

Who Loves the PS?

The Electoral Paradox of the French Socialist Party

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SOCIALIST PARTY (PARTI SOCIALISTE, PS)	
Official website:	www.parti-socialiste.fr
Party leader:	Martine Aubry
Founded:	In 1905 as the French Section of the Workers' International; in 1969 replaced by the Parti Socialiste.
SI and PES membership:	SI: since 1951; PES since 1992
Party membership:	2009: 203,000 (The figure has been relatively stable, varying between 150,000 and 200,000 members for the past 10 years.)
Electoral resonance parliamentary elections:	<p>2007: general election: 42.25 % of the votes; 186 seats out of 577, in opposition; presidential elections: 46.94% of the votes; defeat of Ségolène Royal in the second round</p> <p>2002: general elections: 35.26 % of the votes; 140 seats out of 577; in opposition; presidential election: 16.18 % of the votes; defeat of Lionel Jospin in the first round</p> <p>1997: general election: 44.2 % of the votes; 255 seats out of 577; in government</p>
Electoral resonance European elections:	<p>2009: 16.48 %; 14 out of 72 French seats; PS list</p> <p>2004: 28.9 %; 31 out of 78 French seats; PS list</p> <p>1999: 21.95 %; 22 out of 87 French seats; PS/PRG/MDC list</p>
Government participation:	<p>Since 2002: in opposition</p> <p>1997–2002: in government led by the Socialist Party; head of government: Lionel Jospin as prime minister, with a coalition of left-wing parties («Plural Left»)</p>

The Socialist Party now stands, in common with its European social democratic counterparts, at a historic crossroads. While the fundamental doctrines of democratic socialism – regulation of the market economy, a strongly redistributive social state, and the promise of the emancipation of the individual – are vindicated every day by the ongoing crisis of legitimacy afflicting deregulated capitalism and liberal orthodoxy, the political forces which claim to represent these doctrines are failing to get elected practically everywhere. The parties of the right, conservative and liberal, which have fought against social democratic ideas for decades, are winning election after election throughout Europe. The historical »model« of social democracy no longer appears capable of providing, as was the case 60 years ago, the best economic and social solution – the famous »compromise« – for liberal democracies. The French Socialist Party seems to be particularly hard hit by all this, and indeed for the past 10 years or so. National power – president of the Republic and parliamentary majority – has eluded it since 2002, even though it has managed to become the number one party in France in terms of number of representatives and the »collectivités territoriales« that it runs (regions, »departments,« »communes«).

The presidential election and the general elections that will take place in 2012 already appear to represent a major challenge for the Socialist Party: a return to power and the opportunity to offer the country a new direction to get out of the crisis and build a new model of development and growth. The next two years will be devoted to this objective of 2012, but this short period of time cannot be devoted exclusively to planning an election victory which French socialists have awaited for so long. These two years must also be a period of profound reform of the party, both of its aims and of its workings, in order to ensure, once victory has been attained, the durability of its power and the long-term embedding of Socialist Party politics, and of the French left along with it.

In order to bring this about, the Socialist Party should deal with a number of key questions concerning the narrowness of its »sociological« base, its relations to the institution of the Fifth Republic (especially the presidentialization of French politics), the contents of its policy plans for the country, and perhaps the alliance strategy that it plans to adopt. It should also conduct a profound reflection on the reasons for the malaise which is affecting it and which has left it languishing in opposition at the national level for such a long time. In particular, the Socialist Party should rethink its relationship to the construction of Europe, which to

date has largely rested on a confusion between the requirements of a certain deconstruction of national sovereignty needed for the realization of the European project and an attachment to principles – such as solidarity – which refer to a national dimension which is often neglected at present.

After a brief historical recap of the century-old Socialist Party, we shall draw up an inventory of how the Party stands today, and then try to explain why it lost power and has been unable to regain it for 10 years, before outlining the Party's prospects in 2012 and addressing the question of Europe.

Brief History of the French Socialist Party (1905–2002)

The French Socialist Party («Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière» or SFIO) was created in 1905 through the coming together of various organizations and personalities in the socialist movement under the leadership of Jean Jaurès. However, the latter was unable to establish the party on a reformist basis because the presence of orthodox Marxists – behind Jules Guesde in particular – was indispensable for party unity. The split between the socialists (the minority) and the communists (the majority) took place in 1920 with the establishment of the French Communist Party (PCF). It was only when the Popular Front («Front populaire») was formed, uniting the whole of the left – and in particular with the general election victory in 1936 with Léon Blum as prime minister – that the socialists and communists formed an alliance to counter the fascist threat. After World War II, the PCF became the leading party on the left and overshadowed the SFIO in elections, but it was the socialists who participated in a number of governments during the Fourth Republic, in particular the one led by the leader of the Socialist Party during this period, Guy Mollet, in 1956 and which would be caught up in the turmoil of the Algerian War.

Opposed to the establishment of the Fifth Republic (1958), the SFIO, then the Parti Socialiste (PS – refounded under this name in 1969) was to remain out of government at national level until François Mitterrand's victory in 1981. Mitterrand became party leader when he joined it in 1971 (Epinay congress) and reorganized it with a view to winning the presidency on a radical left-wing platform (the «Joint Program» – «programme commun» – based on «planning, nationalization and worker

management«) and allied with the PCF, with which from then on he was on an equal footing, before coming to dominate it at the ballot box from 1978. In 1983–84, the so-called »tournant de la rigueur« (»liberal turn«) and the departure of the Communist Party ministers signaled a kind of normalization of French socialism in relation to the major social democratic parties (for this reason, some talk of a »creeping« Bad Godesberg with regard to the policies of successive socialist governments in the 1980s and 1990s). At the start of the 1990s, the end of Mitterrand's seven-year term of office was marked by various scandals and economic reversal, which led to the return to power of the right in 1993 (general election) and 1995 (presidential election).

In 1997, Lionel Jospin, who had become the new leader of the PS in 1995 after years of struggle to succeed François Mitterrand, won the general election and became prime minister (under the presidency of Jacques Chirac). He implemented policies that were both distinctly left-wing (including the 35-hour week, »emplois-jeunes« [jobs for young unemployed people], and PACS [contract of civil union]) but also, leading directly from the policies of previous socialist governments of the Mitterrand years, incorporated the market economy (privatization, deregulation, tax reductions). In 2002, Lionel Jospin fell at the first round in his bid to become president, both because of his lack of profile among the electorate and because of the fragmentation of the left, notwithstanding its participation in his majority government, leaving a Jacques Chirac whose credibility was in tatters and leader of the extreme right Jean-Marie Le Pen to confront one another.

