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Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales (CEACS)

**Juan March Institute**

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Author(s): Sferza, Serenella

Date 1994

Type Working Paper

Series Estudios = Working papers / Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales 64 (1994)

City: Madrid

Publisher: Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales

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**ORGANIZATIONAL FORMATS AND PARTY PERFORMANCE:  
THE SHIFTING ADVANTAGES OF FACTIONALISM AND  
THE TRAJECTORY OF THE FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY**

Serenella Sferza

Estudio/Working Paper 1994/64  
November 1994

Serenella Sferza is Professor of the Political Science Department at the Washington University in St. Louis, and was Visiting Professor (Spring Semester 1993) at the *Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences* of the Juan March Institute in Madrid. She presented this paper at a seminar held at the Center on June 1, 1993.

## Introduction

The future of West European parties seems anything but certain. The erosion of long-entrenched patterns of political representation and interest mediation and the identity of the large-scale collective actors and social cleavages on which they rested generates much pessimism about the future of parties, at least as we now know them. At the same time, parties have not entered onto a path of decline as smooth, linear and convergent as the abundant literature on the crisis of parties, with its emphasis on universal structural causes, had anticipated.<sup>1</sup> Cross-national variations have persisted; major parties have displayed discontinuous trajectories, which include episodes of electoral and programmatic revitalization; and the fragmentation of European party system suggests, if not an increase in the variety of party forms and strategies altogether, at least a strong resistance against the expected convergence towards the sort of minimalist electoral parties which analysts perceived as the "one best" model of party competition and organization in advanced industrial societies. Moreover, contrary to expectations, functionally differentiated actors have by and large proven unable to assume the representational and aggregative roles once performed by parties.<sup>2</sup>

Political scientists have responded to these contradictory developments in two major ways. The dominant response has consisted in adjusting and refining the evolutionary approach, which sees party development as the succession of few types-- "notables," "class-mass," "catch-all" and more contestedly "new politics" or "framework" parties-- which correspond to epochal changes in the nature of industrial society. The contrary response rejects the notion that there is "one best" epochal form of party organization. Instead, it builds on variations among parties across and within countries to arrive at a view of party development as a path-dependent, and not necessarily converging, process.

Each approach has important strengths and limitations. The notion that party

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<sup>1</sup> As emphasized by Hans Daalder (1992), discussions of the "crisis" of parties are driven by multiple meanings. This article privileges the "redundancy" argument which underlines most developmental approaches to party development.

<sup>2</sup> This was the underlying assumption behind the vast literature on corporatism. Early work by Philippe Schmitter (1974), for example, totally ignored parties, while Claus Offe saw them as condemned to structural decline. For an exception, however, see Lehmbruch 1977.

development is an environmentally driven evolutionary process marked by the succession of distinct party-types has inspired some of the most influential hypotheses in the party literature. Yet, as discussed below, it rests on rather simplistic views of both the environment and the adaptive mechanisms through which parties respond to it. The path dependency perspective, on the other hand, lends itself to a much richer and more interactive understanding of environmental constraints and party adaptation. The determinism which is avoided when comparing parties among themselves, however, is re-introduced when this approach is applied to a party across time. In this case, the emphasis on continuity within each path makes this approach inattentive to how variations in the environment and party strategies may combine in causing substantial discontinuities in party trajectories. Moreover, both approaches tend to exaggerate the organizational coherence of individual parties.

This paper seeks to contribute to an approach which can account both for the distinctiveness of party trajectories and the discontinuities within them by combining insights drawn from the evolutionary and the path dependence perspectives. Evidence is drawn from the recent history of the French Socialist Party (PS), a party I chose because it presents one of the most striking instances of renewal and decline by a mainstream political formation in Western Europe and is a "misfit" with respect to evolutionary blueprints of party development. Like other European socialist or labour parties over the last decades, the PS faced multiple challenges arising from rapid social and cultural change manifested in the emergence of so-called new social movements, the growth of anti-politics sentiments among mass publics and the fragmentation of traditional political identities. But, instead of responding in conventional ways by conforming to one of the alternative party types, the PS combined some elements of familiar models, such as catch-allism and class mass, along with elements drawn from the new politics and from the historical legacy of French socialism. This response, in turn, took the PS onto a developmental path quite different from those of most of its counterparts, one marked by substantial electoral expansion and internal revitalization in the 1970's and early 1980's, and by subsequent retrenchment.

