

# *PCF and Front de Gauche: exploiting a communist nostalgia in France?*

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## **Introduction: nostalgic beginnings**

One could argue that nostalgia was stamped into the identity of the post-war *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF) from the moment the provisional government-in-waiting stepped into the political vacuum after the collapse of the Vichy government in the summer of 1944. It was a period of instant nostalgia as, across the political spectrum, there was an endeavour to resurrect and reconfigure the past in a way that could offer a unifying sense of identity to a nation whose sense of self and purpose had endured the trauma of defeat and occupation. When, on 26 August 1944, de Gaulle marked his triumphant return with the historic walk down the Champs Élysées to receive the acclamation of the people of Paris, he was met at the Hotel de Ville by the National Council of the Resistance, led by Georges Bidault. Upon being asked by an exultant Bidault to proclaim that the Republic had been restored, de Gaulle famously replied, ‘the Republic never ceased to exist’. And he went on to elaborate his meaning: ‘Free France, Fighting France, the French Committee of National Liberation embodied it in turn. Vichy always was and still remains null and void. I myself am the President of the Government of the Republic. Why should I proclaim it now?’<sup>1</sup> With his characteristically powerful rhetoric, de Gaulle had expunged the memory of the defeat and betrayal that had traumatised France during four years of occupation and begun to forge the resistance myth that was predicated on what Boym calls the operation of restorative memory,<sup>2</sup> reconstituting a sense of national self-esteem that was lost, and

launching the country into a new post-war future. The mythical notion that the French had been overwhelmingly 'resistant' and loyal to the values of the Republic was a powerful political dynamic in Gaullist France, before it began to unravel.<sup>3</sup>

On the left of French politics, the communists were uniquely placed to profit from the frequently observed link between nostalgia and the inclination to romanticise the past, and the potential this creates for generating essentialist, universalistic or monolithic claims about memory. These figurations of memory can, paradoxically, exclude as well as include events and shape a discourse that constitutes a politics of memory.<sup>4</sup> Memories of the PCF's passivity at the signing of the German-Soviet Pact were rapidly erased by the formidable sense of organisation and discipline which the PCF brought to the French resistance movement after the Nazi invasion of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in June 1941. With the successful transition to the French Fourth Republic in 1946 and the return to conventional party politics, the PCF was quick to fashion a political legitimacy based on the evocation of the past. Electoral posters and flyers laid heavy emphasis on the sacrifice of its members in the Resistance. The PCF claim to be the party of 75,000 martyrs shot in the defence of France gave a dramatic edge to its call to the French people to rally to the communist cause. Even though a more accurate calculation of the sacrifice of PCF members puts the number of dead in the region of 10,000,<sup>5</sup> the memory of that sacrifice was so powerfully loaded symbolically that it gave the PCF a moral capital and self-sufficiency that no other political formation could match. This was a crucial factor in the unrivalled consistency of electoral support for the PCF during 1945-78, as the party which averaged 23.4 per cent over eleven successive legislative elections, while all the other parties suffered fluctuating fortunes.<sup>6</sup>

### **An era of uncertainty**

The PCF was well positioned to sustain the narrative it had created about its wartime past and the legitimacy of its role in post-war France, due to its solid implantation in the industrial and social landscape. Its membership base grew as the French economy roared ahead during the period

known as '*les trente glorieuses*' (thirty glorious years of uninterrupted growth). But it could also rely on its hold in French intellectual life. Being an intellectual in France meant being oppositional,<sup>7</sup> and it was difficult for an intellectual not to be influenced in one way or another by Marxist theory. The PCF possessed its own centres of intellectual enquiry which shaped figures who would exercise their influence well beyond the party. The *Institut Maurice Thorez* (IMT) focused on historical research while the *Centre d'Études et de Recherches Marxistes* (CERM) engaged on much more broadly based and varied research in the social sciences. But for French communist intellectuals, as well as those in other European communist parties, there was a growing awareness that the ideological rigidity of the anti-capitalist model offered by the Soviet Union was causing cracks to appear in its façade. The deterioration of the relationship between the PCF and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from 1975 to 1976 suggested that the French party might, like its sister parties in Spain and Italy, emancipate itself from the CPSU and follow a 'Eurocommunist' path. The book on the CPSU under Stalin by Jean Elleinstein, the deputy director of CERM, had a considerable impact,<sup>8</sup> and at the PCF's twenty-second congress in February 1976, there was criticism from the platform of the Soviet Union's record on human rights and democracy. The impression that the 'Italianate' line in the party was in the ascendancy was reinforced in October 1976, when representatives of the PCF's political bureau welcomed in person the refugee dissident, Leonid Plyushch, after his release from a Soviet mental hospital. The Eurocommunist summit of March 1977 appeared to confirm that a new direction was being taken by the PCF, due to the evident 'rapprochement' between Georges Marchais and his Spanish and Italian counterparts, Santiago Carrillo and Enrico Berlinguer. But by the end of the year the signs were that the Eurocommunist-style renovation of the PCF would not be taking place. The polemical differences with Moscow proved superficial as the PCF began to turn its fire on the French *Parti Socialiste* (PS) in the light of the impending legislative elections of 1978. As for the management of its internal affairs, the PCF remained firmly wedded to democratic centralism as its organising principle.

