three years ago: 'The working class has achieved political unity'! (He was referring to . . . the Union of the Left.) Now, far from having been achieved, the political unity of the working class is still an objective lying in front of us.

We must remember that the working class is no more a whole than are other classes: it is neither one, nor homogeneous, nor miraculously free from internal contradictions. It certainly shares the exploitation which is suffered by all productive workers, and which marks it off from the exploited peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. But its working and living conditions are not everywhere the same, and its resistance to bourgeois hegemony varies with the concentration of production and the historical results of struggle. It is this which explains the diversity of political reactions and the uneven character of class consciousness. But the Party leadership has contempt for concrete analysis and for theory. It does not matter if this leads it into a dead-end, because it still keeps control over examination of the situation. We can be sure in advance of what it will say (apart from electoral sociology and so on) when it passes the election results through its 'fine tooth-comb': 'Not enough consciousness' among the militants and the workers; 'not enough effort to make our ideas understood'. Since the line is sacrosanct and determined by 'the objective interest' of the people of France, the only variables are consciousness and effort, are they not? In any case, *no concrete reality and no concrete analysis*.

Who would dare to say that the 'buffer' does not have something to do with the image of the inner-Party reality given by the leadership's practice, and with the visible effects produced by that reality? The leadership may imagine that the Twenty-Second Congress was a Fountain of Youth that washed away the bad memories of the past. But people have a long memory, and blackmailing talk about anti-communism no longer cuts any ice at all! Whether we like it or not, the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie clings to its mythical ideology of property and freedom in a world that is fast stripping them away. And when it sees the Communists with their freshly-painted promises about property and freedom, it certainly lets them speak, but does not therefore stop thinking. Talk away! It is all very well to be heir to the October Revolution, and to preserve the memory of Stalingrad. But what of the massacre and deportation of recalcitrant peasants baptized as kulaks? What of the crushing of the middle classes, the Gulag Archipelago, the repression that still goes on twenty-five years after Stalin's death? When the only guarantees offered are words that are *immediately contradicted* in the only possible field of verification, namely the internal practices of the Party, then it is clear that the 'buffer' also lies within the Party itself.

The Problem of Credibility

On this question, it must be said that the leadership is now breaking its own records. It imagines that the people are so stupid as to take the word of a leadership that talks loud and clear about change, democracy and freedom *in relation to a country which it does not govern and has never governed*. But in these conditions, what proof is there? Certainly not Georges

Marchais's hair-raising maxim: 'The French Communists have never laid a finger on the people's freedoms.' For everyone thought to himself: 'Too true, they've never had the chance!' Who can seriously think that the people's memory is so short that it has forgotten the contempt for freedom and truth with which the PCF leadership morally broke and crushed men under the weight of base accusations invented wholesale just to dishonour them? There were real 'Moscow trials' right here in France. The death sentences were missing, but you can also make a man die of dishonour, by torturing him with the charge of being a 'police-agent', 'crook' or 'traitor'; by forcing all his old comrades-in-arms to condemn, shun and calumniate him, renouncing their own past. That happened in France, between 1948 and 1965. The Communist Party was not in power, and did not 'lay a finger on the people's freedoms'. Doubtless that is why it does nothing to recall, regret or repair those abominations for which its leadership alone was responsible.

It is understandable that the leadership should not be partial to concrete analyses. For while they are exacting and bear fruit, they do not forgive. And since they bring theory into play, it is understandable that the leadership should not be partial to theory. When it is alive, theory too is exacting and bears fruit; but it too does not forgive.

We have to go into all these questions in order to form an idea of the Party's ideology. Rooted in the militants' trust and in its exploitation by the leadership, resting on an arbitrary 'theory' tailor-made to serve a pre-established political line, scorning real theory and concrete analysis of the concrete situation, this ideology is reduced in practice to the following caricatural function: to 'cement' Party unity at any price around a leadership which holds not only the power to order men, but the power to order truth, according to a 'line' fixed by itself alone.