The Socialists' performance, I argue, can best be understood as the product of organizational reforms introduced at the party's re-founding Epinay Congress in 1971. In particular, the shift from a predominantly territorial-based mode of organization to a factional

one gave French Socialists important but highly contingent advantages. In the 1970s, factionalism was a source of dynamism and growth because it fit with the strategic challenges facing the party; in the changed context of the 1980s, however, it became a factor of decay, preventing the party from consolidating its earlier gains and readjusting its program to new economic and political challenges. The shifting advantages of factionalism are essential to understanding the PS' trajectory. By looking at the party at the aggregate level, however, we can only grasp part of the story. New organizational features, in fact, took different forms as they combined with older legacies across locales, producing distinctive regional models of party organization and functioning that substantially departed from the party's national developmental logic.

The argument unfolds in four parts. The first develops my criticisms of dominant approaches to party development. The second analyzes the developmental path of the PS over the last two and a half decades in terms of the match, and then the mismatch, between party organization and strategy and the environment at the national level. The third section looks at regional variations within this trend and at their impact on the Socialists' ability to weather the falloff in mobilization and other environmental changes which took place in the 1980's. It nuances and deepens the analysis of the comparative advantages of organizational formats presented in the second part and shows the limitations of unitary models of party organization in explaining party development. The final section examines the reasons for the PS' organizational (in)flexibility and draws the general implications of this case for the study of political parties.

### **Approaches to Party Development: Evolution vs. Path Dependency**

In the evolutionary perspective, major changes in the socio-structural and politico-institutional environment provide the underlying motor of party development.<sup>3</sup> Parties are seen

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Epstein 1967 and Kirchheimer 1966. For a recent criticism of this approach, see Sainsbury 1983.

as conforming to few major epochal types, with shifts from one dominant type to another occurring when underlying conditions change sufficiently to justify the emergence of new forms of organization and strategy which carry significant competitive advantages. Parties which cannot shed older and presumably obsolete traits in order to conform to this epochal "one best model" are bound to experience serious decline and marginalization. The rise of traditional class-mass type parties in the decades preceding and following World War I, and their subsequent replacement with catch-all ones beginning in the 1960's, are the most important historical evolutionary shifts identified by this approach. Since catch-allism is at the same time the product of successful electoral adaptation to a changed environment and a source of party weakness by almost all measures of performance, such as membership, voter loyalty, programmatic capacity, control over political and policy agendas and the selection of political personnel, the evolutionary perspective has spurred an immense literature on the crisis of parties as instruments of interest representation, policy making and governance. Recent debates about the emergence of a "new" type of party-- alternatively called "new politics," "ecology" or "framework" parties-- associated with post-industrialism both fit in this analytical frame to the extent to which they focus on the structural determinants of this shift, and question its implications to the extent to which the rise of "new politics" parties suggests a return of ideological and participatory concerns (Kitschelt 1990).

While extremely useful in generating ideal-typical models which have stimulated much historical and cross-national comparative research, this evolutionary perspective suffers from major shortcomings. At the most basic level, it is doubtful whether the typology associated with this approach can serve as a meaningful base for distinguishing among political formations and even for describing individual parties. Comparative research on social democratic and labour parties, for example, has unearthed substantial differences among class-mass parties which are as important as their similarities in affecting their performance.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, catch-allism has come to be identified with a diffuse assortment of traits -- from programmatic moderation and cross-class appeal, to electoralism and strong leadership -- at least some of which are to be found in most parties. To make things messier, the emphasis on the sociological determinants of party typologies and strategies has resulted in the labelling as catch-all of all parties which

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Przeworski and Sprague 1986 and Sartori 1976, as well as work by Sainsbury 1983.

manage to attract wide electoral support.<sup>5</sup> Yet, some of those parties which have been most successful in attracting cross-class support, like the British Conservatives or the French Socialists, have done so by explicitly rejecting the ideological and programmatic blandness associated with catch-allism. As a result, the sociology and the politics of "catch-all" parties do not always match.

