

One Step Closer to a Leninist Revolution in France in 1968: The Communists Back Down

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Abstract:

This study observes French communist actions in relation to the social movement of 1968, especially how the communists defined their behavioral principle in order to satisfy a variety of components as well as to increase their party support. Sticking with their own tradition is the fundamental behavioral mechanism of political groups. However, a favorable outcome does not necessarily result from retaining traditional values. Thus, groups try to incorporate some new elements to encourage more flexible behavior. As a result, a conflict between tradition and innovation arises. French communist behavior in the May Movement in 1968 is a showcase for us to observe how difficult it is for an established group to absorb different perspectives and values in order to become a new entity. By the mid-1990s, through further mutations, the PCF, once enjoyed a quarter of votes in the 1950s and 60s, had virtually lost political significance in the French politics.

Key words: French Communist Party, May Movement, Party Behavior, Party Support

Introduction:

Traditional values define who we are and restrain our behavior. Without consulting our past experiences, we can find a way out neither to move forward nor to change direction. In that sense, we can be called, “prisoners of the past.” Most social gatherings, including family ceremonies, alumni parties or community events, are meant to remind us of our own social position through shared experiences. Is transformation away from such tenacious tradition likely? Possible, yes, but highly limited, because we are reluctant to discard any principles that seem essential to our existence. Abandoning traditional features defining who we are weakens our self-identity. To make matters worse, our long-time friends and associates may leave us, because we no longer share the same thoughts, ideas, and mental habits. Acquiring new company is not easy. As a result, we are likely to be isolated from our former circle. Thus, certain risks haunted us when stepping out of our tradition. Political parties are no exception. Party tradition shaped by ideological dogmas strongly defines their characteristics. However, one fundamental difference is that while we live our own life more or less through our peculiar will and individual objectives, political parties rely on their supporters to sustain their survival. Thus, to survive, a party must not alienate its people. It must provide input to adjust the direction to head in, which requires sensitivity, though, because as Feliks Gross argues, parties have a tendency to adhere to particular ideologies that become core values and symbols in the parties (Gross, 1974).

In short, political parties must deal with both supporters along with traditional party values and external developments. Therefore, how to move forward, altering party policy or retaining ideological tenacity, causes dilemmas for them, especially when they encounter large-scale social movements that attract a great number of citizens with various backgrounds. The question is how political parties should behave when dealing with internal as well as external upheavals. Because of various ideological backgrounds among the participants, political parties face two options when getting involved in movements: one is to make their behavioral principles flexible, depending on the external environment. In this case, party supporters easily recognize contradictions between what the parties have claimed and how they really act, which may cause alienation of the adherents. The other is to let them stick with their ideology, leading neither concession nor compromise.

Attitude like this only attracts hard-core party supporters, and leaves many party members unavailable for creating large scale-support. Therefore, when uncertain of the direction to take in the movements, the parties should engage with them carefully. Most cases show, however, that they are unlikely to succeed. To showcase behavioral mechanisms in political parties, this study observes French communist actions in relation to the social movement of 1968, generally referred to as the May Movement. More than 10 million citizens participated in demonstrations and rallies, as well as school and factory occupations. It consisted of two parts, one of which was dominated by the students and mainly focused on student-oriented grievances. The communist action in this part was highly limited, since the communists could not effectively penetrate into the radical student circles, although they shared relatively the same goal. Traditional antagonism with the students whom the communists had regarded as bourgeois elements was difficult for them to overcome. The other part was characterized as the workers seeking economic concessions. This is the main concern in this study, because acquiring such concessions from the government and the capitalist circle has been the ultimate reason for communist existence in developed countries. One question that arises is, how the communists defined their behavioral principle in order to satisfy a variety of components as well as to increase their party support. Which path did the communists promote under different circumstances in the movement, the traditionally established communist vision, or a newly conceptualized moderate idea of Eurocommunism that emerged around the late 1950s? The French communists took the middle-ground between the two paths.

Tradition is the fundamental behavioral mechanism of individuals and also of political groups enjoying a large number of supporters. However, a favorable outcome does not necessarily result from retaining traditional values. Thus, groups try to incorporate some new elements to encourage more behavior that is flexible. As a result, a conflict between tradition and innovation arises, which merely alienates its traditional followers and eventually ends up losing them in the long run. The reason is that those followers do not have any intention to alter their basic values. French communist behavior in the May Movement in 1968 is a showcase for us to observe how difficult it is for an established group to absorb different perspectives and values in order to become a new entity.