Jean Elleinstein now decided to shine a critical light on his own party and began to question the PCF leadership's doctrinal rigidity and refusal,

for example, to publish the new research done by CERM on the modern state. Elleinstein's frustration reached a peak in 1978, when he committed the cardinal transgression of airing his grievances outside the party. In a series of articles in *Le Monde* in April of that year, Elleinstein laid bare the PCF's failure to modernise intellectually and asked whether Lenin had anything to offer to the property-owning workers of Paris. The party leadership's meeting with almost 400 communist intellectuals in December 1978 did little to reconcile the two sides and when Elleinstein was expelled from the party less than twenty-four months later, it began an exodus that fatally undermined the intellectual credibility of the party.

At the base of the party by the end of the 1970s, evidence was mounting that the PCF was failing to keep up with the shifts occurring among its ordinary members. The decision to drop the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as the ultimate objective of the PCF was announced at the party's twenty-second congress in 1976. But the centre-left ground which this move should have allowed the PCF to colonise was being occupied with increasing effectiveness by a resurgent PS. The Communists had signed a Common Programme for Government with the Socialists in 1972, at a time when it was very much the senior partner as an electoral force. By the time tensions between the two parties had made the Common Programme a dead letter in 1977, the potency of the parties in electoral terms was on the verge of being reversed. In contrast to the ideological rigidity of the PCF, the PS under the leadership of François Mitterrand shed its ideological ballast in favour of an appeal to the lifestyle aspirations of not only its traditional public sector and professional constituency, but also an increasingly consumerist working-class electorate. Not only would Mitterrand's ideologically anodyne platform take him to the presidency of the French Republic in 1981,<sup>9</sup> but his campaign would enable him to harvest the votes of forty-four per cent of manual workers, as opposed to the twenty-four per cent who cast their votes for the PCF's George Marchais.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of Mitterrand's second presidential mandate in 1995 the PCF had undergone a considerable make-over, notably in terms of the style of party leadership. Robert Hue was voted in at the party's twenty-eighth congress in 1994, in part, as the antithesis to his predecessor, Marchais, nicknamed by some 'the red king'.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the

sectarian pugnacity of Marchais, Hue styled himself as the quiet conciliator, advocating pluralism and a pact for progress uniting a large swathe of centrist and leftist opinion inside and outside the party. He had, however, little time to develop his credibility as a candidate before the 1995 presidential elections. This was a factor which could be used to explain his modest 8.64 per cent score in the first round. Thereafter his 3.37 per cent score in the same round in the 2002 presidential elections made his failure to rally voters to the communist banner patently obvious. Having jettisoned its formerly doctrinaire image by appointing Hue, in 2002 the party endeavoured to modernise its image further by appointing the first woman party leader. The leadership's attempt to distance itself from an authoritarian image had led it to create a twin-headed structure with Hue as president and Marie-Georges Buffet as national secretary. Hue, however, was forced to concede failure when he admitted, in a newspaper interview, that party members simply did not understand the change.<sup>12</sup>