Ideology, 'theory' and analysis are thus reduced to the level of instruments for manipulating the militants—for convincing them to take up 'freely' a line of practice fixed outside themselves. The pragmatism of this method conflicts with what is most precious in the Marxist tradition: namely, the fertile requirement that theory and living analysis should extend the ideology of Party militants to the origins and perspectives of the struggle in which they are engaged. What is at stake beneath all these questions of theory, analysis and ideology is, in the last analysis, *the Party's relationship to the masses as expressed in its political practice.*

The Solution: Leave the Fortress

All we need is a little historical awareness in order to see that the forms of political practice are as varied as the classes in power or fighting for power. Each of these rules or struggles according to the practice which best corresponds to the constraints of its own battle and its own interests. Thus, drawing on the history and theorists of the bourgeoisie, we may state that the latter's characteristic political practice consists in *getting others to ensure its domination.* That is already true of Machiavelli, even though Gramsci did not see it; and it is also true of all the bourgeois revolutions that followed, whether they were of an active or 'passive' character. The bourgeoisie knew how to accomplish its revolution

through its allies or through those whom it itself exploited—plebeians, peasants and proletarians. It always knew how to let their forces break loose and then wait for them at the crossroads of power, ready to drown them in blood or put them down peacefully and thus confiscate the fruits of its own victory and their defeat.

In opposition to the bourgeois practice of politics, the Marxist tradition has always defended the thesis that the proletariat has to 'liberate itself'. It can count on no class and no liberator other than itself; it can rely only on the strength of its organization. It has no other choice, no exploited mass whom it can manipulate. Moreover, since it is compelled to forge lasting alliances, the proletariat cannot treat its allies *as others*—as forces at its mercy who can be dominated as it sees fit. It must treat them *as true equals*, whose historical personality has to be respected. However, the proletariat is aware of the potentially very serious danger that it will fall into the ideological trap of bourgeois political practice: that it will either surrender to class collaboration and objectively place itself at the service of the bourgeoisie (e.g. social democracy), or *reproduce* within itself, under the illusion of remaining independent, the bourgeois practice of politics. Of course, the two forms may go hand in hand.

What is meant by reproducing bourgeois political practice within the proletariat? It is to treat Party militants and the masses *as others*, through whom the leadership has its policies put into operation in the purest bourgeois style. All that is required to give 'free play' to the whole internal Party mechanism, which spontaneously reproduces the separation of leadership and militants, Party and masses. The leadership then makes use of this separation for its own style of politics: its political practice tends to reproduce bourgeois political practice, insofar as it serves to *separate* the leadership from the militants, the Party from the masses.

Everything from Above

It was with these points in mind that we made our repeated observations on the content and 'realization' of the 1972 line. Everything was done from above, with no attempt to close the gap separating off the membership, and *a fortiori* with no concern for the masses themselves. Of course, as in bourgeois practice, manipulation of the militants and the masses through grand leadership manoeuvres was coupled with contempt for theory and the most vulgar pragmatism. In fact, contempt for the militants and the masses always goes hand in hand with contempt for theory and concrete analysis, and thus with their opposites: authoritarianism and a pragmatist attitude to truth (true is that which works). Everything that has happened since 1972, and above all since September 1977, has done no more than confirm a classical thesis: when a workers' party tends to abandon the principles of class independence in its political practice, it spontaneously and necessarily tends to reproduce bourgeois political practice within itself. We know the results: a little 'buffer', of derisory numerical significance. But a whole world was concentrated in the 1 or 2 per cent of votes which the Left failed to win!

How should we interpret the fact that, in keeping with Stalinist tradition,

theory is the 'property' of the party leaders (anyone who disagrees immediately learns the price he has to pay); and that this 'property' in theory and Truth conceals other 'properties': the militants and the masses themselves? It is a reality that should be understood not in individual terms but in terms of a system. The style of individuals changes: the Stalinism of our leaders has become 'humanist' and may, in some cases, even be 'open'. But it is not that which counts. The important thing is that this whole tendency towards bourgeois political practice within the Party is *the result of a system that operates by itself*, independently of the individuals who find their place within it. It forces these individuals to be what they are: *parties to the system* and *parties caught in the system*. When it is said that the Party functions through authority, from above, this authority should not be understood as a kind of personal passion to be found in a particular leader. It is located *within the apparatus machine*, which, secreting the practices and the consequences of authority at every level of 'responsibility', automatically produces secrecy, suspicion, mistrust and trickery.