I. A New Essence: Euro communism Communist parties outside of the Soviet Union were products of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Although the Soviets initiated the international communist movement and constantly manipulated the policies of their counterparts, they did not simply impose the Bolshevik model. Nevertheless, non-Soviets enthusiastically supported the Soviets and followed all the steps guided by them through the Communist International, established in 1919 (Agnew & McDermott, 1996). The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) took the strongest role as behavioral and spiritual guide for all communist parties in the world in next few decades. It is noteworthy to observe that the communist traditions in the West began moving away from Soviet dominance in the 1950s. Since then, the Euro communist concept as a theoretical justification for the European communists had gradually emerged. The key event that directly affected the communist characteristics in the West was the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU. Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the CPSU, made critical remarks about Stalin to the Congress on February 24, 1956 for the first time. Stalin's dictatorial rule was a "serious error," preventing the country from properly building and developing socialism. In addition, Khrushchev referred to peaceful co-existence with different political systems as well as multiple and peaceful roads to socialism (Hodnett, 1974).

Stimulated by the mild approach, some communists in the West used it as a pretext to distance themselves from the Soviet Union and pave the way for an independent path. Even though the Western communists started taking new approaches, their ultimate goal, establishment of a socialist state, was intact. Communists dedicated themselves to protecting workers and to improving their conditions. Indispensable items for building socialism, such as nationalization of major industries and establishment of a welfare state, were still in the main party platform. On the other hand, to accomplish the objective, the emerging concept of Euro communism in the 1960s changed the communists' struggle to reach socialism into peaceful methods through parliamentary democracy. In order to work within the framework of parliamentary democracy, communists emphasized the electoral market as a desirable area for party activity. Further, because the target was electoral gain, and unilateral parliamentary domination was not realistic, the communists were seriously concerned about collaboration with other Leftist parties. The May Movement broke out when the French communists were transforming their traditional entity from a dogmatic group to a new flexible body. In other words, the movement was a real opportunity for the communists to show that their methods of operation would not stick to the Marxist/Leninist doctrine of revolutionary opportunism, but focus on the peaceful path of Euro communism-orientation to achieve their goal.

II. French Communists and May Movement: Prior to the movement, insignificant electoral support and little common ground for a Leftist alliance deprived the French communists of the arena of national politics. In order to overcome the disadvantages, they were committed to spending extensive energy to establish strong connections with the frustrated citizens and to seeking space outside of parliament for party activity. Through the direct linkage with the citizens, communists could act as intermediaries and as policy-makers when members were elected to parliament.

Once democratic norms thoroughly prevailed in all aspects of socio-political domain, the purpose of the extra parliamentary activities for the communists turned into not physically challenging government, but attracting voters opposed to it. In general, this was the way for the Western communists to pursue their activities. In this context, organizing social movements gave the communists two advantages; one was strengthening ties with the citizens through mutual efforts to obtain direct concessions from the government; the other was an increase of protest votes for the party. In addition to working as a parliamentary party, the communists vigorously utilized space outside of parliament to organize social movements and to encourage ties with citizens. This process was strictly based on the games on parliamentary democracy, not to overthrow the government by force, but to increase electoral support by votes.

Regarding the May Movement, the student body that led the first stage mainly demanded university reforms. For the communists, the decisive forces to take the central role for socio-political transformation were not the students, but the workers, communists' traditional allies (*Archives Waldeck Rochet*, 1968a). The vigorous involvement by the communists in the May Movement started with the general strike on May 13. From then on, France was covered by a massive wave of strikes and factory occupation. By May 29, the total number of workers who were on strike peaked at an estimated eight to nine million, or about 45 percent of the entire labor force.

On May 13, in addition to the strikes led by the major labor unions, Confederation Générale du Travail (CGT) and Confederation Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), large demonstrations took place nationwide, counting about one million participants in Paris, 35,000 in Lyon, and 40,000 in Toulouse, and 50,000 in Marseille. On that day in Paris, public transportation was reduced its service drastically, the post office stopped mail delivery, and industrial production dropped by 50 percent. The demonstrations presented politically-oriented demands. Slogans displayed during the demonstration in Paris on May 13, such as "TEN YEARS, THAT IS ENOUGH!" "OLD DE GAULLE !" "FOR POPULAR GOVERNMENT !" indicated that participants shared a mutual interest in de Gaulle stepping down (*L'Humanité*, 1968a, May 18). At this point, the communists kept a certain degree of distance from the upsurge of the movement. Besides accusing the police of brutality, they did not demand the political concessions that the demonstrators desired (*L'Humanité*, 1968b, May 13). The reason was that the students were not aroused by the peril of economic deterioration that was, for the communists, a prerequisite for their commitment. The scale of the movement itself did not automatically give the communists a pretext to side with the demonstrators.