As Hue retreated from the political stage, Buffet emerged as the sole leader of the party and the direction she wanted it to take emerged at the PCF's thirty-second congress in April 2003. One of the features of the four days of debate to which the congress gave rise was the near anonymity of Buffet and her leadership team. The policy document that emerged from the conference confirmed the pursuit of 'mutation' or change and underlined the need to reconcile the different tendencies that had declared themselves in the party. More significantly, in her closing speech to the congress Buffet tacitly admitted the prospect of survival through alliance politics, by reassuring party members that the leadership would not be providing any blank cheques to anyone.<sup>13</sup> The idea that French communist influence could be preserved and deployed through consensus politics was also articulated by Francis Wurtz, who had been a personal secretary to Georges Marchais. Wurtz subsequently became a long-serving Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and as a member of the *Gauche unitaire européenne* (GUE) party grouping. Using that platform, Wurtz argued that the only way for communists to matter in the struggle against 'l'Europe libérale', or the imposition of free-market economics in Europe, was to join their forces with other adversaries of the neo-liberal agenda.<sup>14</sup> Domestically, well-known 'refon-

dateurs' or advocates of fundamental party reform, like Roger Martelli and Clémentine Autain, were proposing in the pages of *Regards* (the communist-inspired but independent periodical for the debate of cultural and intellectual issues), that not to pursue a path of convergence with other partners and sympathisers on the left would be an abdication of responsibility. Such a failure would simply provide the Socialist party with a free hand to impose its agenda on all the constituencies of the left in France.<sup>15</sup>

### **Back to the future: a new, old 'frontisme'**

Ironically, the individual who would draw the PCF into alliance politics was someone who would emerge from the PS, but like the PCF, would come to share its suspicions of the compromises that the PS has imposed on the left in France. Jean-Luc Mélenchon had joined the PS in 1977, as it rose to eclipse the PCF as the biggest party on the French left. He distinguished himself sufficiently to serve in the last two years of Lionel Jospin's 'gauche plurielle' or plural left government of 1997-2002, when a socialist majority in parliament 'co-habited' with Gaullist president, Jacques Chirac. Chirac's re-election in 2002, supported by a centre-right majority in parliament, freed Mélenchon to pursue an agenda hostile to economic liberalism that set him increasingly at odds with his party. In contrast to the policy of the PS, in 2005 Mélenchon campaigned alongside Buffet and the PCF, Olivier Besancenot and his *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCF) and José Bové's *Confédération Paysanne*, against the ratification of a draft Constitutional Treaty for the European Union. From their different perspectives, they all saw the draft treaty as opening the door even more widely to a market dominated Europe that would operate to the detriment of ordinary people. Mélenchon had already helped create a group within the PS in 2004 called *Pour la République Sociale* (PRS), explicitly committed to combatting economic liberalism. But that did not prevent him from finally quitting the party after the PS congress of 2008. Fiercely critical of the PS's determination to solicit the support of the electorate on the centre ground of French politics, Mélenchon co-founded the *Parti de Gauche* with Marc Dolez and promptly announced in November 2008 the formation of an alliance

with the PCF, with the aim of fighting for a social Europe and against the Lisbon Treaty in the European elections of 2009, under the banner of a *Front de Gauche (Pour changer l'Europe)*.

In contrast to the referendum in France on the Maastricht Treaty on 20 September 1992, where the 'yes' vote was carried by a majority of barely one per cent, the majority against a Constitutional Treaty for Europe was unequivocal at 54.68 percent of the votes cast in the referendum of 29 May 2005. The PCF, Mélenchon and their allies opposing the Treaty could legitimately congratulate themselves on the effectiveness of their campaign, given the substantial lead given to the 'yes' camp by the polling organisations at the beginning of the campaign, and the near-unanimity of the political and media establishment in supporting the Treaty. But the very fact that the establishment was so comprehensively associated with the 'yes' camp also explains why the success of the 'no' camp in the referendum did not serve as a platform for success in the presidential election of 2007. The result of the referendum in May 2005 was to a significant degree a variation on what is termed in French an 'élection sanction'. It was an opportunity to punish a governing elite, seized by many voters in France who perceived themselves to be the victims of the kinds of social and economic insecurity which national and European elites had failed to tackle, or even encouraged by favouring globalisation. The result did not signal a re-awakening of the kind of class consciousness among the French electorate that would restore the fortunes of the PCF or other left-wing alternatives to the PS.

