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Managing the plural left: implications for the party system

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Introduction

The plural left marks a new type of alignment within the French party system. Left parties had cooperated previously according to varying formulae. The type of majority known as *concentration républicaine* (Goguel, 1946) is arguably the first manifestation, followed by the hegemony of the *délégation des gauches* in the 1900s, which put through anti-clerical measures of ‘republican defence’. The interwar period witnessed the *cartel des gauches* – tactical electoral alliances of Radicals, SFIO and selected ‘left republicans’ – invariably unstable and short-lived. Famously, the 1936 Popular Front, a formal alliance of the three main left parties plus smaller allies, managed to campaign on an agreed programme but, although a government was formed and enjoyed some success, this too fell apart under various pressures. After the Second World War, formulae for broad left cooperation ran from tripartism (SFIO and PCF without any Radicals, but including the new force of Christian Democracy) to the more restricted and temporary defensive arrangement of SFIO, Radicals and centre oddments in ‘Republican Front’ alliances excluding the by-now pariah PCF.

Under the Fifth Republic, the growing reality of bipolarisation drove the left’s leaders to the inevitable – a pact between the PS (as it now was) and the PCF, resting on a detailed and ambitious programme to which the incoming coalition government would be committed. The break-up of the Common Programme alliance generated sufficient movement to bring about Mitterrand’s 1981 win and, significantly, for him to feel obliged to involve the PCF in government for the first time in thirty-four years. PCF failure to use this opportunity intelligently soon led to further marginalisation, and by the mid-1980s the left-wing alliance consisted of a large PS with an undisputed leader of high status capable of winning a second presidency (and thus itself capable of winning a majority or nearly), trailing in its wake a small ally (the left Radicals),

and a shrinking PCF, not in total opposition to the PS and usually forced at election time to agree a deal. This unbalanced left duly won the presidency and a working majority in 1988. During this period a sizeable Green vote emerged in France. Yet this new but unfocused challenge was mostly ignored by the left parties (Boy, 1993).

All these cooperative attempts recall two underlying tendencies. First, the left parties have usually been involved in some kind of alliance. The winning of an outright majority by any one party has remained mostly an impossible dream, even after the PS flash in the pan of 1981, though this does not mean that *rapproches de force* in a left alliance are necessarily equal. Second, these alliances have usually been fragile, tactical and short term. The object has been to win an election and govern as best one could, basing government on the *rapproches de force* within the winning coalition. There has been nothing permanent about the pact; sometimes there has been no agreed programme or even clear understanding beyond *discipline républicaine*. Partners have felt free to drop out (PCF refusal to join government in 1936) or change partners in mid-term (the Radicals on numerous occasions between the wars, the SFIO after 1947) or even to vote with the right (the PCF against Rocard after 1988). No party leaders thought in terms of developing an ongoing alliance which respects the different identities and contributions of partners while demanding agreement and discipline on a number of policies and procedures. As a result, little long-term commitment could be given; partners might have to be changed. Hence it always suited the PS to keep alive the (increasingly unlikely) threat that it could revive the old type of Third Force deal with the Christian Democrats; or the PCF could threaten to withdraw into total opposition, e.g., by leaving candidates in at the second ballot (again an increasingly incredible scenario).

The seismic shock of the 1993 defeat shattered PS dreams of being a natural party of government. Rocard, now party leader – in itself a symbol of how low it had sunk – described the left as ‘a field of ruins’ and called for a ‘big bang’ to revive the PS, hinting that it might even have to merge with other left forces. Jospin’s emergence as a credible leader after the European defeat of 1994 and Rocard’s departure stemmed the decline and gave hope that the left could return to office. But Jospin had realised that this could only happen if a new type of relationship were established among its components. Thus was born a new concept of left unity in the shape of the plural left. Negotiations between the parties were direct and clearly focused, and carried out by a small team from each – the PCF, MdC, PRG, and, perhaps most significant of all, the Greens under Dominique Voynet (Amar and Chemin, 2002: 13–74). Each party retained its own electoral programme, but it was understood that all components would be in government if the plural left won.¹

Such a strategy clearly has implications for the party system, both in

terms of its individual components and of the dynamics between these which constitute the party system *per se*. First, we need to examine the motivations of the PS, principal mover in this strategy, but also to a lesser extent, those of its partners. We need then to examine what the plural left implies in terms of day-to-day relations between its components, especially in the light of recent government experience. These analyses may enable us to see how far the new experiment has actually transformed the party system, not just in terms of relationships within the left, but between the plural left and the rest of the system.