From May 14, the workers clearly began to dominate the movement, in that the strikes in factories occurred nation-wide. At first, the workers of Sud-Aviation in Château-Bougon near Nantes, confined their director in his office and occupied the entire plant. The following day, the workers at Renault in Cleon near Rouen ceased production and occupied the factory. From then on, many enterprises followed the suit. At this point, the communists interpreted on-going public disorder as advocacy concerning work-related conditions as well as wages (*L'Humanité*, 1968c, May 15 & Materni, 1968). Focusing only on the matters related to labor conditions gave the communists a favorable ground to move forward.

The PCF Political Bureau published a statement on May 16 and outlined its major demands: a general increase in salaries, security of employment, reduction of working hours without decrease in salary, abolition of unequal regulations on social security, and increase of workers' rights (*L'Humanité*, 1968d, May 17). One significant remark in the May 16 statement was that the communists clearly differentiated between violent actions committed by students and by workers. The militant students more or less aimed at the destruction of the whole political system – a goal which the communists could neither pursue nor support. On the other hand, as long as the ongoing strikes and factory occupations directed concerns of the working class toward economic concessions and better working environments, the communists backed them up. Etienne Fajon, a member of the PCF Political Bureau, stated that one of the crucial party tasks was to keep a majority of students and workers from the influence of militants (Fajon, 1968a).

The headline on *L'Humanité* on May 18 was "THE STRIKE WITH OCCUPATION OF FACTORIES SPREADS HOUR BY HOUR" (*L'Humanité*, 1968e, May 18). The situation was further deteriorating. The CGT National Committee emphasized that an alliance among other unions coordinated strikes and factory occupations (*L'Humanité*, 1969f, May 18). At the same time on the political side, the PCF leaders tried to strengthen its tie with the Leftist parties. The first session between the PCF and the Fédération de la Gauche Démocrate et Socialiste (FGDS) was held on May 17. After the meeting, the PCF Political Bureau suggested that the Leftist alliance centered in the PCF and the FGDS should play a significant role to respond to the political disposition of the workers – the resignation of the de Gaulle administration – (*L'Humanité*, 1968g, May 18). Waldeck Rochet, the head of the PCF, commented in *France-Inter*, "It is time to anticipate the constitution of a popular government and a democratic union. For its part, the French Communist Party is ready to take all responsibilities" (*Archives Waldeck Rochet*, 1969b).

On the other hand, the communist leaders seemed not to be ready to deal with the potential alliance. During a meeting with V.A Zorine, Soviet ambassador, Gaston Plissonnier, a member of PCF Political Bureau, mentioned that the worker-centered PCF and the reform-minded FGDS had different agendas, and neither organization would work on concluding a common program to define a Leftist alliance in the post-de Gaulle period. Roche supported the perspective (Moullec, 1998). The argument presented by Plissonnier and Rochet exemplified traditionally oriented communist exclusiveness. Contrary to the two leaders, some other high officials expressed a new approach to make an alliance possible as the party had stated. Jacques Duclos emphasized that the party should take all measures necessary to form an alliance with the FGDS, based on an agreed framework (Rochet, 1968). Etienne Fajon also suggested on May 18 that the defeat of the Gaullist administration was surely imperative; however, forming a concrete Leftist alliance should be a priority for the party (Fajon, 1968).

On the practical side, there was dissonance among the CGT leadership on how to handle the massive strike waves. George Seguy, Secretary General of the CGT, argued that the workers were unlikely to get involved in a process overthrowing the de Gaulle administration: rather, their prime concern was to pressure the government to induce concessions (*L'Humanité*, 1968h, June 14). On the other hand, Andre Barjonet, a prominent leader of the CGT, regarded the situation as revolutionary so that the union leaders should encourage the members to organize such activities further (Lafranc, 1969). A complete split between the two leaders occurred at a session of the CGT National Committee on May 17. There, Seguy dominated, and Barjonet resigned from the CGT. The National Committee confirmed the same five objectives to achieve as those presented by the PCF: reforms on social security, payment, working hours, employment regulation, and union activities. The CGT also supported the PCF thesis that the situation was not ripe for revolution (*L'Humanité*, 1968i, May 18).

