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France: Defection of the Leftist Intellectuals

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A Research Paper

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*EUR 85-10199
December 1985*

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted] the
Office of European Analysis. Comments and queries
are welcome and may be directed to the Chief,
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**France: Defection of the
Leftist Intellectuals**

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Scope Note

Intellectuals have traditionally played an influential role in French political life. Even though they have seldom sought a direct part in formulating policy, they have conditioned the atmosphere in which politics are conducted and have frequently served as important shapers of the political and ideological trends that generate French policy. Recognizing that their influence on policymaking is difficult to measure, this paper focuses on the changing attitudes of French intellectuals and gauges the probable impact on the political environment in which policy is made.

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**France: Defection of the
Leftist Intellectuals**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 15 November 1985
was used in this report.*

There is a new climate of intellectual opinion in France—a spirit of anti-Marxism and anti-Sovietism that will make it difficult for anyone to mobilize significant intellectual opposition to US policies. Nor will French intellectuals be likely to lend their weight, as they did before, to other West European colleagues who have become hostile to the United States on broad issues like disarmament. Although American policies are never immune to criticism in France, it is clearly the Soviet Union that is now on the defensive with New Left intellectuals—and is likely to remain there at least in the medium term. President Mitterrand's notable coolness toward Moscow derives, at least in part, from this pervasive attitude. [Redacted]

Mitterrand's failure to garner needed support among France's historically powerful leftist intellectuals, moreover, reflects a historic shift that may presage a new role for the intelligentsia. No longer can his Socialist Party rely on the intellectuals to provide a rationale for its policies and actions and to sell that rationale to a French public that has customarily placed great store in the explanations of its intellectual elites. [Redacted]

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Mitterrand's policy failures and short-lived alliance with the Communists may have accelerated disaffection with his government, but leftist intellectuals have been distancing themselves from socialism—both the party and the ideology—at least since the early 1970s. Led by a group of young renegades from Communist ranks who billed themselves as New Philosophers, many New Left intellectuals have rejected Marxism and developed a deep-rooted antipathy toward the Soviet Union. Anti-Sovietism, in fact, has become the touchstone of legitimacy in leftist circles, weakening the traditional anti-Americanism of the leftist intellectuals and allowing American culture—and even political and economic policies—to find new vogue. [Redacted]

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The wide acceptance of this more critical approach to Marxism and the Soviet Union has been accompanied by a general decline of intellectual life in France that has undermined the political involvement of leftist intellectuals. Although they are now less willing to become involved in partisan affairs, we believe that New Left intellectuals will weigh in heavily on two fronts:

- They will support moderate Socialists who are striving to create a broad-based center-left alliance.

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- They will oppose any effort by hardline Socialists to reforge the now defunct “unity of the left” with the French Communist Party in the forthcoming legislative elections.

This New Left activism is likely to increase bickering between the two leftist parties and within the Socialist Party, and it will probably increase voter defection from both Socialist and Communist camps.

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**France: Defection of the
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There is a lethargy about intellectual life in this country that is quite spectacular. Never before have I known such silence, such emptiness. It's like a family in which someone has died.

Alain Touraine



Figure 1. Michel Foucault

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Introduction

Intellectuals matter in France, probably more than in most Western democracies. They have traditionally played a key role in the political process as apologists for the positions of various parties and as important window dressing in the quest for domestic and international respectability. Moreover, they are listened to—talk shows and magazines featuring heavy doses of intellectual debate are very popular. For a variety of complex reasons, the left has claimed the vast majority of intellectuals since World War II and has provided some of them with substantial leadership roles. French intellectuals have routinely defended the domestic schemes of both Socialists (PS) and Communists (PCF), and they have led the charge against US policies in Europe and the Third World. President Mitterrand—an intellectual in his own right—has surrounded himself with “thinkers” and offered many important positions in his government to well-known intellectuals.

This analysis focuses on the changing relationship between French intellectuals and political groups in the context of broad-based intellectual change within French society. It assesses the dramatic breakdown of the dominant post-World War II alliance between intellectuals and the left, the more general decline of the intellectuals' status in French society, the prospects for a resumption of intellectual “engagement” in politics, and the implications of these trends for both French politics and US interests.

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A Traditional Role

French intellectuals—a term encompassing journalists, artists, writers, and teachers—have carved out a special role for themselves as interpreters of political tradition, especially as interpreters of the consequences and implications of the French Revolution. Frenchmen have looked to the permanent intellectual debate about the meaning of their history as a basis for understanding French society, and the course of French politics has occasionally been shifted by a strong stand on the part of intellectuals (see inset).

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Even before the Socialists took office in 1981, however, it was clear that this intellectual identification with the left was fading. The worst kept secret in PCF circles for the past decade was that virtually every Communist intellectual of any stature had either died or defected from the party. Although Socialists managed to snag a few of the disillusioned, the newborn critics of Marxism seemed to drift more easily into neutrality or even to the right. With one or two exceptions, important intellectuals—such as anthropologist Michel Foucault—refused positions in Mitterrand's government. And when Socialists later tried to arouse intellectuals to defend their foundering policies against criticism from the right, the intellectuals again refused, this time with a cascade of public abuse on the government.

