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COMPROMISE, PARTY MANAGEMENT AND FAIR SHARES

The Case of the French UDF

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ABSTRACT

The French UDF has failed in its attempt to become a party capable of dominating the right at the expense of the Gaullist RPR. It is best regarded as an underdeveloped party which has difficulty in acting as a unitary organization. This failure is due to the exceptional historical and institutional context of its birth but also to the preference of its leaders for their existing organizations. To preserve these they have elaborated a sophisticated and measurable system of compromise between themselves and with the RPR which guarantees significant rewards. This underdeveloped status will probably continue indefinitely. In a wider context the UDF's failure sheds light on the difficulty of creating genuinely new partisan organizations.

KEY WORDS ■ elections ■ France ■ party management ■ restricted competition ■ UDF

The Union pour la Démocratie française (UDF) is puzzling to the student of parties. Standard accounts see it as a significant system party, created by the electoral mechanisms of the Fifth Republic (Wilson, 1982; Charlot, 1989). One recent analyst classifies it unproblematically as a 'centre-right party with strong roots in liberalism' (Ware, 1996: 49). But an early study warned that whatever its ambitions, the UDF was still only a federation of bourgeois parties plus a group of deputies (Seiler, 1980: 206).

Cole feels that it is 'best understood as a modern expression of the Orleanist tradition, modified to suit the Fifth Republic', but suggests that its internal diversity gives it 'the weakest claim to be a coherent political entity' (Cole, 1990: 106, 120). The former leader of the UDF parliamentary group, Gilles de Robien, wondered despairingly if it was more than 'a data bank

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at the beck and call of the other member of the majority (i.e. the Gaullist RPR)' (*Le Monde*, 12 September 1995).

Running through these anxieties is the question: what sort of political party is the UDF? Some might be tempted to deny it any claim to party status at all. If we take Sartori's definition of a party (any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections and is capable of placing through elections candidates for public office), then there is already one major problem (Sartori, 1976: 63). The UDF does elect many parliamentarians, mayors and councillors; but in the one election that dwarfs all others, the presidential poll, it has been unable to run a candidate of its own since the defeat of its founder, Giscard d'Estaing, in 1981. This incapacity relates to the UDF's very nature as a political formation, as it was formed from a number of separate parties. There is nothing remarkable about this process, and there are innumerable examples of successful fusions of several parties into one. The merger of the three Dutch confessional parties into the CDA in the late 1970s; that of the British Liberals and Social Democrats into the Liberal Democrats a decade later; even the creation of the French Socialist Party (PS) out of the old SFIO and a number of fragments in 1971, are all recent examples of successful fusions. But the parties that have emerged thus are usually considered unitary actors, with one set of structures and rules, one programme and one shared identity. Even if some may be subject to fissiparous pressures, the way in which they handle these invariably bears the marks of a unified party. Those who disagree with the majority line end by accepting it or by walking out; they do not linger on the inside, trying to keep their past identity within a larger whole.

In the two decades of the UDF's existence, however, there have been few signs of a capacity for unitary action. Although in its own terms the UDF claims to have moved from a confederation to a federation (UDF, 1996), its constituent parties still have their own names, premises and resources; they publish their own broadsheets and programmes. They have kept their own structures, with sovereign party conferences and the full paraphernalia of governing bodies. While they (mostly) elect their candidates under a UDF label, this label usually also carries the name of the original party (e.g. UDF–PR). Once elected, these parliamentarians may well form their own group in the National Assembly, distinct from the UDF (as the Christian Democrats did for 1988–93). In the European Parliament, UDF members do even better, dividing themselves among at least three different groups and reflecting the fact that their parties belong to different Internationals.

Nor have party differences within UDF been decreasing. There has been one mini-merger, with the ex-socialists of the PSD joining the Christian democrats of the CDS to form Force Démocrate (FD) (although curiously, UDF statutes still list the PSD as a separate organization!). But there has also been the recent creation of a whole new party, the Parti populaire pour la démocratie française (PPDF). Moreover, member parties change their names indiscriminately, as French parties tend generally to do. Thus in

addition to the above changes, the Republican Party (PR) is now known as DL – Démocratie libérale. Such casual nomenclature hardly lends an air of cohesion or unity to the UDF.

This diversity suggests that the old parties have retained considerable identities within the UDF umbrella into which they are ostensibly subsumed. It can be asked whether the UDF is more than a holding company. While Giscard's aim was to build up an organically united rival on the right to the Gaullists and to supplant or absorb the latter, that aim still shows little sign of being realized. Nevertheless, the UDF persists; it does well in elections and is rewarded with office (albeit, we will argue, as permanent junior partner to the RPR). Clearly then the UDF must perform some function, or else its component parties would have slipped back into total autonomy. If it were simply a question of making alliances at election time, then this could be done through the established mechanisms of the member parties without the cost of setting up a whole new UDF machinery. We need then to identify just what the UDF is.

