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The Left Reacts: French Leftists and the 1989 Revolutions in Eastern Europe

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Abstract: *The last weeks of 1989 concluded a year of turmoil in Eastern Europe and the fall of communist regimes. For a significant portion of the French population the direction of European communism was relevant not only to the European political landscape but to their own beliefs and identities. In Western Europe and America, the press heralded the 1989 communist collapses in Eastern Europe, from groundbreaking Polish elections in June to the fall of the Berlin wall in November, as great victories in the struggle against communism. But relying upon the English speaking press alone to examine Cold War era events provides a misleading image of how Western countries viewed Communist states and the events which led to their collapse.*

The political climate in America and Britain was highly conservative; however, the political right did not hold as strong a position in other Western nations, even those in the NATO alliance. In places such as Italy and France, viable Communist parties and strong leftist movements existed along with press outlets which represented their ideas and those of a constituency which took a less straightforward view of the West's moral position. The French Communist Party (PCF) achieved some degree of electoral success throughout the Cold War. The collapse of Communist governments and ensuing dramatic power shifts raised a number of questions about the French left which my article considers. How did Communists and Socialists in France, view the fall of states who espoused, in theory, the forms of government and social management their own parties advocated? And how did the Socialist and Communist parties in France relate to their ideological counterparts in Eastern Europe? This article employs French newspapers, political journals, and party communications to discuss the French left's expectations for the future of communism in Eastern Europe, their views on the revolutions of 1989, and their hopes and fears for the future of Eastern Europe as the political climate evolved.

1 Introduction

This headline from *L'Humanite*, the French Communist Party's newspaper, asked an important question about the future of communism in Europe as the last weeks of 1989

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concluded a year of turmoil in Eastern Europe and the fall of communist regimes. For a significant portion of the French population the direction of European communism was relevant not only to the European political landscape but to their own beliefs and identities. In Western Europe and America, the press heralded the 1989 communist collapses in Eastern Europe, from groundbreaking Polish elections in June to the fall of the Berlin wall in November, as great victories in the struggle against communism. Governments in Great Britain and The United States celebrated these events as the beginning of the end of the Cold War and indications of communism's inability to provide a stable and enduring form of government. But relying upon the English speaking press alone to examine Cold War era events provides a misleading image of how Western countries viewed Communist states and the events which led to their collapse.

The political climate in America and Britain was highly conservative, and the leaders of these states during the 1980s, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher led the conservative parties of those countries which promoted a public view of the Soviet Union and communism as opponents of the west and enemies of freedom. However, the political right did not hold as strong a position in other Western nations, even those in the NATO alliance. In places such as Italy and France, viable Communist parties and strong leftist movements existed along with press outlets which represented their ideas and those of a constituency which took a less straightforward view of the West's moral position.

In France, the Communist Party (PCF) achieved some degree of electoral success throughout the Cold War, receiving between eighteen and twenty-six percent of the vote in legislative elections between 1945 and 1978. And in the 1980s, the PCF formed part of Francois Mitterrand's ruling coalition along with the Socialist Party (PS) (Elgie, 2000). Events in Eastern Europe were well covered and portended a fundamental change in the political landscape of Europe. The collapse of Communist governments and ensuing dramatic power shifts raised a number of questions about the French left which will be considered here. How did Communists and Socialists in France, accustomed to

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holding their own in a representative government, view the fall of states who espoused, in theory, the forms of government and social management their own parties advocated? And how did the Socialist and Communist parties in France relate to their ideological counterparts in Eastern Europe? This study will also examine how the French left viewed itself in the greater context of European politics in the wake of communism's collapse in Eastern Europe. These questions beg another: how did a Socialist/Communist coalition which led a nuclear armed Western power manage to make sense of participation in an alliance openly opposed to Communist Eastern Europe? This article will discuss the French leftists' expectations for the future of communism in Eastern Europe, their views on the revolutions of 1989, and their hopes and fears for the future of Eastern Europe as the political climate evolved.

2. Left Parties in Cold War France

Despite their popularity in post-World War II France the parties of the French left, the strongest of which were the Socialist Party and the French Communist Party, never held power before until the 1980s. This changed in 1981, when Mitterrand's coalition formed a government in which the Socialist party led while the Communist party acted as a junior partner. The PCF actually achieved its highest levels of membership in the 1970s. However, with the coalition, the PCF formed part of the ruling government for the first time, and served in the ruling coalition from 1981 to 1984. Despite the resignation of PCF ministers over economic policy disputes in 1984, the party maintained a fragile friendship with the PS while the Socialist coalition held sway in France until later in the decade when a centre-right coalition and its Prime Ministers shared power with Mitterrand, the Socialist President, in a split government situation referred to as "cohabitation." Analysis of this period shows how the strength of ruling coalitions relied on pragmatic centrists as much as left or right wing ideologues (Friend, 1989). Not only were French left politicians confronted by a changing list of issues and challenges internationally, but support for the left was also radically altered by the decline of European communism and the

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dissolution of the Soviet government which had taken an active interest in French politics, including funding the PCF newspaper *L'Humanite*.