Finally, moreover, we have to look behind this apparatus machine, at the gulf imposed between leaders and militants, between the Party and the popular masses. We cannot, therefore, deal only with the Party or even just with the features of its political practice. We must speak of the Party's political relation to the broad masses, and thus of its political line. We must discuss the question that is decisive for this political line: the question of alliances.

A party and a line are indispensable in helping the working class to organize as a class—or, which comes to the same thing, to organize its class struggle. Now, just as the party should not be cultivated for its own sake, so the working class should not be organized for its own sake or it will fall into isolation. The working class proper exists within broad masses of exploited and oppressed workers, of which it is the section best able to organize itself and show the way to all the exploited. The Marxist tradition considers that broad mass action is the determining force, and that working-class action should be conceived as a function of this determination. It is from the broad masses that come the historical initiatives of revolutionary scope: the invention of the Commune, the 1936 factory occupations, the popular conquest of Committees of Liberation during the 1944–5 period, the enormous surprise of May 1968, and so on. *A party is judged above all by its capacity to pay attention to the needs and initiatives of the popular masses.*

The Party once knew how to take a stand on the decisive question of a close relationship with the masses. That is indeed a peculiar tendency of its history. But there is also an opposite tendency which is constantly being strengthened: namely, a reflex of rejection when faced with anything not controlled by the apparatus—with new forms that might unsettle fixed certainties and the established order. Thus, in May 1968, the Party deliberately cut itself off from the student and petty-bourgeois masses *because it did not have control over them!* This instinctive fear of anything not under the control of its 'theory' or its apparatus has the general consequence that, when the Party does move into action, it is always a good few trains late. Even so, it carries in its briefcase *in advance*

the truth about what is going to happen, whereas its first task should be to open its ears to the masses. Marx said: 'Consciousness always lags behind.' And so the Party leadership imperturbably applies the letter of this principle, not suspecting the irony of the matter: *it is sure of being conscious because it lags behind.*

Clearly, if a party is linked to the masses through living, attentive and open relations, then its line can be broad and flexible at the same time as being correct; and if, on the contrary, those relations are ones of distrust, deafness and lagging behind, then the line will be authoritarian and cramped, even though it may be correct in the abstract. We may judge how things stand by the central question of every revolutionary line, the question of alliances. Ever since the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, the entire Marxist tradition has defended the need for alliances. The working class cannot be victorious if it is alone: its struggle would then be a 'funeral-solo' (Marx).

Two Types of Alliance

But there are alliances and alliances. And on this point, two limiting conceptions stand opposed to each other. Either alliances are conceived in terms of a *contract* between political organizations which 'own' their voters; or else they are conceived in terms of a *combat* waged by the organized section of the working class in order to extend its influence. In the first case, it is a question of applying a juridical and electoralist conception: such was the contract 'at the top' that initiated the Union of the Left. But in the second case we are talking of a conception which, while respecting pluralism and perhaps involving a juridical contract 'at the top', directly engages the party in the mass struggle to extend its audience and capture broader positions—above all in the working class and petty bourgeoisie. In short, then, it is a question of primacy: either *primacy of contract* or *primacy of combat*.

No doubt the leadership declared that 'the Union is a combat'. But it is hard to see what content this formally correct slogan could have had, once the leadership had opposed the constitution of popular committees (contrary to the position it adopted in 1934–6 within the Popular Front perspective). In fact, the leadership substituted for *combat within the masses*—which would have given the Union a real basis—*combat between organizations*, under cover of remaining faithful to the Common Programme. It thereby managed to replace unitary electoralism ('right opportunism') with a sectarian electoralism, which sought to pass off one party's domination over another as the real hegemony or 'leading influence' of the working class within the popular movement. But this was still—more than ever—electoralism, and thus right opportunism. The leadership went so far as to launch a series of appeals to the masses, from the September dramatization ('Everything depends on you!', as Georges Marchais said at the *Fête de l'Humanité*) to the stupefying formula: 'Turn the first round into a gigantic "national petition" for an updated and improved Common Programme and for support for the Communists!'