Accepting the conventional view that it is a real party, one must admit that it is an unusual one. It is more than the sum of its variegated parts, but arguably not much more; at the same time it is less of a unitary actor than any typical member of the socialist, Christian democrat or even liberal families. Nor does it seem to be moving towards greater unity. Perhaps it should be viewed as a party in a phase of arrested development. To investigate this hypothesis, we conduct a brief historical overview of the movement before examining its structures and, crucially, its relationship to its partner/rival, the RPR.

Origins and Development of the UDF

The UDF was a pure fruit of political circumstance. As the 1978 parliamentary elections approached, President Giscard sought a political counterweight to the Gaullist party within his own parliamentary majority (Giscard d'Estaing, 1976). His position reflected the peculiar circumstances of his own assumption of office; the presidential election of May 1974 had come 2 years early owing to the death of Georges Pompidou. By then the Gaullist movement, which had provided all the presidents of the Fifth Republic and was much the biggest force in a comfortable parliamentary majority, was clearly dominant within French politics. De Gaulle's charismatic leadership was, under Pompidou, on the way to being routinized. But Pompidou's sudden death caught Gaullism by surprise, with no successor to run as president. Chaban-Delmas was not credible against the fast reviving left, a fact quickly realized by a contingent of Gaullist deputies ('the 43') who followed Jacques Chirac and declared publicly for Giscard, damaging Chaban beyond repair. In this way the long-term strategy of finance minister Giscard, whose smallish Independent Republican Party had always acted

as junior coalition ally to the Gaullists, finally paid off; he was able to impose himself as the right's candidate and win the major prize. He won it, however, in abnormal circumstances, profiting from an unexpected opportunity (Pompidou's death) and a leadership vacuum in the RPR, then engaged in a switch of elites from the wartime generation of 'barons' to the new type of modernizer typified by Chirac. These circumstances are recalled at length because they determined the origins of the UDF and its subsequent development. They are like a birthmark on the body of the movement.

Giscard had to assemble a force to counterbalance (or surpass) the mass Gaullist party which had given (or loaned) him his ticket to the Elysée but which soon began to use its parliamentary might to limit his power to shape policy. Once Chirac had quit as premier in 1976 and set up the RPR as a presidential vehicle, Gaullist deputies began to chip away at government bills until a fatally weakened Giscard lost in 1981 (Portelli, 1987: 149–89). Giscard's own party, relaunched as the PR in 1977, was insufficient; but he could now add to it the Christian democrats of the CDS (the continuation of the major post-war party MRP), who had rallied to him in 1974 (Dreyfus, 1988; Letamendia, 1995). These two pillars were reinforced by a few Radicals from the old secularist party of previous Republics and a handful of socialists, upset by the rapprochement of the new PS with the Communists, huddling under the umbrella of the Parti social démocrate (PSD, previously known as the MSDF). Better known for its publications than its numbers, was the political club Perspectives et Réalités, made up of networks of sympathizers and offering a Giscardian version of the various clubs and think-tanks which had helped the new PS into being through the late 1960s. Finally, there was the possibility for new members to join the UDF directly, bypassing one of the member parties; the UDF is coy with information as to how many availed themselves of this route. All these forces were thrown together into a dramatic new creation. Clearly it could not claim to be a structured mass party like Chirac's revamped RPR; but equally the confederation, as it called itself, aspired to be more than a collection of fragments. Cole (1990: 108) saw it as 'the basis for the emergence of a great centre-right party that would fulfil the rôle of the dominant presidential party'.

The initial gambit was at best a half-success. The UDF could never bring the right under Giscardian leadership. The RPR hung on well in the 1978 elections and has ensured the survival of a competitive alternative on the right, usually coming out rather stronger than its challenger. The UDF survived the defeat of Giscard in 1981 but failed to develop much organic unity in opposition and was unable to prevent Chirac from assuming the mantle of opposition leader. This was, perversely, despite its winning a major ideological battle; during this time its theses of economic liberalism, privatization and deregulation (essentially stemming from the PR) became the standard fare of the centre-right, affecting not just the 'social catholic' thought of the CDS but being cannibalized opportunistically by the RPR as

well (Baudoin, 1984). After the right's win in 1986, Chirac was an unavoidable choice for the *cohabitation* premiership of 1986–8 and became presidential front-runner against Mitterrand. Significantly the UDF was unable to run an authentic candidate of its own in 1988, eventually backing Giscard's ex-premier Raymond Barre, known for his contempt of all parties. Giscard himself withdrew late in the day and younger leaders, like Méhaignerie of the CDS or Léotard of the PR, were too aware of their limited power base and in any case thinking more of the 1995 contest.

The second period of opposition (1988–93) thus put severe strains on the cohesion of the UDF. Mitterrand's clever but vague talk of *ouverture* (enlarging the presidential majority) and his appointment of Michel Rocard as premier (the socialist closest to Christian democrat ideas of the social market economy) led to talk of the CDS leaving the UDF and allying with the PS in a throwback to the coalitions of the maligned Fourth Republic. There was little chance of this, if only for electoral reasons (Elgie, 1994); but some individuals did defect, and the CDS not only formed its own parliamentary group, the Union du Centre, but ran its own list in the 1989 election to the European Parliament. Despite making such concessions to their rank and file, however, CDS leaders remained wedded to the UDF option (Hanley, 1991).