The PCF possessed a broad constituency which spanned most regions prior to the Second World War. The maintenance of a competitive Communist party in France during the Cold War is not entirely surprising given the strong history of the PCF and the general politics of France during the 20th century (Boswell, 1993). French Communists were particularly associated with the French Resistance against Nazi Germany and opposition to the Vichy French government. Despite remaining quiet while the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact held, French communists entered the resistance en masse following the German invasion of the Soviet Union and managed to emphasize their participation in the years following (Friend, 1999). Furthermore, France's situation following the war did not inherently push her into even a tacit alliance against the Soviet Union. Many in France, including the influential and right of center Charles de Gaulle, had little interest in entering a new global conflict. While France was a valuable ally of the United States and Britain in many aspects of the Cold War, the refusal of French governments to fully cooperate with the NATO alliance during the Cold War reflected a political culture more open to socialist and communist movements.

The PCF maintained strong political and philosophical ties to the Soviet Union, eschewing the nation-specific ideas of Euro-communism popular in Italy and Spain (except for a brief period in the mid-70s) which defied the notion of one ideal form of communism, instead stressing the importance of local conditions and cultural traditions. However, the party was conflicted when forced to choose between an ideological stand against undemocratic states and support for communist countries. Sometimes these disagreements reflected an honest ideological quandary in which the French could not resolve their beliefs with complete support for the USSR. For example, the PCF favored Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan for several years, though Andre Leplat of the PCF Central Committee described the eventual withdrawal as "a victory for Soviet Union and diplomacy" rather than the result of military setbacks (LePlatt, 1988). The PCF's

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operations during the Cold War required constant juggling of international loyalties and ideology with domestic political relevance (Ross, 1992). Perhaps the most striking example of their situation is that while the PCF entered government in coalition with Mitterrand's Socialists, the Soviet Union had supported the more centrist Valéry Giscard d'Estaing for President. Despite the paradox of the Soviet Union opposing the leader of a French Left coalition, Soviet officials distrusted the politically savvy Mitterrand and his friendliness with American leaders, opting instead for the strongly independent d'Estaing. The PCF's often public distaste for Mitterrand reflected the pragmatic basis of the left alliance (Murray, 1997).

While the participation of the PCF in French government and the positive results of détente were encouraging signs for the future of European communism, the collapse of the Soviet bloc might not have been entirely unexpected given the overall history of the Cold War. Certainly events prior to the late 1980s are central to understanding how the left developed and the post-Cold War era formed, but the reaction of the French left in 1989 is still highly relevant. The presence of hope and optimism does not reveal stunning ignorance of the political situation despite how some strong statements may appear in hindsight. For example, the image of PCF representative Pierre Blotin attending the annual meetings of the Romanian Party Congress days before the downfall of Ceausescu in December and declaring the events of the year to be but "a crisis of development in communism" does not fully represent the French left. In assemblies of left political parties, the reports of party journalists, and the speculation of intellectuals, members of the French left discussed the worldwide ramifications of 1989 and what changes in the East meant for the future of communism (Ross, 1992).

3. Not Revolution, but Communist Reformation

The French left recognized the real need and possibility for positive changes in Eastern European communist governments. As the Soviet leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev pursued reforms for Eastern Europe, a new era was approaching and the French left certainly did not watch

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idly as the events of 1989 unfolded. Potential results of these reforms were hotly debated. Economic disparities between East and West were apparent. These disparities were seen to reflect deep-seeded problems and a society which had failed to minimize economic stratification. However, the vision of an Eastern bloc reforming socialism for a better future was compelling, and leftist publications indicate a strong hope for the future, despite obvious dangers. The general umbrella of Perestroika often appears as a description of this reform spirit, representing the Soviet system's evolution embodied by Gorbachev. Amongst themselves, the leadership of the PCF often questioned the direction of Soviet reform: long-serving party leader Georges Marchais was much more skeptical at party conferences than in his public pronouncements (Dupin, 1989). However the PCF decided, following heavy debate, to officially support Gorbachev's reforms (Mir, 1989).

Many communists, along with socialists and other leftists, were eager for change and interested in a more efficient, less authoritarian East. Even the most left wing publications did not suggest Gorbachev was the harbinger of Soviet collapse, though this is not particularly surprising in the specific case of *L'Humanite* given Soviet funding of the PCF. Instead, analysis of Eastern reforms tends to emphasize the forward movement of Soviet Communism in directions which would avoid open capitalism. Writing in October of 1989, Jean-Marie Chauvier, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, insisted that Soviet changes in policy were part of reforming Communism (Chavier, 1989). This approach envisioned the endeavors as a massive housekeeping project, long overdue in some respects, working to turn an antiquated but inherently good system into a modernized one which would limit corruption and allow for greater participation.