Second, many hypotheses about party development generated by the evolutionary perspective are not borne out by actual developments. As mentioned above, for example, it remains unclear whether catch-allism has indeed been a source of comparative advantages. Electoral shifts across political blocs appear to be quite limited and, although parties that catch more votes do win, success does not clearly correlate with one format and strategy and in several cases parties that most approached the catch-all model fared worse than those that did not (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Merkel 1990). Moreover, far from having been simplified through the convergence towards a winning party format, European party systems have, if anything, become more complex as many new parties -mainly, but not exclusively, Green ones- have been formed which explicitly reject catch-allism.<sup>6</sup> Attempts to address these new developments from within the developmental perspective are marred by the same determinism which informs its other assumptions. The idea that parties can be reinvented from scratch to reflect new issues, which undergirds many analyses of new framework parties, suggests a questionable mapping between cleavages and parties which overlooks the ways in which "new" parties are largely shaped by the landscaped terrain in which they are built.<sup>7</sup>

Third, the evolutionary approach rests on a reductionist conceptualization of the environment and on an oversimplified understanding of how parties adapt. This is largely because evolutionary theories emphasize a handful of socio-structural macro-variables of epoch-making significance, such as underlying changes in class composition and cultures, to which

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<sup>5</sup> Merkel and Grunberg criticize the excessive emphasis on the sociological aspects, as opposed to the political ones, of catch-allism both in general terms and with respect to the French PS. See Merkel 1992, Grunberg 1992, and Mayer 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Witness, for example, the Lega Nord in Italy as well as the growth of extreme right parties in many European countries. On the fragmentation of electoral systems and catch-allism see Wolinetz 1979 and 1991.

<sup>7</sup> This assumption is especially present among authors most influenced by Ronald Inglehart's work on post-materialism. See Inglehart 1984 and 1990. For a criticism of this approach, see Lewis (N.d.).

they attribute an unambiguous impact on political representation.<sup>8</sup> Yet, epochal transformations are few and far between. Party innovation is arguably more commonly affected by less "structural" factors, such as shifting levels of societal mobilization, changes in the issue-salience structure and altered alliance opportunities. Not only is any particular configuration of these factors likely to send parties quite mixed signals, but such factors are also quite volatile, with the consequence that what "works" for a party under one set of circumstances can quickly become a liability as conditions change. As a result, the functionality of particular forms of party organization is likely to be too circumstantial and short-lived to produce the lasting advantages which may activate party convergence. In addition, the environment in which parties operate is far from uniform, as national contexts often encompass sub-national variations which justify the co-existence within individual parties of diverse and partly contradictory regional models normally associated with different types of parties.<sup>9</sup> The scope for divergence in party responses widens even further if we consider that parties are historical actors with distinctive legacies which are both a source of stickiness and resourcefulness in confronting new challenges. For all these reasons, evolutionary approaches are far too blunt to capture the complexities and variations of party development.

Path-dependent approaches are better positioned to account for these "anomalies." (Panebianco 1988). In this view, structural environments provide far less unequivocal and universal guidelines for party development than assumed by evolutionary theories and party responses are themselves determinant in interpreting and resolving these ambiguities in ways which are heavily influenced by party-specific resources. Hence, similar social structural conditions can support more than one and only one type of representational system. As shown by past patterns of political development, interests are relatively plastic and highly sensitive to different institutional and representational contexts.<sup>10</sup> The "same" actors can be mobilized in

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<sup>8</sup> Since the emphasis is on macro-structural or institutional traits that are increasingly shared by all West European countries in the first case, and by at least all parties within the same country in the second case, these approaches also more or less explicitly imply a convergence of parties within and across systems.