The long expected defeat of the Socialists in 1993 saw the UDF return to power, again very much as a second string to the RPR. Balladur rewarded the confederation above the odds in terms of its vote, hoping for reciprocal support in his 1995 presidential bid. This he duly received, as again the UDF backed an outsider. But Balladur's mistakes proved no match for Chirac's energetic campaign, as he pulled off a famous victory. Chirac rewarded the UDF relatively well despite its treason, and it remained content to play second fiddle. During this time the CDS absorbed the PSD to become Force Démocrate, while foreign minister Hervé de Charette gathered together Perspectives et Réalités and a few individuals to form yet another party, the phantom PPDF, effectively a refuge for UDF politicians who had, like himself, been wise enough to back Chirac in 1995. The right's catastrophic defeat in the 1997 election plunged the UDF into another crisis, however. Back in opposition and having failed even to challenge for the Elysée, it could no longer avoid hard questions: what sort of party is it that apparently can only be what French discourse unkindly calls '*une roue de secours*' (a spare wheel)?

Unity and Diversity within the UDF

We analyse here the UDF's structures so as to establish how far it can be understood as a unitary actor. Its self-description has little doubt about this. Article 2 of the UDF statutes describes it as 'a federation of political parties and groups' (UDF, 1996). The logic of a federation is that the central organs

and other levels within the federation are all allotted clear powers and duties, with corresponding resources. Any parties joining the UDF are accordingly expected to delegate exclusively to it the drafting of electoral manifestos, negotiations with other parties and investiture of candidates, including a presidential candidate. The UDF is also supposed to have disciplinary powers in electoral matters. These provisions apply to all grades of election from local to presidential. Since 1997 there also exists a single membership list covering all members of constituent parties as well as *adhérents directs*. The centre then has a number of apparently significant electoral powers over the periphery and should in theory be capable of unitary action.

As regards the functioning of the UDF's central organs, the aspiration is towards a strong executive, with considerable power in the hands of a president now elected by the membership, especially in disciplinary matters. One notable feature is the presence at departmental and regional levels of a presidentially appointed delegate, who monitors committees at those levels. This function is clearly inspired by the model of the prefect before the decentralization reforms of the 1980s and suggests that Jacobin reflexes are far from dead within the liberal right. The president must however work with a hierarchy of committees typical of French parties, especially the monthly *bureau politique*. It alone can speak for the UDF as a whole (mainly through the president). It drafts programmes and has the last word on disciplinary matters, even over the notionally neutral arbitration commission. Clearly it is the body where most of the UDF's real politics are played out, and it is worth noting its composition (UDF, 1996: art. 9). Thirty members are elected by the national council on a PR basis, the council itself being mainly elected by the membership at large. In addition to these elected members of the BP, there are numerous ex officio members, including the president, secretary general, former presidents, speakers of the houses of parliament (if UDF), leaders of the parliamentary parties and representatives from the European Parliament. Chairmen of the association of regional and departmental councils and the French mayors' association, as well as the leading UDF personality from the Committee of European Regions, may also attend.

This complicated, meandering structure has two purposes. One is to guarantee suitable weight to the constituent parties (hence the PR elements). The other is to reinforce the weight of *notables,* usually multiple office-holders (*cumulards*) on whom UDF fortunes in provincial France depend heavily. A president then finds himself with what seems a strong set of powers in relation to elections (which are after all a party's main business); but equally, he must exercise these under the close supervision of the leaders of constituent parties. Compromise or even stalemate seem more likely outcomes than decisive unitary action.

For whatever the UDF does, its constituent parties remain strong. Each has kept its own structures (more or less the standard hierarchy in French parties, reflecting the territorial divisions of the country). Each has its own

resources, discussions about the sharing of which are still proceeding.[1] Each produces its own programmes and maintains separate membership lists, even though the names are passed on to the UDF. It could even be said that each has its own electorate, in that geographically at least some areas still turn out a recognizably Christian democrat vote or a right-republican vote (Bon and Cheylan, 1988), even if in sociological terms there is now precious little difference between the member parties' clienteles, or even between UDF and RPR voters as a whole (Ysmal, 1989; Backmann and Birenbaum, 1993; Chiche and Dupoirier, 1993; Bréchon et al., 1995). We could add to this the oft-cited historical and ideological differences between the member parties, except that existing literature labours this point heavily, harping on the historical differences between social catholics, anti-clerical republicans and liberals (Rémond 1982; Cole, 1990). These differences have long since given way to more political and electoral considerations; but they are still something to fall back on for politicians looking to differentiate themselves slightly.

