



Universiteit Utrecht

The French Communist Party, a revolutionary Party or a governmental faction?

*The position of French communists in the turmoil of the Cold
War, between U.S strategies and Soviet influence in France,
1944-1953*

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyse what differentiated the communist experience in France from other European countries within the national context of the Fourth Republic, which saw the increased influence of legislative powers in decision-making. The international context of the emergence of the Cold War was also key, with the division of the world into two distinct blocs: the capitalists in the West fighting the communists in the East. Within the ambit of an International Relations framework, this study utilises discourse analysis and the securitisation theory to examine to what extent the ideological confrontation between the United States and the URSS had repercussions on the French Communist Party (PCF) and more generally how it shaped France's political landscape between 1944 and 1953. After a thorough review of the PCF's history up to the Second World War, this paper explores how the influence of the two superpowers in Western Europe and their geopolitical strategies transformed the leadership of the Party. The findings suggest that the US and the URSS were both directly and indirectly responsible for the decline in the PCF's reputation and influence. Initially enjoying widespread popularity in the aftermath of the conflict, the PCF was excluded from power in 1947 and subjected to repression measures by the French government during the following years. While the spread of the anti-communist doctrine by the US in Western Europe affected the French political arena, it led to an instrumentalisation of the PCF by the URSS, which sought to capitalise on the Party's popularity among the population to diffuse the communist ideology. Research shows that not only did the USSR's strategy fail to establish communist-led governments in Western Europe, but the revolutionary stance chosen by the Soviets eventually contributed to the isolation of the Party within French politics.

Key words: communism, PCF, Cold War, Fourth Republic, discourse analysis, securitization theory, France, US influence, Marshall Plan, power dynamics

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List of Abbreviations

CNR	Comité National de la Résistance
FN	Front National
KOMINFORM	Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (1947-1956)
KOMINTERN	Third International Communist Organisation (1919-1943)
MRP	Mouvement Républicain Populaire
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
RGR	Rassemblement des Gauches non-communistes républicaines
RPF	Rassemblement du Peuple Français
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale ouvrière
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

Introduction

After the Second World War in France, the involvement of the French Communist Party (PCF) within the Resistance movement that had fought against the German occupation was glorified, placing the French communists in the spotlight for the first time.¹ The PCF became extremely popular among the population, as its post-World War propaganda relied almost solely on its significant involvement in the rebel group. ‘Similar to a phoenix rising from its ashes, the French Communist Party emerged stronger than it had ever been, rapidly becoming in the years 1945-1946 the first Party in France in terms of membership, electoral support, and parliamentary representation’², recall French historians Jean-Jacques Becker and Serge Berstein. Indeed, the communist faction became the largest political Party at the National Assembly during the elections of the 10th of November 1946, obtaining 28, 26% of the votes and 182 *députés*.³ This was an impressive number in France for the Fourth Republic, at a time when the legislative power and the need for coalitions in the assembly were reaching a peak.⁴ Nonetheless, despite this fame, the PCF was excluded from government in May 1947. The Party never returned to power until François Mitterrand reunified the left during the Fifth Republic and won the presidential elections of 1981.⁵ In addition, on the 27th of July 1947, General Charles de Gaulle, emblematic figure of the Resistance, took a strong anti-communist stance. He declared the PCF to be an existential threat to ‘national identity’, claiming that communism endangered the independence of the nation and called for the unification of the French population against this new ‘peril’.⁶ His Party, the *Rassemblement Populaire Français* (the Rallying of the French People) received a positive reception.⁷

These transformations in France's political landscape were not isolated events but rather deeply intertwined with the international context of the Cold War. As tensions escalated

¹ Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Serge Berstein. "L'anticommunisme En France." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 15 (1987), p. 21

² *Ibid*, p. 21

³ Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, [Accessed February 12, 2024], <https://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Discours-de-Rennes.pdf>

⁴ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020

⁵ *L'Humanité*, May 6, 1947. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, [Accessed March 2, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4739117q/fl.image>

⁶ Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, *ibid*

⁷ Millet, Raymond. "Le Général de Gaulle expose les buts du R.P.F et sa conception de la politique française." *Le Monde*, April 27, 1947, [Accessed May 12, 2024], https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1947/04/26/le-general-de-gaulle-expose-les-buts-du-r-p-f-et-sa-conception-de-la-politique-francaise_1885862_1819218.html

between the United States and the Soviet Union, France turned into an ideological battleground. While the US intensified its involvement in Western Europe through economic recovery plans and anti-communist propaganda, the Soviet Union utilised the PCF as a means to oppose imperialism. Consequently, the PCF's alignment with Soviet policies led to its marginalization within French politics.⁸

Drawing upon the case of the PCF in France, this study examines the construction of the anti-communist narrative in the Western World in the historical context of the Cold War from 1945 to 1953. The research question is phrased as follows: how did the rise of the PCF and its later isolation within the French political landscape reflect the international context of the beginning of the Cold War, particularly the ideological dispute between the Eastern and Western blocs?

The timeframe for the thesis, 1944-1953, encompasses the period surrounding the end of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War. The year 1953 was chosen as the limit for the aforementioned timeframe as Joseph Stalin's death during that year caused a paradigm shift within the French communist Party.⁹ The upheaval following Stalin's demise and the transformation undergone by the PCF are worth examining, however this study would not have fitted within the theoretical limitations of this paper.

This thesis examines the causes of the exclusion and the isolation measures endured by the PCF in the international context of the Cold War through discourse analysis and the lens of the securitisation theory, which are defined in the methodology section. The incorporation of an IR framework to this study proves to be a valuable addition to the existing literature. Furthermore, a close analysis of the US involvement in post WWII France and of the vilification of the US by the Soviets allows for a better comprehension of the international impact these two movements had on French politics. Consequently, this thesis aims to expand the understanding of how Cold War ideologies influenced policy-making in Europe, more specifically in France. This paper also seeks to underline the possible drifts of the securitisation theory and the impact of international policies to domestic affairs.

Historiography

⁸ "Quand le Parti Communiste Français était sous la tutelle de Moscou." *Les derniers secrets de Staline, Géo Histoire*, no. 57, September 22, 2021, [Accessed March 18, 2024], <https://www.geo.fr/histoire/quand-le-pcf-etait-sous-la-tutelle-de-moscou-206414>

⁹ Buton, Philippe, 'Le Parti communiste français et le stalinisme au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.' *Journal of Modern European History*, 2, 2004. 58-81, DOI:10.17104/1611-8944_2004_1_58

The Cold War is an extensively studied period in the fields of history and international relations due to its complex nature. One of the most comprehensive books on this topic is *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, written by Odd Arne Westad. In this book, Westad explains the power struggle between the US and the USSR and how their ideological confrontation impacted the decolonisation process in Third World countries.¹⁰ Focusing on the French experience, Georges-Henri Soutou contributed to the literature on the Cold War by writing about France's involvement in the conflict and its domestic policies.¹¹ In addition, the question of anticommunism has been frequently studied by scholars as it is a key element of the Cold War. However, regarding the rise of anticommunism in France during the Cold War, only historians Jean-Jacques Becker and Serge Berstein have made a significant contribution.¹² In a short but concise journal article, they trace the evolution of the anticommunist sentiment in the country. The article even mentions the anticommunist measures implemented by the French government after the exclusion of the PCF in 1947, although it does not dwell on details.

French communism at the beginning of the Cold War has a tendency to be overlooked by IR scholars. The body of literature around the PCF after the Second World War is quite vast but there is a lack of research on French communism in relation to the question of international relations and security. Most of the literature is devoted to the history of the PCF and thus has been predominantly undertaken by historians. For example, scholars Dr Philippe Buton¹³ and Stéphane Courtois¹⁴ have consistently contributed to the literature on this topic. Moreover, historians Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux and Serge Wolikow have written a compelling volume on the PCF, *Le Parti Rouge*, (The Red Party) which explains the Party's history from its establishment in 1920 during the Congress of Tours to 2020. Even though this book is thorough in its coverage, it primarily offers descriptive insights. Indeed, despite the authors' attempts to connect global events with shifts in the PCF's strategies, there is a noticeable absence of an in-depth analysis of the PCF within the context of the Cold War, with only brief mentions of how the broader international tensions between the USSR and the US affected the PCF. More specifically, historian Jean Marie Guillon demonstrates that the PCF used the memory of the

¹⁰ Westad, Odd Arne. *The Cold War: A World History*. New York: Basic Books, 2017

¹¹ Soutou, Georges-Henri. *La Guerre froide de la France, 1941-1990*. Paris: Tallandier, 2023

¹² Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Serge Berstein. "L'anticommunisme En France." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 15 (1987): 17–27

¹³ Buton, Philippe, 'Le Parti communiste français et le stalinisme au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.' *Journal of Modern European History*, 2, 2004. 58-81, DOI:10.17104/1611-8944_2004_1_58

¹⁴ Courtois, Stéphane, and Marc Lazar. *Histoire du Parti communiste français*. Paris: Humensis, 1995

war for their propaganda.¹⁵ The involvement of the PCF in politics at the beginning of the Cold war and the exclusion of PCF ministers from the government in 1947 have only received limited attention. So far, one book written by Philippe Buton and one article focusing on the exclusion of the ministers published by Léo Rosell have examined this key event, and only a scarce number of articles have analysed the implication of the PCF as a threat to national unity during the period of the Fourth Republic in France.¹⁶

Nonetheless, despite the lack of literature on the PCF by IR scholars, some aspects of the PCF have been analyzed in the broader context of the Cold War by several historians. For instance, Irwin M. Wall focuses on the PCF's Stalinist views in his book *French Communism in the Era of Stalin*, which were heavily criticized by the other French political parties.

Regarding the relations between the USSR and France during the early Cold War period, there is a scarcity of literature. Maxime Mourin is one of the few authors to have studied Franco-Soviet ties in a book covering the years 1917-1967. However, since Mourin's book does not specifically focus on the end of the Second World War and the 1950s, crucial details are often missing.

US-France relations around the question of communism at the start of the Cold War have been examined by an IR academic: Simon Serfaty in 'An International Anomaly: The United States and the Communist Parties in France and Italy'¹⁷, as well as by an intelligence studies professor, Susan McCall Perlman, who successfully manages to grasp the complexities of the PCF in relation to Western international strategy in 'US intelligence and communist plots in postwar France, Intelligence and National Security'¹⁸. Her article, dating from 2018, is the first to impose a new angle on the involvement of the US in postwar France. In her article, she condemns the misinformation conducted by the CIA in an attempt to create a communist threat in France and to justify the antagonization of the PCF. This addition to the existing literature opens a new door on the question of the legitimacy of US involvement in Europe.

Since the perception of the PCF as a threat to national identity at the dawn of the Cold War has not yet been analysed through an international relations lens, an assessment of the securitisation of French communism in the post WWII era using Buzan and Waever's security

¹⁵ Guillon, Jean-Marie. *Images des comportements sous l'Occupation - Mémoires, transmission, idées reçues*. PUR, 2018

¹⁶ Rosell, Léo. "L'exclusion des ministres communistes du gouvernement en mai 1947." *Revue Transversale*, 2022, [Accessed January 2, 2024], <http://tristan.u-bourgogne.fr/CGC/prodscientifique/Transversales.html>

¹⁷ Serfaty, Simon. "An International Anomaly: The United States and the Communist Parties in France and Italy, 1945-1947." *Studies in Comparative Communism* 8, no. 1/2 (1975): 123-146.

¹⁸ Perlman, Susan McCall. "US Intelligence and Communist Plots in Postwar France." *Intelligence and National Security* (2018): 376-390, [Accessed January 3, 2024], [doi:10.1080/02684527.2017.1404292](https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2017.1404292)

framework of analysis, will prove to be a valuable addition to the existing literature. As the discredit of the Party and its isolation were inscribed in a political powerplay, an IR perspective will allow for a better comprehension of the Cold War dynamics and how they impacted Western European countries such as France. Moreover, bridging the securitisation theory to the PCF at the beginning of the Cold War recognises the importance of contextualizing the Speech Act theory and shines a light on the possible drifts, limitations and instrumentalizations of discourse as part of a political agenda.