At the same time, the workers accused the PCF and the CGT of not taking adequate measures to gain concessions from the government. For example, at the Regie Renault plant in Boulogne-Billancourt, a majority of workers who were already enthusiastic to act decisively were frustrated by the CGT leaders' decision to delay a strike order (Fremontier, 1971). On the other hand, Daniel Moreau, Secretary General of the CGT Railway Unions, commented that in spite of a strike order issued by the CGT on May 16, railway employees did not follow the directive immediately (Drefus-Armand & Gervreau, 1988a).

For one CFDT member, the situation in his factory was no doubt revolutionary. However, no upper echelon union leader shared the same observation. Another worker observed factory conditions this way: "Only 15 percent of the workers stayed at the occupied factory to participate in activities there around the clock. The others went to the mountains, the ocean, or stayed home." (Drefus-Armand & Gervreau, 1988b). At any rate, by May 18, the situation reached the point where all aspects of life in France were almost paralyzed by strikes. The railways, telephone service, and mail delivery ceased to function. Since air controllers were on strike, airports were closed. The communists were not pleased to see the on-going events. On May 20, Fajon reminded workers to follow the orders from the CGT in conducting strikes and factory occupation. He also urged that all measures should be carefully designed to protect production systems and to prevent chaotic incidents (Fajon, 1968). Under such circumstances, an inter-organizational session between the members of the PCF Political Bureau and the CGT Confederation Bureau was held on May 19. Among the CGT leaders, Benôit Frachon, Georges Seguy, and Henri Krasucki were also the members of the PCF Political Bureau. At the session, the leaders confirmed objectives in the on-going movement, not those achieved by militant activities of the workers, but by political union of the PCF and the FGDS based on the February 1968 accord (*Archives Waldeck Rochet*, 1968c). The stress on electoral cooperation indicated that destruction of the political system did not reflect party principles.

A statement of the PCF Political Bureau on May 20 reconfirmed that the political objective was defeat of the Gaullist government electorally and establishment of a popular government based on the Leftist alliance (*L'Humanité*, 1968j, May 21). At the same time, the communist leaders emphasized that their roles were neither supposed to be revolutionary nor were they expected to lead the way to socialism (*L'Humanité*, 1968k, May 21). By May 20, local cooperation between the PCF and the FGDS had already formed in several cities. Local alliances acted as real political forces and pressured their headquarters in Paris to establish a concrete political union (*L'Humanité*, 1968l, May 21 & Luc 1968). According to a report in *L'Humanité*, an accord between the PCF and the FGDS branches was concluded in 29 departments (*L'Humanité*, 1968m, May 29). Vigorous activity for Leftist unity was in fact limited to only the local level. In Paris, the headquarters of the Leftist organizations did not share provincial enthusiasm. Although the policies agreed by both parties were clearly listed in the accord of 1968, for the PCF and the FGDS leaders, the agreements did not go beyond confirmation of shared views. In other words, the accord was based on policy discussions but did not set out a concrete platform. The leaders did not discuss any matters that would cause friction between the two organizations (Tiersky, 1994).

Nevertheless, the PCF strongly determined to solve the issues through political means. Rochet stated, at the parliamentary session on May 21, "only a popular government and a democratic union relying on the will of the people can grant the new politics of progress for benefit of all the people...The PCF is ready to take all responsibilities to contribute to this work of national and social renovation" (*L'Humanité*, 1968n, May 22). Rochet had confidence in the direction – no revolutionary path but a political solution – because of a remarkable increase of PCF membership since the May movement erupted. The party had obtained 23,000 new members from May 13. An increase of CGT membership was also noticeable. The confederation had absorbed the new members of 60,000 (*L'Humanité*, 1968o, May 27). As a blow for the PCF, the division among labor unions gradually appeared as the movement went along. In spite of discrepancies in behavioral principles and situational analysis, the CGT and the CFDT had largely worked together since the beginning of the movement. Their cooperation was no doubt one of the decisive factors allowing the May Movement to such a gigantic scale. At their meeting on May 22, both unions declared the following demands: strength of purchasing power, protection and extension of union rights, reduction of unproductive expenses, guarantee of workers' rights, and restructuring of public revenue (*L'Humanité*, 1968p, May 23).