Leftists and rightists in France maintained a balance of intellectual forces for most of the period before World War II. In the 19th century and in the first

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Intellectuals and the Dreyfus Affair

The Dreyfus Affair of the late 19th century crystalized public thinking about what sort of society France had become and highlighted how various groups—the church, the military, politicians, journalists—stood in relation to principles and values associated with the revolutionary tradition. Intellectuals, led by the novelist and journalist Emile Zola, played a leading role in mobilizing public debate about the issues in the affair. When Zola leveled his famous pro-Dreyfus editorials against the government and its allies, he accused them not only of subverting justice and morality, but also, more important in the minds of his readers, of treachery against the revolutionary tradition.

Dreyfus, a Jewish officer attached to the French General Staff, was accused and convicted in 1896 of passing military secrets to the Germans. Revelations that Dreyfus was convicted on fabricated evidence and that the government had concocted still more evidence to cover up its subversion of justice polarized French society and touched off a national soul searching about public morality and historical values.

three decades of the 20th, conservative critics of the revolutionary tradition, such as de Maistre, Tocqueville, and Peguy, were evenly matched against leftist intellectuals, like Babeuf, Proudhon, and Jaures, who encompassed the radicalism of both the 18th-century Revolution and 19th-century socialism.

This parity evaporated, however, in the war. On the one hand, French conservatism stood discredited not only by its xenophobic nationalism, its antiegalitarianism, and its flirtation with fascism in the prewar years, but also by the participation of many of its leading exponents in the collaborationist Vichy regime. On the other hand, the left (except for the PCF in the brief era of the Nazi-Soviet Pact) had stood squarely against fascism and the occupation. It formed the backbone and largest block of fighters in the Resistance, and among these the Communists played a commanding (if often self-serving) role. The



Figure 2. Jean Jaures, paragon of leftist intellectual activism, from an article by Andre Glucksmann on the psychology of pacifism.

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Soviet Union, which was seen as standing alone for years against Germany, became a shining example to the Resistance; former Communist and leading French intellectual Annie Kriegel explains, "It's true that the Americans liberated us—but the turning point in the war was Stalingrad. It was the Red Army that gave us hope." [redacted]

While the French right was intellectually shattered by the war, the left emerged ready to claim the spoils of its success in the Resistance and the allegiance of all those who loved liberty and equality. In the postwar era the Socialists, and especially the Communists, attracted large numbers of intellectuals. The conservatives maintained their hold on power, however, and the left settled into the role of opposition in the 1950s and 1960s. Leftist intellectuals became masters at elaborating Socialist and Communist formulas for reshaping French society and of producing a constant barrage of criticism against the policies of successive conservative governments.¹ [redacted]

The Socialist and Communist Parties also tried in two ways to establish and perpetuate what one critic recently dubbed a leftist "intellocracy." First, they financed numerous journals, reviews, and newspapers through which intellectuals could channel their torrent of invective against the regime and French society. Second, they helped to institutionalize the leftist intellectual establishment and to make it self-perpetuating by underwriting the unionization of the university and secondary school faculties. Both efforts helped ensure that those who circulated into the French intellectual elite were ideologically attuned to its prejudices and partisan loyalties. This system worked almost flawlessly for a time; only since the late 1960s have renegades rejected the teachings of their former academic masters and led the charge against the left. [redacted]

¹ Raymond Aron, one of the few significant thinkers to resist absorption, deplored the affinity of his peers with the left—especially their servility in accepting such outrages as the Stalinist purges and the crushing of the Hungarian uprising, and their hypocrisy in defending such shams as the Stalin personality cult. Aron reasoned in his study of the phenomenon—*The Opium of the Intellectuals* (1955)—that the contemporary left, particularly the Communists, had succeeded in winning and holding the loyalties of intellectuals because it had gratified two deeply felt needs: it assured intellectuals of their *relevance* to the political process, and it organized and gave full rein to their unbounded *penchant for criticism*. [redacted]

A Historic Shift: The "Loud" Silence of the Leftist Intellectuals

The situation had changed dramatically by the time the Socialists came to power in 1981. It was a poorly kept secret in government circles that Socialist officials were surprised and concerned about the dearth of support from intellectuals. Only a few intellectuals of any stature—Max Gallo, Regis Debray, and Antoine Blanca—had accepted the numerous posts offered to them in the Mitterrand government; some openly criticized government actions and policies, especially the decision to entrust four ministries to the Communists. More often, intellectuals showed signs of lapsing into an uncharacteristic silence that quickly generated disturbing questions from the press about relations between the government and its intellectual allies. Important journals of opinion, ever quick to sense even subtle shifts in the political breezes, began to question whether intellectuals were "always of the left" and to note the ironic absence of intellectual involvement in the government of a leftist President who was himself a well-established intellectual. [redacted]