The PS and the plural left: strategy and motivation

As the motor force behind and principal beneficiary of the plural-left strategy was the PS, we need to understand its analysis of the party system and its motivations in pushing the plural left. Jospin's team began with the idea that the left-right polarity remains fundamental in French partisan life (Duhamel, 1997, Mossuz-Lavau, 1998, Cambadélis, 1999: 71–83). This is not just due to electoral bipolarisation, which may be as much a reflection as a cause; voters do still tend to split broadly along the left-right axis, as they have done since republican democracy became the norm (Charlot, 1993, Boy and Mayer, 2000). Obviously the values that underpin left and right identities evolve, as do the partisan forces that express them. But on election day, left-wing voters expect to find an adequate supply in party terms for their aspirations. This supply should normally confront a similar supply on the right in what was a moderately polarised system.

The state of this supply in 1993 was problematic, however. Previously, the PS thought of itself as embodying the only serious left. The PCF was shrinking; allies like the PRG had long been vassalised. Even the newly created MdC might not prove much of a nuisance, as Chevènement's followers might be more easily bought off from outside the party rather than cause trouble from within. From this viewpoint, then, the PS bossed the left and others fell in behind, with little input into policy and having to bargain for what they could in terms of seats, patronage, etc.

All this changed with the scale of the 1993 defeat, when the PS lost 217 deputies (282 to 65) and only took half of its 1988 vote, sliding back to the levels of the mid-1960s. Its allies, being smaller anyway, suffered proportionately less. The left faced a long haul to reconquer voters, but even if voters were to come back, there was no guarantee that they would all go to the PS, especially as the sour end of the Mitterrand presidency had degraded yet further the image of socialism. An alternative strategy therefore seemed attractive: why not build on the very diversity of the left, encouraging each of its components to draw in voters as widely as possible?

Clearly, this meant a downplaying of the hegemonic role which the PS had exercised since the late 1970s and a hard-headed assessment that it could probably never again achieve the scores of 1981 or 1988 nor hope to dominate in the same way. Obviously in any new left alliance the PS would be the biggest player and expect to lead in government; pluralism is a '*réalité hiérarchisée*' (Cambadélis, 1999: 136). But this position differs from the previous winner-take-all arrogance. The PS would have a more consultative, less domineering profile; it would also have to be more generous in sharing seats, posts and resources.

This was a bold step, and Jospin was the right man to take it. Inclined by temperament to a less personal style of leadership, he was also favoured by the institutional context; a plural-left win in 1997 would not be a presidential one (with all its implied legitimacy for one man and his programme). Rather it would be a parliamentary win, a win for parties; any government would have to be based on those parties, even if it was then to govern under cohabitation. The PS thus accepted a changed role for itself within the subsystem of the left. It did so as the best way to preserve its longer-term interests; better to be consensual leader of a broad-left coalition with some chance of gaining office than to be hugely dominant within a divided left with much less chance.

The plural-left strategy also reflected PS views about the left-party sub-system. It divided allies into three categories. The small parties (MdC and PRG) were seen essentially as *notable* movements with particular local strengths. MdC, with its vigorous republican nationalism, would refuse such a description, and certainly its ideological profile promised to cause problems. But in terms of putting together an alliance, these were small organisations with whom one could broker a deal. This meant a guarantee of a few seats for sitting deputies and a place in government, which the PS had indicated its willingness to provide. Previous republican alliances had done no differently.