The CGT leaders were not satisfied with them. George Seguy admitted the existence of irreconcilable differences between the two unions after the session (Seguy, 1972). Two developments demonstrated the real break up. First, on May 24, the CGT organized unilateral demonstrations in Paris, for which the PCF expressed total support (*Archives Waldeck Rochet*, 1968d), but the CFDT did not participate. Second, a sense of rivalry rose. Before negotiations with the government began, the CGT called its counterpart to hold a session to clarify the common objectives at the negotiation table; however, the CFDT refused. Various Leftist groups including student and labor unions organized a big rally at the Charley Stadium in Paris on May 27, for which the FGDS declared its support, but neither PCF nor CGT were invited. One day before the rally, the communists acknowledged that the student groups had started new destructive activity aimed at the breakup of the negotiation process between the government and the industrialists. Therefore, the Paris branch of the PCF urged students and workers not to participate in the rally (*L'Humanité*, 1968q, May 27).

In spite of the situation where the scheme for labor union cooperation was being broken down, the PCF still sought political solution with the FGDS. Rochet informed Françoise Mitterrand, chairman of the FGDS in a letter on May 27: The current situation demands us to take urgent measures. This is why we propose to you that the delegations of our two formations meet at the time and place of your choice today. Now we are ready – [The PCF] suggests assuring the replacement of Gaullist power by a popular government and a democratic union with the communist participation on the basis of a minimum common program. The program should include, first, the satisfaction of essential demands for which nine million workers are on strike [and] creation of modern and democratic university... After the conclusion of our accord, we could call together on the masses of France to support our propositions (*L'Humanité*, 1968r, May 28). Mitterrand did not give a quick response. Further, he mentioned that even if the meeting were held, it would be difficult to foresee any productive results, because there was no indication that the two parties would reach a new agreement beyond the February 1968 Accord (*L'Humanité*, 1968s, May 28). At the same time, in contrast with a communist plan of a popular government with PCF-FGDS leadership, the FGDS already had forwarded the vision of a provisional government, led by Mendès France, a prominent Leftist leader, as president and Mitterrand as prime minister, without PCF participation (Mitterrand, 1977).

Suddenly, a clear possibility for reconciliation among the Leftist camp came out of de Gaulle's speech on May 30. All the Leftists considered it highly provocative (*L'Humanité*, 1968, May 31). The headline in *L'Humanité* on May 31 read, "DE GAULLE RESPONDED IN CONFIRMATION OF HIS WILL TO IMPOSE DICTATORSHIP" (*L'Humanité*, 1968u, May 31). In addition to announcing the dissolution of the parliament, de Gaulle stated that the situation was so grave that communist dictatorship was on the way, and outbreak of civil war was imminent (De Gaulle, 1970). He urged the citizens to defend the country from communist peril. De Gaulle utilized a traditional tactic in blaming the communists for public disorder. The PCF response was obviously harsh. The PCF Political Bureau declared, "To workers on strike for their demands, to students and teachers in struggle for university democracy, and to millions of French who want political change, de Gaulle responded with a true declaration of war... The attack toward the PCF is intended to conceal the will of General de Gaulle to impose his own dictatorship." (*L'Humanité*, 1968v, May 31). At this point, according to his report to a Central Committee session on May 30, Rochet was still confident that the PCF had strong public support. Thus, he urged the Leftist organizations to acknowledge the public interests, which de Gaulle failed to detect, and to develop unity among all the democratic forces (*Archives Waldeck Rochet*, 1968e). The PCF held a session with the FGDS on June 1, which led to a remarkable progress for the communists. Both parties reconfirmed the February Accord of 1968 for forming an electoral alliance in the coming election. They also agreed on common targets such as a minimum monthly wage of 600 francs, a forty-hour working week, an increase in unemployment compensation, and university reforms (*Cahiers du communisme*, 1968a). On the other hand, the two parties could not reach an agreement on forming a Leftist government after the election.

Then, the PCF shifted organizational foci. First, in addition to the continuing talk with the FGDS, the communists emphasized the key role of the CGT as the central actor to represent the workers' demands (*L'Humanité*, 1968w, June 4). The PCF Political Bureau clearly stressed in a statement on June 4 that only the workers affiliated with the CGT and supported by PCF policy could accomplish their goals (*L'Humanité*, 1968x, June 5). With difficulties in cooperation with other labor federations, a means for the communists to enlarge party support was only through the CGT channel.