Mitterrand redoubled the effort to enlist support from the intellectuals after he was forced by the failure of his expansionary economic policies to reverse course and adopt austerity measures that drew embarrassing criticism from both the left and the right, but especially from conservatives of France's New Right, where an "intellectual renaissance" was in full swing (see inset). Almost certainly on Mitterrand's orders, government spokesman Max Gallo—a noted novelist and historian—editorialized in *Le Monde* in the summer of 1983 on the "silence of the intellectuals." Gallo urged leftist intellectuals to speak out, arguing that the vital issues of the day—especially the government's economic policies, but also its record on political issues such as terrorism and crime—demanded a full public debate and that the absence of a leftist rebuttal merely abandoned public opinion to the right. Gallo's appeal drew a strong response from intellectuals, most of whom explained and defended their "silence." At least one critic argued that Gallo and the government would be wiser to accept silence from the intellectuals as the best they could get, and that if

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"Intellectual Renaissance" on the Right

The rejuvenation of conservative intellectual activity that forms part of the so-called New Right is largely separate from the movement of the New Philosophers or New Left. The spectacular effervescence of conservative thought in recent years is associated most closely with the work of Jean-Francois Revel and other renegades from the Ecole Normale Superieure who started with polemics against Jean-Paul Sartre's ethical gymnastics in defense of the USSR and moved on to exposés of the shallowness of Communist intellectual life. Now, says the prominent historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, they have taken on the grander task of reorienting intellectual discourse from its traditional focus on "right versus left" toward "totalitarianism versus liberty."

Encouraged by writers and publishers who are associated in some way with rightwing press baron Robert Hersant, the New Right in France has taken up the idea of reviving classic European liberalism as the elixir that France needs to recover from Socialist "mismanagement." More than this, liberalism—described by its adherents as diminishing the role of government and forcing people to be more self-sufficient—has become a conservative prescription for what has ailed French society for the entire postwar era. The young conservative politicians who are taking up the refrain have argued in the press and in private conversations with US diplomats that the right should lead Frenchmen toward greater self-reliance. A conservative government's principal task, according to them, would be to shrink its own role—whether as taxer, manager, director, or spender. Allied to this concept of government, the new liberals generally applaud the devolution of the massively centralized French Government's powers and resources to subnational governments, a slow process that has recently gained momentum under the Socialists (see also appendix A).

leftists spoke out they would only join the legion of the government's critics. The failure of Gallo's effort strengthened the growing public perception that intellectuals had deserted the left. When Gallo himself departed from the government less than a year later—



Keystone Press ©

Figure 3. Former official Mitterrand spokesman Max Gallo.

citing a desire to return to artistic life—most remaining doubts about intellectual disaffection appeared to evaporate.

The "New Philosophers." One reason for Gallo's failure to mobilize the leftist intellectuals was that he ignored a coterie of young intellectual firebrands who for more than a decade had been making well-publicized converts among leftist militants by assailing the French left as dangerous and implicitly totalitarian. Billing themselves the "New Philosophers," they were mostly former Communists who had left the party after the traumatic events of May 1968.³ Most of them were also graduates of France's most

² Gallo drifted for a while, writing a book that, among other things, criticized the PCF. When the ownership of the Socialist daily *Le Matin* changed hands early this year, Gallo became its editor—some have speculated, on the urging of Mitterrand. A colleague told US Embassy officials that Gallo has used his editorials to defend the government and whip up leftist support, but to little effect.

³ In May-June 1968, after months of intensifying protests, students threw up barricades in the university section of Paris and initiated a period of guerrilla warfare in the streets of the Latin Quarter. The protest spread to other university cities; students were joined by 7 million striking workers (who occupied factories); transportation and public services ground to a halt; and the 10-year-old government of General de Gaulle tottered. Marxist students looked to the Communist Party for leadership and declaration of a provisional government, but PCF leaders were already trying to restrain the worker revolt and denounced the student radicals as woolly-minded anarchists. Many students concluded that the PCF had made a deal with de Gaulle, who eventually put down the riots.

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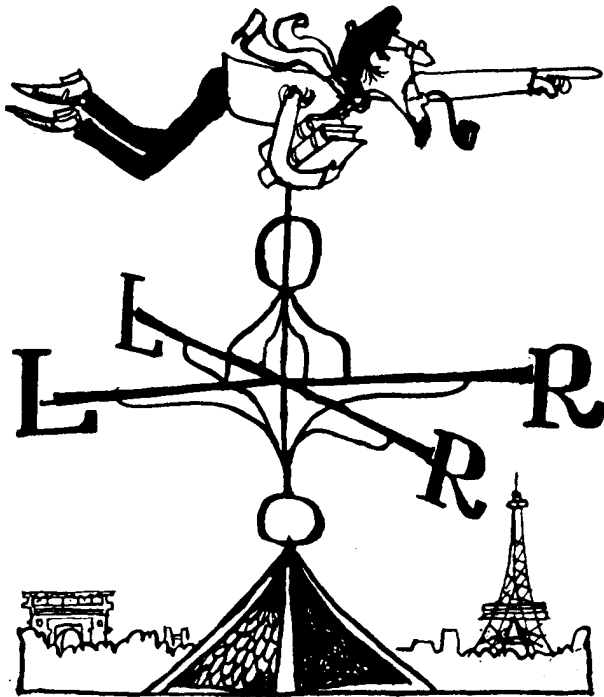


Figure 4. Popular image of leftist intellectual, indicating which way the wind is blowing. [redacted]

prestigious training school for teachers and thinkers, the Ecole Normale Superieure (ENS), and they had in common not just their experience in the Left Bank student movement of the 1960s but also their rejection of the Stalinist sophistries taught at ENS. [redacted]