Once the 'no' campaign was over, the divisions to the left of the PS reappeared and were carried into the presidential election of 2007. The 'anti-liberal' left-wing collective that put José Bové forward as its candidate soon found itself competing for the same modest reservoir of votes as the anti-capitalist Olivier Besancenot and the communist Marie-Georges Buffet. Conversely, the centre-right mobilised behind its candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy who, as the post-election analyses of his victory showed, had gained considerable support among those who had voted 'no' in the Constitutional Treaty referendum. This illustrated the extent to which the Constitutional Treaty issue cut across the left-right ideological divide. Furthermore, the fragile victory of the 'no' campaign was underlined by Sarkozy's determination to pursue France's acceptance

of the Lisbon Treaty by parliamentary means only. An extraordinary congress of the French National Assembly and the Senate was convoked in Versailles where, on 4 February 2008, they voted through the amendments to the constitution of the Fifth Republic that would facilitate the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former French president who has been tasked with overseeing the drafting of the Constitutional Treaty, described the Lisbon Treaty as a pale imitation of it. For his part, however, Sarkozy was adamant that the Lisbon Treaty had reincorporated the essential elements that had been proposed by the Constitutional Treaty. In short, the campaign against the Treaty had been a shallow success and a missed opportunity for the various elements of the non-PS left, and they knew it.

What drew the PCF, anti-capitalist, environmentalist and other constituencies to Mélenchon was the prospect he offered of reviving a dynamic 'gauche décomplexée', a left that no longer felt the need to apologise for the failures of the past but one that could wear its radical heart on its sleeve. When, in January 2011, Mélenchon declared his candidature for the presidential elections scheduled for the spring on 2012, he was rapidly supported by small left-wing movements like *Gauche unitaire* and *Fédération pour une alternative sociale et écologique* (FASE). More striking was the reaction of the PCF, which did something not seen since 1974 and the days of the Common Programme with the PS. The PCF's new guiding body, the national council, declared in April 2011 that it would endorse the candidature of a non-party member, Mélenchon, subject to the ratification of party members at a subsequent national conference.<sup>16</sup> This the membership duly did, eclipsing the hopes of the PCF's own presidential hopeful, the communist Deputy André Chassaigne. The party members concurred with the leadership's assessment that Mélenchon was the candidate most likely to unite the opponents of the neo-liberal economic agenda from across the political spectrum. But key to his appeal was Mélenchon's ability to deploy an iconoclasm, verve and energy not seen since the days of Georges Marchais. Unencumbered by Marchais' image as a bullying apparatchik who had ultimately disenchanting PCF members, Mélenchon was able to go on the front foot and assume the other role that Marchais had perfected, as a scourge of the establishment and the PS. With echoes of



Marchais' excoriation of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the centre-right candidate, and the PS's François Mitterrand, in the 1981 presidential race as two figures offering nothing more than the same old double-act ('un numéro de duettistes'),<sup>17</sup> in 2011 Mélenchon launched into their contemporary counterparts. He described Nicolas Sarkozy, the candidate for the Gaullist *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) and the PS candidate, François Hollande, as 'two men of a by-gone age who can't see that the system has failed'. Mélenchon derided Hollande's ineffectualness even more pointedly by describing him as 'the captain of a pedalo in the hurricane season'.<sup>18</sup>

Mélenchon and his campaign team put together a platform that harked back to France's revolutionary past, with a slogan evoking her 'rebellious beauty', in contrast to Hollande's more prosaic 'change, now'. While Hollande was portrayed as the staid, establishment 'énarque', the senior civil servant archetype who had been through the elite *École nationale d'administration*, Mélenchon was promoted as a radical alternative to Hollande's 'circumspect equivocation'. In an interview with the centre-right weekly *L'Express*, Mélenchon's campaign manager, François Delapierre, hammered home the message that the *Front de Gauche* and its leader would not compromise with the establishment and those (like the PS) who had colluded with it: 'We want to open fire on the media, the polling organisations, the rich and the grandes écoles. We want to smash the existing system and blow everything up, including the PS'.<sup>19</sup> The mantle of the 'anti-system' party once worn by the PCF was now proudly wrapped around the *Front de Gauche* and its campaign manifesto, entitled '*L'Humain d'abord*', chimed with the title of the PCF newspaper *L'Humanité*. The manifesto itself was a throwback to the 'maximalism' that pre-dated the triumph of neo-liberalism, with a worker-orientated and statist agenda for change. Salient features among a raft of proposals included: full pension rights at sixty; a working week strictly limited to thirty-five hours; a €1700 per month minimum wage; salary caps in all businesses; a rent freeze; 'titularisation' or permanent status for 800,000 public sector workers; political accountability for the European Central Bank; state control of capital flows; the creation of a sixth Republic with a National Assembly voted in by proportional representation.<sup>20</sup>