Within the context of necessary reform, the French left could appreciate the Gorbachev government as well as some of the popular movements in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev himself could strike an effective dialog with the French government and leave the French people with a positive impression. He was generally popular with the French public in addition to political leaders ("Des Francais" 1989) and his July 1989 visit to France in which he conferred with

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Mitterrand and visited the Bastille was met with excitement from the public and an enthusiastic welcome from the PCF ("Bonjour Mikhail" 1989). His willingness to confer with Western leaders and the progress made in these meetings, captured headlines which represented Gorbachev as a figure of progress interested in working with the French on European matters leading to greater openness and collective mediation of the changing continental climate ("M. Gorbachev" 1989).

Election reforms in Eastern Europe especially appealed to the French left. Of particular interest was the prospect of wider and more authentic representation in Eastern European governments. This did not necessarily entail separatism; however, French Communists considered representative government an important tool for preserving the Soviet Union and improving the Eastern bloc by promoting communication and allowing diversity to unify rather than divide (Sage, 1989). Communist journalist Jean-Paul Pierot, wrote in the December 19th edition of *L'Humanite* on the struggles following the collapse of communist rule in Romania that despite the rightwing nationalists there were equally or more likely to ignore individual liberties than the former communist regime and stated unequivocally that "liberty and democracy are inseparable from socialism" (Pierot, 1989, December 19). The difficulties of nationalism could be troubling; however nationalism was not a new phenomenon in Europe, though the PCF and many on the left considered it a persistent problem to be overcome (Ferro "L'Union" 1989). Election procedures and legitimate parliaments could be an effective step towards curbing the authoritarian tendencies of European communist states which had made Western support difficult. Symbolic gestures such as the rehabilitation of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's writings by the Soviet government suggested an atmosphere more open to dissident voices (Briancon, 1989). Within three months of this symbolic act, PCF journalist Serge Leyrac, known for a series of articles denouncing Solzhenitsyn and a campaign which characterized Solzhenitsyn's writings as part of a general anti-Soviet conspiracy (Bell & Criddle, 1994), wrote that reforms in the Soviet Union leading to greater representation and elections had the potential to "bring

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modern politics to the Soviet Union” (Leyrac, 1989). The PCF often connected ideas of democracy with modernity in explaining the future of Soviet politics. Voting would bring the Soviet people out of historical backwardness and Democratic reforms would allow them to improve the existing system, pursuing a more efficient communism (“Socialisme un Moderne” 1989)

Leftist supporters of reform also valued new policies which would improve weak Eastern European economies. Greater representation could itself act as an agent for economic improvement. French socialists and communists saw democracy as a method for the working classes to better express their needs, allowing governments to make more informed economic decisions. The PCF welcomed fiscal stimulus plans and new economic ventures, aware of the system’s weaknesses while still opposed to full-blown capitalism (Leyrac 1989, August 10). Polls taken amidst the revolutions of late 1989 indicated the French people saw the Soviet Union’s primary problems as economic, above and beyond the acknowledged unfairness of Soviet government. *Liberation’s* October 1989 poll asked responders to rank what they believed were the primary cause or causes of citizen’s grievances in the Soviet Union. The number one response was economic problems (52%) followed by human rights issues (35%) and restriction of freedom of expression (20%) with the communist ideology/regime itself in fourth (12%) (“L’URSS” 1989). If the economy could be improved through a more democratic and open Soviet society then all of these concerns could be alleviated either directly through legislation or indirectly through a more prosperous society which would reflect well upon the communist system. Beyond symbolic acts, the Soviet government’s concrete policy changes indicated a willingness to pursue representative government. The establishment of regional assemblies raised some concern due to their potential encouragement of nationalist parties in the Soviet border republics. However, even the PCF viewed these new democratic bodies as necessary tests for perestroika (Frederick, 1989).

Modernization and reform could be accomplished with political compromise. Allowing greater political expression would improve economies and incorporate the better ideas of

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the opposition without fundamentally changing the philosophy of a socialist/communist state. In all the satellite states, reform could make socialism more effective without abandoning the ideal of a communist future. The PCF's support for this view appears in an October *L'Humanite* front page article which considers the ramifications of Hungarian reforms leading to a victory for the left over false communism ("Compromis a Budapest" 1989). This opinion was not confined to the PCF; the leftist paper *Liberation*, most closely associated with the Socialist Party, also described the Hungarian reforms as a rejection of authoritarian communism leading to the democratic establishment of a strong socialist party ("Budapest enterre" 1989). Encouraging writers on the left promoted a vision of stable change.