In a different category was the PCF. Even in the 1980s the PS had arguably never pushed home its advantage, in terms of candidacies for seats or town halls, despite a clear drift of voters towards it away from the PCF. The hope was that the PCF would gradually prove redundant. Realistically, though, this would take a long time, as the party hung on in its last bastions. The PS thus resigned itself to the continuation of a sizeable number of PCF deputies, crucial to its majority, as well as Communist presence in government. This did not rule out hard bargaining at local level, but it did imply a willingness not to tread too hard on the PCF's toes. The PS also sought to influence the PCF's internal development. By incorporating it in a new majority, the PS could only increase the tension between modernisers who broadly supported Hue and who needed positive results (in terms of influencing policy) and the older, pure oppositionists (Hage, Auchédé, etc.) who wanted the PCF to

immure itself in a ghetto of protest before the Trotskyists usurped its role in such arenas. The party's internal process remains problematical, and largely independent of PS intervention; but if the PCF were to 'social-democratise' itself yet further and lose some of its hard core, then the possibility of absorbing the social-democratic remnants back into the PS might arise (Cambadélis, 1999: 133ff.). The PCF itself did not believe that the PS's weakening in 1993 opened up any new space. As Lajoinie revealingly told Cambadélis, the only way forward for both parties was together (1999: 26).

The Greens were a case *sui generis*, and PS treatment of them is arguably the boldest and most system-modifying part of the plural-left strategy. Pro-Green sentiments continued to rise among voters, despite finding no successful partisan outlet (Boy, 1993). Several factors ensured this, including division among Green elites, the entry barriers imposed by the electoral system to all new parties and even sharp practice (for instance, Interior Minister Quilès allowing the registration of numerous doubtful ecology candidacies in 1993, thus scattering the Green offer confusingly). The Greens were even unable in 1994 to re-elect their MEPs from 1989. Undoubtedly their challenge could have been ignored by the plural left, which could easily have stopped them winning seats under the two-ballot system.

A bolder alternative was to recognise that the Greens' own ineptitude and the electoral system might not keep them out of Parliament forever, and certainly not without risk. Even if they could only mobilise a first-ballot electorate, it might not be deliverable to the plural left on the second. In other words, the Greens might have some blackmail potential. Taking them into coalition held problems; their demands were far-reaching, not just on environmental questions. But cold-shouldering them was just as risky an option.

The PS grasped this nettle resolutely, with an offer of seats and a place in government. It sought to decant the Green movement, to sort out those interested in political responsibility from those concerned with protest; it sought to distinguish politicians from ideologues, realists from moralisers. It did so with admirable succinctness; the main body of Greens followed Voynet into the plural left. This passage from periphery to centre stage was dramatic; no party can assume such a brusque change of status overnight. By decanting the Green movement and bringing its mainstream firmly into the plural left, the PS knowingly affected not just the internal functioning of the Greens but the workings of the whole party system. It also gambled that the Greens could be fitted successfully into the left, challenging the assumption that they represent a new cleavage (centred on the environment), unassimilable into the left-right matrix. As for the far left, by now capable of around 5 per cent of the vote, the plural left took the common-sense view that its voters are unlikely to support a reformist politics (at least on the first ballot). But

since its representatives were unlikely to figure on the second, it could for coalitional purposes be ignored.

The anchoring of Greens and PCF has also blocked any evolution of the party system towards a two-tier variety. Before 1997, concern was regularly voiced at declining turnout and an increasing tendency to vote for 'protest parties' as opposed to potential government parties. Such worries about a crisis of representation depended on an ontological characterisation of certain parties as being mere protest vehicles, hence unfit for government. Such dubious assumptions fed anxieties; critics dwelt on the increasing share of the first-ballot vote won by such peripheral parties, as opposed to the core of serious parties.² Apart from the FN and Trotskyists (Pingaud, 2000), the main members of the peripheral crew were the PCF and Greens.

If one accepts the hypothesis of a core-periphery division within the party system, one must note that it was nullified at a stroke by Jospin's voluntarism. The plural-left pact tied the Greens and PCF into the responsible camp, leaving the protest to the Trotskyists (rising slowly) and an FN soon to be victim of gross self-mutilation. Suddenly the proportion of core party voters climbed by some 16.8 per cent, leaving only about 18 per cent voting for the peripherals and casting doubts on the extent of the crisis of representation. Seen thus, PS strategy seems not only a voluntaristic attempt to recast the party system but also a profoundly civic action, bringing back into the fold a large percentage of voters and reducing citizen alienation. Such happy coincidences of civic duty and one's own strategic interest are infrequent.