Theoretical framework

In order to appropriately answer the research question, this thesis uses discourse analysis. This type of analysis is useful when studying speeches, archives and newspaper articles as hidden values ‘can be revealed through discourse analysis, emphasizing semantic structures, connections between texts, power relations’.¹⁹ Applying this analysis within an international and historical framework allows for a better understanding of the diversity of relations at play and provides valuable insight regarding the evolution of the PCF in the context of the Cold War. When using discourse analysis, a particular attention is paid to power structures within the text, taking into account the vocabulary used and the tone conveyed.

Moreover, this thesis utilises the Securitisation theory as developed by Buzan and Waever to allow for a better comprehension of the securitisation of communism as a threat through the Speech Act.²⁰ In the securitisation theory, an issue needs to be politicised and securitised through the Speech Act in order to be treated as a security threat. The Copenhagen school developed this theory in the 1990s and argues that policy making in relation to security is not a natural phenomenon but rather the result of a pattern that requires an audience, carefully designed to guarantee legitimacy, visibility and responsibility to decision-makers. ‘Securitisation theory shows us that national security policy is not a natural given, but carefully designated by politicians and decision-makers’ writes Clara Eroukhmanoff, thereby highlighting its subjective and versatile nature. The beginning of the Cold War is a great period to apply the securitisation theory, especially considering the construction of the anti-communist narrative in the West and the repercussions it had domestically. In France, a closer examination of French political strategies shows that the international vilification of the USSR within the

¹⁹ Kivle, Benedicte Maria Tveter, Gry Espedal. "Identifying Values Through Discourse Analysis." In *Researching Values*, edited by G. Espedal, B. Jelstad Løvaas, S. Sirris, and A. Wæraas, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-90769-3_10.

²⁰ Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998

Western bloc spurred attempts at securitisation of the PCF as an existential threat and resulted in the isolation of the PCF from power. In 1947, General Charles de Gaulle, emblematic political figure of the twentieth century, publicly framed the PCF as a threat to national identity and used the Speech Act to try to securitise communism as a danger. He then took measures to publicly discredit the PCF in order to rally the supporters of communism to his own new Party: *The Rassemblement Populaire Français* (RPF). As a result, this thesis investigates how the instrumentalisation of the Speech Act can challenge existing political narratives and change public opinion with the construction of a threat. The incorporation of international power dynamics between the West and the East and the emphasis on the international war of ideologies at the time prove to be highly valuable in explaining the growing domestic anti-communist sentiment in France despite the popularity of the PCF.

Methodology

This thesis primarily relies on the archives of the PCF to establish a coherent narrative. Key sources include minutes from the political bureau and the secretariat. Furthermore, propaganda posters released by the PCF and articles from the communist journal *L'Humanité* contribute significantly to understanding the Party's political dynamics and viewpoints within the context of the Cold War. Other primary sources: official reports, public statements and speeches such as the Vladimir Lenin's Terms of Admission into the Communist International or the Marshall Plan speech are examined within the framework of discourse analysis due to their transformative nature and the impact they had on the PCF's policies. Regarding IR theory, the works of Buzan and Waever' such as the book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* on the securitisation theory and other articles written by the Copenhagen school are incorporated in order to analyse General De Gaulle's securitising move towards the PCF.

Furthermore, secondary sources are included throughout the thesis to provide additional relevant material and nurture current debates started by IR scholars and historians on the topic. The role of secondary material is also decisive in providing a more consistent historical background. Books, articles and journal articles on the history of the PCF, the communist narrative, the IV Republic, the complex relationship between PCF and the USSR, and on the influence of the US in Western Europe at the beginning of the Cold War are thus used throughout this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis will be composed of an introduction, three chapters organised in a chronological manner and a conclusion. The introduction includes an historiography, a presentation of the theoretical framework and a presentation the methodology used for the paper, including a summary of the sources used throughout the thesis. The first chapter will be an overview of the history of the French communist Party. I will analyse the events and causes surrounding the birth of the PCF as a French political faction, the role the French communists played in the political landscape of France during the years prior the Second World War, and the reasons behind the sudden popularity of the French communists in the aftermath of the conflict.

The second chapter will delve into the heart of the topic by addressing the changes in the management of the PCF after the dissolution of the Komintern in 1943 until the beginning of 1947. It will examine how the end of the Third International allowed the Party to become a governmental faction and the obstacles it faced due to its perceived lack of legitimacy within French politics—obstacles that ultimately led to its exclusion from government in May 1947.

The first half of the third chapter will be structured around the securitisation theory and the analysis of a speech delivered by General de Gaulle at the peak of the Cold War. The second part of this section will focus on the establishment of the Kominform, a new international organization under Soviet rule, and its impact on the PCF's policies. This section will also highlight the isolation measures implemented by the French government as a form of retaliation to keep the PCF out of power, with the complicity of the US. Finally, a conclusion will draw the thesis to an end.

Chapter 1: An Overview of French Communism 1920-1946

This chapter will explore the history of the PCF from its creation to its apogee, which coincided with the end of the Second World War and the entry of the world into the Cold War era. 'France is, with Italy, the country in Western Europe where the communist movement was the most powerful'²¹, writes Julian Mischi in *The Communists' Party*, published in 2020. In his scholarly work, the author fervently advocates for the recognition of the French Communist Party (PCF) as a pivotal actor within the political landscape of the twentieth century, both in France and in the European arena.

1.1 The creation of the PCF

In order to understand the geopolitical importance of the PCF and the reasons behind the attempts of securitisation of the Party by French officials at the beginning of the Cold War, it is first essential to comprehend its defined features and the landmark events that shaped it. The genesis of communism in France can be attributed to multiple national and transnational factors. It is the result of a complex power struggle influenced by the revolutionary climate rising from the ashes of tsarist Russia in the aftermath of the First World War. However, when it first emerged, the idea of a French Communist Party, particularly one aligned with the Bolsheviks, did not enjoy widespread popularity. Workers across Europe were on strike and attempts to reverse the government were occurring in Germany and Hungary, but the sympathy towards bolshevism was not always thought as an example to follow among French left-wing politicians. In reality, the PCF was founded on December 29, 1920, from a divorce between reformist socialists and revolutionary Marxists who decided to turn to Moscow and the newly transformed Russia to align themselves with the workers' revolution.²² Inspired by the events of October 1917 that had finally reverberated across Europe, former socialists Marcel Cachin and Ludovic-Oscar Frossard desired to join the Third International, an organization established by Vladimir Lenin to spread the Bolshevik ideology in the West.²³

²¹ Mischi, Julian. *Le Parti des Communistes: Histoire du Parti Communiste française de 1920 à nos jours*. Marseille: Hors-d'atteinte, 2020, p.14

²² Saada, Philippe, dir. *Le Congrès de Tours*. 2020. Documentary.

²³ Spargo, John. "The Third International." *Current History (1916-1940)* 12, no. 6 (1920): 932-938.

From the 25th to the 30th of December 1920, an exceptional Congress was held in Tours by French Socialists to decide once and for all whether to join the Third International.²⁴ In order to adhere to the novel organization, aspiring members had to accept 21 conditions imposed by the Bolsheviks, determined to select new representatives with great care and not see their movement tarnished by foreign appropriation.²⁵ These conditions were rapidly criticised by many socialists of the SFIO (Section Française Internationale Ouvrière), the first socialist Party of France, as they seemed severe and meant that the French would have to fall under the yoke of the Soviets. Indeed, the conditions specified that discipline within the Party was mandatory, that the French communists would have to execute all decisions taken by the International and thus the USSR, and that they would have to show unanimous and unconditional support to the Soviet Union:

11. It is the duty of parties wishing to join the Third International to re-examine the composition of their parliamentary groups, eliminate unreliable elements and effectively subordinate these groups to the Party Central Committees. They must demand that every Communist proletarian should subordinate all his activities to the interests of truly revolutionary propaganda and agitation.

*15. It is the duty of any party wishing to join the Communist International selflessly to help any Soviet republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces. Communist parties must conduct incessant propaganda urging the workers to refuse to transport war materials destined for the enemies of the Soviet republics; they must conduct legal or illegal propaganda in the armed forces dispatched to strangle the workers' republics, etc.*²⁶

The mouthpiece of the opposition, Léon Blum, ardently denounced the system of permanent dictatorship that would unfold from accepting the conditions. He affirmed that the

²⁴ Lenin, Vladimir. "The Third Communist International." In *Lenin's Collected Works*, Volume 29, 240-241. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972, [Accessed February 21, 2024], <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/mar/x04.htm>

²⁵ Lenin, Vladimir. "Terms of Admission into Communist International, July 1920." In *Lenin's Collected Works*, Volume 31, 206-211. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, [Accessed February 21, 2024], <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x01.htm>

²⁶ *Ibid*

imposed conditions highlighted the ‘dictatorship exercised by a centralised party, where all authority rises from one level to the next and ends up by being concentrated in the hands of a secret Committee’.²⁷ Furthermore, he argued that joining the Third International signified agreeing to a subordinate role where the French would have no power and would only become mere marionettes of a new form of terrorism.²⁸ Notwithstanding his best effort, his speech did not receive the intended success. On the other side, Marcel Cachin defended the Third International and the Bolshevik revolution, as he believed, like many others, that the Komintern would exercise leniency regarding the conditions it imposed.²⁹ His discourse was acclaimed by the receptive public, sympathetic towards the Russian cause. Four days after the start of the Congress, the inevitable separation was finally complete, and a new Party, the SFIC (Section Française Internationale Ouvrière) was created. In the subsequent year, it would take the name PCF, embrace the 21 conditions under the pressure of Moscow, and formalise its status as a subordinate of the USSR.³⁰

Throughout the twentieth century, PCF’s close relationship with the USSR was perceived negatively by the other political Parties. Despite the dominance of communist ideology on the left, apprehensions among socialists, centrists, and conservatives persisted regarding the consequences of this proximity, among suspicions that the PCF's political agenda merely mirrored that of the Soviets. This discomfort escalated with the death of Vladimir Lenin in 1924, coinciding with the ascension of Joseph Stalin, a figure marked by ambition and centralization of power. Stalin's consolidation of authority extended to the Third International, further tightening control over the PCF in the following years.³¹ The new leader promulgated his cult of personality through the Third International and carefully selected the rulers of the French communist Party based on their fealty and true obedience to him. Maurice Thorez, an ardent advocate of Stalinist policies, emerged as a prominent beneficiary of this system, as he later became the most emblematic figure of the PCF and benefited from a celebrity worship within his own Party.³² According to the historian Jean-Marie Vincent, it was at this time that

²⁷ Blum, Léon. "Léon Blum’s Speech at the Socialist Party Congress at Tours, 27 December 1920", [Accessed February, 20 2024], <https://www.marxists.org/archive/blum/1920/speech.htm>

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ Abbreviation for the Communist International, also known as Third International

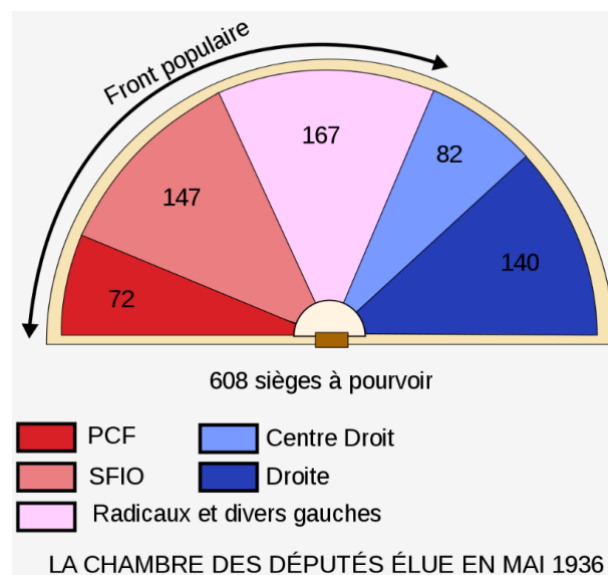
³⁰ “Quand le Parti Communiste Français était sous la tutelle de Moscou.” *Les derniers secrets de Staline, Géo Histoire*, no. 57, September 22, 2021, [Accessed March 18, 2024], <https://www.geo.fr/histoire/quand-le-pcf-etait-sous-la-tutelle-de-moscou-206414>

³¹ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020.