From 1972 to 1977, nothing was done to arouse and develop initiatives at

the base or forms of unity between manual and intellectual workers. What is more, any suggestion of popular committees was rejected by invoking the risk of 'manipulation'. And then, after crushing their initiative for years on end, the leadership finally made an appeal to the masses. To avoid being 'manipulated', it ended up quite simply manipulating the masses. Just imagine: the masses were expected to respond to the party leadership's appeal *in extremis* by suddenly mobilizing their forces and transforming their civic vote into a 'petition' of support for the 'battle' being waged by the Party within the Union of the Left! Here we can see what happens when a conception of union through leadership *contract* is chosen, and when a desperate last-minute attempt is made to reverse the outcome by writing *combat into the contract*. Electoralism is not avoided but worsened; and confusion is only increased by an appeal for mobilization of the masses, when they were in the previous period carefully excluded from the struggle.

And yet, the policy of union could perfectly well have been a mass-struggle policy: one of *popular union*, combining a contract signed 'at the top' with a united struggle at the base, in which the Party could have extended its influence beyond the 'buffer'. In that event, *combat* would have been directly inscribed in the *contract* and priority given to united mass struggle. No longer treated as the manipulable object of a bourgeois practice, the masses would have been trusted to thwart any manoeuvres or manipulation; the conditions would have been created for a working-class and people's policy of *popular unity*.

Distrust of the Masses

The leadership's deep-rooted, tenacious and inveterate distrust of the masses prevented the Party from taking this liberating choice. Instead, it fell back upon a policy of contract, in which the Union was managed 'from the top'. Quite literally, the Party *had not wanted to bear* the slogan 'popular unity' which arose spontaneously from the huge workers' processions of 1973–5. Was this fear of risk, disguised as fear of adventure? Or was it, in the end, just straightforward routinism? It would be interesting to hear the reasons given by the leadership. But in any case, the leadership withdrew—and drew the Party—into the protective fortress of old habits. The Left was defeated, but the fortress stands as immovable as ever, whatever the colour of the sky.

All that has just been said must be completed and illuminated by a view of the Party *from the outside*. For the Party exists not just in its apparatus, its practice, its conceptions and its line, but also in *the outside world*, in the concrete French situation. And it must be said that it occupies a quite specific position there. It must be said that, owing to its distrust of the masses and its withdrawal into itself, the Party exists in French society like a garrison in a fortress, rather than 'a fish in water'. Now a fortress, of course, holds out and lasts; indeed, it is made for that. And the Party, of course, needs continuity. But if it is to be the continuity of a fortress, then one might as well read Vauban as Marx. Machiavelli said that he who builds and takes refuge in a fortress makes himself the prisoner of its walls: he is lost not only to war but also to politics.

The fortress may have had a reason for existing during the early years of

the Third International. At any rate, it is worth examining the point. But today, the Party should treat it not as a refuge, but as a mere base of operations. In fact, that is what it did in 1934–6, when its policy opened broadly to the masses in movement. ('We have no ministers, but we do have the Ministry of the Masses!'—Maurice Thorez.) The same was true during the period of the Resistance. For revolutionaries, *a fortress has no reason for existence unless they themselves go out to deploy their forces among the masses*. We must look things straight in the face: the March 1978 defeat is the defeat of a political line and practice which are one with the Party's fortress-like functioning and its refusal to go out and 'lose itself' (i.e. find itself again) in the masses.

To say that the Party appears as a fortress in French society no doubt strikes a strange chord. For in fact, what is involved is a *withdrawal*: withdrawal into a mere third of the working class, preventive withdrawal before the masses, and a withdrawal before events that reaches the point of a systematic lag. Yet the leadership finds a way to make a virtue out of necessity, by presenting this unmotivated withdrawal as a sign of strength, prudence and even political far-sightedness! Strange far-sightedness, that involves blinding oneself to the objective significance of the withdrawal—to the fact that it can only lead to an *isolation* of the Party in French society which, clearly, no rise in membership can suffice to break down. But when someone points out this isolation, which should be of the highest concern to the Party, the leadership immediately lays the blame on the bourgeoisie and its gut anti-communism. And since there are no perks, it sees this isolation simply as proof that the Party is not 'like the rest'.