State of Play: The Socialist Party Caught in Midstream

An Electoral Paradox

The Socialist Party's electoral position has been paradoxical for the past 10 years or so (2002–2010). While it has done well at the local level – the PS has won all the local elections since 2004 (municipal, cantonal, regional) and has become the leading party in France in terms of number of representatives and the authorities it is running – in contrast, it has been regularly defeated at the national level (general and, especially, presidential elections). This paradox is particularly apparent in the period after each election. When it comes to a national election (and therefore

Table 1:
PS Election Results since 2002

	<i>Result/ Recorded Votes (%)</i>	<i>Political Outcome</i>
Presidential 2002 (L. Jospin)	16.18	Defeat/eliminated at the first round
General election 2002	35.26	Defeat/main opposition party
Cantonal 2004	38.56	Victory (+8 pts/2001)
Regional 2004 (PS + allied left)	49.92	Victory (+13 pts/gain on the right)
European 2004	28.9	Victory (+7 pts/1999)
European referendum 2005	Yes 54.67/ No 45.33	Defeat/PS split
Presidential 2007 (S. Royal)	46.94	Defeat at the 2nd round
General election 2007	42.25	Defeat (+ 46 seats/2002)
Municipal 2008 (PS + allied left)	33.35	Victory (takeover of the towns)
Cantonal 2008	35.11	Victory (+172 seats)
European 2009	16.48	Defeat (-17 seats)
Regional 2010 (PS + allied left)	49.51	Victory (+18pts/gain on the right)

a defeat), the commentators declare that the death of the party is nigh, while when it comes to local elections (and therefore victory) those very same commentators declare that the PS has become a force to be reckoned with! In fact, the PS is neither dying – it has a solid network of representatives and local authorities which today constitute its real vitality – nor at the top of its game: any party which fails to win national elections or to gain the presidency despite numerous attempts really ought to ask itself some serious questions about its organization, how well it works, and what it is offering. It is precisely caught between this local potency and national uncertainty that the French Socialist Party finds itself today.

The PS's Threefold Sociological Problem

The electoral paradox which has just been described can be traced back to what one might call the PS's »sociological problem,« which is threefold.

The first problem is that the PS has become a party of representatives in the true sense of the word: almost half of its real members (party

membership of approximately 150,000) – that is, 60,000 people – are representatives at various levels (municipal, district, cantonal, regional, national, European) and the other half »aspire to become so,« to adopt the formula often used by the ps.¹ This has important consequences for both the decisions taken by the party leadership (political positioning, reform, ways of opening up procedures for the nomination of election candidates) and the »sociological« composition of the party itself, since the representatives are less inclined than other party members to tolerate any challenge to their position and favor the recruitment of cronies rather than of persons who might threaten them electorally, for example within the local party.

The second major problem for the ps is that the sociological composition of its members is extremely lopsided. The last substantial inquiry into the matter dates from 1998,² but there is no reason to suppose that, as a result of recent developments – the joining of those known as »20-euro activists« in 2006 at the nomination of the presidential candidates, for example – there has been a radical sociological change within the party.³ The main features of socialist sociology remain those brought to light in 1998: male predominance, despite the undoubted readjustment due to the introduction of the law of parity (72 percent of members were men at this time); high average age (67 percent above 50 years of age); significant imbalance in favor of middle and higher social and occupational groups (16 percent workers and low-ranking employees as against 35 percent higher management and professionals), as well as members working in the public sector (58 percent).⁴

The third »sociological« problem is the composition of the socialist electorate, as manifested at various elections on the basis of exit polls, supplemented by the results of various opinion polls among socialist supporters. Besides the weakness of the overall results registered by the

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1. On this key point, see in particular, Chapter 2, »Les élites socialistes, une société d'élus,« in R. Lefebvre and F. Sawicki (2006): *La Société des socialistes. Le PS aujourd'hui*. Bellecombe-en-Bauges: Editions du Croquant: 67 ff.
 2. Rey, H.; F. Subileau; and C. Ysmal (1999): *Les Adhérents socialistes en 1998*. Paris: Cahiers du CEVIPOF (Sciences Po). This inquiry followed on from one conducted by the authors about a decade earlier; H. Rey and F. Subileau (1991): *Les Militants socialistes à l'épreuve du pouvoir*. Paris: Presses de la FNSP.
 3. See, in particular, T. Barboni (2009): »Le Parti socialiste, parti de militants, des militants... ou de supporters?,« in *Recherche Socialiste* 46–47 (June): 12–27.
 4. Figures taken from Rey; Subileau; and Ysmal (1998): op. cit.

ps (if one takes into account in particular increasingly low turnouts, with the exception of presidential elections), which individually gains between 20 and 30 percent of the recorded votes in the first round, it may be noted that this electoral »base« is sociologically rather narrow. It comprises mainly voters from the middle and upper strata and few from the working classes (especially from the social and occupational groups »employees« and »workers,« who represent more than 50 percent of the active population in France). Furthermore, the proportion of voters from the public sector is particularly significant in relation to their weight in the active population. The geographical distribution of the socialist vote also suggests the strong representation of densely-populated urban areas (especially downtown areas) and peri-urban areas in contrast to other residential areas.⁵

This threefold sociological question-mark against the ps is a triple handicap to the extent that the party is no longer in step with French society, as it was in the 1970s, for example, because of its network of intermediaries and ties throughout the country and among social strata – even though the ps has never been, strictly speaking, a working-class party, due to the existence of the Communist Party to its left and the split from the trade union movement. The triple problem of over-representation of representatives within the party, an activist sociological profile out of step with the general population, and a narrow and skewed electoral base makes difficult, not so much the prospect of an election victory – which depends on numerous other factors – but, at a deeper level, the party's ability to remain in power, its consistency over the long term, and the spreading of its values within society. It is in this respect that sociology plays an essential role in politics, as both Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci have shown.

Partial Restoration of Its Image with Regard to Public Opinion

The difficulties – both economic and political – of Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency have, in recent years, gifted the Socialist Party with leadership of the opposition. The French public considers the ps to be the left-wing party most likely to provide the candidate from this camp in the second round of the presidential election. However, the opposition to Nicolas

5. See, in particular, G. Brustier and J.-P. Huelin (2009): *Recherche le Peuple désespéré-ment*. Paris: Bourin Editeur.

Sarkozy constitutes neither a political program nor a platform. And it is on its plans for the country that the PS will now be judged.