<sup>9</sup> Much attention has been devoted to the implosion of national economic models and to the study of regional political economies; see for example, Piore and Sabel 1984 and Locke (forthcoming). The implications of this approach have yet to be applied to the study of political parties. See, however, Tarrow 1976.

<sup>10</sup> See the debate on corporatism and the various essays in Berger, ed. 1981.

multiple ways with different implications for party strategy and organization, and, once these variations have become institutionalized, they are likely to reproduce themselves through different patterns of adaptation and change. Moreover, as complex organizations with distinct historical legacies, parties, far from discarding older traditions and resources, adapt by drawing on their ideological and organizational repertoires to meet new constraints and challenges. In this way, distinctive legacies associated with former "stages" and formative experiences are maintained and transformed in ways that help account for the diversity of outcomes across parties.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, some scholars believe that the features parties acquire at their founding are so resilient that they form a sort of genetic code which dictates subsequent development by privileging certain lines of action and foreclosing others (Badie 1989). In this view, therefore, party development is a highly historical process which depends as much on past politics as on structural imperatives and which is best understood in terms of continuity within distinctive paths.

Path dependent approaches offer many correctives to the often simplistic views of the environment and party adaptation that mar the developmental approach. Moreover, it resonates well with the growing emphasis on the political and institutional determinants of interest formation.<sup>12</sup> However, path dependency tends to over-emphasize the coherence of a path once it is taken. Hence, this approach is less equipped to deal with change and discontinuities within individual parties.<sup>13</sup>

In the next sections, I apply insights drawn from both the evolutionary and the path-dependent approach to explain the distinct and discontinuous trajectory of the French Socialist Party. From the evolutionary approach I borrow the idea that party performances largely hinge on the match, or, alternatively, the mismatch, between party organization and strategy and the

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<sup>11</sup> It has often been noted, for example, that parties without strong links to unions, have been unable, or have not even tried, to establish voluntary incomes policy when in office.

<sup>12</sup> Surprisingly, students of parties, having pioneered the study of the impact of institutions on political representation, have been conspicuously absent from the recent revival of this approach under the label of "new institutionalism". This is partly because the approach in itself is less new when applied to political parties, and partly because students of parties have privileged formal macro-institutional rules, notably electoral rules. See Steinmo et al 1992.

<sup>13</sup> For a typical application of this approach to the French Socialist Party, see Portelli 1980.

environment. At the same time, however, I emphasize the role of party resources, rather than of sheer environmental imperatives, in producing these outcomes. Matches, moreover, often depend on environmental factors and resources which are too volatile or too contextual to consolidate into a "one best" format. From the path-dependent approach I borrow the view of adaptive strategies as bounded by the distinctive historical experiences and organizational repertoires of individual parties. However, I depart from the path-dependent approach in suggesting that old traits can acquire new meanings in changed settings, thereby causing unexpected deviations from established trajectories. Moreover, by calling attention to substantial intra-party variations which are usually ignored by both approaches, I also question the fit of individual parties into single unitary types. As a result, I arrive at a view of party development which is more open-ended than that provided by either the evolutionary or the path dependency perspective.

### **Explaining the Trajectory of the French Socialist Party**

The French Socialist Party (SFIO until 1971; PS thereafter) did not follow evolutionary blueprints. During the crucial years of party formation, the persisting salience of the issue of regime stabilization and the ensuing primacy of "political" over social issues, led French Socialists to adopt forms of organization and an ideology that were less class-specific than those of most of their counterparts. While committed to working class interests, the SFIO framed their representation within a larger Republican project. The party never developed an integrated "labour movement" format based on close party-unions links and a self-contained sub-culture and came to resemble more a "citizens'" than a class-mass party (Bergounioux and Grunberg 1992). With no institutionalized support base in the working class, the SFIO was quite ineffective in furthering working class interests and a poor match for the Communist Party. After World War II, French Socialists were dwarfed politically and electorally by a Communist

Party which dominated the political culture and the agenda of the Left and labour movement.<sup>14</sup>