³² *Ibid*

‘the Party became more completely dependent on the Soviet leadership of the Communist International than either the German or Italian parties’.³³

Nevertheless, during the interwar period, the socialists still believed in a reunification with the PCF, and the prospect eventually materialised. From 1923 to 1933, the PCF followed the doctrine of ‘class on class’³⁴, which focused more on popular agitation and class struggle between the working class and the capitalist class than on legislative power. However, the situation changed with the rise of Hitler and fascism.³⁵ To fight this new threat, Stalin changed his foreign strategy and the Third International allowed the PCF to form alliances within the left wing. As a result, in 1934, Maurice Thorez, general secretary of the PCF, began to fraternise again with leftist groups. In 1936, the resurgent SFIO, the radicals and the communists formed a coalition in order to win the legislative elections: the *Front Populaire* (Popular Front). Overall, it turned out to be a huge success. The left won 57 % of the votes during the first round and then managed to secure 386 seats out of 608 in the Chamber of Deputies.³⁶



Results of the legislative elections of May 1936.

This victory, not only symbolic for the left wing, brought real change and two years of strong reforms in France including the right to strike, collective bargaining, paid vacations and

³³ Vincent, Jean-Marie. "The PCF and Its History." *New Left Review*, no. 52 (November-December 1968). <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i52/articles/j-m-vincent-the-pcf-and-its-history>

³⁴ Spargo, John. "The Third International." *Current History (1916-1940)* 12, no. 6 (1920): 932-938.

³⁵ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020

³⁶ Boissieu, Laurent. "Résultats des élections législatives de 1936." *Chambre des députés 1936*, [February, 20 2024], <https://www.france-politique.fr/assemblee-nationale-1936.htm>

the 40-hour week.³⁷ Moreover, communists seriously dealt with legislative matters for the first time, shifting the image of the Party from an anti-government organisation to a regular parliamentary Party. This shift contributed to the popularity of the Party which gained many new members during the time of the coalition. For instance, from 1935 to 1936, the number of new adherents increased by 236%, growing from 86 902 members in January 1935 to 288 483 at the end of December 1936.³⁸

Yet, the coalition did not last. In Autumn 1938, tensions within the Party about the Spanish Civil War and the Munich Accords led to the dissolution of the left. On the 23rd of August 1939, the gap between the SFIO and the PCF reached a point of no return with the exposure of the Molotov–Ribbentrop agreement, a non-aggression pact signed between Germany and the Soviet Union at the very dawn of the Second World War.³⁹ Even though the signing of the Pact came as a surprise for both the French communists and the other political Parties, the PCF's alignment with the USSR could not be ignored. Torn between its loyalty to the Soviet Union and its patriotism towards France, the PCF fell into a dilemma as the French communists' desire for national defence no longer worked with Stalin's international stance, especially since the Soviet leader described the coming war as 'inter-imperialist'.⁴⁰ Consequently, and in spite of its reluctance to accept this new political narrative, the PCF folded in front of Stalin as decisions within the Third International were deemed stronger than the PCF's own wishes.⁴¹ As a result, Léon Blum's prediction that Moscow would completely control the PCF once it joined the Russia organization had come true. This ambivalence between domestic duty and international devotion within the PCF would in the following decades become a symbol of the Cold War's polarization of the world and lead to the downfall of the Party.

1.2 The Second World War, the aftermath and the PCF's rise to power

On the 26th of September 1939, this uncomfortable position already backfired on the French communists as Edouard Daladier, the head of government, declared them hostile to French interests and decreed the complete banning of the PCF as well as of all the 'associations,

³⁷ Vigreux, Jean. *Histoire du Front populaire: L'échappée belle*. Paris: Tallandier, 2016.

³⁸ « Les effectifs du PCF de 1920 à 2009: tableaux et cartes », *Fondation Gabriel Peri*, [Accessed February 21, 2024], <https://gabrielperi.fr/centenaire/les-effectifs-du-pcf-de-1920-2009/>

³⁹ Moorhouse, Roger. *The Devils' Alliance: Hitler's Pact with Stalin, 1939-1941*. New York: Basic Books, 2014.

⁴⁰ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020.

⁴¹ *Ibid*

organisations and groups that depend on it.’⁴² This decree did not only target the PCF, but all French organisations affiliated with the Third International. The official communist newspaper *L’Humanité* was also censored. For two years, the PCF remained clandestine and established a powerful underground network. As a result, when Germany invaded The Soviet Union, on the 22nd of June 1941, and Stalin finally ordered communists all around the globe to fight fascism, the PCF was ready.⁴³ At the time, France was already in the hands of Nazi Germany, and the country was divided between the Occupied territory in the north and the Vichy Regime led by Marshall Philippe Pétain in the south. Demonstrating adept organisational capabilities, acclimation to clandestine operations, and fervent commitment to communist principle, PCF members joined the Resistance and even became the most active Party with their own resistance movement, the National Front (FN).⁴⁴

On May 27, 1943, Jean Moulin, a prominent figure of the Gaullist resistance, founded the National Council of Resistance (CNR), an organisation which aimed to gather all resistance movements, political parties, and labor unions in order to coordinate and unify resistance efforts against the Nazis and the Vichy Regime. Roger Salomon Ginsburger, member of the FN, represented the PCF at the first meeting. The same year, Stalin dissolved the Third International due to the complexity of the ongoing war.⁴⁵

When the Liberation occurred in the summer 1944, the PCF was no longer portrayed as hostile but rather as heroic due to the actions of its members during the war, and this new prestige ‘overlayed that of the Red Army, the USSR, and Marshal Stalin’.⁴⁶ Enjoying increasing popularity, the PCF joined the Provisional Government of General Charles de Gaulle. Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux and Serge Wolikow assert that this moment was one of most significance for the PCF as it became officially recognised as a Party of government: ‘The active contribution of the PCF to the Resistance, its acknowledgment of the legitimacy of General de Gaulle, alongside the diplomatic engagements with the USSR, culminated in its uninterrupted participation in governmental responsibilities from April 4, 1944, to May 4, 1947, a first time in its history’.⁴⁷

⁴² Grenard, Fabrice, dir. *L’interdiction du parti communiste en France en 1939*. 2024. Documentary.

⁴³ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 86

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.90

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.97

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.101

Benefiting from the status of martyr of the Second World War, the PCF utilised effective propaganda to remain on top. Throughout the years 1944 and 1945, the PCF presented itself as the 'party of the 75,000 executed,' arguing that a majority of communists fell as victims during the Second World War due to their resistance activities.⁴⁸



Translation: 75,000 communists were massacred by the Krauts or murdered by Vichy traitors. They are the honour and pride of the party of those who were shot.

Of the French resistance party

Of the party of worker-class struggle

And of the union of all republicans.

French, to be faithful to the memory of these heroes who died so that France might live,

VOTE for the republican and resistant union lists.

Even though the historian Claude Pénnetier admits that the number was exaggerated and could be lowered to 5 000, this myth contributed to entertain the nobility of the Party among

⁴⁸ Pénnetier, Claude. *Les Fusillés, 1940-1944: Dictionnaire biographique des fusillés et exécutés par condamnation et comme otages ou guillotins en France pendant l'occupation*. Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier, 2015.

the population for the decade to come.⁴⁹ As expected, this strategy was a success. During the legislative elections of the 21st of October 1945, the PCF became the first Party of France, winning 26,23% of the votes against 23,91% for the centrist *Mouvement républicain populaire* (MRP) and 23,45% for the SFIO. If the gap was at first not considerable, the divide excavated even further during the 10 November 1946 elections, when the PCF won 5,4 million votes (28,3%) and the MRP less than 5 million.⁵⁰

The aftermath of the Second World War in France was thus characterised by an exceptional popularity of the PCF. This fame was nurtured by the conviction that the Party was driving away from the yoke of the Soviet Union. Indeed, even though the PCF had remained a clear ally of the USSR throughout and after the war, as can attest meeting minutes from the Political Bureau of the Party and numerous articles published in *L'Humanité* covering the repatriation of French prisoners released by the Red Army,⁵¹ the necessity to keep strong Franco-Soviet relations,⁵² and the anniversary of the October Revolution,⁵³ the fact that the party was more 'nationalised' at the end of the conflict and more welcoming towards the French parliamentary system led the population to believe that the dissolution of the Third International had softened ties between the French Communists and Stalin. In reality, the PCF did take some liberties after the war; for example, it joined in 1945 the tripartite alliance with the MRP and the SFIO in order to establish the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, and some of its members such as François Billoux and Charles Tillon became ministers within the government.⁵⁴

However, the Party remained primarily faithful to the USSR, and this allegiance eventually cost them greatly. From March 1946 to 1947, geopolitical tensions grew between the US and the Soviet Union, an 'Iron Curtain'⁵⁵ started dividing the world in Western and Eastern blocs, and the Cold War emerged. During the next five decades, two ideologies would confront each other through proxy wars and economic and political competition: capitalism, championed by the US and the communist doctrine supported by the Soviet Union. The possibility of

⁴⁹ Pennetier, Claude. *Les Fusillés, 1940-1944: Dictionnaire biographique des fusillés et exécutés par condamnation et comme otages ou guillotiné en France pendant l'occupation*. Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier, 2015.

⁵⁰ Boissieu, Laurent de. "Assemblée nationale constituante 1945 [archive], [Accessed January 25, 2024]. www.france-politique.fr

⁵¹ 261J4/2-21, « Réunion du 7 Juin 1945 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

⁵² 261J4/2-44, « Réunion du 6 décembre 1945 », *Ibid*

⁵³ 261J4/2-40, « Réunion du 8 Novembre 1945 », *Ibid*

⁵⁴ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020.

⁵⁵ Churchill, Winston. "Sinews of Peace" (Iron Curtain Speech), March 5, 1946. Accessed [March 4, 2024], <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/sinews-of-peace-iron-curtain-speech.html>

communist expansion in the West, spurred by the prominence of the PCF, immediately concerned the United States and later the other French political factions. From 1947 onwards, efforts were then made to discredit and isolate the Party, with the intention of undermining its reputation and dismantling its sphere of influence. 'Had France transitioned into a popular democracy in 1946-1947, which was not unconceivable, the history of Europe would have turned drastically different' concludes Georges-Henri Soutou.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Soutou, Georges-Henri. *La Guerre froide de la France, 1941-1990*. Paris: Tallandier, 2023.

Chapter 2: The PCF and the polarization of the world - 1944- 1947

This chapter will analyse the transformation of the PCF from a parliamentary faction to a revolutionary Party in the years 1944 -1947 and the causes of this change. The goal of this study is to examine how the ideological dispute between Washington and Moscow reverberated on French politics, excavating a political and ideological divide between the socialists and the communists. This partition strengthened with the growing influence of the US in Western Europe and the international tensions in Indochina which resulted in an insurmountable divergence of opinions among the French governmental factions. As the PCF navigated its allegiance to the Soviets and the communist ideology, this chapter aims to examine the Cold War's influence on the PCF's perception among other political factions, eventually culminating in the Party's exclusion from government and the enactment of the Marshall Plan.