The election of Nicolas Sarkozy as President of the Republic in May 2007 and his defeat of the candidate of the PS and the left, Ségolène Royal, led to a period of despondency and disarray in the PS. Royal's presidential campaign had, indeed, been conducted without the party and even against it. In parallel with that, the PS failed to back, as it should have done, a candidate whose legitimacy, notwithstanding her nomination at the party primaries in November 2006, was never entirely recognized by the whole party, from top to bottom.⁶ The rifts within the party lasted until the convulsive events of the Reims congress in November 2008: Martine Aubry was narrowly elected leader over Ségolène Royal in the face of accusations of foul play. The numerous centripetal forces in the PS – influential figures at local level, »young« leaders known as »quadras« (40-somethings) – publically voiced their misgivings and disagreements for months, even though the new President of the Republic was pursuing a policy of »opening up,« poaching socialist figures by appointing them to his government or giving them assignments of various kinds.⁷ The calamitous outcome of the European elections in June 2009 – even if many social democratic parties in Europe suffered the same fate – had convinced observers that the PS, if not deceased, was in no state to deny Nicolas Sarkozy a second term of office.

Nevertheless, since 2009 the PS has not only gradually resumed its position as main opposition party, but its leader Martine Aubry is increasingly looking like a natural candidate for the presidential election and well before the primaries which must decide the issue. Such a turnaround in public perception is due above all to the mistakes made by the president, who has been hit by a number of scandals concerning his ministers or himself, for example, when he sought to have his son appointed head of EPAD, a quasi-governmental organization overseeing real estate and the administration of La Defense, near Paris. The turnaround is also due to the economic crisis, which has distinctly curbed the president's reforming zeal by obliging him to implement increasingly harsh austerity

6. There is a well-informed account of the socialist campaign and of Ségolène Royal's complex relationship with the party during 2006–2007 in R. Bacqué and A. Chemin (2007): *La Femme fatale*. Paris: Albin Michel.

7. See our analysis »La triple ingouvernabilité du parti socialiste,« available at: <http://laurentbouvet.wordpress.com/2008/12/01/la-triple-ingouvernabilite-du-parti-socialiste>.

measures, even though he refuses to retract the measures he introduced benefiting the wealthy as soon as he came to power in 2007. Finally, the abilities of Martine Aubry should be noted who, although she had a tough time getting elected party leader, has been able to get it back on track, put a stop to the rifts, and impose herself as its natural leader. The »victory« in the regional elections in 2010 has therefore been credited to her, even though she was not directly a candidate for the leadership of a region, in contrast, for example, to Ségolène Royal.

The adverse public perception of Martine Aubry – especially as »La dame des 35 heures«⁸ – has finally been overcome. And although she may still appear less a potential presidential candidate than, in particular, Dominique Strauss-Kahn – but more so now than Ségolène Royal – on the other hand, she best embodies the left and its values in the minds of the French public.⁹ In contrast to Sarkozy's razzmatazz, she cuts a rather austere and modest figure, not dissimilar to Angela Merkel. At a time of economic and social crisis in France, this personal aspect undoubtedly plays a key role. That is not yet enough to gain the presidency, but some ground has certainly already been made up, although no one rated the PS's chances very highly in 2008–2009. What still remains to be done – the plan, the presidential candidacy, electoral alliances and so on – is no less important for all that and the PS must not be found wanting if it is to have any hope of defeating Nicolas Sarkozy, who will probably be a candidate on his succession in 2012.

Plans Remain Uncertain

In order to win the presidential election in 2012 and to return to power for the long term, the PS must be in a position, in the next two years, to put before the people of France a political project which they can really get on board with. This means more than just proposing to put an end to »Sarkozyism.« Work on the PS's new political platform has certainly been rebooted since Martine Aubry became leader in November 2008, having

8. The title of an extremely critical book on Martine Aubry which appeared a few years ago. P. Alexandre and B. de L'Aulnoit (2002): *La Dame des 35 heures*. Paris: Robert Laffont.

9. See, in particular, BVA-Orange-L'Express-France Inter index (which calculates the president's popularity and future outlook for 20 top-tier political personalities) for July 2010, available at: http://www.bva.fr/fr/sondages/barometre_politique/observatoire_de_la_politique_nationale_-_juillet_2010.html.

been almost abandoned under the leadership of François Hollande (1997–2008). It remains at an embryonic stage, however, confronted by three major structural problems which threaten to limit its impact considerably.

The first problem is related to the connection between the party's platform and that of a presidential candidate. In the French presidential system, a person's candidacy puts them directly before the French people, engaging in a kind of dialogue, notwithstanding the fact that a party's infrastructure, resources, and networks are essential. Candidates have to present the country with a political agenda which is their own and with which they can be fully identified. In other words, the three essential dimensions of a presidential election – representation, personification, and presenting a narrative – must fit together perfectly. If the discrepancy between these dimensions is too great, candidates have little chance of winning over their fellow citizens. Hence the importance of the political platform and its extreme personalization. But how is this personalization to be coordinated with the collective development within the party of the latter's political platform – all the more so as the general elections, which follow the presidential elections, basically involve the presentation of this platform. Considering the importance of the presidential election in determining political balances of power, including within the party, it is clear that the candidate's agenda has priority. The role of the party in this context is to prepare, as best it can, the rolling out of this agenda once the candidate has been nominated. This is exactly what happened at the end of the 1970s, when the PS developed its »socialist project« which candidate Mitterrand drew on for his »110 propositions for France« in 1981. The key element in this period was that François Mitterrand was both First Secretary of the Socialist Party and the presidential candidate, which meant that he was able to ensure that the party as a group was singing from the same hymn-sheet and that its activities remained coherent within the framework of his presidential candidacy.

The second pitfall lying in wait for the party when it comes to develop its »projet« is that of reducing it to a simple program. There is a crucial difference between the two. Indeed, since the 1980s, when the general election comes around the PS and its candidates do nothing more than put forward programs of economic and social measures, sometimes with a few provisions labeled »societal« thrown in. These are not genuinely comprehensive »projets« – or political projects – which make it possible to impose a general direction on analyses of the current situation and of

society, which is subsequently reflected in the set of measures presented to the French people, endowing it with coherence. The reasons for this drift are manifold and not confined to the Socialist Party. One might mention here the domination of the agenda-setting process, for the past 20 years or so, by experts and, especially with regard to the PS, by so-called »technocrats« – in other words, economic and legal experts from the public administration whose number and influence grew as the PS became a party of government in the 1980s and 1990s. It is therefore the state which has invaded the party, rather than the other way around. The prospects for 2012, unfortunately, resemble what has usually resulted from this in the past: the selection of those in charge of the party »project« remains profoundly vitiated by the technocratic evolution of the past 25 years (practically all of them are grey technocrats from the personal staff of socialist ministers). As things stand, with barely two years to go before the presidential election, the PS has still not given much thought to the state of French society, apart from noticing that it is in crisis! Thus, the first elements made available since the »convention sur le modèle de développement«¹⁰ – the first of the major meetings on the party project which took place in spring 2010 – are essentially related to fiscal reform which is supposed to make possible a readjustment of taxation in favor of the middle and working classes. Martine Aubry has also floated – in a personal capacity – a number of ideas to be explored in relation to social issues, most notably perhaps in her efforts to introduce the notion of »care« into the French political debate – although without much success so far – deriving from Anglo-Saxon social science and rarely used in France.¹¹

The third structural problem afflicting the working out of the PS's political project is due to the fact that the socialists have not always been clear about the position they intend to adopt on the left. For a start, this is because it is ultimately the person of the presidential candidate which orients the party in one direction or another at election time and during the following years. This was the case with François Mitterrand and Lionel Jospin, and will be so again for 2012 if we consider the two possible candidates Martine Aubry and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the

10. »Convention on the development model.« The text of this convention is available on the PS website: <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/articles/en-direct-le-conseil-national-de-la-convention-nouveau-modele-de-developpement>.