All in all, the centrifugal tendencies within the federation are huge. In our view, even the electoral powers of the centre are more apparent than real. A centralized membership list is useful, but it does not stop people from joining, being socialized by and developing loyalty to a constituent party. A single programme for an electoral coalition looks good to voters; but if the political will is there, even the most unlikely political bedfellows can produce such a text. The UDF has for every poll since 1978 produced a text signed not by its own members alone but also by the RPR. Even the much vaunted unitary designation of candidates is a brokered process, conducted essentially in a committee of representatives from the member parties and chaired thus far by Jean-Claude Gaudin, a past master at compromise negotiation, as befits a mayor of Marseille. We will shortly present figures to show that rigorous and identifiable rules have evolved over the years to govern the allocation of candidacies and winnable seats. Thus while the UDF might assume charge of the allocation and try to enforce it once it has been agreed, the way in which it is agreed is defined by the member parties at the periphery, not by the UDF at the centre. It is probably also true that when a member party locally disagrees with a UDF decision, then it will use various means to oppose it, including backing in a fairly open way a dissident. In short, the powers of the centre seem increasingly threadbare.

The evidence to date suggests much tension between the unitary aspirations of the centre and the desire of the periphery for autonomy. Clearly brokerage between sub-party barons must be at a premium; accordingly, we might expect to find evidence of this at the level of political outcomes or rewards. In particular, it would be interesting to see if political compromises struck among sub-parties could be measured in terms of 'fair shares'. Our empirical evidence suggests that this is the case, not only among the sub-parties of the UDF but between the UDF as a whole and the RPR.

Prizes for Coming Second? Party Competition in Restricted Markets within the French Right

The most obvious test of collusion is to examine performance in legislative elections over the past 2 decades. By their very nature, such contests are more susceptible to influence by national leaderships than competitions for municipal or departmental councils, though it is our conviction that local case studies would reveal further patterns of subtle complicity in line with what in our view occurs at national level. Clearly such work is beyond the scope of the present study. Electoral competition was investigated under three headings: the selection of candidates, the outcome of this process (viz. the deputies elected) and the shares in any government formed by the partners.

French legislative elections offer parties a tactical choice, by virtue of there being two rounds; only candidates taking over 50 percent of the vote in the first round are deemed elected, and only then provided that this score represents over 25 percent of the electorate (a condition not always fulfilled) (Cole and Campbell, 1989; Frears, 1991). Typically, less than a tenth of seats are decided thus. To make the second ballot, a candidate must garner 12.5 percent of the registered voters (of whom about three-quarters turn out on average). This often means that one left candidate might face two from the right in a contest which effectively becomes first-past-the-post. (With the decline of the communists in recent years, the reverse scenario rarely obtains.) Clearly it makes sense for one of those parties in close proximity to stand down in favour of the other, giving it a better chance of victory. This practice of *désistement,* or *discipline républicaine* as it is called on the left, was of course common currency for many years before the Fifth Republic; it has been given an extra impulse lately by the ability of the Front National (FN) to make the second ballot in many cases. Here the moderate right dare not allow itself the luxury of a double candidacy.

All this is common knowledge, but what is less frequently appreciated is what follows from the above. If proximate parties can agree on a single candidacy on the *first* ballot, their chances are maximized even more. Voters' attention is focused on the sole real choice (assuming that not too many are put off by the withdrawal of their traditional champion), and the possibility of winning more seats at the first round increases. If *désistement* is one way of restricting competition, then first-ballot agreements are, potentially, an even better one. The main problem is to strike an agreement among the competitors that suits everyone. National leaderships are in the best position to do this, being able to trade off seats across *départements* (the main locus of electoral business in France) or even regionally. A disappointed candidate can be talked or bullied into withdrawing in the name of party interest across France as a whole and perhaps be promised some other seat or gratification in the future. Our results suggest that the RPR/UDF leaderships have progressively developed this type of electoral compromise since 1978, and that clear underlying patterns can be seen beneath their agreements.

Typically the right will publish a joint manifesto a few weeks before the election; Raymond Barre's Blois programme of January 1978 began this tradition (*Le Monde,* 1978: 24–7). At the same time, UDF and RPR leaders conduct a series of meetings in which constituencies are examined one by one and, so far as possible, awarded to either of the parties; sometimes an independent right-winger belonging to neither group (such as Jean Royer, long-time deputy and mayor of Tours) will be left unchallenged, reflecting the continuing power of local *notables* in France. Theoretically, incumbents are not supposed to be challenged; but ambitious young politicians will seek ways around this by putting up ageist arguments or by finding evidence to show that their camp is really ahead in the constituency, in manoeuvres reminiscent of Labour and Liberal Democrats in British 'target seats'.

In some cases it will prove impossible to agree on a single candidate, so a contest will ensue; it is left to the voters to decide who carries the right's flag into the second round. In such contests, polemics are to be eschewed in the first round; the losing candidate is expected to withdraw automatically and campaign actively for his more fortunate rival/partner (*Le Monde*, 1978, 1981). Local federations (the departmental level of party organization) or local constituency organizations do not always accept the verdict of Paris; so every campaign will contain a number of dissident candidacies (probably not exceeding 10 percent). Usually a dissident RPR will stand against an agreed UDF, or vice versa; but more spectacularly, it can be one (or more) internal UDF dissidents against an agreed UDF candidate. Such lapses of discipline are not unknown in the notionally more disciplined RPR, where the occasional dissident takes on an agreed candidate. These cases reflect local rivalries as a rule, though it may sometimes suit Parisian leaderships to encourage dissidents in a semi-visible way against awkward *notables* who will not realize that their time is up. Occasionally dissidents pull off a coup by beating their own side and the left combined to take the seat; but this is rare. Generally, the management of competition by Paris has been assured to a high degree, and the types of exception listed above are sufficiently rare in our view to confirm the rule.