The PCF noted the "acceptance" of reform and compromise by the existing government. For example in Poland, as the labor movement Solidarity gained a place in the Polish government, cautious leftists emphasized compromise over revolution. *L'Humanite* journalist Claude Marchaud called the result of the June 1989 Polish elections, in which approximately one-third of seats in the legislature were open to popular voting, "A New Coalition" which would settle crises instead of a revolutionary movement disestablishing Communism (Marchaud, 1989, August 18) This appraisal of the political situation described the Polish communist leader General Jaruzelski as supporting the need for more representative government (Pierot, 1989, July 22) In fact, when Solidarity established the coalition, *L'Humanite* described "Le Forcing de Walesa" in which Solidarity leader Lech Walesa was, according to the PCF, compelled by public opinion to form a grand alliance of parties from all sides ("Le Forcing" 1989). The keys to such compromise governments, from the French perspective, were that they not become dependent on anti-communism, and they avoid the indecision inherent in multi-party parliamentary democracy, particularly in these cases where parties, coalitions, and procedures were being invented on the spot (Marchaud, 1989, August 11).

Compromise and coalition in Eastern European governments was a message embraced across the French left. Besides allowing for the preservation of the local

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communist establishment's better institutions in Eastern European countries, a middle ground promised stability. According to this concept, the success of reformists must be tempered by the realization that power, having been gained, ought to be exercised to solve serious problems the citizens of Eastern Europe faced on a basic economic level and the states' foreign debt crises ("La Pologne" 1989). Given the rioting, upheaval, and nationalist revival in Eastern Europe fear of instability was natural, particularly for the left which could sense the potential for either a sudden East-West military crises, or a general backlash against socialism and communism in the wake of a dramatic conclusion to the Cold War. Thus, delay and confusion in the East were met with dire concern in France (Vodak, 1989). However, there was little question of returning to more direct Soviet control.

French leftists could point to many reasons why reform did not equate to revolution in Eastern Europe. In September of 1989, following the summer of Polish elections and coalition building, General Secretary of the French Communist Party George Marchais led a session of the PCF Central Committee in which the party decided to support Polish reforms, despite the perceived, and very real, influence of the Catholic Church as well as Western capitalists in encouraging Solidarity. The committee excused these influences by describing the Polish situation as a matter complicated by the nation's culture. Church influence and other distasteful factors were explained as the product of rural agrarian Polish traditions. The committee reaffirmed that socialism would prove superior to capitalism so there would be little need to worry (Loyal, 1989). A traditional, Catholic, Polish culture also served as a fine scapegoat when needed. Pope John Paul II's meetings in Rome with Lech Walesa were a significant event in the drama of 1989. To *L'Humanite* correspondent Jean-Pierre Delahaye, the visits showed Walesa's reliance on the Catholic Church and a cowardly retreat, to "play at debauchery," from the economic turmoil in Poland (Delahaye, 1989).

Whatever the PCF would attribute to culture, one idea appears unaffected by regional variations in tradition: the superiority of socialism over capitalism, with an implied movement towards "real" communism. In addition to Soviets, Hungarians, and Poles, elections would help East

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Germans too. Besides, these reforms supposedly had the full support of Moscow (Marchaud, 1989, October 13) and, when given a choice, the PCF believed most people would vote for socialists or communists, due to the obvious superiority of the left in facilitating social equality ("Pret un Dialogue" 1989). Perhaps the most striking expression of confidence in the perseverance of communism came in December, after the fall of the Berlin wall and so many revolutions, Jean-Marie Domenach, author and vocal leftist Catholic, wrote in "Ich bin ein Ost-Berliner" that whatever the results of governments and flaws in communist states, "the ideals of communism are the ideals of freedom" and therefore the ideology cannot perish since humanity naturally seeks freedom (Domenach, 1989).

Thus, in several ways the tone of the press and the left was one of anticipation but also reassurance. On July 4, 1989 *Le Monde*, the French newspaper of record, released a poll which indicated forty-seven percent of the French public saw Soviet reforms as marking a significant and lasting change in the system. While this figure was the headline, the remaining fifty-three percent saw the reforms as temporary, minor, or insignificant change, indicating a lingering skepticism which, in light of the events and duration of the Cold War, is easily understood. Even in the summer of 1989, there were many reasons to agree with the French professor of Russian history Marc Ferro that "the Soviet Union has not burst" and the near future would not portend such a dramatic occurrence (Ferro, "L'Union" 1989).

4. The German Question

Germany was an important component of any scheme for reformed communism and closer East-West ties. The potential for greater cooperation between East and West inspired much enthusiasm from the French left. Soviet reform raised the possibility of greater cooperation between Eastern Europe, France, and the greater European community. Whatever the result, there was much evidence of a changing international situation and the French left could make use of closer communication with the Soviet Union to solve the potential problems the reforms themselves would create. Certainly the economic changes in Eastern Europe would require significant changes in French policy to

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accommodate and help countries formerly dependent entirely upon Soviet support and political decision-making. And a united Germany would be most immediate economic and political force France would react to in a changing Europe. However, changes to the Central European balance of power were of particular importance to both the French left and the French people in general. The possibility of a reunified Germany elicited a mixture of support and apprehension even in those supportive of the West German government and its efforts to improve relations with East Germany.