Having been an outlier in the golden age of class-mass parties, French socialism also became an outlier in the new age of catch-allism. Just as political analysts were predicting the decline of traditional left parties, the PS underwent ideological revitalization and electoral expansion, and it did so not by conforming to dominant models. Although the party expanded its appeal beyond the traditional boundaries of the Left to attract a broad spectrum of French society-- a process that made it sociologically more catch-all-- it did not display any of the political features of catch-allism. The PS redefined, but did not abandon, Left ideology and programs: Socialist supporters retained a strong left-wing identity and the PS derived its credibility from a very radical project and alliance strategy, which rested on the expansion of the party's militant capacities and the tightening of its links to organized labour (Lewis and Sferza 1987; Capedevielle et al 1985). When the United Left won power in 1981, the PS was widely regarded as the most successful *and* radical Left European party. At the same time, however, the PS continued to differ remarkably from social democracy in its organization and relation to the labour movement.

Most accounts of the Socialists' success have downplayed its anomalous aspects and presented it as the byproduct of an exceptionally favorable institutional setting and underlying societal context. In these views, modernization created a "natural" constituency for the PS, while the systemic dynamic of the Fifth Republic endowed it with a major positional rent (Lancelot et al 1986; Bell and Criddle 1988). These accounts, however, are misleading on two grounds. They focus nearly exclusively on, and often exaggerate, the sociological catch-allism of the PS while ignoring the highly programmatic stance and militant revitalization which undergirded the party's expansion. And, by presenting the PS as a party "whose time had come" (Bell and Criddle 1988:41), they attribute explanatory power to environmental factors which can best be seen as providing permissive, but not sufficient, conditions for the PS' performance. In light of the popularity of this explanation, I elaborate these criticisms in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>14</sup> At the 1956 legislative elections, for example, the SFIO obtained 15% of the vote as against 26% for the PCF. In 1981, 1986 and 1993 the PS obtained respectively 37,5%, 32% and 17,4% as against 16%, 10% and 4,6% for the PCF.

Societal modernization of the type which took place in France can hardly be said to have dictated the PS' strategy, or to have guaranteed its success, once chosen. Indeed, it is precisely these sorts of social changes that are routinely invoked to account for the triumph, in other comparably developed societies, of catch-allism. Moreover, while the mobilization of new actors and New Politics-style themes in the wake of 1968, served as a catalyst for the party's, the PS' prospects for tapping these resources looked anything but certain. In its initial stages, this wave of mobilization was intensely anti-political, reflecting a profound disillusionment with the prospect of change through electoral politics and an even deeper distrust for traditional parties (Berger 1979). The transformation of the energies unleashed by '68 into an ideological and militant reservoir for the PS, therefore, has to be explained.

Similarly, the systemic logic of the Fifth Republic, with its simultaneously polarizing and centripetal drives, also had ambiguous implications for the PS. In order to benefit from the centripetal drive, French Socialists had to displace the Communist Party as the dominant formation within the Left. Herein lay the rub, for, in order to achieve this latter goal, the PS had to radicalize its program and exacerbate the system's polarizing drive, two requisites which did not augur well for its capacity to attract groups that remained highly distrustful of the PCF and of the statist and jacobin Left tradition it embodied. Had the PS' initial status as the junior partner in the Union of the Left alliance not been reversed, the centripetal logic that ultimately favored the Socialists might have been suppressed within the Left bloc leading to a different scenario with the Communist Party benefitting from the polarizing effect of the electoral system, but at the expense of the electoral prospects of the whole Left.