Table 1 lists the moderate right's candidacies since 1978. The usual caveats are in order, bearing in mind the chronic indiscipline of right-wing deputies (Anderson, 1974). Some non-party candidates may join a party on election, or be signed up by party leaderships desperate to get ahead of their rivals; so there is not always a perfect fit between membership of parliamentary groups and lists of successful candidates. The 1986 elections are omitted from this list because they were held, uniquely, on departmental PR. This meant that party leaderships effectively picked the deputies, not just the candidates, as it was they who made up the lists in rank order; the relevant figure here is, then, the number of deputies elected, to which we shall come shortly.

Bearing these caveats in mind, a number of trends emerge clearly from the figures. To begin with, the number of intra-right contests has sunk virtually

Table 1. Agreed single candidacies between UDF and RPR

Year	*Total candidates (seats to fill)*	*PR*	*Other Right Majority*	*Plain UDF*	*CDS/FD*	*PR*	*Radicals*	*MDS/ PSD*
1978	179[a]	98	34		14	32	1	
	(491)	(55.1)	(14.6)		(7.3)	(18)	(0.6)	
1981	375	199	20	14	45	83	10	4
	(491)	(53.1)	(5.3)	(3.7)	(12.9)	(22.1)	(2.7)	(1.1)
1986								
1988	567	287	19	48	77	112	16	9
	(577)	(50.6)	(3.4)	(8.5)	(13.6)	(19.8)	(2.8)	(1.6)
1993	501	252	23	25	63	114	14	10
	(577)	(50.3)	(4.6)	(5)	(12.6)	(22.8)	(2.8)	(2)
1997	571	295	15	33	80	100	23	[b]
	(577)	(51.6)	(2.6)	(5.8)	(14)	(17.5)	(4.0)	

[a] plus four agreed internal UDF contests.
[b] joined CDS to form FD.
Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages except in column 2.
Source: *Le Monde* (1978, 1981, 1988, 1993, 1997).

to nil; 20 years ago, well over half the seats were contested. Intriguingly, whereas 1988 and 1997 saw almost no contests, 1993 saw 76. This is explicable by the electoral context. In both 1988 and 1997 the right knew that the national result would be very narrow either way, whereas in 1993 everyone knew that there would be a walkover for the right. In this case, it could allow itself the luxury of extra internal competition[2]. This proves not only that the right's leaders can manage electoral competition within constitutional parameters but that these parameters can be relaxed or tightened according to leaders' judgements of the electoral context.

Between RPR and UDF as a whole it is clear, historically, that there is almost an equal share-out of agreed single candidacies, with the RPR usually taking slightly over 50 percent[3]. Within the UDF itself similar ceilings can be observed, with the CDS/FD usually taking around one-seventh and the PR around one-fifth of the pool; it is remarkable how stable these proportions seem over time. The smaller elements of the UDF are invariably reduced to penny numbers; and most significant of all, the proportion of straight UDF candidates has never been higher than one-twelfth, usually struggling to reach 5 percent. Many straight UDF candidates have stood in previous elections with a sub-party label and have since quarrelled with that party; hence they take up the neutral UDF label, a fact again freely admitted by officials.[4] Here is one vivid proof of the UDF's inability to affirm its existence separately from that of its members.

Another angle on the collusive relationship of the UDF and RPR is

provided by looking at the conversion rate of candidacies agreed into seats won. It was decided to take only the last three elections (1988 to 1997) for this purpose (Table 2), as previous polls had had much higher numbers of intra-right contests, which distort the final picture. Context is all-important again, as the 1993 figures clearly reflect the massive swing to the right across France; this means that nearly every protagonist has a conversion rate of candidacies into seats of over 90 percent. Figures from the other contests suggest however that a more normal strike rate is 40–50 percent.

Taking the 1988 and 1997 polls, we see that both RPR and UDF fall into this range, maintaining the balance already observed as regards candidacies. More interesting patterns arise from within the UDF, however. Here it is clear that again the smaller brethren receive scant reward; but between the two major players, CDS/FD seems to have a growing edge over the PR. This probably reflects both the fact that CDS/FD can still call on the old MRP bases of provincial France and that Bayrou's enlargement strategy towards the secularist wing of the movement is paying off. The recent rise of the PPDF (almost all of whose deputies previously wore the colours of other formations) testifies mainly to M. de Charette's organizational energies and his desire to put down a marker for future internal arbitrations.