Beyond the necessary risks associated with potential capitalist influence, the subject of Germany presented the one potential divisive issue amongst leftists generally united in their support of more open communication. Despite apprehension, as West German initiatives reached out to East Germany the French left was approving, particularly on the basis of disarmament (Gorce, 1989). The discussion of demilitarization as an essential step made the prospect of reunification more palatable. Messages of peace and a potentially quiet end to the Cold War, by the standards of twentieth century conflicts, appealed across factional lines on the center and left. Further in favor of any movement towards demilitarization, particularly in Central Europe, was the strong American presence in Germany (Klein, 1989). Certainly any action which would clearly lessen American involvement in Europe was worth consideration by French intellectuals and politicians. Furthermore a friendly approach from West Germany on the basis of peace might also make the implementation of needed reforms smoother, preserving the merits of the East German system rather than destroying the founding principles of communism (Gorce, 1989). The East German regime of Eric Honecker did not appear a likely candidate for compromise and gradual reform, however. Honecker was considered a holdover Stalinist whose philosophies the Soviet Union itself had evolved beyond (Adler, 1989). Meanwhile Berlin represented an issue more incendiary than anything else in the Soviet bloc due to then strong Western presence in West Berlin which placed military forces and civilian populations of East and West in close, and tense, proximity. Signs of détente

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were encouraging, and Honecker's October visit to Denmark served as an important symbol of a more open East German foreign relations (Marchaud, 1989, October 12). Yet, this failed to totally ameliorate concerns over the effects of a reunited Germany on the continental power structure.

The real potential for German reunification unearthed bad memories which French political discourse voiced. Fears of resurgent nationalism might be considered and dismissed academically in the case of breakaway Soviet republics which were far away from French borders. But in the case of Germany and Eastern Europe the potential threat of strong nationalist movements installing undemocratic ethnically homogenous governments was certainly real as reflected in leftist criticism of reform. The PCF rather consistently decried violence and turmoil during the Soviet Republics' demonstrations in 1990, characterizing riots and ethnic violence as either the result of nationalist extremism or signs of a totalitarian nationalist revival to come ("Le File" 1990).

Again the issue of stability was paramount, of maintaining France's position in relation to the rest of Europe. In the case of a reunited Germany, fear of authoritarians and fascist nationalism were direct, evoking memories of Franco-German conflict in the 19th century and during the World Wars. The PCF did not condemn reunification outright, appreciating the potential for a more peaceful political environment with less American military presence. However, the December 8th edition of *L'Humanite* featured a large article "Bonn weighs on the East" worrying that Helmut Kohl's particular reunification plan could destabilize Europe. More telling than this article was its placement. A story on Asian economic investments entitled "Kamikaze" ran in a sidebar on the same page, combining with the story of German political moves to provide a not so subtle reminder of World War Two era fanaticism and aggression (George, 1989).

Worried French writers feared that the economic success of West Germany combined with the future potential of a reformed East Germany could result in German

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dominance of Europe from a strong economic and political center. Commentaries on German ambitions included expressions of concern that West Germany would do more to exploit the East than to integrate East Germany into a new framework (Moureau, 1989). Long-serving *L'Humanite* journalist Okba Lamrani took a more direct approach to the subject of potential German economic power with the provocatively titled "Mark Uber Alles" in which Lamrani envisioned a European continent transformed into a massive German currency zone (Lamrani, 1989). The potential for a united Germany highlighted the need for Europe to develop a more effective dialog amongst nations and to avoid future rounds of dominance by one or two major powers. A closer relationship between the Soviet Union and Western European countries could keep the playing field of Europe from tilting towards the middle (Hentsch, 1989). The strength of this view is reflected in the quiet diplomacy of President Mitterrand who attempted to delay German reunification. However, Mitterrand's fears of reunification reflected a general suspicion of major changes, leading him to overly cautious positions on the legality of the 1991 coup in Russia, which he did not condemn publicly, and the expansion of the EU, which he wished to move slowly with careful analysis of the new Eastern European regimes (Kaplan, 2003).

5. Towards a Better, Stronger, Closer Europe

The French left generally welcomed greater participation of the Soviet bloc countries in the European community. The far left supported the Soviet Union's new willingness to publicly meet and deal with Western leaders. The same held true for the French government. As important a figure as Mitterrand was to the French left politically, he often played the role of centrist. With his meetings with Gorbachev and natural talents for compromise, Mitterrand could scarcely do more to encourage open communications between East and West. In February 1989, *Le Monde Diplomatique* took a stand in favor of greater communication with an emphasis on open public dialog. The journal strictly communicated this message as one of

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peace and openness, detente without the prospect of revolution ("L'Avant Garde" 1989). With open communication and the potential for reform, some saw the possibility of truly bringing the Soviet Union into a European sphere which had developed, admittedly more intellectually than militarily or economically, independent from American dominance.