2.1 The PCF, an independent faction?

The end of the Komintern

The dissolution of the Third International in the context of the Second World War, on the 15th of May 1943, came as a shock to the PCF as well as to other European communist factions.⁵⁷ This decision was perceived as a source of sorrow and was hardly mentioned among grieving communist leaders, as this resolution had been imposed on them and was viewed as a disappointment.⁵⁸ The French leader Maurice Thorez belonged to the category of communists who preferred to act as if the disappearance of the International did not undermine nor change the transnational action of the working class and those fighting for them.⁵⁹ At the time, Joseph Stalin gave several reasons to justify such a choice, including the need to maintain a strong alliance with the United States to prevail against fascism and the necessity to 'allow patriots from endangered nations to unite all progressive forces in their respective countries, regardless of their political opinions or religious beliefs, to forge a common front of national liberation'.⁶⁰ Indeed, members of the International were facing various threats, and the Komintern could not handle them all simultaneously. The dissolution was quite effective and led to alliances with other political factions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the PCF joined the *Comité*

⁵⁷ "Dissolution of the Communist International." *Marxist Internet Archive*, Final Statement, May 15, 1943, [Accessed January 25, 2024], <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/dissolution.htm>

⁵⁸ Kriegel, Annie. "La Dissolution Du « Komintern »." *Revue d'histoire de La Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 17, no. 68 (1967), 35

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

National de la Résistance (National Resistance Committee) formed by Charles De Gaulle two weeks later, and the partnership with the other French political Parties outlived the war, leading to a tripartite system inside the government of the IV Republic and the National Assembly.⁶¹

As a result, despite Maurice Thorez's vision, the end of the Komintern greatly affected the political tactics of the PCF in subsequent years as it deliberately became a governmental faction. Departing from a revolutionary stance, the PCF reached for the first time a high level of freedom and advocated for a legal takeover through national elections rather than a revolutionary overthrow. The archives of the Political Bureau of the PCF are especially insightful for grasping how much the Party wanted to get into government roles and employ established political channels to gain power. Considering the often-overlooked nature of this component in the historiography of French communism, it is noteworthy to explore this facet of the PCF, especially since the PCF operated during this short period with the same degree of autonomy as its counterparts, thereby establishing its legitimacy to represent the interests of the French people after winning the 1945, 1946 and 1947 elections. It is important to emphasise here the concept of legitimacy, as it calls into question the underlying foundations on which securitising moves were based around that period, and that will be analysed in chapter three.

The PCF as a governmental Party

Since the dissolution the Third International, the PCF wished to become a governmental power at even a larger scale than during the 1936 coalition of the *Front Populaire*. Indeed, even back then the PCF did not hold any governmental positions; its influence in parliament was consequential but it had never previously expressed the ambition to have communist ministers. A document of the Political Bureau from the 31st of August 1945 reveals that the PCF's principal objective was henceforth to win the elections and thus 'to develop the idea that communists should play a larger role in the governance of the country's affairs'.⁶² This decision was heavily criticised by the Soviets and by staunch PCF members who wanted to stay aligned with the URSS' revolutionary stance. In a letter to the former leader of the Komintern Ivan Stepanov, the French communist André Marty wrote in 1946 that the Party's 'enthusiasm for parliamentarians' was creating a 'danger of rupture with the working class'.⁶³ In addition,

⁶¹ Soutou, Georges-Henri. *La Guerre froide de la France, 1941-1990*. Paris: Tallandier, 2023.

⁶² 261J4/2-31, « Réunion du 31 août 1945 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

⁶³ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 120

Andrei Zhdanov, a Soviet politician often described as ‘the propagandist-in-chief’, condemned the PCF's attitude the following year as ‘opportunist’ and denounced its ‘parliamentary cretinism’⁶⁴, no longer aligned with Moscow's directive line. These relentless criticisms clearly illustrate the transition of the Party from being under the yoke of the USSR to becoming an independent entity, resolute in pursuing its own path to power and no longer awaiting approval from the USSR before taking action.

The PCF voluntarily chose to join the provisional government of General de Gaulle in August 1944, which oversaw the transition to the Fourth Republic, and became responsible for the conception of the new Constitution. This desire for cooperation also resonated among SFIO members, but it became rapidly tainted by the strains of the Cold War. Nonetheless, during the first years of the Fourth Republic, collaborations with the communists were often considered, if not encouraged. On the 10th of September 1944, the socialist Daniel Mayer offered to join forces with the PCF and affirmed that the socialists were opposed to the creation of an anti-communist bloc. This strong political stance showed that an alliance was still thought possible between socialists and communists and a strong unified discourse was initiated from that point forward. On December 4, 1944, two delegations met at the headquarters of the PCF to discuss the establishment of a permanent committee of understanding, *le Comité d'Entente*.⁶⁵ The first meeting of the committee occurred on the 19th of December 1944, with the objective to propose joint lists with the socialists for the upcoming election. In April 1946, the PCF envisaged to propose an accord to the socialists for a joint campaign for the referendum and even considered entailing the MRP to the campaign.⁶⁶ However, the idea of a merger between the two parties was eventually pushed back and then completely abandoned due to the too numerous points of contention between the SFIO and the PCF. On the 12th of September 1946, the Committee was officially dismantled. Nevertheless, despite its failure to unify the two parties like it had been the case in 1936, the desire for unification on the socialists' part and their rejection of an anti-communist bloc in 1944 demonstrated an acknowledgment of the PCF as a viable governing party. Although the PCF's attachment to the USSR was criticised and played a role

⁶⁴ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 121

⁶⁵ Parti socialiste. *37e Congrès national: 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 août 1945: rapports*. France: Librairie du Parti, Gallica, [Accessed February 21, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k818409/f10.item>

⁶⁶ 261J4/3-18, « Réunion du 11 avril 1946 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

in the unsuccessful merger attempt, it was at first largely interpreted as a conflict of interests rather than a direct threat.⁶⁷

Another demonstration of the SFIO's tolerance towards the PCF occurred when a majority of socialists endorsed Maurice Thorez's candidacy for the presidency of the government in November 1946.⁶⁸ Indeed, the PCF claimed republican tradition dictated that the strongest party should be entrusted with forming the government, and after the results of the legislative elections, the communists arrived on top.⁶⁹ Since Maurice Thorez was the most popular member of the PCF, he revendicated the right to candidate for the position of Prime Minister. After numerous hesitations, most Socialists agreed to vote for him and only 23 abstained. However, Maurice Thorez fell short of the 310 votes needed for election, garnering only 255 votes.⁷⁰ If this was not a striking victory for the PCF, the members of Political Bureau explained during a meeting from December that the results were actually a tremendous success as the other Parties did not oppose any other candidacy and 'nobody in the Assembly, called the legitimacy of his candidacy into question'⁷¹, thereby legitimizing once more the stance of the PCF as a governmental Party. The PCF interpreted this setback as temporary and remained convinced at the time that the 'idea of communist-led government would develop in the country'.⁷²

As a result, throughout 1945 and 1946, the SFIO, the PCF, and the MRP coexisted within the government. If tensions resulted from this unusual cohabitation due to a divergence of opinions, all parties had significant roles to play. Since the PCF was determined to follow the rules, the other political factions were generally coping with its parliamentary presence. During the January 1947 elections, a president was elected for the first time and the government was composed of five PCF ministers: Charles Tillon for the Ministry of Reconstruction and Urbanism, Ambroise Croizat for the Ministry of Work and Social Security, Georges Marrane for the Ministry of Public Health and Population, and the communist François Billoux was attributed the Ministry of National Defence, which was a major victory for the recognition of

⁶⁷ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 121

⁶⁸ Hue, Robert. "Maurice Thorez, un homme d'État." *Nouvelles Fondations*, no. 5 (2007): 87-91.

⁶⁹ 'Elections législatives novembre 1946', France Politique, [Accessed April 27, 2024, <https://www.france-politique.fr/assemblee-nationale-1946.htm>]

⁷⁰ Hue, Robert. "Maurice Thorez, un homme d'État." *Nouvelles Fondations*, no. 5 (2007): 87-91.

⁷¹ 261J4/ 3-44, « Réunion du 5 Décembre 1946 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

⁷² *Ibid*

the PCF as a legitimate faction and symbolised to the population the acceptance of the PCF as a national Party.⁷³ Maurice Thorez occupied both the position of vice chancellor and of Minister of State.

In addition to being a governmental Party since the dissolution of the Komintern, the PCF became more nationalised and developed several key organisations during its first years of independence. Roger Martelli, Jean Vigreux and Serge Wolikow assert that in the aftermath of the Second World War, ‘the communist galaxy irrigated the entire society, not only with the weight of the party, but also with specific organizations such as the Union of French Women (628,000 members), the Union of Republican Youth of France (245,000 members), the People's Relief, not to mention the role of syndicate known as the CGT (4 million members in 1945)’.⁷⁴ The communist press, principally the sales of *l'Humanité* in Paris and *La Terre* in the smaller cities, represented between 20% and 25% of national circulations, and aimed all the layers of society: middle classes, workers and women alike were targeted by the communist propaganda.⁷⁵ This territorial anchoring gave enormous prestige to the PCF and increased the popularity of the Party in the entire country. Not only did it show the Party's willingness to get even more nationalised, but it also meant that it was reaching almost every level of the political, societal, and economic life of France. In the following years, this anchoring would become crucial to maintain the Party's influence on the French population.

2.2 The PCF, a party from abroad?

A constant devotion to the Soviet Union

In France, the shift towards anticommunism increased in 1946-1947, but the PCF already faced criticism by the other political factions in the previous years. However, the critiques were mostly about the PCF's attachment to the Soviet Union and not the communist ideology itself as a part of the population believed that the Party's interests in foreign politics impacted its ability to focus on France. The PCF had to often justify its political stance and to affirm that the Party's loyalty towards the USSR was beneficial to France: ‘sympathy and understanding towards the Soviet Union are elements of a truly French policy. Anti-Sovietism leads to a policy contrary to the interests of France’⁷⁶, wrote members of the political bureau.

⁷³ 261J4/ 4- 2, « Réunion du 23 Janvier 1947 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

⁷⁴ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 108

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 109

⁷⁶ 261J4/2-25, « Réunion du 19 Juillet 1945, Archives du PCF, Seine Saint-Denis

Through their newspaper *L'Humanité*, the communists were regularly trying to find new positive connections between the Soviet Union and France to demonstrate that Stalin was France's strongest ally and a messenger for peace. For instance, on the 25th of September 1946, they released an interview with Stalin denouncing the 'war blackmail' and the use of the atomic bomb which he affirmed was 'destined to intimidate those who lack nerves'.⁷⁷ In the headlines, we can read 'It is possible to reach an amiable collaboration with the USSR and the Western countries'.⁷⁸



Cover of the newspaper *L'Humanité* from the 25th of September 1946, 'Stalin denounces war blackmail: "The atomic bomb is destined to intimidate those who lack nerves"'.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *L'Humanité*, September 25, 1946. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, [Accessed March 2, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4738955v>

⁷⁸ *Ibid*

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

Their use of propaganda was successful to an extent within the French population, but never escaped the other Parties' scepticism.⁸⁰ Moreover, the PCF also still had to fight its way to governmental positions. For example, the communists believed that the MRP and SFIO repeatedly manoeuvred 'to establish of a governmental formation from which the communists would be excluded'⁸¹, like during the canton elections of September 1945, when 'the candidates presented by the right aimed to conceal the reactionary figure of the MRP and to promote the coalition between this party and the socialist Party'.⁸² In November 1945, General de Gaulle refused to grant one of the three big ministries (National Defence, Interior and Foreign affairs) to the PCF despite the Party's first place at the legislative elections under the pretext that the PCF had 'chosen between East and West'.⁸³ This argument joined the one made by Léon Blum, who declared that the PCF remained an element foreign to the nation, 'a foreign nationalist party'.⁸⁴