The PS triggered a voluntaristic recomposition of the party system. Within the historic left-right cleavage, it energetically re-organised the left pole. This strategy involved downgrading its own position somewhat, while continuing quasi-clientelistic relationships with small allies. But the dynamic counterpart to this was the challenge thrown out to Greens and Communists; they were offered measurable rewards in return for their cooperation. Yet acceptance of rewards put pressure on them as parties, highlighting their internal contradictions as they moved into a new role of responsibility as opposed to criticism. The PS pursued a calculated strategy of interference in the affairs of other parties, aiming to modifying their behaviour, the better to reshape the whole party system. The strategy sought to make the broad left viable again. It worked quicker than expected, but the experience of government opened a new chapter.

The plural left in government

The management of intra-left relationships is seen first in terms of distribution of rewards and second in the regulation of tension between

partners. The basic reward for any party is places in government. Jospin's smallish government respected electoral weight in its shareout of posts but not to the extent of the proportionality used to compose Italian cabinets under *partitocrazia*; pluralism is indeed a hierarchised reality (see Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1 Vote–position ratio in first Jospin government

	<i>Ministers</i> (N)	<i>Government posts</i> (%)	<i>Share of total Left vote</i> (%)
PS	19	70.4	50.0
PRG	3	11.1	3.1
PCF	3	11.1	21.8
MdC	1	3.7	2.4
Green	1	3.7	14.5
Other left	—	—	8.2
	27	100	100

The second Jospin government in 2000 was again based on PS supremacy, but added an extra dimension to the formula. It brought in the Fabius tendency, neutralising Jospin's only serious rival for leadership of the PS. Jospin also added Mélenchon and his *gauche socialiste*, main source of internal party criticism. After this internal rebalancing only the Poperenites, persistent old-left militants, remained outside the magic circle.³ Thus groups within the PS became part of the balancing process alongside allies from outside the party. This new government also saw an extra junior post for the Greens, a deliberately belated recognition of their success in the 1999 Euroelections.

Jospin played the numbers game, but only on his terms. Ministers from smaller parties tended to be confined to specialist areas. Thus Voynet was given Environment and specifically denied Health; Hascoët's junior ministry was environmentally tagged. The Communists received social ministries, including Transport, where access to unions is still important. Even the placing of Chevènement at Interior showed that the most republican force in the government had its very specific place (but no other?).

If distribution of rewards was relatively mechanical, control of this delicate alliance was complex. Jospin was a hands-on prime minister, at the heart of policymaking and attending personally to relations with allies. He used formal and informal contacts, from traditional weekly breakfasts with senior PS 'elephants' to formal meetings with other party leaders,⁴ as well as less visible social contacts with the latter. While a relatively high degree of public argument was tolerated, the PS was clearly leader of the coalition. Regular complaints about PS hegemony, by Voynet in particular but also Buffet, are one indication of this.⁵ A

more convincing one is the semi-public slapping down of allies for crossing a line in the sand. This happened to Voynet after she launched into Jospin's leadership style in a regional council of her party; she simply took the lesson on board and did not resign, suggesting that the Greens had to accept PS primacy in the last analysis.⁶ Voynet's late departure from government was not a rejection of Green participation in a plural-left government but a career move to become mayor of Dôle – a failure, but she did become party leader (Amar and Chemin, 2002: 218–27).

More subtle techniques were also used by the PS to maintain its ascendancy, notably attempts to influence the internal workings of other parties, as described above. Jospin held contemptuous views about the chronic fissiparity of the Greens which he strove to increase.⁷ Hascoët's appointment was a masterstroke, as he and Noël Mamère, the vocal Bordeaux deputy who criticised Voynet's failure to obtain more radical environmental policies, formed increasingly a pole of opposition to Voynet within the Greens. While differences between the factions may well be exaggerated, each was keen to secure the nomination as Green candidate for the 2002 presidentials, as Villalba and Vieillard-Coffre demonstrate in this volume (see Chapter 4). The more divided the Greens were, the less their first-ballot impact and the bigger Jospin's score, in theory. Thus putting both groups in government might have increased tension within the Green Party and weakened their electoral appeal. In party system terms, therefore, the PS sought to weaken competition within the left sub-system from the inside, by modifying the behaviour of one of its protagonists.