The message of most French politicians on the left and in the center was that closer communication with the Soviet Union would strengthen Europe as a whole. The potential economic benefits of perestroika could not only improve the Soviet Union but open a massive population lacking in quality infrastructure and important goods to economic ventures which would not only benefit governments, but also ease shortages and improve the quality of life in Eastern Europe ("La Perestroika" 1989). Symbolic events contributed to eased tensions. Many Western musicians, including Ozzy Osborne, gathered in August of 1989 for a music and peace festival in the Soviet Union to promote disarmament and lessen tensions between East and West, receiving an enthusiastic reception which must have suggested future commercial opportunities as well (Poirette, 1989). Article after article emphasized connections to be made or remade thanks to a more open relationship between the Soviet Union and the west. For example, Soviet psychiatrists looked to integrate into worldwide professional organizations (Smadja, 1989). The possibilities must have appeared endless. Notable French journalist Pierre Haski, at the time head of *Liberation's* diplomatic section, stated that closer relations were the key to everything, that as Moscow struggled through reform, it would develop a "new rapprochement with Europe" which would inevitably lead to more effective economic reform and a reduction in military forces (Haski, 1989).

Closer relations with the Soviet Union were evident in very public displays which provided the left with excellent press in addition to closer relationships with Eastern European leftists. Marchais traveled to Moscow, meeting with Gorbachev and other high-ranking Soviet officials. He expressed the PCF's support for perestroika, envisioning an era of greater public acknowledgment and mutually beneficial ties between the two parties (Leyrac, 1989, September 23). In a gesture of support, Marchais's visit

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included trips to a few of the border republics including Belorussia, where he laid a wreath at the memorial to the World War II era massacre of Polish prisoners at Katyn by the Nazis. This visit showed solidarity with the Eastern European communists while emphasizing the importance of a stable transition by making solemn gestures of comradeship in the borderlands. (Leyrac, 1989, September 2). These trips combined with Gorbachev's own meetings, with both Western leaders and allies such as Honecker, displayed a willingness to move forward while serving as a leftist testament to the viability of Eastern European socialism ("Confiance" 1989).

Such leftist visions of unity constituted a very positive and inclusive view of reform in which German discussions signified progress. Meanwhile the end result of more changes in Eastern Europe would allow for greater communication with the East whose newly emerging governments could receive help from both the West and the Soviets. Rhetoric from the left along these lines was occasionally grand and sweeping, lauding Gorbachev's embrace of a continental vision of Eastern Europe within the larger European community (Drach, 1989). Such visions tended to imagine France as a leader on the continent, but that was hardly a newly advocated concept. Whatever its views on nationalism, the French left was still French. And, given the French independent streak in international politics, PCF's participation in government, and economic advantages, France could easily be seen as a logical western ambassador to interested Communist and former Communist governments. Sometimes this potential was voiced outright. Alain Bocquete, PCF politician and today leader of the 23 member (out of a total of 326 representatives) PCF led coalition in the French senate, suggested in October of 1989 that perestroika was an imitation of the PCF's own adaptations to parliamentary government (Dupin, 1989). Most often, however, the PCF's interest in playing a big brother role to reforming Eastern European communist parties is most evident through the sheer enthusiasm of leaders such as Marchais during his travels in Eastern Europe, coupled with large doses of prescriptive advice along the line of warnings against nationalism and Jean-Paul Pierot's emphasis on political compromise in Hungary. These

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public meetings and potential new role in working with Eastern European communists helped to reinforce the PCF's relevance domestically where they continued to disagree with the budget cuts and business-oriented economic policies which had motivated PCF representatives to leave the Socialist led coalition government in 1984.

Beyond these hopes for the future were models of Europe which moved past the immediate ramifications of perestroika and reform to consider larger philosophical questions about the European political system. Theorists examined state structures to determine what effect lessening tension and a peaceful end to the Cold War could have on the new framework which emerged. This included the concept of the nation-state itself. Max Wallace, a leftist analyst of fascism highly distrustful of American intentions, asserted in an article published in the March 1989 edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique* that a combination of Western cosmopolitanism and communist suppression of nationalism could create the potential for "L'Europe sans nations," which would include the Soviet Union and form a strong new confederation based on leftist ideals reinforced by Western resources (Wallace, 1989). Wallace and other political theorists believed that such a new paradigm could allow a virtuous socialist Europe to confront the problems of the developing world. Marchais's article following the fall of the Berlin wall included pronouncements of a new era in which a "renewed socialism will embrace Europe" developing partnerships amongst leftists through reforms in the East and the PCFs continued fight against injustice. This exciting image of a future united Europe branded the third world as "the child of capitalism" calling for progress and European rapprochement (Marchais, 1989). Included in the fall of the nation state was the potential for new constructions which could not be predicted. However, the pan-European model receives the most detailed consideration, likely because it seemed the most plausible and took a path many intellectuals had considered before, for better or worse, under the guise of many different political philosophies from imperial autocracy to proletarian communism (Brie, 1989). Despite these hopes for the future, even the idealists worried over the ramifications of a unified European parliament, either because such a parliament might unfairly neglect

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small minorities on the continent or because the controversy over establishing and codifying such a parliament would prove so straining as to sabotage the whole project (Wallace, 1989).