Analysis of the UDF parliamentary group in terms of its sub-parties also turns up some constants (Table 3). Plain UDF members usually make up about one-eighth, while historically the PR has had about a half. The CDS/FD has usually enjoyed around a third of the representation; but 1997 saw it push significantly ahead of a sharply reduced PR. This reversal of long-established proportions is likely to have severe repercussions. Generally, the UDF as a whole has trailed behind the RPR ever since the defeat of Giscard, with the exception of 1988, where the RPR promptly sought to make good its tiny shortfall by signing up *non-inscrits* (members sitting as independents).

The ultimate test of consistent collusion must be shares in government, rather than in the legislature. Clearly government is supposed to be a non-party matter, in that the prime minister is designated by a president endorsed by universal suffrage precisely so as to make him, as de Gaulle hoped, above party. Although this pious fiction has enabled previous presidents and premiers to pack non-party loyalists into government, it has not altered the unwritten rules of the game, so far as party shares within ruling coalitions are concerned. Table 4 gives a quantitative summary of the membership of right-wing governments since 1978; the prime minister is included, and all ranks from *ministre d'état* down to under-secretary for state are given equal weighting. This obviously ignores the real hierarchy within executives in terms of influencing decisions. It must also be observed that many of the non-party ministers were presidential loyalists and should in truth be counted to his party of origin (many of them do join a party after or during office). To that extent the table is a very rough guide; even so, it reveals some striking continuities.

Table 2. Conversion rates of agreed candidacies into seats

	1988			*1993*			*1997*		
	Candidacies[a]	*Deputies elected*	*Conversion rate*[b]	*Candidacies*[a]	*Deputies elected*	*Conversion rate*[b]	*Candidacies*[a]	*Deputies elected*	*Conversion rate*[b]
Non-party	19	13	68.4	23	36	100[c]	15	11	73.3
RPR	287	128	44.6	252	242	96.0	295	137	46.4
Total UDF	262	130	49.6	226	207	91.6	262	110	42.0
Plain UDF	48	17	35.4	25	26	100[c]	35	14	42.4
CDS/FD	77	49	63.6	63	57	90.5	81	46	57.5
PR	112	58	51.2	114	104	91.2	100	38	38.0
Radicals	16	3	18.8	14	13	92.9	23	3	13.0
MSD/PSD	9	3	33.3	10	7	70.0	PPDF 26[d]	9	34.6

[a] No. of agreed candidacies reserved for named party.
[b] Deputies as percentage of candidacies.
[c] The extra deputies are derived from the numerous winners of the 76 internal contests, including several dissidents.
[d] PSD joined CDS to form FD.
Source: *Le Monde* (as for Table 1).

Table 3. UDF deputies by party

Year	*Total UDF*		*Plain UDF*		*CDS/FD*		*PR*		*Radicals*		*MSD/PSD*	
1978	139	(100)	17	(12.2)	35	(21.1)	71	(51.1)	7	(5)	9	(6.5)
1981	62	(100)	8	(12.9)	20	(32.3)	32	(51.6)	2	(3.2)	–	
1986	129	(100)	20	(15.5)	41	(31.8)	61	(47.3)	6	(4.7)	1	(0.8)
1988	130	(100)	17	(13.1)	49	(37.7)	58	(44.6)	3	(2.3)	3	(2.3)
1993	207	(100)	26	(12.6)	57	(27.5)	104	(50.2)	13	(6.3)	7	(3.4)
1997	110	(100)	14 +9 PPDF	(12.7) (8.2)	46	(41.2)	38	(34.5)	3	(2.7)	merged with CDS	

Source: *Le Monde* (as for Table 1). Figures in parentheses are percentages.

Table 4. Party shares in government since 1978

Government	*Total ministers*		*RPR*		*Total UDF*		*CDS/FD*		*PR*		*Radicals*		*MSD/PSD*		*Plain UDF*		*Other right & non-party*	
Barre III (3.4.78–21.5.81)	48	(100)	13	(27.1)	27	(56.3)	7	(14.6)	4	(29.2)	2	(4.2)	–	–	4	(8.3)	8	(16.7)
Chirac (20.3.86–10.5.88)	45	(100)	22	(48.9)	20	(44.4)	8	(17.8)	6	(13.3)	3	(6.7)	1	(2.2)	2	(4.4)	3	(6.7)
Ballladur (28.3.93–18.5.95)	30	(100)	14	(46.7)	16	(53.3)	5	(16.7)	6	(20)	1	(3.3)	–	–	4	(13.3)	–	–
Juppé I (19.5.95–6.11.95)	43	(100)	21	(48.9)	18	(41.9)	7	(16.3)	8	(18.6)	1	(2.3)	–	–	2	(4.6)	4	(9.3)
Juppé II (7.11.95–2.6.97)	33	(100)	17	(51.5)	13	(39.4)	5	(15.2)	4	(12.1)	1	(3.0)	–	–	3	(9.1)	3	(9.1)

Source: *Le Monde* (as for Table 1). Figures in parentheses are percentages.