As Mélenchon was to elucidate later in an essay, Hollande and other socialist leaders in power in approximately half of Europe were indistinguishable from their supposedly right-wing rivals, and all shared in the spoils of a corrupt system. It was therefore no surprise that the left failed to make the establishment tremble. Invoking a Jacobin faith in the power of the ordinary masses, for Mélenchon the only force that could challenge the system was 'the people'.<sup>21</sup> During the course of the campaign itself, through his attacks on the failures of the PS, the excesses of capital and the ritual evocation of France's revolutionary past, Mélenchon was attempting to shape an act of memory, the recollection of a once proud and shared destiny, a 'collective re-presentation'.<sup>22</sup> While Mélenchon did not succeed in his declared ambition of running a close third behind Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande (he was pushed down into fourth place by Marine Le Pen, the candidate of the far right *Front National*), his appeal to France's 'peuple de gauche' or left-wing faithful, was borne out by the results. With 11.1 per cent of the votes cast in the first round of the presidential election on 22 April 2012, Mélenchon's performance constituted the first time a candidate to the left of the PS had got into double figures since the 15.35 per cent polled by Marchais in 1981. Looked at on a regional and local basis, Mélenchon scored more highly than his overall share of the vote suggests in the traditional communist heartlands of the industrial north, the old 'red belt' around the Paris region and those remaining bastions of rural communism in places like the remote parts of Brittany, Dordogne and the Lot-et-Garonne. Noteworthy also was Mélenchon's ability to poll strongly in traditional PS regions like the Landes and the Hautes Pyrénées. But arguably his most striking breakthrough was among the 'bobos' or the bohemian-minded bourgeoisie concentrated in large urban centres like Paris, Lyon and Grenoble, where Mélenchon secured almost twenty per cent of the vote.<sup>23</sup>

For Pierre Laurent, who succeeded Marie-Georges Buffet as national secretary of the PCF in 2010, the decision of the communists to mobilise behind Mélenchon was entirely justified. When asked if being called 'communist' any longer meant anything, Laurent answered that for part of the twentieth century communist ideas had been dogmatised and led to a kind of democratic myopia. Now, however, the enduring worth of

certain communist ideas could re-emerge and be re-invented for a different age. Interestingly, to underpin his optimism for the future, Laurent went back to the past, but now a de-dogmatised past. He evoked the lasting fruits of the contribution of the few Communist ministers in the first post-Liberation government and the early life of the Fourth Republic, for example, those who had fought for the establishment of the social security system. Through their support for the Popular Front alliance of the mid-1930s and onwards, the French communists had remained faithful to their core social values, and their commitment to the *Front de Gauche* was a way of preserving and adapting that social vocation to the needs of future generations, in contrast to the social-democratic movements who had compromised or forgotten that vocation.<sup>24</sup>

For some French communists, however, 'de-dogmatising' the past also means throwing the communist baby out with the bathwater. While the 1980s had seen the rise of the 'renovators' in the party, such as Pierre Juquin, the 1990s was marked by the emergence of a backlash by the defenders of an 'orthodox' vision of what the party's mission should be, and they first mobilised through the creation of a 'communist coordination' in 1991 to challenge the direction in which the party was being taken. By the mid-1990s other orthodox tendencies were beginning to manifest themselves in the PCF and expressed a yearning for an unequivocally dogmatic view of what the PCF was for. Thus, in 1996, the *Gauche communiste* or communist left sprang up and demanded a return to the definition adopted at the birth of the PCF in 1921 of the PCF as a party of revolution. A paroxysm was reached at the Martigues congress of 2000, when the frustrated orthodox dissenters split from the PCF to set up organisations to pursue their communist mission. After various incarnations, these endeavours resulted in the launching of the *Pôle de renaissance communiste en France* (PRCF) in 2004, with Léon Landini as its president and Georges Gastaud as its national secretary.