5. Concerns of the French Left: Capitalism and Nationalism

Not all discourse from the left was so optimistic regarding the future of Eastern Europe. Ambitious pan-European projects required the correct sort of transition in Eastern Europe, and as 1989 concluded, many on the left cautioned against the dangers of the reform process. The leftist press showed concern towards Eastern European nations' abilities while contemplating a new Europe and encouraging Soviet participation. Though philosophically encouraging, particularly for the long-term, direct commentary assessing the immediate situation following Soviet detachment and changes in local government was often stark and distrustful. This distrust focused upon the intentions of reformers or their susceptibility to a more American style of capitalism influenced by Western neoliberals (referring to the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in particular). The fear was, as *Le Monde Diplomatique* editor Chavier indicated in his article "Neoliberal Fascinations," these Western leaders failed to understand the fragile situation of East Europe as well as the nature of Eastern European reforms as the restructuring of communism. Such misunderstandings, Chavier stated, led to capitalist economic policies which encouraged corporate or nationalist autocrats (Chavier, 1989).

Reform could be positive, but the French left criticized its direction. Solutions which addressed economic problems would not necessarily change society to avoid social injustice or prevent the emergence of separatist movements. Even though the collapse of communist governments on a massive scale and the complete dissolution of the Soviet Union were rarely, if ever, considered, by the end of 1989 many prominent leftists acknowledged the volatility of the Soviet situation (Ferro, "La Moment" 1989). Gradually aware of the extent to which Soviet influence could disappear from Eastern Europe at a time of major change from Poland to

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Bulgaria, French leftists had advice and warnings for new fledgling governments. The left tended to favor democracy, thus their support for representation, in the wake of Soviet reform and withdrawal, but the meaning of democracy was itself a question.

In August of 1989, following the establishment of representative institutions in Poland, the opening article of *Le Monde Diplomatique* announced that change was inevitable. The result of this change was to be democracy, but the author, Ignacio Ramonet, later to become editor-in-chief, questioned what else came with democracy, particularly capitalism. Ramonet was willing to move beyond debating the possibility of major reforms in Eastern Europe, assume these reforms to be in progress, and progress straight to an attack on the assumption that representative government in Eastern Europe implied a capitalist economy. And what, if capitalism was part of the move toward democracy, would become of the Communist parties of Eastern Europe so long in power and surely not without local support (Ramonet, 1989)?

This question reflects a fear of American-British incursion onto the continent in a new form, as well as a belief that Eastern European states lacked the resources and political experience to undergo such a drastic change without becoming repressive. The importance of dialog between East and West is emphasized once again in these encouragements. Capitalism introduced to a developing country lacking widespread infrastructure could lead to corporate dictatorship, the more difficult to avoid without past experience in representative government (Cassler, 1989). Given the power of the Russian corporate "oligarchs," their influence during the 1990s, and charges of corruption from the Russian government and press, these concerned assessments appear prophetic in hindsight.

Eastern European countries' lack of experience with open elections strengthened French concerns for Eastern Europe and reinforced leftists' cautionary approach to democratization. They cited examples already developing such as the Hungarian parliament established in late 1989 in which little was being accomplished due to procedural confusion and an inability to form consensus (Gradwohl, 1989). If such institutions could not establish themselves,

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then democracy might indeed give way to a unifying autocrat or a ruling class dictated by a military-industrial complex instead of elected officials. Warnings against recklessness and calls for restraint suggest an increasing sense of acceptance that rapprochement with the west necessarily implied expanding some form of capitalism into Eastern Europe (Julien, 1990). Many of these views from the left are not strict anti-capitalist proscriptions but support compromise, directing the new governments of Eastern Europe towards a mix of capitalism and socialism resembling continental Western European frameworks while maintaining or incorporating communist principles of equality of social justice.

French leftists realized the economic needs of Eastern Europe; however, they connected these with social needs and injustices as well as a poor business model. Furthermore, they could reasonably assert that Eastern European governments would need to institute both social and economic reforms carefully over a broad spectrum of society. The new governments following the 1989 revolutions, such as the Solidarity led Polish coalition, gathered a wide variety of people and interests in order gain power. The French left could argue the importance of satisfying these numerous social and economic needs based on maintaining the stability of the new government (Patel, 1989). However this was certainly no open embrace of capitalism. Fears of capitalist speculation in new markets such as Hungary fueled concern that a bloom of foreign investment without sufficient government oversight could endanger socialist parties and the wages of the working class (Salsac, 1989).