The New Philosophers were motivated by two developments. First, the traditional leftist parties' pusillanimity during the student revolt of 1968 tore the scales from their eyes, causing them to reject their allegiance to the Communist Party, French socialism, and even the essential tenets of Marxism. Second, by the early 1970s most had also moved toward a searching critique of the Soviet Union, a trend accelerated by the publication in France of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in 1975. Under these stimuli they reexamined the entire French and European leftist tradition. Two leaders of 1968, Bernard-Henri Levy and Andre Glucksmann, wrote a number of popular books that tried to lay bare the fallacies of the leftist intellectual tradition. They argued that no socialism existed in France that was not implicitly Marxist and that all Marxist thought is ultimately totalitarian. [redacted]



Figure 5. Bernard-Henri Levy [redacted]

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Figure 6. Andre Glucksmann [redacted]

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The New Philosophers more than compensated for their often abstruse prose by becoming exciting media personalities, defending their points of view in the long, intellectualized television and radio programs that the French relish. Their influence was primarily negative, however, since they had little to offer in the way of practical suggestions for a new program. Despite their sweeping denunciation of what Levy called the blindness of the left, the New Philosophers professed continuing antipathy for Gaullism and only a lesser-of-evils acceptance of capitalism. Levy became chief editor at the Grasset publishing house—one of France's largest—where he was able to ensure that New Philosopher views found easy access to the public. Books by New Philosophers became immediate best sellers—an amazing feat in an era when most

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philosophical works could achieve publication only through the heavily subsidized university press. Informed observers across the political spectrum have noted the profound influence of the New Philosophers on the thinking of the post-1960s generation. [redacted]

“There Are No More Sartres, No More Gides.” The defection of young intellectuals from Marxism and the PCF left it to the aging Marxist mandarins to uphold the tradition. Sartre, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Louis Althusser—the last clique of Communist *savants*—came under relentless fire from their former proteges, but none had any stomach for fighting a rearguard defense of Marxism.⁴ Critics—prominent among them, the New Philosophers—have been highly successful in persuading the present generation of the “foolishness” of Sartre, the evils of Marxism, and the barbarism of Soviet Communism (one New Left wit jibed that calling the Soviets barbarians slanders barbarians). As a result, the Communist Youth Movement has atrophied even on university campuses, Communist publications directed at young intellectuals—such as the PCF’s *Revolution*—are languishing, and no intellectuals of stature now belong to or even support the PCF.⁵ [redacted]

Causes of Leftist Intellectual Defection

The Bankruptcy of Marxist Ideology. Disaffection with Marxism as a philosophical system—part of a broader retreat from ideology among intellectuals of all political colors—was the source of the particularly strong and widespread intellectual disillusionment with the traditional left. Raymond Aron worked long years to discredit his old college roommate Sartre and, through him, the intellectual edifice of French Marxism. Even more effective in undermining Marxism, however, were those intellectuals who set out as true believers to apply Marxist theory in the social sciences but ended by rethinking and rejecting the entire tradition (see inset). [redacted]

⁴ Althusser, who was Levy’s and Glucksmann’s mentor at ENS, strangled his wife in 1980 and spent the next five years in prison. In his last television interview, Sartre admitted that Marxism had proved a failure. [redacted]

[redacted]

Defunct Marxist Scholarship in the Social Sciences

Among postwar French historians, the influential school of thought associated with Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, and Fernand Braudel has overwhelmed the traditional Marxist historians. The Annales school, as it is known from its principal journal, turned French historical scholarship on its head in the 1950s and 1960s, primarily by challenging and later rejecting the hitherto dominant Marxist theories of historical progress. Although many of its exponents maintain that they are “in the Marxist tradition,” they mean only that they use Marxism as a critical point of departure for trying to discover the actual patterns of social history. For the most part, they have concluded that Marxist notions of the structure of the past—of social relationships, of patterns of events, and of their influence in the long term—are simplistic and invalid. [redacted]

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In the field of anthropology, the influential structuralist school associated with Claude Levi-Strauss, Foucault, and others performed virtually the same mission. Although both structuralism and Annales methodology have fallen on hard times (critics accuse them of being too difficult for the uninitiated to follow), we believe their critical demolition of Marxist influence in the social sciences is likely to endure as a profound contribution to modern scholarship both in France and elsewhere in Western Europe. [redacted]

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Leftist intellectuals who were not already hostile to socialism—Max Gallo may be the best example—were driven to defection by the obvious failure of leftist ideology implicit in Mitterrand’s early attempts to socialize France. By 1983 most Socialists were ready to admit that their program of economic expansion and beefed-up budgets for social welfare would not work, and the dose of austerity that these policies eventually forced rang the death knell of leftist ideology for many informed observers. Alain Touraine—leftist sociologist and sometime editorialist for

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The US and USSR in French Public Opinion

Recent opinion polls show that the Soviet Union has declined steadily in French esteem over the past three years, while the United States has gained substantially. Surveys taken by France's most respected polling firm just before the recent Reagan-Gorbachev summit show, for example, that 59 percent of the French have an unfavorable opinion of the USSR, as opposed to only 9 percent favorable.^a In contrast, opinions of the United States were 43 percent favorable and 27 percent unfavorable—a notable improvement over a similar poll in 1982 that showed 30 percent favorable and 51 percent unfavorable. Questioned on specific issues, those polled strongly approved Washington's record over Moscow's on economic development, workers' rights, individual liberties, antiracism, reducing social inequalities, raising the standard of living, access to health care, and aid to the Third World. According to the US Embassy in Paris, other published polls showed similar dramatic advances in public confidence in the United States at the expense of the USSR.