11. See the presentation of this idea taken up by the PS, available at: <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/articles/le-care-acte-i>.

former embodying a more classic and more social conception of the left, while the latter has for a number of years embodied the right wing of the PS and the refocusing of the party along Third Way lines. Secondly, in order to regain power within the party and undoubtedly also the presidential candidacy it is better to be able to unite the different strands of the party and therefore to bring together the left and right, be it in respect of members or sympathizers. The tradition according to which the party »wins when it campaigns on a left-wing platform« seems still to prevail, if the rhetoric displayed at recent congresses, conventions and other meetings is anything to go by; even if no one within the party is under any illusion about putting itself forward as a party of government that, once in power, will be in no position to effect any significant shift to the left. The most recent example of this socialist tradition of »talking left, but acting right« is retirement reform. The PS has declared officially that a left-wing government will restore the official retirement age of 60 – which the current reform proposed by the right-wing majority will change – while within the party everyone readily recognizes, in private, that nothing will come of it. This gap between rhetoric in opposition and policies actually implemented once in government is one of the main criticisms directed towards the PS in each of its terms in office.¹² This kind of vacillation may be found, moreover, in all the official documents of the PS, whether it be the last declaration of principles, adopted in June 2008,¹³ or the text of the abovementioned »convention on the model of development« in which realist passages – especially on fiscal reform – alternate with, to a greater or lesser extent, lyrical flights of fancy about instigating »a change of civilization.« To that extent, it indicates both a lack of persistent political reflection with an eye to the long term and a party deeply divided ideologically, even to the point of conflict, with regard to key choices about society – the rift in the socialist camp concerning the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005 is the most prominent example of this in recent years.

12. See, on this recurring issue for the PS, the now classic analysis by A. Bergounioux and G. Grunberg (2005): *L'Ambition et le remords. Les socialistes français et le pouvoir (1905–2005)*. Paris: Fayard.

13. The text of this declaration is available on the PS website: <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/le-ps/la-declaration-de-principes>.

A Party in the Process of Modernization

Reform of how the party works is currently a key issue. The fact is that the PS, despite a number of significant reforms of its internal workings in the past – in particular the election of the First Secretary by direct vote of the party membership – is a party fraught with difficulties in this respect. Its internal imbalance in favor of elected representatives is considerable; its low membership deprives it of a critical mass of representation and intermediaries in society; its leadership remains weak to the extent that the First Secretary is not also recognized as the »natural« or designated candidate for the presidential election; its finances are mainly dependent on state funding (in accordance with the general election results) and the contributions of its representatives which, of course, makes the PS even more dependent on the latter.

In view of all this, the leadership has embarked on a process of what it calls »renovation« – in parallel with development of the »project« to which we have already referred – aimed at solving a number of outstanding problems: the ban on holding several offices concurrently (even if implementation of this reform will have to wait a few years) or more effective implementation of parity and an opening up to diversity (for example, ethnic minorities).

However, the major issue of »renovation« is the primaries, the selection of the candidate for the presidential election in a procedure open to all supporters of the left, and therefore by no means confined to party members. This important reform is viewed by many socialists as a necessity for the resolution of many of the party's structural problems: the leadership crisis (the designated person will be »legitimate«); the relationship of the leadership to the »project«; and party alliances. It may be doubted, however, that these primaries, as so far envisaged,¹⁴ are capable of solving the organizational problems that have just been described. With this end in view, they would have to take place much earlier, before the presidential elections, in order to allow the candidate – who would also be the party leader – to establish him/herself and to prepare »his/her« project while setting the party to rights and getting it behind him/her – and, in the same way, establishing alliances around the candidacy and project over a period of years with other political forces.

14. The PS document on »renovation« is available at: <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr/renovation>.

The weakness of the current renovation process is reflected in the vagueness of the proposals and the party's lethargy with regard to the fundamental issues. The approach involving numerous »conventions and topical meetings« in order to outline the party's vision before the nomination of a candidate (in autumn 2011) testifies to the party's incomplete conversion to the presidentialization of the Fifth Republic – it was evident at the last election that the presidential candidate alone was able to truly direct how the party's program (»projet«) is put together because it is he/she alone who can make use of it at election time. However, at the moment, everyone at the PS is acting as if the candidate who will be nominated in the primaries will be content to take up the party's agenda and simply make it their own, personalizing it and putting their own stamp on it. But a presidential campaign involves clear-cut and firm choices which have little to do with the consensual approach which governs the working out of the party's program. Every tendency, group, or standpoint must recognize in it at least some part of its political DNA in order to get behind this project and not risk exposing the divisions in the party in the public arena. The result is rather nondescript and unlikely to engage and inspire the voters or even PS supporters.

Finally, it seems clear that the elephant in the room with regard to »rénovation« in its current form is the future of political parties as such, as a form of political organization serving as a reference point of contemporary democracy.¹⁵ The debate on the primaries and the opening up of the party as regards the key moment of the nomination of the presidential candidate is only the beginning of a far greater deliberation on what might be called »the party form.« What does it comprise? What are the links between the party's interior and its exterior? Must the distinction between member and non-member remain absolute? Should we move towards a federal form made up of various movements and groups whose goals would no longer be directed strictly towards electoral victory or even to continue to maintain specific organizations with this aim? The PS is clearly not the only party concerned with such questions. It may be noted in particular that the creation of Europe Ecologie directly calls into question the party format. The PS still has a long way to go

15. In the sense defined canonically by Robert Michels (1959 [1911]): *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*; Dover Press, or Moisei Ostrogorski (1903): *La Démocratie et les partis politiques*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, in particular.

before it reaches this »postmodern democracy,«¹⁶ however, given both its essential role on the left and its current make-up, which is rather that of an exclusive club of local representatives than of a large organization on the same wavelength as society overall.

From Opposition Party to Constructive Party¹⁷

The ps's greatest challenge in the coming years will be to go beyond the opposition party stage to become a party which offers the country new ideas and is able to form a government. As has been seen, the ps has been able to re-emerge as a force to be reckoned with as principal opposition party against the right-wing majority – relegating to second place both the centrists and the environmentalists which for a while believed they might be able to oust the socialists as the main alternative to Sarkozyism. Politics as usual has therefore been restored in France, with the ps providing a candidate in the second round of the presidential election.