For the PRCF, the failure of the PCF was due to the fact that it had cut itself off from its ideological moorings, and it was time for communism in France to rediscover the energetic conviction that had once defined it by returning to the past, both symbolically and discursively. Whereas the hammer and sickle had disappeared from PCF publicity,

the PRCF chose to put it front and centre on its logo, in bold, bright red, and topped by the slogan '*franchement communiste*': frankly, clearly, unequivocally communist.<sup>25</sup> As for its discursive self-definition, the PRCF trumpeted its return to marxist-leninist doctrine, the pursuit of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and a blanket refusal to collaborate with the PS. What, to Pierre Laurent and the PCF appears anachronistic, to others seems justified, especially in the light of the *Front de Gauche's* failure to break through in subsequent elections. Its 6.34 per cent share of the vote in the European Elections of 2014 put it well behind its mainstream party rivals and even further behind the great winner in that election, the *Front National*, with over twenty-five per cent of the votes cast. The seemingly irresistible rise of the *Front National*, after its breakthrough in the European elections of 1984 with eleven per cent of the vote, has seen it replace the PCF as France's 'anti-system' party and draw in working-class voters, especially from those areas worst hit by unemployment, such as the mining and metal-bashing region of the Nord. For the PRCF, the return to marxist-leninist roots is preferable, and ultimately more viable, than the woolly-headed 'angélisme' or naivety that had taken the PCF into alliance politics with partners who were inherently incapable of forming a cohesive unit. The communists, for example, could never be reconciled with the hostility of the Greens to nuclear power, and the threat the Greens' attitude represents to one of the few French technologies generating well-paid employment for skilled industrial workers. As for Mélenchon himself, the failure of the *Front de Gauche* to break through the ten per cent barrier in the European elections was testament to the fact that it had failed to offer a coherent 'left' alternative to the PS and the road to disaster on which François Hollande and the socialists had dragged the nation after their electoral triumphs in the presidential and legislative elections of 2012.<sup>26</sup> In the lead up to the French regional elections of December 2015, Mélenchon reproached the PCF for not wanting to make the *Front de Gauche* broader and more dynamic and accused he communists of being 'barely disguised quasi-Socialists'. For his part, Pierre Laurent advised Mélenchon not to 'confuse radicalism with provocation and invective'.<sup>27</sup> It was a lack of cohesion that was noticeable in the first round of the elections and that contributed to the

inability of the *Front de Gauche* lists to attract more than five per cent of the votes.

### **Conclusion: nostalgia for all**

One of the interesting things about communist nostalgia in France is the way it has grown beyond the constituency one would expect. In the early 1990s this took a theoretical form, an intellectual anxiety as to what would follow the demise of the traditional ideologies of left and right. For some commentators, the end of those ideologies would lead elites to abdicate responsibility for determining the evolution of collective values, since underlying these are moral choices that have come to be perceived as belonging to the individual alone. Consequently, the default position for political elites in particular would be the adoption of a quasi-managerial discourse, focused on objectives such as more rational organisation and efficiency gains.<sup>28</sup> In France in particular, this nostalgia for clear ideological dividing lines would engender a growing fearfulness that would seep through the many crevices of political life and express itself most notably in a mistrust of globalisation. In contrast to the 'Anglo-Saxons', many in France see globalisation as a neo-liberal determinism that subjugates all possible political challenges to the status quo to irresistible and planetary economic forces. In other words, the old ideologies have given way to a new totalising vision that refuses to acknowledge itself as such but that in fact operates as an ideology of material compulsion.<sup>29</sup> More recent evocations of a past with a fixed ideological topography have illustrated the way left-wing and right-wing nostalgia in France can mirror each other. The recollection of the French communist movement, classically defined by Kriegel,<sup>30</sup> as a robust community and stabilising factor rooted in the country's social and economic landscape, can now serve an essentially conservative nostalgia. The portrayal of the PCF as the last great ally of de Gaulle in the defence of national sovereignty against the American hegemony to which so many of its European neighbours had submitted,<sup>31</sup> expresses part of a nostalgic yearning for a country with a settled identity, classic political cleavages, a properly articulated social structure and an independent sense of national purpose.