^a Poll taken between 9 and 14 November 1985 by Sofres, and published in *Le Monde*, 19 November 1985.

the Socialist daily *Le Matin*—may have written the epitaph of socialism: “The essential merit of the leftwing government has been to rid us of Socialist ideology.” One noted academic recently remarked how doubly ironic it has been in the Fifth Republic that it fell to de Gaulle to rid France of colonialism, and to Mitterrand to rid it of socialism.

Anti-Sovietism. According to various knowledgeable observers, hatred of Soviet totalitarianism has taken deep root in the French left (see inset), motivated partly by the searching and relentless polemics of Glucksmann and Levy. Academic studies and press articles on the bankruptcy of Marxism in France have credited the New Philosophers with a central role in convincing an entire generation of French intellectuals that:

- The Soviet state is proof that “Marxist Revolution is a myth,” a cynical hoax that, far from causing the state to wither away, imposes a monstrous reactionary machine.⁶
- The quintessential mark of intellectual distinction and freedom in the modern world is to have a decent loathing for the Soviet Union.

The persistent cult of Stalinism within the PCF and the party's obsequious support for Soviet interests, manifest in all PCF newspapers and journals, helped to translate anti-Sovietism into revulsion for the PCF. The recent publication of secret documents concerning French Communist relations with the Kremlin during the invasion of Czechoslovakia have shown vividly how meekly the French party accepted Moscow's direction and justifications. Remembrances of the strength of the Stalin personality cult in the French party—especially in its heyday in the 1950s, when party intellectuals heaped ludicrous praise (in prose and poems) on the Soviet leader at every excuse—have made the rejection of Sovietism all the more personal and heartfelt, according to academic analyses. Both academic observers and journalists have also noted that the intellectual bias against Marxism, combined with newly fashionable disdain for the Soviet Union, has thrown up an apparently impregnable barricade between the New Left intelligentsia and French Communism (see inset).

This aversion even figured to an extent in the strong antipathy of leftist intellectuals toward the Mitterrand government. When the Socialists forged the “union of the left” as an election tactic in the late 1970s, the New Philosophers criticized them; when the same alliance resurfaced in 1980, the New Philosophers prepared to desert the Socialist Party; and when Mitterrand invited the Communists into his government in 1981, they moved into full opposition.

⁶ In their popular books (see appendix B), Glucksmann and Levy argue that the machine feeds on gullible humanity in part through the sophistries of corrupted intellectuals. In fact, says Levy, “The only successful revolution of this century is totalitarianism,” of which the Soviet state has proved the durable and consummate master. Hence, also, the New Philosopher equation, popularized by Glucksmann, “Hitler = Stalin, Stalin = Hitler.”

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Anti-Sovietism the "Touchstone"

New Left thinker and defector from the Spanish Communist Party Jorge Semprun mirrored the thinking of the present generation in responding to a question in the intellectual journal Le debat.

LD. What is it to be a leftist [intellectual] in France, today?

S. Today, the touchstone of leftist thought is a critical attitude toward the USSR, of which one of the corollaries is to reject the parties issuing from the Comintern tradition [the PCF] The essential question is not the barbarism of Pinochet, nor the demolition of the Lorraine steel manufacture, nor even the imperial redeployment of Reagan. The fundamental question is that of an attitude toward the USSR. [redacted]

Jacques Roukniqne, expert on Soviet affairs at France's respected Institute de Science Politique, keeps a close eye on both the Soviet Union and French opinions of it. He told one interviewer before General Secretary Gorbachev's recent visit to Paris, "There's been a dramatic change in the Soviet Union's image here over the past 10 years. The intellectuals have abandoned Marxism, discovered the gulag, discovered the horrors of the Soviet system. Generally speaking . . . [Marxism] no longer inspires people on the left, or even within the Communist Party [where] there are strong critical voices." [redacted]

Intellectuals who remained in Socialist ranks lapsed into silence. Nothing Mitterrand has done—including the Socialists' hard line with the Soviet Union, Mitterrand's explanation that he needed to name some Communist ministers to buy labor peace from the Communist-controlled trade union, and the Communists' departure from the government in 1984—has reversed the New Philosophers' hostility. Levy remarked scathingly that it was like "having four fascist ministers in the government." Thus far, New Left intellectuals have shown no inclination to forgive Mitterrand for his flirtation with the Communists or to commiserate with his spectacular failure to make socialism work. [redacted]