Nevertheless, despite all its efforts and internal reforms, the ps is far from being a party which the electorate will vote for on its own merits rather than simply to block the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) or solely as a tactical vote for the left in order to fend off the right. Whether a decision to vote is taken for positive or negative reasons is a crucial factor in determining the legitimacy of the government which comes to power after winning the election. If its legitimacy is weak a government's political room to maneuver will be much narrower than if elected to implement a set of policies explicitly endorsed by the majority of voters. The participation rate and the distribution of votes are clearly the two other factors to be taken into account in this respect.

The ps has certainly re-emerged as the main institutional vehicle of the very strong opposition to Sarkozyism in France, but confidence remains low. This is because, on the one hand, what proposals it has come up with so far remain very vague or are the object of internal divisions – for example, the party is divided on whether to keep the powerfully symbolic retirement at 60 – and, on the other hand, there is no unifying principle – or, indeed, candidate – which could establish the ps as a coherent proactive force the people of France could get on board with.

16. On this issue, see in particular Colin Crouch (2004): *Post-Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press; and P. Rosanvallon (2006): *La Contre-démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance*. Paris: Le Seuil.

17. »Du parti d'opposition au parti de proposition.«

Besides the risk of a lack of legitimacy in the event of victory in 2012, the main problem would be the new government's precarious position in the face of rival political forces wishing to encroach upon the vast terrain of anti-Sarkozyism which often appears to be the sole unifying factor within the PS. The same applies on the left with regard to Europe Ecologie and in the center with regard to François Bayrou's Modem, which have made the fight against Sarkozyism and its lack of public morality their main argument. This is also the case on the right, where the president of the UMP group in the National Assembly, Jean-François Copé, or even former prime minister Dominique de Villepin oppose Nicolas Sarkozy in very different ways but both effectively in terms of public opinion.

Alliance on the Left: Necessary But Not Sufficient

Whoever its candidate might be, along with its policies and its ability to convince the voters that it is the only party able to govern the country apart from the right, the PS, if it is to win the elections in 2012 – both presidential and general – will have to form alliances with other political forces. In fact, the PS cannot win a national election on its own, obtaining sufficient votes in a general election, for example, to constitute an absolute majority in the National Assembly – which has only happened once, in 1981. In recent years, its average score has been around 30 to 35 percent of the votes. It therefore has to get an additional 15 to 20 percent of the votes in order to attain a majority – both in the second round of the presidential election (therefore in the name of its candidate) and in the general elections which follow. The PS, therefore, needs to enter into alliances – a call to vote for the socialist candidate in the second round of the presidential election and an electoral pact to give socialists a free run in the general election – with other parties in order to cobble together a majority.

Traditionally, the PS allies itself with forces on the left, in particular with the PCF and the Greens. But since the center established itself as a distinct political force in relation to the right – in the form of François Bayrou's Modem – in the 2007 presidential election, the question arises of whether priority should be given to a traditional alliance on the left or to an opening up to the center. In 2007, the socialist candidate proposed this alliance between the two rounds of the presidential election to the centrist candidate, who had won 17 percent of the votes, but the latter rejected it. Subsequently, Modem's failure in various elections and the

return of a large part of centrist representatives to the traditional bosom of the right more or less resolved the issue by default and therefore, once again, an alliance on the left was favored by the PS. The fact is that in this framework it is now the Greens which play the role of principal ally and not the PCF, which in recent years have allied within the »Front de gauche« with the Left Party (Parti de gauche – PG), founded by Jean-Luc Mélenchon on the model of Die Linke.¹⁸

An alliance on the left – with the communists, the PG and the Greens – has many advantages but just as many drawbacks for the PS. The first benefit of such an alliance is its salience for the voters, since it fits squarely within the traditional right-left framework. The second is that it mobilizes voters on the left who refuse out of hand to vote for the PS, either because they consider it too liberal or right-wing or because they regard it as too dogmatic or not sufficiently concerned with environmental issues, for example. This pink (PS)-red (PCF)-green alliance allowed the left to attain the majority in the last local elections. Nevertheless, this kind of alliance also entails a number of drawbacks. First of all, if the PS is to have any hope whatsoever of obtaining the alliances which are essential for victory it must modify its position and policies, making them more left-wing or giving them a greener tinge in order to demonstrate its goodwill to its potential allies. The PS must therefore proceed in this way – and therefore make commitments not all of which it will be able to honor once in power – in order not to appear too hegemonic and so has to adjust its weight in the balance of power which it dominates. The second drawback is that the voters that the PS covets in this left-wing alliance are often the same as its own from a sociological standpoint. As a result, the likelihood of capturing the 15 to 20 percent additional votes which are essential for winning the second round is very low since the constituency of Europe Ecologie so much resembles that of the PS.

In other words, the voters that the PS must attract in the second round – presidential and general elections – are not just supporters of other left-wing parties, but also those who abstained (particularly from the working class) and centrist voters. Such voters are not easy to persuade on the basis of electoral pacts between parties. If they vote, they do so for a party and a candidate who offers them a set of policies they

18. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former member of the PS, sees himself as the Oskar Lafontaine of the French left – he often refers to his German counterpart and to Die Linke – and intends to change the ideological direction of the PS from the outside, having failed, according to him, to do so from the inside.

can believe in. These voters are not the same sociologically and, to some extent, politically as classic socialist or left-wing voters, but they are indispensable for winning national elections. This is the main difference from local elections, in which decent mobilization of the socialist constituency is generally enough, given the low participation rates. To reach these other voters quite clearly something other has to be offered than formal party alliances.

Beyond party-political alliances, the PS and the French left are also adversely affected by the institutional disconnection between the parties and the trade unions since the Charter of Amiens in 1906. Furthermore, the links between the parties and what one might call »civil society« – associations, social movements, the intelligentsia, business circles – are strained, both because of the way in which parties (which do not need it for their activities) are organized in France (their funding by the state; the dominance of representatives; their hierarchical structure; the strict distinction between the status of member and that of non-member; the primacy of the presidential election; and so on) and, in parallel with that, due to civil society's indifference or even suspicion vis-à-vis political parties, which are considered to be purely institutional in nature and in which power is monopolized by exclusive groups solely concerned with obtaining it and the benefits it brings.