A major source of tension was clearly policy-making (Szarka, 1999). Examination of the policy process since 1997 requires a separate study, but several points can be made. First, the plural left generally found agreement easiest on libertarian matters like PACS or parity legislation. Second, PS partners continued to argue for their favourite radical policies (wealth tax for the PCF, regularisation of all *sans-papiers* and commitment to phase out civil nuclear energy for the Greens) while knowing that the PS would not accept them, at least in untrammelled form. Third, the junior partners had to swallow some bitter pills (adoption of the Euro for the PCF, burial of nuclear waste or reactivation of the *Phénix* nuclear reactor for the Greens). That said, however, many government bills were the product of horse-trading between the parties, a classic example being the hunting bill, which Voynet defended in Parliament although it was not fully to her liking. The last-minute withdrawal of PCF opposition to the social modernisation bill in June 2001 saw compromise stretched to the limits. The PCF accepted face-saving amendments to a bill which in the end removed protection from workers.⁸ Tension was frequent, but a deal was usually struck.

The major clash was undoubtedly over Corsica. The special arrangements proposed by Jospin were denounced by Chevènement's MdC as incompatible with republican principles. Jospin could not withdraw from an arrangement whose impact might prove as spectacular (initially, at least) as the Ulster Good Friday agreement, in order to appease a minority. No public row occurred, and each side expressed its views; but Chevènement resigned (Amar and Chemin, 2002: 204–17). He was replaced by a Jospin loyalist Vaillant; but MdC did not get even a junior post in compensation. This reflects the lack of talent in MdC, but also the PS's calculation that it could tough this challenge out, as the blackmail potential of MdC was small. This was a grave miscalculation. MdC's blackmail potential would be seen on the evening of 21 April 2002 to amount to some 1.5 million votes; the margin of Jospin's defeat, which put him out of the second ballot, was only 190,000. Retrospectively, MdC's exit was probably the moment when the plural left lost the 2002 elections. At the time, MdC made clear its continuing commitment to the coalition, but the damage was done.

The Greens could muster more immediate blackmail potential, however, as they showed in a cantonal by-election in Ardèche by maintaining their candidate on the second ballot and costing the PS the seat. This was doubtless connected with the length of time it took to appoint Hascoët, some nine months after the Greens had 'earned' the seat by their European election performance. Jospin had also leaked it out that he wanted the Greens to have a group in the next Parliament (even if the threshold had to be reduced), which meant that he expected to offer them some winnable seats. Clearly, *rappports de force* were perceived differently; the Greens were respected more than MdC because it was felt that they could do more damage. This was despite PS annoyance at the Greens' political style, notably their constant moralising about the low standards of public life in France. This is a dossier the PS would rather have buried, as it had its own Mutuelle Nationale des Etudiants Français (MNEF) scandal to set alongside Tibéri and the Paris *mairie*. But it dared not revenge itself too heavily on the Greens, because they could cost it seats.

The PCF position was always going to need subtle handling both by its leaders and the PS. The PCF could logically pose only as the radical pole of the coalition, seeking to drag it further towards progressive policies without being irresponsible, to criticise constructively without being disloyal. It had to be a Janus, sending a populist message to its constituents and a more consensual one to its partners. Generally it managed this balancing act about as well as any could have. Initial hostility to the euro never led the PCF to vote against this key measure of the government, though it never abandoned its criticisms. Demonstrations planned against the second round of legislation on the

thirty-five-hour week in October 1999 seemed unacceptable for a governing party and led observers to ask whether this was the line in the sand. But Hue needed (and got) a big demonstration on an economic issue like this, to persuade his people that the PCF still counted and could mobilise people. The circle was squared by presenting the protest as directed not against government but against the *Mouvement des Entreprises de France* (MEDEF), which was trying to block measures in favour of workers. An indulgent PS under Hollande even pretended to endorse this strategy. Clearly the PS calculated that the PCF needed some visible protest in order to comfort its natural base and that this was a way of keeping the PCF at a certain strength, for the time being at least. Again it had too much blackmail potential to be alienated brutally, hence the protest could be accommodated. The resultant compromise suited both sides; lines in the sand have sometimes to be moveable.