Prospects for Intellectual Influence

Although leftist intellectuals have played a key role for more than a decade in hardening public attitudes toward Marxism and the Soviet Union, their influence appears to be waning, and they are unlikely to have much direct impact on political affairs any time soon. Anti-Marxism and anti-Sovietism, which cut such a swath in the early 1970s, have taken on a life of their own and become so much a part of French intellectual orthodoxy that the New Philosophers no longer seem to have anything new to say. Moreover, there has been a popular trend away from ideology and toward a more pragmatic approach to political problems, and this has tended to undermine the stature of intellectuals of all stripes. [redacted]

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Decline of Intellectual Life. Many leftist intellectuals appear to have succumbed to a kind of listlessness following their vigorous rejection of ideology and party affiliation; others—like Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Pierre Chanou, and Michel Sarre—have tried to stir a national debate on the noticeable decline of French intellectual life. Some have pegged the decline of the intellectuals' stature to the rise of a high-technology economy and society in France, and there is no gainsaying that French youth, who once joined every new intellectual fad, now think of careers in science or business:

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- Opinion polls show that "intellectual professions" have lost significant ground to business and technical careers in the esteem of young people.
- Last year, student elections across the board produced an overwhelming number of new university officers who were either nonideological or conservative, according to press reports. Historian and former Communist Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie wrote that he was surprised to find how much students and junior staff at the University of Paris have shifted away from the left.
- Additional proof of the shift in attitude is obvious in the classroom. Educational reforms of the past decade designed to push students into business and

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Some Responses to Interview Questions About Marxism and Radicalism on the Nanterre Campus of the University of Paris

Guy Lachenaud, a junior professor in 1968 and now, at 46, vice-president of Nanterre:

There is no longer a student movement. The only groups that still survive combine a minimum of militant rhetoric with a lot of photocopying.

The operator of the campus newsstand on sales of Marxist publications, such as Rouge, Revolution, and Lutte ouvriere:

I order five copies [of each] per week, and I have trouble selling two or three.

A student:

In '68, papa was on the barricades. Me, I'm going to do my thing in the bank.

Anonymous:

Today? This is the permanent nonrevolution.

[Redacted]

technical courses were at first fiercely resisted by students and professors in the 1970s. As recently as the spring of 1983, when Mitterrand tried to extend these reforms, students rioted in several university cities. Now, the rioters' younger brothers and sisters swell business and science classrooms to overflowing, even on formerly red-hot campuses like the University of Paris at Nanterre, where Marxist intellectual chic ruled supreme as late as the mid-1970s (see inset).

- Intellectual careers, once almost guaranteed to those who attended the elite schools, are apparently no longer assured. The Fabius government, for example, recently announced a program to find jobs in local and national governments and in business for the unemployed graduates of the ENS. Socialists have also moved to force resident foreigners out of low-level teaching jobs, presumably to free scarce positions for French teachers. [Redacted]

Some critics, like the philosopher Michel Serres, argue that intellectuals, particularly on the left, are merely "revving up," but others point to a decline of intellectual vitality. Marc Riglet, editor of *France-Culture* and conference master at Paris's Institute for Political Studies, argued that French intellectuals are unable to mobilize and engage in a lively discourse because they are not as capable as they once were. He viewed this development as part of a decade-old cultural inertia that had come to characterize France.

[Redacted]

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Other intellectuals like Alain Besancon and numerous conservative thinkers agree with Riglet that the languishing of the intellectuals is part of a cycle of cultural decline. They argue persuasively—in articles and books as well as on television—that there are indeed no Flauberts, Prousts, or Baudelaires; moreover, keen observers, like historians Besancon and Pierre Goubert, say there is no reason to expect any soon. Mitterrand and Culture Minister Jack Lang, despite more than doubling the Culture Ministry budget, have failed to stem the tide of complaints that "creativity is in a slump in France," and that, across the cultural spectrum, "the absence of innovation is striking."⁷ [Redacted]

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A conference in Paris last year, organized to consider the issue of "French identity," turned quickly to the lethargy of French intellectuals and its implications for their future political role. Participants appeared to agree that ideology—left or right—was unlikely to mobilize intellectuals in the future. The bad taste left by disillusionment with Marxism in the mouths of virtually every leftist intellectual has translated directly into a kind of neutralism that has contributed to their immobilization. Even "liberalism"—meaning

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⁷ Lang's well-publicized attack on "American cultural imperialism" in 1981 and his later convocation of an international conference of leftist intellectuals drew stinging criticisms, notably from the *Wall Street Journal*, about the recent poverty of French cultural productivity, especially in comparison with American accomplishments. These charges gave rise to a great deal of self-criticism on the part of French intellectuals, like Besancon and Riglet. [Redacted]

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Figure 7. Students protest Gorbachev's visit to France in October 1985.

Anti-Sovietism, currently a fixture in the mentality and writing of intellectuals, continues to have great potential for stirring ferment. General Secretary Gorbachev's visit to France this fall generated protests not just from rightists: the New Left, and especially dissident intellectuals, used the visit as an opportunity to vent frustration about Soviet brutality in Afghanistan, continuing repression in Poland, and disregard of the human rights provisions of the Helsinki accord. Thousands of students turned out for Left Bank demonstrations, shouting "Gorbachev Gulag!" The Sakharov case also excites continuing fascination in French intellectual circles. Although the government probably short-circuited some planned protests by promising publicly to take the lead in broaching human rights with Gorbachev and by prohibiting street demonstrations during the visit, intellectuals nonetheless used the visit to press for the release of Sakharov and his wife and for a tougher French line with Moscow.