In the early 1970's, in sum, the societal and institutional contexts of Fifth Republic pulled the PS in opposite directions, any one of which alone would have been insufficient for the PS to succeed, and which, taken together, seemed like a recipe for incoherence and paralysis.<sup>15</sup> If the rapid expansion of an urban, highly-educated, white collar sector and the centripetal drive of presidential elections seemed to call for a catch-all strategy, the polarization of the party system between Left and Right, the conditions of intra-left competition and the extraordinarily high level of mobilization called for a more militant and programmatic approach

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<sup>15</sup> And, in fact, the issue of how to read these contradictory signals prompted many debates within the PS.

associated with class-mass parties. Faced with these contradictory demands, French Socialists, shunning the catch-all approach, went "backwards," in a sense, not to the class-mass stage -- which, as we saw, never really existed in the case of the SFIO -- but to elements of its historical legacy by reviving a form of party organization -- factionalism -- which was part of its repertoire. Factionalism, I argue, allowed the PS to combine organizational traits and strategies associated with class-mass and catch-all parties and even features of framework parties. It was this organizational format that gave the PS the resources and the flexibility it needed to meet apparently incompatible demands.

Thus, the PS's success cannot be "read off" environmental factors or evolutionary blueprints, but rather can be best understood in terms of the match between the party's internal institutional make up and the challenges and opportunities it confronted. The resurfacing of an old trait as an instrument of party renewal is perfectly in keeping with path-dependent approaches and it signalled important continuities in the repertoire of the French Socialist Party. At the same time, the valence it assumed can only be understood within the specific context in which it took place, while its impact on the PS' performance permanently changed the trajectory of the PS and the geometry of the French Left.

## **The Comparative Advantages of Organizational Formats**

The shift from a territorial format to a primarily factional one was the major organizational reform introduced by the new PS.<sup>16</sup> Spurred by the need to keep together the heterogenous coalition headed by François Mitterrand which took control of the party at the Epinay Congress of 1971, this shift deeply affected the PS' political culture and internal functioning.<sup>17</sup> Territorial models of party organization, in fact, are patterned to reflect local,

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<sup>16</sup> The Congress introduced proportional representation of ideological currents on the party's governing bodies at the federational and national levels. While the PS continues to forbid the existence of factions, the distinction between currents and factions is extremely slippery.

<sup>17</sup> To be sure, this dichotomy, while it captures different institutional logics of party organization, does not cover the full range of party configurations. Since almost all parties contain a certain amount of factionalism and, as long as parties contest elections, factions never fully replace territorial units, it downplays similarities across types and

electoral and administrative concerns; they are likely to favor issues and forms of recruitment and mobilization that "fit" with existing electoral alliances and do not threaten the position of established local leaders. Hence they appear better suited to the conservation of resources and party reproduction at times of low mobilization. The factional model which prevailed in the PS, by contrast, rested on highly vertically integrated units which competed on ideological grounds and served as an optimal conductor for the energies unleashed by high mobilization.<sup>18</sup> As factions eclipsed departmental federations as the main loci of activism, socialization, political debate and party governance, they became a major factor of symbiosis between the party and its environment.

The existence within the party of distinct political projects and organizational networks which targeted distinct audiences enabled the PS to simultaneously pursue strategies which are usually associated with different types of parties. Factionalism, as I show in the next section, differentiated the PS' political "offer," and it promoted an ideological and institutional dynamic which helped the party gain proximity to a variety of mobilized actors and renew its relations with labor. As a result, the PS became simultaneously a more catch-all and a more militant party and was able to combine horizontal growth, a term by which I refer to the widening of its following beyond the Left's traditional partisan and sociological borders and vertical growth, a term by which I refer to the deepening of its coverage of the Left electorate.<sup>19</sup>

By the mid 1980's, however, the environment had changed dramatically. The conquest of power in 1981 and the break-up of the Union of the Left in 1983; the exhaustion of the

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ignores critical differences within formats, such as those between ideology-based and patronage-centered factionalism and between centralized and decentralized territorial formats.

<sup>18</sup> While there is an abundant literature on factional dynamics within specific parties, there has been little attempt to reflect in a systematic way about the consequences of factional formats. See, however, Sartori 1976; Panebianco 1988; Hanley 1986; Bergounioux and Grunberg 1992; Hine 1982.