By such devices was the balance maintained between coalition partners, albeit with a fairly visible degree of dissent; Szarka notes a 'pragmatic level of cohesion' (1999: 31). Problems as awkward as the Kosovo crisis or the launch of the euro were managed. Two major sets of elections (municipal and European) saw either joint lists or competition kept within amicable bounds. There was no major crisis of the type that plagued coalitions in previous republics, and no party voted down government bills. The plural left sustained a viable social-democratic government up to the 2002 elections.

These were traumatic for the plural left, though it remains to see how far they have rendered the concept invalid. All the component parties ran a presidential candidate, even the PRG whose black, female and overseas candidate, gifted most of her 500 signatures by the PS, seemed a living symbol of the diversity of the left today. Conventional wisdom has it that this plurality cost Jospin his place in the second round and let in Le Pen, but this is simplistic. The timidity of Jospin's campaign (downplaying all reference to socialism) and his late and unconvincing attempts to climb onto the law-and-order bandwagon were fatal. His inversion of the electoral calendar was absurd; why did a man running as leader of a governing *party* give first priority to a contest where personality and stature override partisan considerations? The argument about plural candidacies is also misleading. Every party must put up a candidate if it is to be taken seriously; previously, PCF, Greens had always done so, making their point in the first round before mostly supporting the Socialist in the decisive vote. A plural left should logically imply a plurality of candidates, but capable partners should be able to bargain enough to prevent plurality from degenerating into fragmentation.

The problem with this was Chevènement, whose candidacy sanctioned an ego trip in preparation for over thirty years. For all his talk of

overcoming the irrelevance of the left–right cleavage (language already heard in the Third Republic), the ex-PS leader was really targeting left voters worried about law and order and the economic consequences of European integration. Like the Trotskyist candidates who took over 11 per cent and played, in different words, on similar fears, he bit deep and knowingly into Jospin's reserve of votes. He was quite entitled to point out that Jospin had lost 2.5 million votes after five years in government. But one can retort that without his candidacy Jospin would have easily made the second ballot, with a good chance of beating Chirac. Chevènement's motives, and his support, deserve painstaking investigation; but he dealt the plural left a body blow. The June parliamentary elections found it struggling against the tide. All the parties campaigned on their own platforms, but with enough residual unity, helped by fear of letting the FN onto the second ballot in numerous seats, to prompt a high degree of concerted candidacies. Thirty-four seats saw one joint candidate (14 PS, 12 PCF, 4 PRG and 4 Greens).

Variable geometry prevailed elsewhere: the PS made way for 31 PRG and carved up 130 seats with the Greens (70 PS, 60 Green) and 28 with the PCF (15 PS, 13 PCF); only one PS–PCF dogfight took place, in Marseilles.⁹ The plural left turned on the MdC with some relish, running candidates in all its seats; only one incumbent survived out of eight, and angry voters sent Sarre and Chevènement to comprehensive defeat. This revenge was meagre consolation for an outcome which left the PS with 146 deputies (from 250), the PCF 21 (from 36), the PRG 7 and the Greens a bare 3; overall, the left went from 319 to 177 and faced a block of 399 right-wing deputies.

Dramatic developments had been occurring on the right since the first presidential ballot. Sensing the magnitude of his victory over Le Pen, Chirac seized the opportunity to pressure the right's parties into a merger. The measure, often adumbrated in the past, seemed feasible at last. In the new chamber, the President's embryonic new party UMP and its satellites boasted 363 seats; Bayrou's maintained UDF scraped 29. A special congress in autumn would officially launch the new party and consecrate the disappearance of the RPR and DL. Faced with what looked like a mass conservative party, solidly ensconced in office, the battered left had plenty of time to take stock. Despite the hurt of defeat, however, it is questionable how much has really changed in the situation of the party sub-system, which we term the plural left.

Consequences for the party system

The plural-left experiment has clearly had consequences for the party system, mostly for the left sub-system, though also for the system as a

whole. The left sub-system has been reorganised voluntaristically, from above. What exists now is a semi-permanent constellation of parties around a hegemonic pole, the PS. To use neo-Weberian analysis (Gaxie, 1996, Offerlé, 1987), an entrepreneur, the PS, has cartellised the competition within its sector of the market, guaranteeing itself and its cartel allies a larger share. As this move came about after a huge loss of market share, we could even parody political-market language further and say that it had turned a reverse into an opportunity.