Inevitably the party of the president obtains just over half the seats, a symbolic measure that speaks volumes about where power really lies. Observers will note that Balladur, an RPR hierarch, went out of his way to promote the UDF and particularly the CDS above their due. This was thought to be an emergency measure to tie them into the coalition during a possibly difficult cohabitation. It later became clear that Balladur's presidential ambitions were the true reason; he was eventually endorsed by the UDF whom he had rewarded so generously, and had he won, the federation would doubtless have received some extra seats. The principle of fair shares still obtained.

Within the UDF, it can be noted that the CDS usually enjoys around 15 percent of the seats, which is some way above the level of the residual Christian democrat vote in France (probably 10 percent at best); such is the price it can extract for its support. The PR has varied more, declining from the Giscardian heights of the 1970s, and now seems to be behind its partner. There are always a few scraps for the small parties, fuelling accusations that they are merely 'submarines' of president or premier.

This quantitative examination of the RPR–UDF relationship and of the internal dynamics of the UDF suggests a number of points. First, there is a distinct structural balance in favour of the RPR; it usually ends up with the lion's share of candidates, deputies and latterly ministers. Within the UDF there is a clear pecking order; the direct members and the small parties know their place at the bottom and are grateful for the crumbs thrown to them in terms of opportunities, seats and the odd portfolio. Even bare survival as part of a team is better than obliteration on one's own. Among the other protagonists, however, the tables seem to be turning, as the CDS–FD inches ahead of its Republican rival and Bayrou's enlargement strategy begins to outflank Léotard.

Such is the underside of the UDF. We can now establish what sort of party the UDF is and how it might evolve.

The UDF: An Under-developed Party?

We have borrowed from the language of development theory to describe the UDF thus. Sartori (1976: 72) is prepared to admit that 'a party may even be, when observed from the inside, a loose confederation of subparties'. The question is: how loose? When the looseness reaches the extent described here, some would wonder if we can still speak of a party at all. Clearly the UDF does not possess some of the key attributes of a normal party. We have cited its inability to run a candidate in the most important election of all (in the last two presidentials, the UDF has supported men from outside its ranks but on their terms, not its). This failing is a mere symptom of its inability to perform as a unitary actor, or to put it differently, to be more than the sum of its parts. This unitary capacity must in the last analysis be what differentiates party from mere faction.

Yet something beyond these parts exists; the parts have set up an organization with resources and a defined role (albeit heavily limited in practice). The UDF has assumed a public identity, if only in negative terms: people know that it is the part of the right which is not Chiraquian or Gaullist. If the UDF were simply an electoral cartel, then presumably its electoral business could be done by inter-party committee as polling day approached; the holding company could be shut down, the attractive building near the Champ de Mars sold and the staff paid off. Clearly the parties that compose it still have an aspiration for it to be something more than a permanent electoral committee. But despite regular talk of strengthening the federation and going beyond petty disputes (usually associated with the arrival of a new leader), the real situation has hardly evolved since 1978. Stuck between the smallish parties which make it up and the hypothetical superparty which would mean the end of these latter, the UDF remains in a limbo of underdevelopment.

This situation might be seen as transitory or untenable; logically, the UDF ought either to develop towards full party status or else fragment back into its separate parts. Even in a country with the reputation for allowing the temporary to become permanent, 20 years is a long time. Unfortunately for those who like tidy political solutions, we believe that the UDF's status as an under-developed party can continue almost indefinitely.

There are several reasons why no further concession of sovereignty by the member parties is likely. First is the weight of *notable* domination throughout the parties. These are not mass parties in a real sense.[5] The parties' lifeblood is office – local and national. Their mayors and councillors are far more important than the modest number of activists, who are very often *notables'* personal followers as much as party loyalists.[6] As decentralization increases the opportunities for political action, the weight of *notables* will increase rather than decrease; moves afoot to curtail multiple office-holding will take a long time to have an effect, if they are not circumvented on the ground. Membership of national UDF bodies reflects *notable* domination, as we remarked; and it is the same elites who run their own parties that sit on UDF instances. For them there is no incentive to change.

A second factor is the mutual suspicion with which some parts of the UDF regard each other, essentially the PR and the FD. Republicans still think that at heart the FD leadership is nostalgic for the old Third Force days, even if they concede that the new generation under Bayrou is less preoccupied with this particular demon and more aware of the electoral constraints than its predecessors.[7] Perhaps this is simply a clash between two different ideological traditions, but suspicion remains.

Important also is the strong culture of individualism that characterizes the French right (Anderson, 1974). Large parties. with their structures and disciplines, do not suit the temperament of men such as Léotard or Madelin; they are used to working with small handpicked teams of loyalists, often with a civil service background and at any rate well versed in the machinery of

state. They are insiders who think in terms of taking over apparatuses, whether of party or state, by dint of high-class organization and adroit use of the media rather than by the long slog of normal party activity. A small party can be taken over easily and used for media purposes; it can be the beginning of a presidential bid. It is not felt necessary to have a large machine that can mobilize en masse. (Whether this feeling still persists after Chirac's against-the-odds defeat of Balladur in 1995 thanks to his possession of the RPR will be interesting to see.) Such men feel that they are superior in quality to the RPR and that the latter has perhaps to make up for this by more organization. All these cultural or attitudinal factors play a role in the disinclination to convert the UDF into a true party.