Second, the PCF attack against militant groups intensified. The communists had carefully avoided open confrontation with the militants because of a fear of further division of the Leftist camp. However, at the beginning of June when the PCF focus shifted to electoral campaign, the party severely denounced them as destructive forces, because the militant groups refused to end the strikes, divided the working class, disturbed communist objectives, and distorted real intentions of citizens (*L'Humanité*, 1968y, June 4). The gigantic strikes that had spread nation-wide gradually died down in some sectors from the end of May. Auto plants, a symbol of factory struggles in the movement, returned to work - at Regie Renault on June 17, Citroen, and Peugeot on June 20. The massive public disorders that shook France in May and June were nearly over in mid-June, although more than 300,000 workers were still on strike.

Rochet recognized that the main reason for workers to participate in the May Movement was not the actions of the students. Rather, the political malaise caused by the Gaullist policies was the major factor for them to turn the student protest into a labor-oriented movement (*Cahiers du communisme*, 1968b). Did the PCF perceive the political implication from the beginning of the labor-oriented protest? Did this perception of a politics-centered approach determine PCF behavior? Apparently, in the new stage when workers became involved, the PCF did not realize that union participation had the potential to be politicized, aiming at replacing the government. In addition, the communists' response was limited in scope, only accusing the police of overreaction.

Outbreak of factory occupation, which the PCF recognized as a serious intention of the workers, was a turning point. The communists believed that the uprising was an indispensable requisite for communist involvement: thus, the PCF turned its attention to seeking economic concessions through the CGT channel. Simultaneously, the communists adopted a political approach as an extension of workers' demands, because the situation was suitable to communist operation. At the same time, the PCF aimed neither at overthrowing the present administration nor at challenging the existing political system. Rather, their objective was creation of a Leftist coalition government within the framework of parliamentary democracy. In this regard, the PCF needed FGDS cooperation, but eventually failed. Why? First of all, a strong sense of rivalry existed among the major Leftist actors. In the mid-1960s, the communists had reason to believe that the FGDS could be a real partner for them. Communist support for Mitterrand as a presidential candidate in the 1965 election was a fresh memory at that time. Both groups concluded an official electoral alliance in February 1968.

However, the benign relationship between them did not last long. The PCF and the FGDS could not reach an agreement on a political map in a post de-Gaulle period. Participation in PCF-CGT led demonstrations was rejected by the rival unions. The communists did not endorse rallies sponsored by their counterparts. In addition, the communists' long history of subordination to the Soviets made it difficult for non-communist Leftists to believe the shift to moderate positions.

Second, inter-organizational accords only worked dependent on external environments. Prior to the May Movement, the rival Leftist trade unions, the CGT and the CFDT, and political parties, the PCF and the FGDS, had concluded agreements in 1966 and 1968, respectively. The accords could be seen as conceptualization of common goals among the Leftist camp and indication of possible Leftist unity, because cooperation of the four Leftist groups would give great political leverage to challenge the Gaullist administration. Gigantic demonstrations in which almost all Leftist forces took part in mid-May exemplified how the inter-organizational alliance worked. However, Leftist cooperation was short-lived. PCF and CGT leaders could not create a common agenda or agree on behavioral principles with their counterparts throughout the May Movement. Organizational conduct of each party and union was determined by individual analysis influenced by external developments, but not restrained by agreements to cooperate.

Third, since the public atmosphere was so confused, direction of the Movement interpreted by each actor was not based on a generally shared description of the situation, but on ideological and organizational traditions. The CFDT leaders criticized the PCF for focusing more on economic bargaining than on political development. They were convinced that, since extensive strikes and factory occupations indicated the serious intention of the workers, overthrow of the government by a revolutionary path with frustrated citizens was among real agenda items. On the other hand, the PCF and the CGT argued that the actors participated in the May Movement based on clear-goal oriented activities, seeking educational reform and economic concessions. Therefore, radical activities stemmed not from the desire to overthrow the government, but to obtain concessions from it. In this way, the Leftist camp could not create a shared point of view, and diversity of organizational characteristics prevented the Leftists from reaching unity. In the labor-oriented part of the May Movement, the PCF found a larger space for party actions in parliament sessions, government negotiations, factory meetings, and public demonstrations as well as the Leftist alliance. In addition, the communists were delighted to acknowledge that the party membership significantly increased during the Movement. Once the communist leaders began to mention possible replacement of de Gaulle in late May, the party concentrated on participation in the new government. Establishment of a Leftist coalition government was the ultimate objective of the communists for the post-de Gaulle period. However, the PCF must have observed the on-going development anxiously, because the Leftist camp failed to produce concrete post-election political planning. Their concern came into being in the election of June 1968.