It is right that the question of the Party and its transformation should be at the heart of the members' preoccupations. If the Party has to change, should it not become 'a party like the rest'? If it does not become a party 'like the rest', how can it possibly be transformed? This question refers precisely to the problem of ending the Party's isolation or, in the words of our metaphor, *leaving the fortress*. A grave opportunist danger here threatens the Party. For there are two ways of 'leaving the fortress': first, by standing still, liquidating the revolutionary tradition, and 'transforming' the Party from a party of *withdrawal*, as it is today, into a formally liberal one 'like the rest'; or second, by abandoning fortress-like withdrawal and resolutely involving the Party in the mass movement, extending its zone of influence through struggle, and finding in that mass-oriented struggle the real reasons for transforming the Party, by giving it the life that comes from the masses.

In this case, moreover, there can be no question of 'a party like the rest', borrowing its internal rules from the bourgeois parties. The Party has to *invent* these rules on the basis of its mass practice and its militants' experience and analyses, while retaining what is best in the historical experience of the revolutionary movement. I am not brandishing words, but speaking of facts. If only the militants were at last able to express themselves, we would be surprised at *the wealth of concrete proposals*, matured through reflection, which they already have in their heads. There is already enough strength, will and lucidity in the Party's working-class and popular base to change 'what can last no longer' and create novel

forms that will safeguard the Party's class independence and political autonomy, and satisfy its need for real freedom in reflection, discussion and action.

A word should be said about the question which is now agitating all the bourgeois propaganda against the Party: namely, *democratic centralism*. We can be sure that the militants will not fall into the bourgeois trap: they will defend the principle, not through fetishism of the statutes or attachment to the past for its own sake, but because they know that if a party is not to be 'like the rest', it needs rules different from the rest: rules which point to a degree of freedom incommensurate with—and much richer than—bourgeois rights. They also know that a living party will invent new forms of such freedom together with the masses, without taking advice from experts in bourgeois democracy—be they Communist or not.

Conditions for Change

For ourselves, we can now draw from the analysis a number of conclusions for future work and struggle. I shall present them in numerical order, but wish to imply *no priority and no subordination*. They all hang closely together, and we shall have to set to work in every field at once. At all costs, then, we need:

1. A Marxist theory brought back to life: one that is not hardened and deformed by consecrated formulae, but lucid, critical and rigorous. A Marxist theory rescued from its current crisis in the Communist movement by the practice of concrete analysis and the practice of popular struggle. A theory which will not dodge mass initiatives and social transformations, but which will, on the contrary, openly face them and impregnate and nourish itself with them.

2. A thorough critique and reform of the Party's internal organization and mode of functioning. The great debate started by the rank and file must involve the Party in concrete analysis of the existing rules of democratic centralism and their political consequences. It is not a question of giving up democratic centralism, but of renewing and transforming it in such a way that it will be placed at the service of a revolutionary mass party and maintain the Party's specificity and independence from the bourgeoisie.

3. A concrete analysis of the class situation in France. This will allow the Party to understand (in order to counter) the objectives, turns and manoeuvres of the bourgeois class struggle; to grasp the specific course of the division and contradictions within the working class, as well as in the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie; and lastly, to *know* the nature of the parties, especially the CP and SP, and their place in these class relations.

4. A policy of alliance of all working-class and popular forces, combining agreements at the top with the developing struggle of the Party at the base. *A line of popular union* (free of reformism or sectarianism) for active mobilization of the masses and unfettered development of their initiative.

I have here given only the general principles. But provided these conditions are fulfilled, it is possible for the Party to change. It will be able to leave behind all the equivocations and constrictions inherited from the past; to redeem its errors and failures; and to assist the rallying of the popular masses for their long-awaited victory.

Translated by Patrick Camiller