<sup>19</sup> For a more extended discussion of these terms, see Serenella Sferza (N.d.). To be sure, horizontal and vertical growth can never be fully separated. Because of a variety of factors, ranging from inter-generational "leakage" and the erosion of passions to the shift in interests over time, vertical growth cannot be taken for granted. However, there are important underlying continuities in political socialization and the terms of appeal are not likely to differ radically from one generation or one component of the collectivity to another. As a result, vertical growth is the most common source of party revitalization, but also the most endangered by social and cultural change. See Noiriel and Percheron 1989. On the evolution of the Socialist electorate in France, see Bell and Criddle 1988. For a discussion of "cultural liberalism" as a component of the Socialist vote, see Capdevielle et al 1985; Dupoirier and Grunberg 1986; and Boy and Mayer 1990.

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ideological and militant reservoirs created by the mobilizations of the late 1960's and early 1970's; the inability of Left governments to bring about economic growth and their subsequent abandonment of their more radical policies and the emergence of new issues that cross-cut pre-existing alignments altered the political agenda and the terms of political competition. These factors, together with the emergence of the Mitterrandists as the clearly dominant faction in the PS, eroded the advantages of factionalism. In this later period, the PS' performance was negatively affected by a growing mismatch between its organizational format and its environment.

The following table summarizes the relationship between organizational formats and levels of mobilization.

**Table 1**

Organizational Format	Shifts from:	
	Low to High Mobilization	High to Low Mobilization
Factional	Favorable for Horizontal Growth Renewal	Likely Retrenchment Liability for Reproduction
Territorial	Mismatch; Party Misses Opportunity For Renewal	Favorable for Consolidating Renewal

### **Organizational Match: Factionalism in the 1970's**

In the early 1970's, factionalism in the PS was a primarily ideological phenomenon which embodied different stances with respect to the major issues that had long been a matter of

contention within the French Left.<sup>20</sup> Some factions, notably the one associated with Michel Rocard, adhered to a society-centered view of political and economic transformation which would simultaneously empower workers and citizens and introduce change through the practice of *autogestion*.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the Rocardians aimed at building a framework party informally linking together a wide array of groups and associations, and sought to emancipate the Left from the ideological and organizational hegemony of the PCF which they saw as inherently authoritarian and even conservative. Others, notably the faction identified with François Mitterrand, combined more conformist views, rooted in the Republican tradition of the French Left with its emphasis on statism and *laïcité*, with a unitary Left strategy, one in which the alliance with the PCF was both instrumental to the Socialists' electoral triumph and justified by a shared historical past. Still others, notably the CERES, presented an original synthesis of old and new demands, combining statism and mass participation, openness to modernist technocratic themes and attachment to Republican values. Extremely critical of the transformative potential of the Left as long as it remained divided, the CERES sought to transform the PS into a class-mass party with solid working-class support and to promote its fusion with a reformed Communist party.

Competition between these alternative strategies of party building and societal transformation was a crucial factor in the PS' ideological and militant renewal.<sup>22</sup> Party Congresses became major occasions for programmatic debate and major political and leadership choices. The mechanisms of internal representation, which made participation in the party's leading bodies dependent on the support mustered by distinct Congressional motions, encouraged factions to engage in ideological debate and develop permanent organizational

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<sup>20</sup> Attempts to analyze various factions by locating them on a right-left continuum or by looking at the social characteristics of their supporters have led to rather unsatisfactory results. On the one hand, the validity of Left-Right criteria appears quite arbitrary at a time when what was at stake was precisely the definition of the Left and hence of the various criteria traditionally used to identify it. On the other hand, the fact that the two most opposed factions -- the Rocardians and the CERES -- had the most similar social bases at the grass-roots level helps dispel sociological explanations of the PS' politics.