IV. PCF and Election of June 1968

The May Movement that shook France for more than one month ended in a conventional way: the government asked the public to express its political support by casting votes. President de Gaulle announced the dissolution of the Parliament on May 30. The first round of general elections was set for June 23, and the second one for June 30. After a period of public disturbances that involved the participation of about nine million citizens and affected almost all segments of socio-economic life in France, the public quickly turned attention to restoring order and regularity in daily life (Converse & Pierce, 1986). For the communists, the rapid change in the social atmosphere was not a positive sign to expect an increase of electoral support. If public conditions returned to normal, the communist argument to challenge the corrupted Gaullist government was rather weakened. Despite continuing strikes in some sectors, public interest in the election was not necessarily high.

In the election campaign, while de Gaulle and his party, Union pour la défense de la république (UDR), appealed to the public that they defended public order, stability, and civil liberty, they adopted a fierce negative campaign against the PCF, claiming that it bore the whole responsibility for public disorder, destructive behavior, and division of society. Rather than countering the UDR, the communists focused on the two points in the campaign. First, the party continuously advocated economic issues as the central concern for voters. Demand for raising salaries was a classical communist agenda item to keep good relations with the working class. In an interview with Radio Europe No. 1 on June 8, Rochet summarized the election pledges of his party: improvement of salaries, reduction of working hours, regulations on social security, extension of union rights in the enterprise, a just wage for rural workers, the modernization of the university system, and the improvement of housing and healthcare (*L'Humanité*, 1968z, June 10).

Second, the PCF tried to persuade the public not as a party of the revolutionary Leftists but as a party of patriots, as they did during the United Front era in the 1930s and the resistance period in the Second World War. On June 10, in an interview with the Radio Europe No. 1, Fajon stressed that the PCF diligently worked on party agenda based on national interests. He justified party pledges in this way, “the red flag associates with the French flag” (Fajon, 1968b). An issue about which the communists were concerned was that the electoral agreement with the FGDS would not positively change the actual voting behavior of its supporters. According to the pact between the PCF and the FGDS, one party’s candidate would step down on the second ballot in favor of the other whose candidate obtained the most votes in the first ballot. In theory, the party stepped down was to urge its supporters to vote for the other representative on the second ballot. Strong party discipline was a key to make this type of electoral alliance succeeded. However, FGDS supporters did not tend to follow the party instruction. The outcome of the first ballot in the election of June 1968 was a landslide for the UDF and a major blow for the Left. It suggested that the Gaullists’ propaganda warning to be vigilant against a communist plot for dictatorship sounded persuasive for many voters who felt exhausted after the gigantic social movement. With a turnout of about 80 percent, which was at the same level as in the election of 1967, the UDR obtained 43.65 percent of the total electoral vote in the first ballot, compared to 20.03 percent for the PCF and 16.50 percent for the FGDS. The PCF and the FGDS lost 2.03 and 2.29 percent of their support from the previous election. The communist leaders could not escape the debacle. The vote for Rochet, Fajon, and Garaudy dropped 5.62 percent, 5.67 percent, and 5.88 percent, compared to the previous election, respectively (*Cahiers du communisme*, 1969).

In terms of parliamentary seats, the UDR won a huge majority of 358 out of 487. The PCF seats declined from 73 to 34, and the FGDS from 121 to 57. In the Paris district, thirty out of thirty-one allocated seats went to the UDR. It goes without saying that after the May Movement, the election of 1968 was a historical defeat for the Left, similar to the election of 1958. For the PCF, a trend of electoral recovery through the elections of 1962 and 1967 was halted, and electoral support returned to the 1958 level. Rochet commented shortly after the first ballot that the defeat was caused by the Gaullist strategy of arousing public fear of civil war in the event of a communist victory (*L’Humanité*, 1968aa, June 24). The upsurge of the May Movement confronted the Gaullist administration could not translate into a communist victory in the election of 1968. The fact that PCF and CGT memberships rapidly increased during the movement gave the communists confidence that the public was on their side, and citizens were looking for a change. Contrary to communist anticipation, a UDF landslide occurred, while the public was moving back to normal life. The communists simply had miscalculated.