For these reasons it is hardly surprising that the actual direct members, who might be expected to push for moves towards full party status, are so lacking in influence. Already there are very few of them – probably a tenth of the total membership of the UDF and all constituent parties at best. Even deputies elected under a straight UDF banner are often refugees from member parties; they are often signed up in the new Assembly by one of these, as happened to the PPDF deputies after the 1997 election. In short, new activists and deputies are targeted by the member parties in a way that is bound to weaken any UDF identity.

On the other hand, a return to autonomy by member parties is just as unlikely. The very existence of the UDF institutionalizes the permanent compromise that has to go on among the member parties and between them and the RPR. We have suggested that the compromise results in very precise shares and guarantees generous second prizes for the UDF as a whole. It would be harder and more acrimonious to carry on these deals outside a framework that all have come to know; in particular it would be hard for the divided UDF parties to face up individually to the RPR for negotiations in which, according to a joke current in the UDF, the RPR starts from the position that 'what's mine is mine and what's yours is negotiable'. Familiarity has also become a factor. As well as politicians being used to working within this framework, the public has some identification with the UDF. It would be a rash move to abandon this advantage and expect voters to switch their identification to sub-parties which keep changing their names.

The UDF seems condemned then to soldier on as an under-developed party. But it has to be asked if there is anything that could alter this scenario. We can imagine only one circumstance in which the move to full party status might be attempted. This is a victory by a UDF presidential candidate. Elected on the second ballot with half his votes coming from RPR voters and over half of the deputies in his majority probably RPR as well, such a hypothetical president would be in the situation of Giscard in 1974. If he had learned from the mistakes of his predecessor, he would want to avoid the dependency on the RPR which sealed Giscard's fate. The only way to do this would be to build up a serious presidential party, rather as Pompidou did for de Gaulle after 1958 (Charlot, 1967). If the UDF were really

promoted from within the state, making full use of the huge resources and patronage that the presidency confers, then it might persuade the existing member parties to throw in their lot with the new venture, as well as prising off a number of RPR deputies and *notables* from that organization. All would depend on the energy and timing of the move, particularly the preparation of the dissolution of the National Assembly which would test the success of the gambit.

It is obvious that this is a far-fetched, though not an impossible, scenario. Neither Jacques Chirac nor Lionel Jospin are likely to be an automatic choice as president in 2002. Chirac in particular will face fierce competition from inside the RPR in the person of Séguin. It is true that the potential champions of the UDF look unpromising. Léotard has been around too long and remains dogged by scandal; Bayrou is an able party politician but has yet to acquire national status. Alain Madelin may yet have the capacity to surprise people, if he can persuade the French that his brand of tough liberalism with a nationalist tinge should be tried. The competition at this stage seems open, and the UDF must have a chance. If its hour strikes, it will be thanks to circumstances as exceptional in their way as those of 1974, viz. a loss of ascendancy by the dominant right-wing party, though in this case it would not be due to sudden death but to the political ineptitude of the Chirac clan.

There is a lesson here about party change that goes beyond the mere UDF. It is a truism to say that it is hard to break or modify established party structures; the phenomenon of persistence is well known (Mair, 1997: 76–90). The failure of the UDF to forge a fully developed party out of its ingredients is a proof of this, as is the failure of Gaullism to wither away long after the conditions that summoned it into being (decolonization and the collapse of the Fourth Republic, the need for state-led economic expansion and an independent foreign policy) have disappeared. For a genuinely new force to come into being, it seems that exceptional outside circumstances are required, as well as the capacity among elites to recognize these circumstances and to react in consequence. Gaullism did this after 1958. The UDF was given the circumstances but perhaps did not have the elites nor the time; it remains to be seen if, given a second chance, the elites will act more positively. Only if they do will the UDF escape from under-development and become *un parti comme les autres*.

Notes

My thanks to David Broughton and the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments.

1 Interview with FD official, June 1997.
2 Interview with UDF official, June 1997.
3 For details of a typical campaign agreement see Backmann and Birenbaum (1993).

4 Interview with UDF official, June 1997.
5 UDF officials suggested that total UDF membership might be 100,000 of which 8–10,000 might be direct members. The CDS for its part claimed 52,650 members in 1994 (*La Croix*, 25 November 1995). These are probably generous estimates.
6 Patriat (1995: 290) shows that the right holds 20 regions (7 RPR and 13 UDF) and 75 *départements* (28 RPR, 43 UDF and 4 other right). This is a clear illustration of *notable* strength compared with parliamentary inferiority vis-a-vis the RPR.
7 Interview with PR official, June 1997. From 1947 to 1958 the Christian democrats were regular coalition partners of socialists, as well as Radicals and conservatives. Less visibly at municipal level, many major towns (Marseille, Nancy, Nantes) were run by similar partnerships until 1977, when the growing socialist/communist alliance made such arrangements untenable.

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