The PS gambit assumes that the left can normally enjoy at least half of the electoral market; it has to make sure that internecine competition does not stop it from realising its share. To identify its product to customers, the plural left branded itself firmly as such. Its discourse picks up classic left themes; in economics, it is Keynesian and regulatory, striving for full employment; in social affairs, it stands for 'cultural liberalism' and inclusion. Politically, it is republican and *laïc*. The gambit also assumes a certain division of labour, with each party picking up a distinct electorate (Giacometti, 1998); these can then be reconciled under the broad headings just described. Far-left voters are assumed to be of a distinct type and the hope is that many will support the plural left on the second.

The plural left has involved its components more closely than most previous arrangements of this type. There were joint declarations, if not a common programme, and joint lists (or failure to put up a rival candidate) seemed as frequent as traditional *désistements*. The work of Parliament seemed subject to the same process of *compromis majoritaire*, even if smaller allies complained that executive decisions were dominated by the leading party. One might agree with Cambadélis (1999) that the left parties are being changed by their participation in the plural left; they are becoming more used to a culture of compromise. This does not mean that they are will lose their identity or merge, but they seem likely to be increasingly attracted to coalitional logic. The plural left looks set to become a lasting feature of the political landscape, notwithstanding changes of nomenclature. The alliance produced electoral victory and workable government for five years; it then lost but not hugely. What does this suggest about the future of the plural left and of the party system generally?

First, relatively little has changed within the components or within the dynamics between them. To take the protagonists in turn, the PS still remains the biggest party. It faces a period of intense leadership struggle in the short term, but that will be resolved. It will continue to have difficulty in defining what socialism really means today. Its linguistic rigours and ideological traditions make this task harder than for some sister-parties, but that is a detail. The PS and all social-democratic parties are all struggling with the same problem, which Rosanvallon summarised neatly: finding out how to reconcile the increasing individualism of

modern societies with that desire for security which the left saw as needing collective solutions.¹⁰ There is no easy answer to this question, and failure to provide a ready-made one will not stop the PS or any similar party from winning elections again. When the left wins again, then the PS will be the major player in that victory.

Its partners in the plural left remain in its dependency. The PRG will never be more than a local satellite. The PCF continues to lose lifeblood but is far from dead. It saved its parliamentary group and it still runs 84 towns of over 10,000 and two *conseils généraux*. It lost money in the presidentials, as Hue took less than 5 per cent. It too will undergo a leadership struggle, linked to an identity crisis, as it oscillates between protest and the aspiration to be a government party.

The Greens are still stuck with the same contradictions. Mamère's pragmatic campaign rescued them from the electoral consequences of undiluted radicalism and saved their election expenses. But the tension between governmentalsists and radicals remains, the more so as even Mamère began to cast doubt on whether the PS could be relied upon to deliver enough (with particular reference to the commitment to wind down the nuclear power programme). But the Greens' modest electoral appeal probably means that they can maintain a presence in a left alliance but not twist the arm of the leaders. Portelli wonders if the movement has fully accepted the logic of being a party as opposed to a social movement.¹¹

All of the above was true when the plural left began life in the mid-1990s. So was the fact that one segment of the party system, the far left, remains hostile to the whole notion of a reformist left alliance. It thus remains a potential threat, capable of biting indiscriminately into the left's electorate. What has really changed in the dynamics of the plural left is the role of the MdC. Chevènement's movement is at war with the plural left. It did fatal damage in the presidentials, but its parliamentary performance was poor. It remains to be seen whether, with considerable debts, the movement can go very far in its attempt to draw together *républicains des deux rives*, basically Jacobin nationalists of left and right. It could prove to be a mere club for intellectuals and politicians at the end of their career, but remains for the moment a residual threat for the left parties. This one minor exception does not, however, invalidate the concept of the plural left for the future.

One of the strongest consequences of the plural left was, perversely, its effect on the opposite side of the partisan spectrum. The plural left put itself into the driving seat of party politics in France with only 44 per cent of the vote in 1997. This had implications for the right. It had always hitherto understood the logic of bipolarisation better than the left. It usually managed to present voters with an agreed programme and arrange a highly sophisticated carve-up of constituencies and/or places in government, with measurable criteria (Hanley, 1999b). Logically it

ought to have responded to the plural left with a display of tighter unity; but its recent history has been one of internal strife compounded by the rise of the FN. The European elections saw the right's offer fragmented into RPR, a UDF which had lost its liberals (now DL) and the sovereignist RPF, not to speak of the two branches of the ex-FN.