The consequences of the Iron Curtain

The ideological tensions of the Cold War made sure to change the Parties' perspective on communism as the US' propaganda aimed to frame the ideology as the greatest new peril to eliminate and the Soviet Union as the mastermind behind it. The involvement of the US in Western Europe through the enactment of the Franco-American accords, also known as the Blum-Byrnes agreements, in 1946 and the Truman Doctrine in March 1947, fuelled an anti-communist movement in France.⁸⁵ As communism began to be seen as a threat rather than as an inconvenience in the West, the same fate happened to the PCF which acknowledged during a meeting that 'the course of international events reveals the numerous attempts to develop anti-Soviet and anti-communist sentiments in the face of the growing strength of the USSR'⁸⁶ and called for a mobilisation of the Party in order to confront 'all attacks, better disseminate all slogans, and gain more influence over the people'.⁸⁷ During the 38th Congress of the SFIO, between the 29th of August and the 1st of September 1946, the socialists drafted a resolution which summarised their new approach towards the PCF. Whereas in 1945 they did not mention

⁸⁰ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020

⁸¹ 261J4/2- 36, « Réunion du 4 octobre 1945 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*, *ibid*

⁸⁴ 261J4/ 2-4, « Réunion du 15 novembre 1945 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

⁸⁵ Transcript of the Truman Doctrine's Speech, 12th of March 1947, *National Archives*, [Accessed January 25, 2024], <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/truman-doctrine>

⁸⁶ 261J4/ 3-15, « Réunion du 21 mars 1946 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

⁸⁷ *Ibid*

the USSR, they asserted that they desired a coalition with the PCF for the coming elections and argued for a return to an ‘organic unity’:

*‘The Socialist Party is determined, on its part, to establish as soon as possible the necessary climate for total unity. It earnestly hopes that the Communist Party will be inspired by a similar determination.’*⁸⁸

In 1946, they clearly pointed out the PCF’s affiliation with the USSR as problematic, and their use of vocabulary evolved to depict the communists. They denounced the imprisonment of not only the PCF but of all national communist Parties by the Soviet Union, thus raising the issue to the international level:

*‘In terms of our relationship with the Communist Party, it is important to affirm that the unity of the working class remains a fundamental goal for us. However, we are obliged to acknowledge that it will not be achievable as long as the national communist parties are not liberated from their political and intellectual subjugation to the Russian state, and as long as they do not practice genuine workers’ democracy.’*⁸⁹

Consequently, the 38th Congress exemplifies how the international context of the Cold War influenced France’s domestic affairs. It particularly illustrates how the political factions that once considered total unity with the PCF and agreed to a political coalition with enthusiasm began to distance themselves from this possibility. Indeed, as demonstrated above, the socialists became more reluctant to collaborate closely with the communists as the Cold War expanded to Europe. During the 1945 Congress it was question of the ‘influence’ or the possible control of the Soviet Union, which was not even cited, but the year after the focus turned out to be on the necessity to free all communist Parties from the yoke of the Soviets.⁹⁰ Reflecting on the Congress, the communists declared that ‘what brought all the tendencies together for the final vote was anti-communism’⁹¹, a situation which would have never happened in 1944. It is worthy to note that between 1944 and 1946, the direction of the PCF did not change as it

⁸⁸ Parti socialiste. *38e Congrès national: 29, 30, 31 août, 1er septembre 1946: rapports*. France: Librairie du Parti, Gallica, [Accessed February 21, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k81841n/f2.item>

⁸⁹ *Ibid*

⁹⁰ *Ibid*

⁹¹ 261J4/ 3-33, « Réunion du 5 septembre 1946 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

remained an independent Party. Its attachment to communism and Stalin became more apparent through the years due to the growing propaganda of the USSR which was supported by the communist factions, but it was still an autonomous and deeply nationalised Party.⁹² The decision of the SFIO to drift away from the PCF was thus not motivated by the fact that the PCF had lost its independence but due to the escalating tensions between the West and the East.⁹³



Cover of the newspaper *L'Humanité* from the 30th of October 1946 glorifying Stalin as an agent for peace with the big headline 'Stalin proclaims the USSR's desire for peace. It is necessary to uproot the seeds of fascism in Germany. Interview with Generalissimo Joseph Stalin: 'Churchill and those who think like him are pushing for war.''⁹⁴

⁹² *L'Humanité*, October 30, 1946. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, [Accessed March 2, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4738986d/f1.image>

⁹³ *Ibid*

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

The exclusion of the PCF ministers

However, the climate of 1947 put the PCF in a paradoxical situation as communists became torn between their loyalty to the Soviets and to the communist regimes fighting for their right to exist in Asia, and the French government's choice to maintain a global colonial policy. As a result, the proxy war in Indochina and the repression of the liberation movement in Madagascar excavated the ideological divide between the SFIO and MRP on one side and the PCF on the other. In Madagascar, the Malagasy people were rebelling against the French colonial power which had sought to regain its colony at the end of the Second World War and was ruling with an iron fist over the indigens. Over 20,000 inhabitants fought against the colonisers, leading to an increase in combat and sabotage, while French repression was brutal.⁹⁵ The same situation occurred in Indochina, where Vietnamese aspirations for independence began to manifest through conflicts between the nationalist communist forces led by Ho Chi Minh and the French troops.⁹⁶ The communists adamantly opposed colonialism and even encouraged the liberation of French colonies, particularly when it meant that they would be supplanted by communist-led governments. As a result, the PCF was part of a government which voted in favour of a continuation of conflicts that were directly hurting communists. Even though the Party tried to support the cause of the Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh and to appease the belligerent temperament of the other political factions, this ambiguous situation forced the communists, whose determination to stay in the government was unwavering, to do a series of what Philippe Buton describes as 'quite surprising contortions'⁹⁷ that fragilised the tripartite structure of the government.

In addition, during early 1947, the social situation deteriorated in France, leading to a wave of strikes in the Renault factories, freshly nationalised.⁹⁸ Vincent Auriol, the first president of the Republic elected in January 1947, received around the same period alarming testimonies of communist plots. A rumour that the communists were preparing an action to seize power after launching a massive transport strike in December started circulating among French officials.⁹⁹ The published archives of the PCF, including the archive of the Political Bureau and of the Secretariat do not confirm this rumour, which was probably unfounded and

⁹⁵ Ellis, Stephen. "The 1947 Anti-Colonial Insurrection in Madagascar." *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 1 (n.d.): 158–59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853708003551>

⁹⁶ Tønnesson, Stein, and Philippe Devillers. *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520256026.001.0001>.

⁹⁷ Buton, Philippe. "L'éviction des ministres communistes." *L'année 1947* (1999): 339-355.

⁹⁸ Hue, Robert, « Maurice Thorez, un homme d'État », *Nouvelles Fondations*, n°5, (2007) p. 87-91

⁹⁹ *Ibid*

only disseminated to weaken the Party, already standing on thin ice. Furthermore, given the PCF's inclination to stay within the government in April 1947, it appears improbable that the Party considered seizing power that way. Objectively, conspiracy theories were rampant during the post-war period. Already in 1946, rumours of communist *parachutages* (parachute drops) in France, arms cache and the resurrection of brigades were mentioned in US reports.¹⁰⁰ Susan MacPerlman argues that these claims, which origins were transnational, were invented to encourage US involvement in France. However, the rise of anti-communism and plots to reverse the Republic were sometimes true.¹⁰¹ It is the case of the anti-communist plot of the *Plan Bleu* (Blue Plan) which was uncovered by the French secret service during the summer 1947 and gathered Vichy supporters, former anti-communist *résistants* and military personnel.¹⁰² The objective of this plot was to reverse the government and eradicate all the communists from power.¹⁰³ Even though the culprits were apprehended, this plot and all the others made up testimonies clearly indicated that the geopolitical situation was shifting to the detriment of the PCF, and of the communists of Western Europe in general.

As the PCF was usually the target of this campaign of misinformation, its credibility as a governmental Party suffered the most during that period. Vincent Auriol and his prime minister Paul Ramadier feared a revolutionary activity and these rumours put their trust to the test. As a result, on the 4th of May 1947, Paul Ramadier dismissed the communist ministers of his government, with immediate effect. The source of discontent lay in the government's handling of the Renault strikes, but the PCF's sole opposition was so significant that they would likely have been ousted for another reason that month. It marked the first instance of such a measure being taken and signalled the end of the PCF as a governing faction. The PCF believed this situation was temporary, but in reality, their exclusion from power became permanent. The day before the Council of the Ministers, Maurice Thorez, who had foreseen what was going to happen, declared to the Central Committee, in Paris:

'We are a Party of government, a Party that bases its policy on serious principles (...) Therefore, we should not regard it as fortunate that we are no

¹⁰⁰ McCall Perlman, Susan. *Contesting France: Intelligence and US Foreign Policy in the Early Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

¹⁰² Augustin, Jean Marie. *Le Plan Bleu: Un complot contre la république*. Éditions La Geste, 2002.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*

longer in government. On the contrary, we should work to create the conditions for our return to a stronger position in government.¹⁰⁴

This declaration demonstrated once more how much the Party had evolved since the dissolution of the Komintern, and the dismissal of the communist ministers how much France was facing the turmoil of the Cold War. Originally, Maurice Thorez and the other communists thought that they could even use their exclusion as a tool for propaganda, as can attest the cover of *L'Humanité* from the 6th of May 1947.¹⁰⁵



Cover of the newspaper *L'Humanité* from the 6th of May 1947, the headline states 'The communist ministers are excluded from the government. True to the declaration of January, the deputies of our party had refused their confidence in a policy that moves away from increasing the purchasing power of the workers'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Hue, Robert. "Maurice Thorez, un homme d'État." *Nouvelles Fondations*, no. 5 (2007): 87-91.

¹⁰⁵ *L'Humanité*, May 6, 1947. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, [Accessed March 2, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4739117q/fl.image>

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*

The communist leaders wanted to show that they were close to the workers, to the people, and that they were the only ones fighting for their rights. However, it was only the beginning of their isolation. In June 1947, the US strengthened its grip over Western Europe through the establishment of the Marshall Plan, and triggered a chain of events which led to the end of the PCF as a governmental Party.

The Marshall Plan

On the 7th of June 1947, the communist Marcel Cachin wrote in his *Notebooks*: ‘Ramadier’s failure will bring us back to the government’.¹⁰⁷ However, the PCF’s ambition to return to power was already compromised on the 5th of June 1947 as on that day, Secretary of State George C. Marshall delivered a landmark speech, sparked by anti-communism, calling for the creation of an American program to aid European reconstruction: the Marshall Plan.¹⁰⁸

If his discourse mostly focused on helping the ‘entire fabric of the European economy’,¹⁰⁹ the primary aim of the Marshall Plan was to counter Stalin’s influence in Europe and curb the communist tendency in this region.¹¹⁰ As Charles Maier explains, the Marshall Plan embodied the belief that ‘economic assistance could help prevent Communist political advance in Europe’.¹¹¹ American officials wanted to offer ‘the cure’¹¹² to eradicate this disease, viewing European communism as a consequence of economic despair. In his address, George Marshall portrayed the US initiative as altruistic, designed ‘to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace’.¹¹³ He then stated: ‘our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos.’¹¹⁴ The words communism, Stalin, or the USSR were never mentioned in this speech. However, in the weeks preceding the speech, George Marshall had contemplated referencing the ‘communist threat’, a rhetorical tactic previously used during the Truman Doctrine speech on March 12th, but he feared that it might provoke the Russians

¹⁰⁷ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Marshall, George C. "The Marshall Plan Speech, 5th of June 1947." Harvard University, George C. Marshall Foundation, [Accessed March 7 2024]. <https://www.marshallfoundation.org/the-marshall-plan/speech/>.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*

¹¹⁰ McKenzie, Brian A, *The Plan Marshall Book: remaking France, Americanization, Diplomacy and the Marshall Plan*, (Berghahn Books; 2005), p. 17

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 18

¹¹² Marshall, George C. "The Marshall Plan Speech, 5th of June 1947." Harvard University, George C. Marshall Foundation, [Accessed April 2, 2024]

¹¹³ *Ibid*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

and lead to direct repercussions.¹¹⁵ This report clearly shows that the involvement of the Americans through the Marshall Plan was mostly political. Nonetheless, by maintaining ambiguity, the US could safeguard their interests and discourage Russian retaliation.