The »European Question« Left Hanging in the Air

At the PS everyone now pretends that the deep division in the party concerning the European question, which appeared at the time of the referendum on ratification of the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT) in 2005, has been overcome. As if the French Socialists, after having been split, were finally united on Europe.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Even if supporters and opponents of the ECT are now to be found side by side in the PS leadership, the rift remains deep. The current situation which is so inauspicious for the construction of Europe – economic and financial crisis, institutional weakening as a result of the Lisbon Treaty – has clearly led to a downgrading of the European question among Socialist concerns. Not only that, but their credibility on the issue has suffered among the French public, if the PS's poor showing at the European elections in 2009 is anything to go by, having done very well in 2004, with a large number of European representatives.

The European split is even more serious, however, because it reveals the major ideological divide prevailing within the PS between two camps which cohabit but cannot reach agreement on fundamentals. This constitutes a virtually insurmountable obstacle to the building of a coherent and attractive set of policies, as we have seen. This divide opposes, on the one hand, those who support building up the European institutions, as practiced in particular since the Maastricht Treaty, as well as globalization and the compromise with capitalism and the market economy (especially the opening up of public services to market forces) and, on the other hand, those who advocate an anti-liberal – economically – vision and are hostile to capitalism, who favor an increased role for the state and public services, and perhaps protectionism – at the European level – or even the end of the euro. In short, there is a rift between social-liberal reformists and old-school socialists – to adopt the names which the two sides hurl at one another in a spirit of anathematization.¹⁹

This split on Europe and, beyond that, on the party's global vision could re-emerge at any time, especially in the event of yet another defeat in 2012. It could also prove crucial in terms of the primaries for nominating the presidential candidate if one considers, for example, the real differences between Dominique Strauss-Kahn (social-liberal), Martine Aubry (traditional left), and Ségolène Royal (who tends towards a kind of left-wing populism).

Reasons for the Malaise: The PS Confronted by the Crisis of Social Democracy

The French Socialist Party, like all European socialist, social democratic, and workers' parties, has been hit hard by the crisis of Social Democracy.²⁰ However, as in every country, more specific national factors will

19. For a clearer idea – and a proposed typology – of the ideological divisions within the French left (and the PS) which have been alluded to here, see in particular F. Miquet-Marty (2010): *La Guerre des gauches n'aura pas lieu*. Paris: Fondation Jean-Jaurès: 23 ff.

20. We shall refer, in this connection, to two of our own texts. L. Bouvet (2010): »Tackling Populism to Regain the People« (presented at an FEPS seminar in Brussels on March 16, 2010); available at: <http://laurentbouvet.wordpress.com/2010/03/19/tackling-populism-to-regain-the-people>; and »Les contradictions de l'antilibéralisme,« in *Le Débat*, No. 159 (March–April 2010): 155–158.

help us to refine the reasons why the PS has found it so difficult to translate election victories at local level into national election victories for the past 10 years.

First of all, as in most other European countries, the advent of the post-industrial society since the 1970s has led, over the long term, to a marked reduction in the traditional electorate of the left and the PS – in France most evident in the collapse of the PCF and abstention or voting for the extreme right by part of the working class. The PS, which has not won back the communist electorate since 1981–83, has compensated for this in part by winning over middle class or higher categories of voter, especially in the urban centers. But the promise of a »social democratic government« (which may be translated as meaning, for example, an assurance given to the middle classes that their standard of living will rise and that their children will enjoy a status and living standards better than those of their parents), of which the PS was the main representative in France, has evaporated.²¹

Confronted by this structural evolution of the left-wing electorate, the French right long remained clueless as to how to exploit it, handicapped as it was on the right by a Front National which was both strong and capable of attracting an electorate which was both working class and nationalist (especially small tradesmen and shopkeepers), and uncertain about its security, whether economic or personal. This difficulty recovering part of the working class vote which had abandoned the left was overcome by Nicolas Sarkozy in the presidential election in 2007. He was able, in fact, to »triangulate« some of the left's cherished values – such as the value of »work« especially and by praising those French men and women »who have to get up early [to go to work],« while stressing, more traditionally, security – notwithstanding the presence on the left of a candidate, Ségolène Royal, who was also attempting to adapt to the same double logic. In recent years, the right has even begun to be converted on certain issues of cultural liberalism (the acceptance of gay rights, for example) which makes the frontier between right and left less marked than it was 10 years ago. Since 2007, the policies implemented by President Sarkozy have generally contradicted the campaign promises of candidate Sarkozy. It is almost exclusively the most well-off French men and women who have benefited from the reforms undertaken by

21. See on the particular form taken by the end of the social democratic »promise« in France, L. Chauvel (2006): *Les Classes moyennes à la dérive*. Paris: Le Seuil.

the right-wing majority. But the turning point of the 2007 campaign remains inscribed in people's memories and right-wing candidates in the next elections, including Sarkozy, know that if they want to win once again they will have to continue in the same direction, namely the triangulation of a number of left-wing values.

Besides these recent developments, it is also important to recall that the PS has never had a monopoly on discourse on the social – »left-wing« in the traditional sense – in France. The presence of a strong communist party which was also the guardian of a veritable »political culture« which, indeed, became a »passion«;²² the special character of Gaullism one of whose characteristics was a concern for social issues (a significant portion of the electorate has voted Gaullist since the Liberation); and the presence on the moderate right (centrist) of a social element (of the Christian democratic variety) have made it difficult for the PS to establish its hegemony over social reform discourse. All the more so because there has been a broad national consensus on the welfare state – known as »social security« in France – since World War II.²³ The coming to power of the left in 1981 raised hopes of a social »new wave,« as in 1936, 1945, and 1968. This wave was all the stronger because, for the first time since 1936, the left – including the communists – was in sole charge of the government and of social advances (39-hour week, retirement at 60, a fifth week of paid vacation). But the »liberal turn« in 1983 – deregulation, deindustrialization, followed by privatization – put an end to these hopes and led to a clear break between the working classes and the government parties of the left (basically the PS on the (classic) grounds of betrayal. This led to an even greater alienation from the PS whose electoral strategy has never been to regain this lost constituency, but rather to replace it with another base centered on the middle class in the public sector in particular. A major part of the PS's loss of credibility derives, therefore, not only from the fundamental ideological turnaround in the mid-1980s, but also the distance between what the leadership says and the policies

22. See, in particular, M. Lazar (2002): *Le Communisme, une passion française*. Paris: Perrin; and »Forte et fragile, immuable et changeante... La culture politique communiste,« in S. Bernstein (ed.) (1999): *Les Cultures politiques en France*. Paris: Le Seuil, Chapter 6: 215–242.

23. The basis of the contemporary French social state was outlined by the Conseil national de la Résistance (CNR), which brought together all the French political groupings opposed to the Vichy regime and to the Nazis: from communists to Gaullists, as well as socialists, radical republicans and Christian democrats.

actually implemented by the party once in power. The PS has often been censured for »talking left« and »acting right« and the party has not been able to restore confidence among the French public.