The final major point of concern expressed by the French left was the emergence or reemergence of strong nationalist movements. Realistic assessments from the left supported reform but warned that after so many years of repressing nationalist sentiment without effectively alleviating social problems, the Soviet government must plan against inevitable nationalist agitation as control softened (Kis, 1989). Gorbachev's hopes that perestroika would ease some nationalist tensions, particularly in the Caucasus and the Ukraine, ran up against the strength of nationalist sentiment which the French left recognized ("Tensions" 1989). The destabilization of the Balkan states, which *Le Monde*

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Diplomatique's regional feature described as "a fragile mosaic," erupting as the Yugoslav government crumbled and would continue to be a topic of concern for all Europe ("Les Balkons" 1989). French papers printed exposés on nationalist movements in the USSR complete with brief histories and details of the conflicts between local minorities, such as *liberation* correspondent Giles Schiller's August 10th piece on the Soviet Republic of Moldavia (Schiller, 1989). Conflicts within the Soviet Union threatened its breakup and redoubled concern over nationalist resurgence.

In Southeastern Europe, the number and status of minorities left Muslims, Turks, and others in Romania and Bulgaria open to the abuses developing in Yugoslavia. Nationalism could taint democracy with the specter of state legislated discrimination and pogroms (Chiclet, 1989). Economic disparities, such as those between republics in the Soviet Union which the French left considered significant challenges for Soviet reformers, gave rise to dissent. For the PCF these "Inequalities of the Soviet Federation," as *l'Humanite* journalist Bernard Frederick described them, represented the drama of capitalism playing out on a particularly unfortunate stage (Frederick, 1989). What effect newly created representative institutions would have on the process was unclear. Reports from the PCF regarding Soviet elections stated they were fair, the result of meaningful positive reforms; however local elections also highlighted the economic and separatist problems which necessitated reform in the first place (Pierot, 1989, September 2). As the French left sought to befriend Eastern Europe, leftist intellectuals urged caution, fearing the lessons of the 20th century would be lost on governments and peoples who saw the results of Western political development without understanding the continuing social struggles experienced in the process of creating and maintaining democracy against stratification, totalitarianism, and discrimination.

6. Conclusions: The French Left Hopes for the Future

The French left was and is diverse. The strong popular support for socialist and communist parties in France relative to the United States and Great Britain allows for a broad spectrum of viewpoints within leftist political circles. Unquestionably, the revolutions of 1989 marked a time of

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drastic change in the European political landscape. However, during that year, even as governments fell along with the wall, hopes and expectations for a stronger left in the future of European politics could be read even from the most strident PCF leaders who feared the corruption of communist ideology by Western capitalists. PCF infighting and some of the very strong idealistic statements made by PCF leaders might lead one to think that the PCF was blindly supporting Moscow's party line. While the headlines of *L'Humanite* give some credence to this idea, the arguments contained within these articles, the thorough reasoning and idealism expressed within the whole text, reveal genuine belief as does the persistence of these French communists in the PCF beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of their financial support. Also, as important as the PCF was to the French left and its view of Eastern Europe, the socialist government's rapprochement, the journalists at *Liberation*, the intellectuals published in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and the crowds of French people gathered to applaud the visit of Gorbachev speak against any idea that the complete collapse of the communist bloc was inevitable and obvious to westerners.

The French left generally embraced perestroika, acknowledging the major economic and social problems present in Eastern Europe. Reform was encouraged with the hope that the West could serve as a model while the East could act as a strong ally in shaping the future of socialism, providing support for those Westerners seeking a more fair and adequate social compact between citizen and government. In these hopes for successful reform, images of a closer Europe, we see the dreams of the French left, not only for the future of Eastern Europe or an expanded European community, but for France as well. Language from the right heralded the fall of communism, not only communist governments but of a political philosophy which remained the embodiment of ideal government for significant numbers of Frenchmen. The problems which Eastern Europe experienced, and against which the French left warned, were the local issues of the French left writ large upon the world: racism, religious intolerance, materialism, unfair wages, corrupt oligarchies, rabid nationalism, and the dominance of foreign powers.

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Despite the regimes they sometimes defended, these voices from the left were not seeking to prop up corrupt dictatorships indefinitely. However the core tenets of the left from Mitterrand to the PCF were shared responsibility, liberty, and duty to others. In pursuing the ultimate victory of these ideals the French left sometimes ignored blatant injustice in the present in order to build towards a better future, but other times they decried these injustices even from close allies. They warned against the effects of unrestricted capitalism on the poor and believed, as the PS, the PCF and other parties of the left continue to, that the aim of government should be the good of all citizens. On November 11th 1989, *L'Humanite* published an article by Jean-Claude Gayssot, PCF legislator and, in 1990, drafter of The Gayssot Act which criminalized Holocaust denial in France. The article entitled "I am a Happy Communist" welcomed reforms in Germany, arguing that democracy and freedom would move Germany towards socialism while helping that country avoid the pitfalls of capitalism. His conclusion, "Capitalism is not the future of the world," reveals what the genuine proponents of socialism and communism saw as important and inevitable in 1989. Not changes in government, but the ideal future of a fair society (Gayssot, 1989).

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