Reactions from European countries to the Marshall Plan were almost immediate. In the following weeks, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, French Foreign Minister George Bidault, and Soviet Foreign Minister Viatcheslav Molotov met to outline their individual needs and expectations regarding the Marshall Plan. However, Molotov promptly withdrew from discussions, viewing the Marshall Plan as another move to ‘relieve a crisis in the capitalist mode of production’¹¹⁶ and as a mechanism for disrupting the established post-war order. Subsequently, eighteen European states, excluding the Soviet bloc and Spain, opted to participate in the Marshall Plan. Because Western Europe needed funds for reconstruction, the US took advantage of its economic hegemony to implement its own conditions in exchange for financial aid. The Marshall Plan especially targeted France, which was described by the Secretary of State Robert Lovett as the ‘the keystone of continental Western Europe’.¹¹⁷ The Americans were afraid of a communist takeover and argued in a France policy and Information statement that ‘though at peace, France is the scene of an international political battle, the outcome of which is of the greatest importance to the United States. The world drama of Russian expansion is being played in miniature on the stage of France.’¹¹⁸

The Americans’ state of mind reflected their growing paranoia regarding the domino effect, a theory whose foundations were already laid in 1947. According to this theory, if one country were to succumb to communism, neighboring nations would likely follow, initiating a chain reaction with global repercussions.¹¹⁹ Even though US President Dwight Eisenhower first referenced it in 1954, the entire Cold War mindset in the United States was shaped by this fear of communist expansion.¹²⁰ This mindset led them to impose conditions on France and other European countries, especially those dominated by communist factions. In order to keep obtaining a financial aid, the countries’ governments had to combat communists, particularly

¹¹⁵ Bryan, Ferald J. "Origins and Construction of the Marshall Plan Speech", [Accessed March 7, 2024]. https://www.marshallfoundation.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/04/Origins_and_Construction_of_the_Marshall_Plan_Speech.pdf

¹¹⁶ McKenzie, Brian A. *The Plan Marshall Book: Remaking France, Americanization, Diplomacy and the Marshall Plan*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, p. 20

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 21

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 20

¹¹⁹ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954*. Vol. 1, pp. 381-390

¹²⁰ *Ibid*

by keeping them out of the government, and accept the coordinated recovery of all European economies, including Germany.¹²¹ Strategically, the French government had to remain aligned with the narrative of the USA, which was its greatest benefactor and strongest ally outside Europe. Consequently, from July 1947, the other governmental factions widened the gap between them and the PCF, while the communists publicly denounced the loss of sovereignty that would result from agreeing to the terms the Marshall Plan.¹²² The communists argued that the acceptance of the Marshall Plan would signify France's 'subjection to the trusts'.¹²³ Moreover, one of these prerequisites of the Marshall Plan included pro American publicity, as stipulated by the Article VIII of the bilateral agreement, which ordered the mediatisation of 'Marshall Plan projects and relief aid'.¹²⁴ The objective of the mediatisation campaign was to portray the United States in a positive light and increase American popularity and control over the country.¹²⁵ As the Marshall Plan was driven by anticommunism, the PCF accused the Americans for their exclusion from government and continuous exile in a newspaper article of the 13th of September 1947: 'Ramadier resolved to capitulate to American demands'¹²⁶. As a result, the Marshall Plan heightened tensions between the Western and Eastern Blocs on an international scale and exacerbated domestic conflicts between the PCF and other political factions in France.

In conclusion, if the PCF had started to drift away from its revolutionary stance at the end of World War II, had become a fully parliamentary faction and obtained the favours of the public, the strains of the Cold War propelled the PCF in the middle of a territory dispute between the US and the USSR. This feud affected the French political landscape, resulting in the exclusion of the Party from government and in its permanent loss of governmental status during the Fourth Republic. As the US strengthened its grip over France and the other countries in Western Europe through economy recovery programs such as the Marshall Plan, its involvement gave rise to anticommunism in the country. The rejection of the communist doctrine, which began to be seen as the new greatest peril to eradicate, eventually led to

¹²¹ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 118

¹²² 261J4/4-27, « Réunion du 15 Juillet 1947 », Secrétariat, Archives du PCF, Seine Saint-Denis

¹²³ *Ibid*

¹²⁴ McKenzie, Brian A. *The Plan Marshall Book: Remaking France, Americanization, Diplomacy and the Marshall Plan*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, p. 26

¹²⁵ *Ibid*

¹²⁶ *L'Humanité*, September 13, 1947. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, [Accessed April 5, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4739228v/fl.item>

securitising moves against the PCF and to the reestablishment of an international communist organisation supervised by Stalin, the Kominform, which will be scrutinised in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Cold War strategies: securitising the PCF and shifting alliances, 1947-1953

This chapter will explore the efforts made by influential political figures such as General Charles De Gaulle in 1947 to securitise the PCF as a threat to France's national unity, and the reasons for the partial success of these policies despite the growing anti-communist sentiment in France and the credibility of the securitising actors. This section will then analyse how the US's influence in France led the Soviet Union to establish a new communist International Organization in September 1947 in order to expand its sphere of influence through the lens of the European communist Parties at the peak of the Cold War. Additionally, this chapter will examine how this development impacted the French communists' directive line, pressuring them to re-emerge as revolutionaries and leading insurrectional campaigns. The shift from parliamentary to revolutionary led the PCF to suffer various strategies of isolation, containment, and repression from 1947 to 1953 by the French government with the complicity of the US, which will be discussed in the last subsection.

3.1 De Gaulle's attempt to securitise communism as a threat to national unity

The PCF suffered greatly from the reversal of public opinion towards the Soviet Union, especially in the second half of 1947. At the beginning of the year, press analyses and opinion polls remained tolerant towards the USSR. However, with the increasing influence of the US in Europe, the enactment of the Truman Doctrine in March and the growing fear of the spread of communism in Greece and Turkey, public opinion started to clearly drift away from this positive stance and to view the USSR as a foe.¹²⁷ As a result, several influential actors started using this change in perception to their advantage and presented the PCF as the mouthpiece of an enemy nation, thus initiating securitising moves towards the communists.

These moves did not come from members of the traditional Parties, who exercised caution regarding public anti-communism discourse, but from an external influential actor: General Charles de Gaulle. The reason for this caution was a crisis in public opinion regarding the Marshall Plan, described by the communists as 'an attempt by the US to dump industrial

¹²⁷ Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Serge Berstein. "L'anticommunisme En France." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 15 (1987): 17–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3769624>

and agricultural surpluses on Europe' and 'a declaration of war'.¹²⁸ Brian McKenzie affirms that despite the rise of anti-communism, the PCF's criticisms of the Marshall Plan 'attained a high level of public acceptance' in the years following its announcement.¹²⁹ As a result, public anti-communism by the French government was only going to confirm to the French population that the Marshall Plan had 'rendered the government subservient to U.S interests'.¹³⁰ However, De Gaulle had left the government in 1946 and was not affiliated with American strategies. His anti-communism was inscribed in the context of the Cold War, but primarily reflected his commitment to defending France's sovereignty. This situation allowed him to make a securitising move towards the PCF on the 27th of July 1947.¹³¹ On that day, De Gaulle delivered an alarmist speech in Rennes, a city located in the northwest of France, to warn the French people of this evil endangering the unity, freedom and stability of the nation. By July 1947, De Gaulle had already prepared his triumphant comeback through the creation of a new political Party in April of the same year, the *Rassemblement Populaire Français* (RPF), 'the Rallying of the French People'.¹³² He was eager to resurface since stepping back from the provisional government in 1946 after refusing the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, and adamantly believed that anticommunism was key to unifying France behind him. Moreover, his anti-communist stance allowed him to denounce the failure of the Fourth Republic and thus advocate for a new one, with him as the leader of the state.¹³³

Through his speech, De Gaulle conveyed a sense of emergency which is inherent to the Speech Act, thus setting the tone of his discourse: 'today, a grave concern looms over our country'.¹³⁴ Calling for the rallying of the French people against the red menace threatening the nation, De Gaulle condemned the ideological popularity of the communist doctrine in Europe and the geographical advance of the USSR with virulent language. He also denounced the 'internal enemies' of France who undermined national unity by representing only the interests

¹²⁸ McKenzie, Brian A. *The Plan Marshall Book: Remaking France, Americanization, Diplomacy and the Marshall Plan*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, p. 25

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 26

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 26

¹³¹ Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, [Accessed February 12, 2024], <https://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Discours-de-Rennes.pdf>

¹³² Millet, Raymond. "Le Général de Gaulle expose les buts du R.P.F et sa conception de la politique française." *Le Monde*, April 27, 1947, [Accessed May 12, 2024], https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1947/04/26/le-general-de-gaulle-expose-les-buts-du-r-p-f-et-sa-conception-de-la-politique-francaise_1885862_1819218.html

¹³³ *Ibid*

¹³⁴ Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, *ibid*

of the USSR.¹³⁵ The language of urgency and the idea of an existential threat were omnipresent in his speech to ensure that the audience felt personally threatened, which, as Clara Eroukhmanoff explains, remains essential to the performative root of the Speech Act.¹³⁶ Indeed, De Gaulle labelled the communist threat as ‘dangerous’, ‘unacceptable’, and ‘alarming’ in order to raise the PCF as an existential threat to the safety of the nation.¹³⁷ Described as a group of ‘separatists’, ‘a group of men serving a foreign state’, and ‘accomplices to evil’, the French communists were constantly referred to but never properly named. This strategy allowed De Gaulle to play on multiple fronts simultaneously: domestically, by addressing a broader public without alienating those who were sympathetic to the PCF—‘I am speaking to all true French people, including those who, until now, believed they could listen to others, but who now see that our homeland is at stake and cannot continue on the same path’¹³⁸—and internationally, by positioning himself as a resolute opponent of the Soviet bloc, which encompassed all communist parties in Europe.