Strategists hypothesised about the creation of a plural right, which would take in RPR, RPF, DL and UDF in the hope of further marginalising the far right. France would then have a polarised two-bloc system, with a radical element (Trotskyists and FN) on either side. Given the small size of the radical elements, it would be a moot point whether such a system deserved to be called 'polarised pluralism'. That one could even envisage such a two-bloc system shows how far the party system has moved from the days of the *quadrille bipolaire* of the 1970s. Within the many-membered left bloc there is a clear dominant pole; within the right the RPR would have to claim a similar position of ascendancy. The plural left, by its successful take-off, put major pressure on the right sub-system.

However, there seemed little positive reaction by the right until the 'divine surprise' of Le Pen's presence on the second ballot of the 2002 presidentials. The presence of this bogeyman allowed Chirac to pressure the right parties towards a merger that shows every sign of being more workable and lasting than anything previously attempted, even if the maintaining of the UDF outside the UMP umbrella means that the 'French Tory party' is less than complete. Certainly the right sub-system appears to be in a process of radical and further-reaching reorganisation as a result of what has happened on the left. Within it, the RPR would appear to have played a dominant role similar to the PS on the left and the new party will be very much under its influence.

Faced with the dramatic movement towards unity on the right, some have expressed the wish that the left follow and create a broad-based party. This is unlikely. The smaller parties have distinct identities and ideological traditions, somewhat divergent electorates and above all apparatuses keen to preserve their prerogatives. Leaders such as Hollande seem perfectly aware of this and are not pushing for any sort of merger. Some PS leaders are counting on the demise of the PCF, but that will be some time in coming. In the meantime, a politics of alliance seems the only way forward, with separate identities, but regular electoral alliances and a broadly agreed programme of government. The parties will have to work more closely on a day-to-day basis and manage their unity without taking it for granted. In other words, they will have to carry on doing what they learned to do in 1997–2002. The French party system will not be suddenly bipolarised *à l'anglaise*. But a much more unified right will now confront a left whose success will depend on a constant ability to work out a creative tension between unity and difference.

One final point must be made. The success of the plural left brings

out a constant of the French party system ever since it first became recognisable in the late nineteenth century (Hanley, 2002). This is the ability of party elites to collude when necessary in order to modify or restrict competition. Such a strategy has usually necessitated fine judgement and readiness to act boldly; the agents had to challenge the structures in which they operated in order to modify them. Looked at in long-term perspective, the plural left – and its imitators on the right – are simply repeating this pattern.

Notes

- 1 In competitive terms, PS and MdC agreed not to challenge each other's incumbents; PS also left the Greens a free run in 30 seats. PCF and MdC agreed 48 joint candidacies. PS and PCF signed a joint electoral declaration, focusing on demand stimulation and job creation, the thirty-five-hour week, tax reform, an end to ongoing privatisations and a new immigration law (Szarka, 1999, Buffotot and Hanley, 1998).
- 2 By this logic, in 1993 only 58.98 per cent (of a 70 per cent turnout) were voting for potential governing parties and two-fifths of voters were mere 'protesters' (Habert *et al.*, 1993: 300).
- 3 *La Croix*, 28 April 2000.
- 4 *Le Monde* 26 April 2000.
- 5 *La Croix* 2 June 2000.
- 6 Voynet claimed that there was no real collective strategy in government. Major decisions were taken in ministerial meetings dominated by the PS or during Tuesday morning breakfasts with PS 'elephants'; future measures were announced to PS summer schools, but not to ministerial colleagues; smaller alliance partners were simply used for dirty jobs – nuclear waste to herself, transport unions to the PCF's Gayssot (*Le Monde* 23 May 2000).
- 7 *Le Monde*, 23 May 2000.
- 8 *La Croix*, 14 June 2001.
- 9 *La Croix*, 7 June 2002.
- 10 *La Croix*, 3 July 2002.
- 11 *La Croix*, 15 November 2000.