A growing appetite for nostalgia is partly driven by the perceived decline of the public sphere and the collateral damage to a shared social experience and sense of collective identity. This would be felt more acutely in a movement like the French communists which for most of the twentieth century had secured its place in French life by operating as a closely knit counter-community and counter-culture. The difficulty for communists of every persuasion, however, is how to make their nostalgia appeal to anybody outside their political tribe. Of all the major European societies, one could argue that France is the one most troubled by a loss of certainty as to its national vocation, its sense of identity, and its preparedness for the future. Whether it is the yearning for a pre-industrial idyll articulated by some, or the pre-modern mono-culturalism promoted by others, when it comes to nostalgia, French communists are peddling their particular variants in a very crowded market-place.<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre II: L'Unité 1942-44*, Paris : Plon/ Livre de Poche, 1956, p374. All translations from the French are by the author of this article.
- 2 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- 3 The humiliation of defeat and occupation, followed by the painful process of decolonisation, were instrumental in shaping the posture of Gaullist France as it attempted to bolster its image at home and abroad by nostalgic appeals to the country's historic vocation, especially in terms of its cultural influence. See Kate Marsh and Nicola Frith (eds), *France's Lost Empires. Fragmentation, Nostalgia and La Fracture Coloniale*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011.
- 4 Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin (eds), *Regimes of Memory*, London: Routledge, 2003.
- 5 Stéphane Courtois, *Le PCF dans la guerre*, Paris: Seuil, 1975.
- 6 B.S.Bell and B.Criddle, *The French Communist Party*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p206.
- 7 Jean-François Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises*, Paris: Fayard, 1990.
- 8 Jean Elleinstein, *Le Phénomène stalinien*, Paris: Grasset, 1975.

- 9 Alistair Cole, *François Mitterrand. A Study in Political Leadership*, London: Routledge, 1994.
- 10 Gérard Le Gall, 1981, 'Le nouvel ordre électoral', *Revue politique et parlementaire*, July-August, 1981, pp10-17.
- 11 J. Fabien, *Les nouveaux secrets des communistes*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1990, p123.
- 12 Robert Hue, interviewed in *Le Parisien*, 6 November 2002.
- 13 C. Monnot, 'Le PCF découvre la démocratie intene en étalant ses divisions', *Le Monde*, 7 April 2003.
- 14 Francis Wurtz, interviewed in *Libération*, 3 June 2004.
- 15 Clémentine Autain and Roger Martelli, '1944-1984-2004 – les tournants de la Gauche', *Regards*, 7/8, 2004.
- 16 *Le Parisien* editorial, 'Présidentielle: le PCF se range derrière Mélenchon', *Le Parisien*, 8 April 2011.
- 17 Emilie Dussartre-Chartreux, *Destins croisés: vivre et militer à Limoges*, Paris: Karthala, 2004, p357.
- 18 Jean-Luc Mélenchon, interviewed in *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 12 November 2011.
- 19 François Delapierre, interviewed in *L'Express*, 4 April 2012.
- 20 Front de Gauche, *Le programme du Front de Gauche et de son candidat commun Jean Luc Mélenchon*, Paris: Librio, 2011.
- 21 Jean-Luc Mélenchon, *L'Ere du peuple*, Paris: Fayard, 2014, p32.
- 22 Peter Burke, 'History as social memory', in Thomas Butler (ed.), *History, Culture and the Mind*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp.97-113, 101.
- 23 Ministère de l'Intérieur, *Résultats de l'élection présidentielle de 2012*, intérieur.gouv.fr. Accessed 24 September 2015.
- 24 Lilian Allemagna and Jonathan Bouchet-Petersen, 'Pierre Laurent: le communisme n'est pas une société parfait à atteindre', *Libération*, 15 August 2012.
- 25 The logo is proudly displayed on its website, <http://www.initiative-communiste.fr>.
- 26 L'Obs européennes, 'Européennes: Le Front de Gauche échoue à capter les mécontents et finit 6e', *nouvelobs.com*, 26 May 2014. <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/elections-europeenes-2014/20140526OBS...> Accessed 24 September 2015.
- 27 L'Express, 'Front de Gauche : Mélenchon et Laurent (encore) en désac-

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- 32 Aurélien Bernier makes the very interesting point that one of the reasons that the *Front de Gauche* finds it difficult to come up with a necessary and plausible critique of the way the EU functions is that it is afraid of being perceived as encroaching on the nationalist, anti-EU territory staked out by the *Front National*. See *La Gauche radicale et ses tabous*, Paris: Seuil, 2014.