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This antitotalitarian and anti-Soviet sentiment among French intellectuals will militate against any significant modification of the government's already tough stand against Moscow. By now, in fact, most Socialist leaders must calculate that a tough attitude toward both the PCF and Moscow is the only way they can hope to galvanize the intellectuals into backing them in the 1986 legislative election. The intellectuals will also make it difficult for any rightwing government to engineer a resumption of the "special relationship" with Moscow that characterized the presidency of Valery Giscard d'Estaing.

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less government and more self-sufficiency—has only weak support in both intellectual and public opinion, judging from recent polls and media reports.

Limited Reengagement. Nevertheless, some issues will probably continue to draw intellectuals into the fray. In a recent survey, most prominent writers indicated that they are prepared to resume much of the political involvement once characteristic of leftist intellectuals—but that they would stop short of mobilizing for parties and ideology. A more likely theme to reengage intellectuals would be French cultural identity, which is tied closely to the emotional issues of alien influences in France, immigration, and racism. Anti-immigrant rhetoric and the racism associated with the rise of the extreme right National Front have galvanized many leftist intellectuals into action, largely in street protests organized by an antiracist group called S.O.S. Racisme.

In our view, the strong currents of anti-Marxism, anti-Sovietism, and disillusionment with ideology among leftist intellectuals may also have a powerful effect on the Socialist Party. Mounting evidence suggests that the Socialists face a significant electoral disaster in next year's legislative elections. As the party heads for the political wilderness and tries to make sense of its experience in government, the New Left intellectuals are likely to play an important role in this soul searching and in reshaping the Socialists' attitudes and self-image.

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In particular, deep anti-PCF sentiment among intellectuals may prove decisive in subverting machinations by Socialist Party chief Jospin and others on the left of the party to rekindle enthusiasm for the "union of the left"—the myth that the Socialists came to power in 1981 only through their alliance with the PCF and that the left can only achieve power in the future through unity.⁸ Intellectuals are likely to weigh in heavily against this notion and will probably support overwhelmingly the strategy—long touted by Socialist dissident Michel Rocard, but now apparently accepted by both Mitterrand and Prime Minister Fabius—that the long-term future of Socialism lies in forging a center-left alliance. [redacted]

intellectuals have taken to calling "primitive anti-Americanism"—is now identified with the Communist daily *l'Humanite* and is considered bad form. Anti-Americanism formerly also stood as a mark of intellectual status, separating thinkers from ordinary folk (who were generally suspected of harboring good opinions of the United States, even in the Vietnam era). Now, just the opposite is true; finding virtues in America—even identifying good things about US Government policies—is looked upon as an indication of discerning judgment. Attempts by some to revive significant and sweeping criticisms of US policies are seen as transparent efforts to divert critics from their legitimate target, the activities of the Soviet Union. [redacted]

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In sum, New Left activism is likely to increase bickering both between Communists and Socialists and within the Socialist Party. It will also probably lead to increased voter defection from both camps. [redacted]

This climate of intellectual opinion will almost certainly make it very difficult for anyone to mobilize significant opposition among intellectual elites to US policies in Central America, for example. It is also likely to deny to other European intellectuals—notably, in Scandinavia and West Germany—who are hostile to US policies and interests the powerful leadership they formerly received from the French (in the era of US involvement in Vietnam) and the support they now need to create a West European consensus on transnational issues, such as disarmament. The heated debate in the West German press between Glucksmann and leading German intellectuals over pacifism and INF basing provided graphic evidence of the distance between the two and of the ability and readiness of New Left French intellectuals to argue persuasively against attitudes that play into Soviet hands. Although US policies are certainly not immune to powerful intellectual criticism in France, even on the right, it is the Soviet Union that is now clearly on the defensive and likely to remain there, at least in the medium term. [redacted]

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French Intellectuals and US Interests

In the postwar era, French intellectuals helped significantly to generate and shape international hostility to US policies, both in Europe and in the Third World. From Beirut to Lisbon to Mexico City, influential intellectual elites listened to and mimicked the thinking and prejudices of *cafe savants* like Regis Debray. Now, on the other hand, anti-Marxism and anti-Sovietism appear to have permitted the younger generation of French intellectuals to adopt a more open attitude toward the United States. This in turn has given rise to a new wave of genuinely pro-American sentiment, rooted in the vogue of American popular culture, in respect for the American economic vitality of the 1980s, and in admiration for the new image of self-confidence that the United States now projects in the world. [redacted]

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In France, the anti-Americanism that used to be taken in polite circles as circumstantial evidence of an adequate education is no longer in vogue. Knee-jerk slander of the United States—what the New Left

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⁸ Mitterrand's Socialists benefited far more in 1981 from the 16 percent of Jacques Chirac's Neo-Gaullists who stayed home rather than vote for Giscard d'Estaing and from the 5 percent of centrist voters, previously in Giscard's camp, who crossed over to give the Socialists a chance. [redacted]