De Gaulle lifted anticommunism above politics by framing it as a danger to ‘the freedom of men’ and the ‘independence of France’ in an attempt to reunite members of all political factions behind him.¹³⁹ His imagery was very strong, imbued with the powerful symbolism of submission versus freedom. He frequently referred to slavery in his rhetoric, as he slandered the PCF’s loyalty towards Stalin and compared it to the relationship between a slave and his master. The communists were portrayed as deceiving — ‘to achieve their ends, there are no means these men do not use’— parasites determined to reverse democracy to establish a dictatorship: ‘on our soil, among us, men have vowed obedience to the orders of a foreign enterprise of domination, directed by the masters of a great Slavic power.’¹⁴⁰ He did not hesitate to exaggerate and defame in order to make his point, without providing any proof to back up his arguments: ‘for them’, he asserted, ‘the real goal is to bend our beautiful country to a regime of totalitarian servitude, where each Frenchman would no longer control their body or soul, and France itself would become the submissive auxiliary of a colossal hegemony’.¹⁴¹ Feeding on

¹³⁵ Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, [Accessed February 12, 2024], <https://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Discours-de-Rennes.pdf>

¹³⁶ Eroukhmanoff, Clara. "The Securitization Theory." In *International Relations Theory*, Bristol, England: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017

¹³⁷ Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, *ibid*

¹³⁸ *Ibid*

¹³⁹ Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p. 23

¹⁴⁰ Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, *ibid*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*

paranoia, De Gaulle delved into the roots of what would become McCarthyism in the United States, a witch hunt against communism at every level of society, and magnified the threat it posed to fit his political agenda at the peak of the Cold War. He believed his past legitimacy as a securitising actor would be sufficient to guarantee a successful securitisation of his Speech Act and the enactment of extraordinary measures such as a revision of the Constitution and of the electoral procedures for deputies in the National Assembly which had failed to protect France against communism.¹⁴²

Overall, De Gaulle's securitisation speech achieved a mixed success. On one hand, De Gaulle was acclaimed by the public in Rennes, and the RPF became popular really quickly. The politician Jean Charlot estimated the number of RPF supporters in 1948 at 400,000, a significant number for such a recently formed Party.¹⁴³ Furthermore, during the local elections of October 19, 1947, the RPF emerged as the victor with 38% of the votes cast, establishing a record for a Party this young.¹⁴⁴ By winning over major cities, including Paris and Rennes, the RPF reflected the growing anti-communist sentiment among the population. On the other hand, while it was well accepted by the public and received extensive media coverage, De Gaulle's movement failed to gain political support from key actors such as the MRP and the SFIO. No extraordinary measures against the PCF unfolded from this speech, it did not have a long-term impact on political agendas and policy priorities, but it led to an expected schism with the PCF, which remained one of the largest Parties of France and thus still heavily influenced the political landscape. By vilifying the French communists, De Gaulle attacked more than 25% of the French voters, and by accusing the government of incompetence, he turned all the other political Parties against him. The governmental factions viewed the RPF, its publicly exacerbated anti-communism and its anti-parliamentarism, as new threats to overcome. They believed that De Gaulle's initiative was endangering their republican institutions. Instead of welcoming De Gaulle's movement, they opposed the RPF through the creation a centrist-right coalition, the Third Force during the same year. The coalition included the SFIO, the MRP and left-wing radicals, and was imagined as an isolation measure designed to prevent the PCF and then the Gaullists from acceding governmental positions. The Third Force will be studied further in a

¹⁴² Speech by General Charles de Gaulle, 27 July 1947, [Accessed February 12, 2024], <https://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Discours-de-Rennes.pdf>

¹⁴³ Fondation Charles de Gaulle, Université de Bordeaux III (CARHC). *De Gaulle et le RPF 1947-1955*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1998

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*

subsequent subsection as it became one of the most effective containment strategies endured by the PCF in the years 1947-1953.

As for the PCF, the communists immediately condemned De Gaulle's discourse. During a meeting of the secretariat of the 28th of July, the PCF emphasised that 'De Gaulle's speech is primarily intended to frighten the hesitant and to prevent the unity of the communists and the republicans'.¹⁴⁵ The communists were already facing expulsion and isolation measures from the other political factions, but this discourse discredited them even further in the eyes of the public. Since the PCF had been publicly framed as an enemy to French interests by the most emblematic figure of the period, any new alliance with the socialists or the conservatives became extremely difficult to imagine. The following day, *L'Humanité* published a communiqué condemning De Gaulle's strategy.¹⁴⁶ The communiqué was severe in denouncing his securitising move, as the acceptance of this movement by the population was a turning point in the French perception of the PCF as a viable national Party. Comparing De Gaulle's anti-communist allegations to Hitler's, the communists recalled the essential role they played in the Resistance and accused the General of being under the 'cup of international big capitalism', specifically the United States. However, at the time, the US did not see the return of De Gaulle as favourable, as the general was famous for being difficult to 'deal with' especially in regards to France's sovereignty.¹⁴⁷ A top secret telegram from the US ambassador Caffery to the Secretary of State from the 29th of October 1947 reveals: 'When faced with the dilemma of De Gaulle or communism, there is no doubt that the majority of the French people will pick De Gaulle. I assume that in our own interest we will do the same, even though that choice must boil down to the lesser of two evils.'¹⁴⁸ In addition, the PCF called for a new union with the socialists and 'republicans of all stripes'¹⁴⁹ in the defence of democracy. Evidently, the other political factions did not respond positively to this communiqué, since they viewed the PCF as a threat to the Fourth Republic as much as the RPF.

Analysing De Gaulle's attempt at securitising the PCF as a threat to national unity and its positive reception illustrates how much the French political landscape evolved during the first

¹⁴⁵ 261J5/4- 29, « Réunion du 28 Juillet 1947 », Archives du PCF, Seine Saint-Denis

¹⁴⁶ *L'Humanité*, July 30, 1947. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, [Accessed March 2, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4739190v/f4.item>

¹⁴⁷ Telegram from the US ambassador to the Secretary of State, October 29, 1947. *Foreign Relations of The United States, 1947*, Office of the Historian, [Accessed May, 20 2024], <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v03/d508>

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁹ *L'Humanité*, July 30, 1947. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, *ibid*

years of the Cold War and was influenced by US anti-communist policy. In 1944, it would have been unthinkable to tarnish the image of the PCF and lead a smear campaign against it with the approval of such a big part of the French population, but in 1947, this movement achieved a meteoric rise, and got the highest score at the local elections merely months after its creation.

3. 2 The PCF and the Kominform

A reluctant return to a revolutionary stance

On the 22nd of September 1947, two months after De Gaulle's securitising move and five months after the communists' expulsion from government, Maurice Thorez declared to the journalist Harold King that the PCF views had not changed and that the objective of their policy was to return to government. The local elections were scheduled in October 1947, and the communists were determined to keep the highest score despite France's internal political tensions. According to opinion polls, the communist voters remained faithful to the PCF, even after the securitisation attempt by the RPF. In the interview, Maurice Thorez assured that they were committed to return to governmental positions: 'the PCF is a governmental Party, in the assemblies and in the country, and has never deviated from this line, which will not change (...) We have asked for and are asking for a democratic union government in which the largest of the French parties obtains the place assigned to it by universal suffrage'.¹⁵⁰ He then concluded the interview by assuring that there is no communist international and no 'unified tactic, neither for the recent past nor for the future'.¹⁵¹ Coincidentally, at the same time, in Sklarska Poreba, Poland, representatives of eight European communist parties, including the PCF, and the Soviet Union's envoy Andrei Zhdanov, met to discuss the creation of a new International Organization ordered by Joseph Stalin. The ruler of the USSR hoped to utilise the strongest communist factions in Western Europe, namely the PCF and the Italian communist Party (PCI) as a catalyst to expand the communist ideology and counter the influence of the United States in this area.¹⁵²

Resulting from this meeting, the Kominform was created on October 5, 1947. The reestablishment of a Soviet led communist international organization altered the leadership structure of the PCF, which had behaved like a parliamentary faction until its reintegration into the new international organization. One of the requirements for joining the new organization

¹⁵⁰ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 119-120,

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*

¹⁵² "La Nouvelle Internationale." *Le Monde*, October 7, 1947, [Accessed May 12, 2024], https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1947/10/07/la-nouvelle-internationale_1890058_1819218.html

established by Andrei Zhdanov was that the PCF had to abandon its policy of joining national unity governments and completely align with Moscow's directive, which relied on anti-imperialism and pacifism (mainly anti-colonialism and opposition to nuclear weapons, which were only possessed by the U.S. and thus threatened the USSR).¹⁵³ In an official report presenting the guidelines of the Kominform, Zhdanov stipulated that the communist factions must embrace the URSS, set up as a model, oppose all other political factions and no longer collaborate with them.¹⁵⁴ These new policies signified a complete rupture with the PCF's former principles and political strategies. To celebrate the new communist international organization, the French communists immediately took a more radical position towards the Marshall Plan that they described as 'imperialist plans of expansion and aggression'.¹⁵⁵ Associating 'imperialism' with 'anti-democracy', the PCF presented the Kominform as the camp of 'peace and democracy'.¹⁵⁶ Never before had the French communists denounced the Marshall Plan with such animosity. This hostility was symptomatic of the ideological dispute arising from the Cold War.

From that moment forward, Soviet implantation in France through the PCF became total. The French communists started losing all sense of objectivity regarding the USSR and took a strong Stalinist stance, for which they would be blamed in the late 1950s, after the death of Stalin.¹⁵⁷ Forced to make amends after his interview, Maurice Thorez confessed during a meeting of the Central Committee: 'We failed to expose from the beginning the conduct of the socialists as a shameful betrayal of national interests'.¹⁵⁸ Their new unconditional obedience and support to the Soviet Union transpired through the self-criticism process that followed the French communists' adherence to the Kominform and their clear worship of Joseph Stalin. It was no longer a question of autonomy and freedom, but of blinded obedience to the motherland. The PCF became an extension of the USSR, with no will of its own.

The submission to the Kominform went above the one to the previous international as the communists stopped questioning the Soviet Union and vowed a personality cult to Joseph

¹⁵³ Mencherini, Robert, *Guerre froide, grèves rouges, « les grèves insurrectionnelles » de 1947*, Paris: Syllepse, 2017

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁵ *L'Humanité*, October 5, 1947, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, [Accessed May 12, 2024], <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k47392476>

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁷ Marcou, Lily, *Le Kominform, le communisme et la Guerre Froide*, Paris ; Presses de Sciences Po, 1977

¹⁵⁸ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 121

Stalin. In a meeting of the political bureau from the 28th of April 1948, the French communists reiterated their ‘feelings of affection, gratitude, and devotion towards Comrade Stalin, the educator and guide, the respected leader, and the trusted friend of people fighting for their national independence, democracy, and peace’.¹⁵⁹ This statement followed a condemnation of the communist Party of Yugoslavia, as the members of this Party decided to disaffiliate themselves from the Kominform in order to prioritise national communism, the titoist doctrine¹⁶⁰, and refused to adhere strictly to Soviet directives.¹⁶¹ The French communists’ worship of Stalin remained omnipresent at the core of the Party. In a meeting from 1952, members of the political bureau wrote that it was important to consider Stalin's *work The Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* ‘not merely as a classic Marxist-Leninist work among others, but as an exceptional masterpiece, the manual for the communist of our time, and organize its dissemination accordingly’.¹⁶² Between its devotion to Stalin and its acceptance of the Zhdanov doctrine, the PCF became the mouthpiece of the Soviets and changed its public image to reshape itself as a dissenting and revolutionary force. The shift within the Party was immediate, but during the October 1947’s elections, the communists lost only 3% of the votes compared to the November 1946 legislative elections. Nonetheless, it was also during these elections that the anti-communist Party of De Gaulle achieved its best score. Jean-Jacques Becker and Serge Berstein explain that ‘while the PCF was pushed into a ghetto like never before, this ghetto had taken on the appearance of a powerful fortress’,¹⁶³ meaning that while the enforcement of an anti-communist sentiment through the influence of the U.S had successfully radicalised a significant part of the population, the French communists were also more inclined to remain faithful to the USSR in this ideological dispute. However, this situation rapidly evolved in the following years due to the implementation of isolation and anti-communist measures by the French government and the creation of French anti-communist organisations with the complicity of the Americans.¹⁶⁴

Repression, discredit and containment strategies against the PCF: 1948-1953

¹⁵⁹ 261J4/5-16- « Réunion du 28 avril 1948 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

¹⁶⁰ According to the titoist doctrine, the approach to communism should not be a unified pattern but should instead be tailored to the specific conditions prevailing in each country.