This lack of credibility is due in large part to the paucity of intermediaries for the PS in civil society – in accordance with the constraints and peculiarities of the situation in France already discussed. In the 1970s, the PS was, however, the party par excellence of the »new classes« that had emerged in French society, the party of the new activist middle class, and that of young »baby boomer« workers who established themselves in professional and family life, in particular by becoming home-owners. The PS was therefore the party whose policy program best represented the identity-based social movements – feminists, environmentalists, immigrants, gays and so on – which first came into their own during those years. It was the party which called for new rights, while continuing to embody the hopes of the »world of work« and the workers' movement within the institutional framework of its alliance with the PCF. Since the 1980s and 1990s, for the various reasons discussed above, the PS is no longer part of this social dynamic. It has cut itself off from these opinion-makers who are indispensable for the effective promulgation of ideas, particularly in accordance with Gramscian notions of hegemony. When it comes to putting over its message or presenting its policies, the PS feels the adverse effects of this severance from civil society. It is no longer in a position to influence opinion or to put a particular topic on the agenda, as it once was. However, this capacity is absolutely essential if one wishes to govern for the long term and successfully implement the kinds of reform that are necessary, in particular in times of crisis when the state's room to maneuver is constricted. In parallel with this, with regard to public opinion, French voters do not seem to expect anything in particular from the PS or have any specific political demands to make of it.

It seems, moreover, that the increasing importance attributed by the PS to issues deemed »societal« – or relating to the »values« of post-industrial societies – to the extent that it has brought about the party's liberal transformation has not been sufficient to guarantee it a new electoral base large and robust enough to ensure regular victory in national elections. The PS leadership therefore continues, while »talking left,« to try to get people to believe – and they often believe it themselves – that what matters most is their social and economic program: jobs, purchasing power, public services, and so on. However, their actual behavior, whether in government or in opposition, is utterly at odds with this

kind of talk, insofar as they direct their attention towards what they can really exercise some control over, namely so-called societal change, concerning, for example, the extension of individual rights, in particular to minorities, in the name of combating discrimination. This serves only to heighten the impression that the Socialists have converted to liberalism since not only do they seem to have surrendered to the laws of the market and of capitalism in the realm of economics, but they steadfastly promote a forthright cultural and moral liberalism – in other words, they favor wholesale individual emancipation: hedonism, frank consumerism (although it increasingly has a green or bio tinge), moral individualism, multiculturalism, and so on. However, this twofold conversion ultimately persuades only a narrow constituency – already described above and of whom the term »bobo« (»bourgeois bohemian«) represents a fairly accurate caricature – which is not likely to enable a national election victory and, above all, a democratic base large enough to legitimize a socialist-led government that will last. All the more so because the quasi-monopoly which the PS long held on what could be called modernity as far as values and morals are concerned has ruptured in recent years since the conservative right, in turn, became more liberal. Working class voters are distinctly less susceptible to this change in values even if they often tacitly validate its effects in the form of mass consumption, especially as regards leisure activities.

Target 2012

The next two years will be crucial for the PS. The 2012 elections – both presidential and general – are very important indeed. Facing a weak incumbent president, everyone at the PS is well aware that this election is winnable. It will be 24 years since the PS won a presidential election (1988) and 15 years since it won a general election. Yet another defeat would undoubtedly result in the demise of the PS as we know it. Victory would once more give the Socialists – and the French left in general – the chance to show that they are able to conduct a kind of politics different from the right: one that is both more effective economically and more just socially. The historic responsibility in this time of crisis is considerable, proportionate to the disaster of another defeat. That is why the PS must undergo a profound change over the next couple of years, above all taking the necessary steps to win back part of the working class. This

will involve tackling all the dimensions mentioned here – party program, candidate, alliances, party organization and so on – simultaneously, and all within a coherent framework.

Regaining a »sens du peuple«²⁴ (translator's note: literally »a sense of the people«: what in Michelet, for example, can be understood to mean direct access to the collective mind and spirit of the common people) is therefore absolutely essential for the PS, in common with a number of other social democratic parties currently suffering from the same problems, in particular having to confront the populist challenge.²⁵ In France, electoral victory, but also its »depth« – the participation rate and level of support for PS policies rather than merely beating Sarkozyism – will undoubtedly depend on winning over working class voters, even more than in 2007. If it is to take up this challenge the PS will have to meet at least three requirements. The first is the quality of its program. A lot more is needed, as we have seen, than what was offered at the last election and which already seems to be emerging: namely, a straightforward technical program, topped off by a declaration of commonplace general principles. What is needed is an ambitious social program which, besides an original and exhaustive analysis of contemporary French society – in particular the disconnection between the elites and the public, to use populism's own terminology – will have to offer new, but common-sense solutions to the main economic and social problems, but also in relation to society and identity.

The second exigency is the twofold achievement, always difficult to pull off, of left-wing unity – including the Greens – and expansion towards the center. The prevailing conditions of a rejection of Sarkozyism should certainly help to bring this about, but the PS must still devise both the right approach and the kind of organization required by this new strategy. However, what we are hearing from the Rue de Solferino (headquarters of the French Socialist Party) is quite different, since the old reflexes and the old left-wing alliances are in evidence, envisaging the simple adding together of the various groups which make it up – extreme left, communists and Left Front, socialists, radicals, republicans, Greens and so on – against a right-wing which is itself an amalgamation. The political dynamics of a two-round presidential election, even if it brings two candidates face to face only in the second round, is clearly more complex,

24. »Sens« being understood here in its three senses in French: meaning, direction, and sense (or reason).

25. See L. Bouvet: »Tackling populism to regain the people,« footnote 19.

especially because of the vote for the extreme right in the first round which is not transferred automatically and en masse to the right in the second round, particularly if the candidate is Marine Le Pen, daughter of the historical leader of the French extreme right, who is likely to succeed him because she appeals to social populism much more than her father.

All of which underlines the importance, as if there was any need, of the third requirement which the PS will have to satisfy in order to win in 2012: the choice of a person able both to take up the populist challenge and to represent the broadest possible political constituency, which people can really get on board with. This is a real test, considering the current hardening of positions on all sides aimed at appearing, within the PS, as »more left than thou« in relation to everyone else. However, as the presidential elections approach the need for the candidates to »presidentialize« themselves – in other words, to show that they are capable of making it into the second round – and the position of president itself is likely to progressively narrow the ideological gap. The sole remaining question in this connection is what effect the primaries will have on this traditional process of realignment, since there is no precedent on this scale – these primaries are open to external participation and therefore not entirely bound by the internal logic of winning power inside the party, which is governed by a strictly pre-defined rhetoric concerning what is »genuinely« left-wing, what are the indications that one really belongs to it, and so on. On the other hand, it cannot be excluded that these primaries will, as in American elections, prompt a radicalization of the candidates in accordance with the tactical exigencies of the campaign or the need to accentuate their differences.