Conclusion

It would be fair to say that the May Movement in 1968 in France was only one occasion in the West in the post-Second World War period where severe public disorder could have caused insurrectional upsurge that eventually led to a Leninist-type revolution. Positive conditions for that surely existed at that time; month-long confusion, strong rivalry between the Leftist/Rightist organizations, a large number of frustrated citizens, and the existence of powerful extremist groups. On the other hand, one of the most crucial conditions for the Leninist-oriented insurrection, the appearance of an extremely strong leader who could provide charismatic character to lead the citizens one step further to attack or to overthrow the existing political system, did not come out. Waldeck Rochet, the PCF leader at the time of the movement, was not qualified to take such a role. Despite the dynamic levels of social confusion and chaos, the French communists observed from the May Movement in 1968 that no step for a revolutionary stage could be expected at any point. There was no sign of even conditional justification for revolutionary activity by the party. PCF adherents were urged to avoid any violent confrontation with the police forces. The party then devoted its energy to political settlement to find a way through a Leftist alliance.

The PCF also attempted to attract protest voters at large in order to gain parliamentary representation. In this respect, the ultimate purpose of communist involvement in social movements was perceived as enlarging electoral support. Such communist behavior in the May Movement indicated that the French Communist Party had clearly transformed itself into a Eurocommunism-oriented moderate organization, expected to work within the framework of democratic systems. A miscalculation for the communists was that an increase of PCF membership during the Movement could not be translated into that of parliamentary representation in the post Movement election. Why? The communists relied on three different groups in the public for party support; the die-hard traditional adherents stuck with the Bolshevik-oriented ideology; the frustrated citizens harshly hostile to the government; and the general workers desired economic concessions. Each group responded differently to the communist actions during the May Movement.

First, in spite of some policy changes to be a moderate entity, the French communists had obviously taken a strong role as faithful followers of the Bolshevik line and retained a close relationship with the Soviet Communist Party. Their severe criticism against innovative communist leaders such as Gomulka in Poland and Nagy in Hungary as revisionists was still fresh memory at the time of the Movement. Ronald Tiersky even suggests, by mid-1960s, the sincerity of the policy changes in the PCF was at least doubtful (Tiersky, 1994). For those who had stuck with the PCF based on traditional communist ideology and activism, the communists' actions seeking only a political end through cooperation with other Leftists and negotiation with the government were surely not acceptable. Party tradition following the Bolshevik path was the ultimate reason for their support.

Second, the frustrated citizens expected quite a lot from the communists. They were neither concerned about communist ideology nor peculiar tradition but attracted by communist claims during the Movement. As long as the PCF had advocated moderate propositions and never attempted to pursue radical action, the citizens committed their support to the PCF. Could the communists expect concrete and prolonged support from this group? No, they could not. Since one motive for the citizens to join the communist circle was a sense of frustration against the government, they left easily if the causes for their dissatisfaction were removed. As for this group, the moment that public order was restored, they quit supporting the communists.

Finally, the core of support that the communists relied on was the general workers. During the May Movement, even communists were perplexed to observe their radical behavior. On the one hand, the PCF at first encouraged the workers to get involved in the student-initiated movement. Recognizing that the public reacted strongly against the Gaullist government, the communists changed their course and let the movement go forward along with workers' participation. On the other hand, once the scale of the movement exceeded their expectation, the communists tried to prevent further escalation. They argued that political solution led by the Leftist alliance including the PCF, not destructive operations by continuous strikes, was the only way out to obtain economic concessions. A number of radical workers were not convinced by the communist rhetoric, which they perceived against their tradition, and regarded as "double-standard."

From the behavioral perspective, the communists were right not to take a revolutionary path in the May Movement. The chance was slim for any actors to change the firmly established democratic system. Decline of communist votes after the Movement, however, indicates that there was certain gap between what the party expected and what the party was expected. The political parties mutate time to time depending on external situation, which seems to be one of the key factors for party survival. Even so, they must be very careful to calculate the damage supposed to be brought by party mutation. That is because, especially, original and long-term supporters attracted by party history and equipped with party tradition as well as ideology are unlikely to accept fundamental changes. In fact, they are ones who leave the party behind in the first place. The others follow suits. As for the French Communist Party, it could be fair to say; the more moderate it became, the less support they got. By the mid-1990s, through several fundamental mutations, the PCF, once enjoyed a quarter of votes in the 1950s and 60s, had virtually lost political significance in the French politics.

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