¹⁶¹ Marcou, Lily, *Le Kominform, le communisme et la Guerre Froide*, Presses de Sciences Po, 1977

¹⁶² 261J4/9-11- « Réunion du 14 novembre 1952 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

¹⁶³ Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Serge Berstein. "L'anticommunisme En France." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 15 (1987): 17–22

¹⁶⁴ Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Serge Berstein. "L'anticommunisme En France." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 15 (1987): 17–22

Obedying Moscow's directives, the PCF ceased its efforts to gain governmental positions and focused on the mobilisation of the masses. During the winter of 1947, a series of strikes led by the left-wing syndicate known as the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) paralysed the country for weeks.¹⁶⁵ Protests had already occurred in France in April, with workers from Renault demanding salary increases. However, this time the strikes began in the metallurgies of Marseille and were immediately supported and organised by the PCF. The strikes expanded to factories, transportation networks, and even port traffic. They resulted in violent confrontations, acts of sabotage, and the deaths of several protesters, including a young worker named Vincent Voulant.¹⁶⁶ While the increase in prices and the need for better supplies sparked these mass movements, they coincided with the PCF's new resolution to disrupt the political life of France through mobilisation. No longer seeking a governmental recognition, the PCF fought on the front line alongside the syndicates, leaving the door open for the French political factions to implement new anti-communist measures at a governmental level. 'Anti-communism under the Fourth Republic can be characterized by a few key features. Firstly, the unity of all political forces in a steadfast anti-communism'¹⁶⁷ explain Jean-Jacques Becker and Serge Berstein. It was especially the case during that period as both the socialists and conservatives feared that the communist activists might attempt a coup to seize power. In the archives of the PCF, there is no mention of a plan orchestrated by the communists to reverse the government, but members of the political bureau do advocate for a 'Popular Union government based on the broad development of the mass movement'.¹⁶⁸

In an address to General George Marshall, French minister of Foreign Affairs George Bidault decided to turn to the Americans for help and wrote in march 1948 that 'it is time to create a true collaboration with the United States and the other nations of Europe'.¹⁶⁹ Affirming that the French government was determined to do everything in its power to organize the defence of the European democratic nations, he expressed his gratitude for American economic aid but emphasized that it was no longer sufficient to resist Soviet aggression on the territory. This opinion, shared by most Western European countries, resulted in the signing of the Treaty

¹⁶⁵ Mencherini, Robert, *Guerre froide, grèves rouges, « les grèves insurrectionnelles » de 1947*, Paris: Syllepse, 2017

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁷ Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Serge Berstein. "L'anticommunisme En France." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 15 (1987): 17–22

¹⁶⁸ 261J4/5-30, « Réunion du 29 Juillet 1948 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

¹⁶⁹ *Origine du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord*, OTAN, published December 6, 2001, [Accessed May 12, 2024], <https://www.nato.int/archives/1st5years/fr/chapters/1.htm>

of Brussels on the 17th of March 1948.¹⁷⁰ This treaty exemplified the countries' commitment to establishing a common defence system and strengthening their economic and cultural relationships. Following this treaty, the U.S passed the Vanderberg Resolution on the 11th of June 1948, which allowed the U.S government to conclude military alliances in times of peace.¹⁷¹ This resolution was a turning point in American strategies as it gave the U.S government the legitimacy to propagate the Truman Doctrine and to provide a military aid to any country requesting it in order to fight communism. As a result, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed on April 4, 1949, by twelve countries including France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg Belgium, laying the foundations for NATO.¹⁷² The North Atlantic pact was heavily criticised by the PCF as it was yet another sign of U.S expansion in Western Europe.¹⁷³ However, the French communists no longer had the ability to influence governmental directives as they remained excluded from it.

Indeed, from May 1947 to March 1952, the French governmental factions forged a new alliance known as the Third Force to preserve the Fourth Republic and confront the dual opposition posed by the communists and the RPF. On one hand, the communists advocated for a development of mass communist movements, while on the other hand De Gaulle aimed to overhaul the government to establish a new republic with enhanced presidential executive authority.¹⁷⁴ The Third Force was a perfect illustration of the Cold War dynamics as this coalition would have never been considered without the international political context. As a result, the political cleavage in France was no longer Left/Right but East/West, representative of the division of the world into two blocs. This cleavage led to alliances between political Parties that everything opposed.¹⁷⁵ In spite of the success of this endeavor, the coalition of the Third Force was marked by instability as the SFIO and MRP disagreed on almost every political matter. They only showed unity when it came to anticommunist measures and external politics, like when the French government agreed to sign the North Atlantic Treaty or through their reinforcement of colonial policies such as the continuation of the war in Indochina and the

¹⁷⁰ *Origine du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord*, OTAN, published December 6, 2001, [Accessed May 12, 2024], <https://www.nato.int/archives/1st5years/fr/chapters/1.htm>

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*

¹⁷² *Le Traité fondateur*, OTAN, April 4 1949, [Accessed May 15 2024], https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/topics_67656.htm

¹⁷³ 261J4/6-19, « Réunion du 19 mai 1949 », Archives du PCF, Seine-Saint Denis

¹⁷⁴ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, 134

¹⁷⁵ Duverger, Maurice. "Public Opinion and Political Parties in France." *The American Political Science Review* 46, no. 4 (1952): 1069–78, [Accessed April 25, 2024], <https://doi.org/10.2307/1952113>

refusal to give Algeria its independence.¹⁷⁶ Their unity in anticommunism also transpired in 1950 when the *depute* Jean-Paul David, president of the *Rassemblement des Gauches non-communistes républicaines* (RGR), that can be translated as the Union of the non-communist and republican left-wing Parties, founded an anticommunist organisation *Paix et Liberté* (Peace and Freedom) with secrets funds of the government and the support of the president of the Council of Ministers, René Pleven.¹⁷⁷ As Roger Martelli explains, the objective of Peace and Freedom was to ‘denounce the Soviet Union's threat to Europe and its totalitarian grip on Soviet society, while associating these themes with the PCF’.¹⁷⁸ The organization had a significant cross-party network as the government was directly involved in the project. Consequently, Peace and Freedom operated for six years on the territory through a regular radio broadcast, the utilisation of anti-communist and satirical posters and the distribution of leaflets exceeding the millions of copies. It was not a simple political campaign but a genuine psychological warfare aimed at inciting paranoia among the population.¹⁷⁹ The organisation had such a huge impact on the population that the PCF's membership declined significantly in subsequent years, with historians noting a decrease from 650,400 members in 1948 to 330,000 in 1952.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, during his travels to the US in 1952 and 1953, Jean-Paul David was received by high ranked-officials, including the Secretary of State and representatives of the CIA who were pleased with the progress of the organisation and happy to help.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Duhamel, Éric. « III / La IV^e République en guerre froide, 1947-1954 », Éric Duhamel éd., *Histoire politique de la IV^e République*. La Découverte, 2000, pp. 41-63

¹⁷⁷ Delporte, Christian. « Paix et Liberté : l'anticommunisme par l'image », *Parlement[s]*, *Revue d'histoire politique*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2019, pp. 49-56

¹⁷⁸ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, 134

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 135

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*



Peace and Freedom anti-communist poster from September 1950. Stalin is portrayed as an untrustworthy, cunning and belligerent figure.¹⁸²

As a result, this period was marked by a severe repression of the communists, the strongest in time of peace in France.¹⁸³ From 1948 to 1953, the headquarters of the PCF were frequently seized. Communist intellectuals and members of the PCF such as Jacques Duclos and André Stil, redactor in chief of *l'Humanité*, were regularly arrested and detained by the police.¹⁸⁴ In addition, in 1951, the Parties of the Third Force passed a law of ‘apparentement’ to stay in power as the legislative elections approached and they feared a victory from the

¹⁸² Affiche du mouvement français *Paix et Liberté* contre la politique de Staline (1951), CVCE, [Accessed May 14, 2024],

https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/affiche_du_mouvement_francais_paix_et_liberte_contre_la_politique_de_staline_1951-fr-d7e04ca9-d558-43d1-8946-0ec15018cb9e.html

¹⁸³ Becker, Jean-Jacques, and Serge Berstein. "L'anticommunisme En France." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 15 (1987): 17–27

¹⁸⁴ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigneux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 134

communists or the RPF.¹⁸⁵ The idea was that all declared allied lists achieving an absolute majority would share all the seats. Isolated, the PCF and the RPF were disadvantaged by these provisions, and officially lost the elections despite their high scores. The Third Force won 51% of the votes while the PCF maintained its previous score of 25%, and the RPF 21,75%.¹⁸⁶ This indirect measure of exclusion of the PCF perfectly symbolised the mindset of the time in France, and even in Western Europe in general. If the PCF remained a powerful opponent with devoted members, it stood alone in France's capitalist geopolitical landscape and suffered from this marginalisation process until the end of the Fourth Republic. The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, the return of General De Gaulle to the head of the government in 1958, and the creation of the Fifth Republic ultimately sealed the decline of the Party.

¹⁸⁵ Martelli, Roger, Jean Vigreux, and Serge Wolikow. *Le Parti rouge, une histoire du PCF 1920-2020*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020, p. 134

¹⁸⁶ Boissieu, Laurent. "Résultats des élections législatives de 1951." *Chambre des députés 1951*, [Accessed May, 20 2024], <https://www.france-politique.fr/assemblee-nationale-1951.htm>

Conclusion

This thesis sought to investigate the crucial role played by the PCF within French politics during the pivotal period of the Cold War. Born out of an ideological divorce within the socialist faction in 1920, the PCF emerged as a popular political party in the aftermath of the Second World War and contributed to the establishment of the Fourth Republic. However, the following years, the French political landscape underwent a dramatic transformation from the unity observed during the conflict. While the PCF was considered a viable party by socialists and conservatives in 1945, this perception shifted as international tensions increasingly portrayed communism as a threat. By 1947, the PCF had become perceived as the adversary of all political factions.

This thesis thus answered the following research question: how did the rise of the PCF and its later isolation within the French political landscape reflect the international context of the beginning of the Cold War, particularly the ideological dispute between the Eastern and Western blocs?

As demonstrated, the cleavage between East and West, or capitalism and communism, was mirrored on a smaller scale in France from 1944 to 1953. The involvement of the US and the USSR significantly molded the French political landscape during that period as each superpower sought to gain control of the territory and assert its influence in this strategic area of Western Europe: the US through economic recovery programs and anti-communist propaganda, and the USSR through the re-establishment of an international communist organisation aimed at spreading communist doctrine across Europe. While the socialists and conservatives aligned with US' policies, the PCF's remained aligned with the Soviet Union and defended its interests. This ideological feud led to securitisation attempts against the PCF by General De Gaulle and to marginalisation measures by the French government to prevent the communists from coming to power.

There have been limitations to this thesis, which need to be addressed. First, because of my city of residency as well as financial issues, my access to the archives of the PCF, kept in Paris, were limited. Therefore, it had consequences on the final structure of this thesis as some sources remained inaccessible. Indeed, I initially aimed to study reports by the ministry of Interior and anti-communist speeches delivered at the National Assembly to strengthen my analysis of the anti-communist narrative in France.

Moreover, while I tried to stay as objective and neutral as possible in my examination of the PCF's strategies, I am aware that a historian is undeniably biased and influenced by the sources they find and use. In the case of this thesis, a majority of the sources identified are archives from the PCF's political bureau or have been written by members of the communist Party. The book *Le Parti Rouge* which traces the history of the French Communist Party, and has laid the foundations of my analysis, has been written by authors sympathetic to the communist cause.

As the scope of a thesis is inherently limited by time and word count, avenues for future research may include further exploring the Party from an international relations perspective within a different timeframe. For instance, examining the impact of Stalin's death on the transformations experienced by the PCF at the end of the Fourth Republic could be interesting. Indeed, Stalin's popularity increased within the Party after his death until Nikita Khrushchev's denounced his crimes in a compelling report in 1956. Subsequent to Khrushchev's report, the French communists embraced structural reforms to adapt to the new political reality and adopted a more moderate approach. Moreover, looking at the PCF in regards to decolonisation policies and within the ambit of theories on postcolonialism could be worth examination, as it is also symptomatic of the Cold War dynamics such as proxy wars and power struggle. The prime example would be the decolonisation of Algeria.

In sum, the objective of this thesis was to challenge Western views on communism during the Cold War by focusing on the case of France. It aimed to explore the extent to which the USSR influenced European communist parties and how the US managed to reverse public opinion and propagate an anti-communist narrative in a country where communism was glorified in the post-Second World War era. It further sought to understand how international relations shape domestic policies, blurring the line between serving the nation and self-interests.

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