And Europe?

What one might call the new »European crisis of consciousness«²⁶ today affects all European countries and all political forces on the continent, to

26. An allusion to a famous work by P. Hazard (1961): *La Crise de la conscience européenne (1680–1715)*. Paris: Fayard (published in English as *The European Mind 1680–1715*); by analogy with the (re)founding moment of our era. For an analysis of this crisis, see the chapter »La nouvelle crise de la conscience européenne: l'Europe politique entre nation et fédération. Regards français,« in J. Delors and K. Lamers (eds.) (1998): *France-Allemagne: le bond en avant*. Paris: Odile Jacob-Notre Europe: 113–180.

be sure with the exception of the few genuinely anti-European parties scattered about here and there. However, the social democratic parties are more profoundly affected by this European crisis than any others. The concomitance of European disarray and the setbacks of the European social democratic parties is striking, as amply demonstrated by the results of the European elections in June 2009: as if the construction of Europe as it has taken place over the past 50 years and the historical project of social democracy in Europe had gone hand in hand and that they were both now undergoing a profound crisis. This critical situation reveals the constitutive paradox of contemporary European social democracy: while social democracy has been built within a national framework and has derived all the benefits of its »model« there, social democratic parties have always been among the strongest advocates of the federal construction of Europe – in other words, a Europe which calls into question national sovereignty.

Indeed, while the social democratic regime and model was constructed at national level (the »social question,« the establishment of democracy, and nation-building are largely concomitant processes, even though they are often antagonistic in modern day politics), social democrats, since the very day after World War II ended, have been among the foremost advocates of the construction of Europe, in the name of the internationalist values deeply embedded in the history of the workers' movement and of a more complex and more subtle vision of the East-West confrontation between communism and liberal capitalism. However, this preference for Europe has led to the dismantling of the protective and legitimate – because democratic – framework of the nation in which solidarity was forged, the fundamental principle of the social democratic model. The social democrats have allied themselves, at the European level, with Christian democrats both in the center and on the right in order to realize their European ambitions. They were seized by a kind of schizophrenia which gave way to a vision of the construction of Europe which was certainly pragmatic, but fundamentally (economically) liberal. This accepted the construction of a borderless market, in response to the impossibility for the foreseeable future of realizing a political Europe at the European level. By allying themselves – sometimes for good reasons, sometimes against their better judgment – with this liberalism the social democrats helped to destroy their own social base and their doctrinal legitimacy without, for all that, winning the battle to construct a truly political and social Europe.

This first paradox of European social democracy is coupled with a second: the European level is now the only one at which it is still conceivable to construct something closely resembling a social democratic model for the future, whether in the face of the challenges of globalization or the impotence of nation-states. Effective market regulation, more equitable distribution of wealth, greater democracy, and the renewed promise of emancipation for all must now be achieved by the construction of a political, economic, and social space which is effective and cohesive and in which social democratic values are able to assert themselves: manifestly, this space is Europe.

The current state of the European Union, the »sick man« of globalization, cries out for some sort of reinvention of Europe; in other words, a new political process which goes well beyond a Europe of treaties and »small steps,« as well as the functionalist approach which has been applied so far. This »forward leap«²⁷ can only be towards a federal Europe and very much in the political sense – which will necessarily be closer and more integrated than the current EU²⁷, not to mention what looks likely on the basis of future enlargements (Serbia, Turkey, and so on). In simple terms, towards a Europe which will make it possible to reconstitute at another level – post-national – the conditions needed for realizing key elements of the social democratic form of government and social democratic models: the extension of practical democracy, while at the same time improving the level of education and living standards, social justice for all based on a legitimate and acknowledged solidarity between those actively involved in the body politic (yesterday the nation, tomorrow Europe),²⁸ with a political power which is democratic, legitimate, and effective at the head of it, able to ensure regulation of the market, active redistribution of wealth, and effective protection of its citizens.

The political forces of social democracy are now confronted by this challenge all over Europe. The efforts made in recent years within the

27. Ibid.

28. This point is developed in detail in our article (2008): »L'avenir du principe de solidarité au sein de l'UE: solidarité nationale ou européenne?«, in M. Koopmann and S. Martens (eds.): *L'Europe prochaine. Regards franco-allemands sur l'avenir de l'Union européenne*. Paris: L'Harmattan: 167–76. It is also available in German translation: »Die Zukunft des Solidaritätsprinzips in der EU: Nationale oder europäische Solidarität?«, in M. Koopmann and S. Martens (eds.) (2008): *Das kommende Europa, deutsche und französische Betrachtungen zur Zukunft der Europäischen Union*. Nomos, DGAP-Schriften zur Internationalen Politik: 165–74.

PES in terms of the publication of joint electoral programs, especially at European elections, constitute a first step. But they are far from sufficient. The PS, because of the deep divisions on Europe mentioned above, does not seem ready to go further in these reflections; first, it has to decide between the two visions currently co-existing in the party. The selection of a candidate for the presidential election, by virtue of the authority and legitimacy it confers on the eventual winner, might serve as an opportunity to close the chapter which opened with the trauma of the debate on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 within the party, and cause it to choose the policy it will pursue on Europe in the coming years – in the same way that, for example, François Mitterrand and Jacques Delors were able to impose their clear and determined vision of Europe on the Socialists in the 1980s.

Conclusion

The 2012 election is not a foregone conclusion but the way is now clear for the PS to an extent not experienced for a considerable time: there is no serious rival on the left and the right has been profoundly weakened by Sarkozy's presidency and its frustrated hopes. But if they are to win, the Socialists – and the rest of the left with them – will have to offer the French public a program for the country and not just a change of government. This program, which they must now come up with, will have to be conveyed by a person – whose program it will be every bit as much as the party's – who will have been able to assert him or herself between now and autumn 2011, the date of the primaries at which the PS candidate will be nominated, and therefore, by default, the candidate of the left in the second round of the election. A good program and a good candidate: these are the two tasks of the PS between now and the election. Then it will have to run a good campaign. This program, this candidate, and this campaign will have to show the French public that the Socialists – far beyond the leftist rhetoric which they tend to adopt in opposition (and often forget once in government) – have learned from their past mistakes and that they are ready to take up the reins of national power once again in the clarity of their convictions and their policies. In that way, they will be able to retain power and deal with the serious difficulties facing both France and Europe today. In order to do this, two avenues will have to be given priority: taking into consideration the demands of the working class

in every domain – the Socialists have to regain a »sens du peuple« – and taking up a position in the European dimension. A narrow political path will have to be trod if these two requirements are to be reconciled, which have often appeared antagonistic, but it is now the only practicable one for social democracy in both France and Europe as a whole.

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