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Appendix A

Cultural Aspects of New Right Thought

The more esoteric side of New Right intellectuality has focused surprising energy on demands for cultural renewal, arguing that what is essentially wrong with France is that its culture has been eroded by external influences and degraded by neglect. Conservative writers, many of them associated with the Group for Research and Study of European Civilization (GRECE) and the Clock Club (Club de l'Horloge)—both composed mainly of young graduates of France's elite school of administration, ENA—have found an outlet for their arguments in Hersant publications, notably *Figaro Magazine*, which is edited by GRECE kindred spirit Louis Pauwels. [redacted]

Pauwels and two proteges, Jean-Claude Valla and Alain de Benoist, have worked overtime to give the New Right a stridently elitist ethic. Led by Benoist, all three charge that cultural decline in France is linked directly to egalitarianism—to the allegedly foolish denial of the essential superiority of some men, and to the imposition of man-in-the-street mediocrity on French society. Pauwels and others have encouraged rightist anthropology that looks beyond the Revolution to Christianity as the source of egalitarian weakness in European civilization. Pauwels and Benoist have often praised the “perceptive elitism” in pre-Christian European societies as the source of cultural virtues to which modern Europeans should look for revival and renewal. [redacted]

This insistence on the reasonableness of elitism dovetails with the New Right's predilection for classic liberalism in the vision of a society in which government refuses to impose an artificial equality on citizens and in which individuals are free to realize the full advantages of their talents. Some New Right intellectuals argue also that because egalitarianism is artificial it requires a heavyhanded, enforcer role for government. This they believe is the root of totalitarianism. [redacted]

Elitism in the thinking of the New Right is almost certainly one important reason that few French intellectuals have made the journey from the left to



Figure 8. Louis Pauwels and Alain de Benoist at recent Conservative function. [redacted]

GRECE.⁹ In our view, there is little prospect that many will do so in the future, notwithstanding occasional similarities and alliances of viewpoint. Recently, New Right intellectuals have played down the antiegalitarian and even anti-Christian elements of GRECE/Horloge thinking, but leftist intellectuals and conservatives like Revel who consider themselves “men of the left” are still wedded to egalitarianism as the essence of the democratic-republican tradition in France. Conservative politicians avoid opportunities to gladhand the faithful at Horloge functions, and even Pauwels seldom ruminates now on the virtues of paganism and elites. [redacted]

⁹ There are two near exceptions to this; Glucksmann and editorialist Jean-Edern Hallier are prone to off-the-wall statements that often smack of invention by GRECE. Annie Kriegel writes for the Hersant daily *Figaro*, but as critic of the left and not as exponent of New Right ideas. [redacted]

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Reactions to the New Right

Reaction to the controversial social and ethical positions of the New Right intellectuals has been varied. Marxist intellectuals who remained faithful to the ideas and biases of the left have rejected them outright; others who belong to neither New Right nor old left circles have found virtues in them. Regis Debray, for example, who still touts the agenda and ideology of the left and (sometimes) advises Mitterrand on foreign policy, writes diatribes against the modern intellectual renegades, condemning them for forsaking written discourse in favor of becoming glib media personalities (mediatics). He charges that the leftist New Philosophers especially have been re-shaped intellectually by the TV medium into shallow talking heads, incapable of precise philosophical writing.^a [redacted]

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Raymond Aron, the revered dean of contemporary conservative thought in France, detested the New Right intellectuals, often equating their elitist anti-egalitarianism with the worst antidemocratic strains in French conservatism. Annie Kriegel joined Aron in fearing that racist and fascist sentiments lurked in New Right hostility to alien cultural influences and in their thinking about genetics, heredity, and ethnology. [redacted]

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But Aron is dead, Debray is no longer taken seriously as a thinker, and Kriegel has never commanded a large public following. Against these critics, the New Right can point to kudos from Michel Foucault, France's most profound and influential thinker. Foucault has praised the upstarts for, among other things, reminding philosophers of the "bloody" consequences that have flowed from the rationalist social theory of the 18th-century Enlightenment and the Revolutionary era. [redacted]

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^a Debray's book on *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France* is one long diatribe against the renegade leftist intellectuals and their sometime allies on the right. [redacted]

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Appendix B

Important Books by Glucksmann and Levy

Andre Glucksmann

La cuisiniere et le mangeur-d'hommes (The Cook and the Man-Eater), 1975. Read as a commentary on *The Gulag Archipelago*, this "essay on the relations between the state, Marxism, and the concentration camps" is a painstakingly detailed survey of the disastrous economic and political history of the USSR, as seen against the high-minded declarations of its leaders.

Les Maitres Penseurs (The Master Thinkers), 1977. Glucksmann's acclaimed examination of the impact of 19th-century German philosophy on the forging of the German state and on the 20th century. Most important, it exposes the relationship between philosophers such as Marx and Nietzsche and modern tyrannies.

Bernard-Henri Levy

Barbarie a visage humain (Barbarism With a Human Face), 1977. Levy locates the roots of modern totalitarianism in the optimism and rationalism of the 18th-century Enlightenment, which, he argues, first defined the state as the agent of progress. In this role, says Levy, the state has invariably demanded absolute power, and in one degree or another has diminished the authority of the individual.



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