<sup>21</sup> On Socialist factions, see, among others, Bergounioux and Grunberg 1992; Hanley 1986; Rey and Subileau 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Autogestion, the single most popular and decisive ideological innovation adopted by the PS was almost singlehandedly imported into the party by the CERES before becoming the axis of major intra-left debates.

networks. The raised stakes and vitality of intra-party politics, in turn, gave Socialist sympathizers incentives to join the party. At the same time, since none of the factions gained total hegemony over the party until 1981, each faction had powerful incentives to seek out new members and ideas in order to strengthen its relative position in the party.<sup>23</sup> As factions engaged in a competitive drive to gain proximity to collective actors and to impart political coherence, albeit as parts of competing strategies, to the ideas and the demands of a wide variety of groups, from regionalist and women groups to catholic unionists and secular associations, they wove multiple ties between the party and mobilized sectors of society.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to encouraging the opening of the PS, factionalism also shaped the party's reach. By allowing the PS to differentiate its offer, and hence to achieve the electoral effectiveness usually attributed to catch-allism, while at the same time eschewing the ideological and militant demobilization associated with this type of party, factionalism, in fact, acted as a "widener" and a "deepener" of the Socialists' appeal.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, the co-existence of different discourses and projects stretched the PS' coverage of the political spectrum. With each faction targeting a distinct audience, the party as a whole succeeded in giving expression to a variety of currents which had developed outside of mainstream party politics and whose appeal extended well beyond the Left, while at the same time renewing longstanding commitments to the traditional goals and audiences of the French Left. Some factions, like the Mitterrandists, Mauroyists and, in part, the CERES, emphasized ideas and policies, such as *laïcité* and nationalization, which had long been part of the Left's historical repertoire. They were especially effective as instruments of vertical growth in competing with the PCF for the support of those occupational and cultural collectivities, such as civil servants, public school teachers, secular "red" peasants and sectors of the working class that comprised the Left's core support base.<sup>26</sup> Other factions, namely the Rocardians but also the early CERES,

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<sup>23</sup> According to Panebianco (1988), parties governed by divided and unstable coalitions are likely to adopt a conquering attitude vis-a-vis their environments and possibly to encourage participation.

<sup>24</sup> Electoral growth, far from leading to a centrist position, was accompanied by an increase of left-wing identifiers and higher rates of approval for key points of the Left program, like nationalization. See Lewis and Sferza 1987.

<sup>25</sup> On "political offer", see Gaxie, ed. 1985.

<sup>26</sup> The point is not that these groups are "naturally" socialist because of their inherent characteristics, but that they

incorporated into the Socialists' symbolic discourse and programs, a wide array of demands, ranging from *autogestion* and decentralization to gender issues, which had become extremely popular after May 1968.<sup>27</sup> They were especially effective as instruments of horizontal growth: they attracted to the PS newly mobilized groups that had no prior ties to the Left, such as peasants in western France, progressive catholics, regionalists and middle and upper level cadres; promoted the rapprochement between what was still a largely anti-clerical party with weak links to organized labour and the CFDT, and they presided over the PS' expansion into France's most conservative regions.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, the compartmentalization of audiences through their identification with distinct factional political discourses and national leaders and their participation in separate factional networks, allowed the PS to reconcile its ideological and electoral eclecticism with a militant and programmatic stance. Throughout the 1970's, factions created separate microcosms with distinct paths of recruitment, activism and political career. By publishing their own reviews or bulletins; organizing conferences and summer schools; promoting political tourism; housing their members in distinct hotels at party congresses and discouraging cross-factional fraternization, factions created very high levels of factional identification and insulation among party members.<sup>29</sup> This compartmentalization recreated within factions the political coherence and bonds which their co-existence may have obscured at the global party level. As a result, factionalism served as an antidote to the ideological blandness and the decline of militancy which usually accompany the diversification of a party's ideological and sociological appeal (Kirchheimer 1966; Pizzorno 1966).

The impact of factionalism as a deepener, and not only a widener, of the PS' appeal was essential in a highly mobilized and polarized context where the PS needed access to ideological

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had been captured within the Left's sphere of influence during a phase of previous horizontal growth that had happened sometimes in the past.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the faction's differential appeal, see Subileau 1987.

<sup>28</sup> The CERES and the Rocardians, for example, played a central role in organizing the 1974 Assises du socialisme, which marked the PS' opening to Catholics and the deepening of its links to the CFDT. This was a particularly important aspect of party-building in a context where establishing ties to organized labour was a touchstone of the party's newfound credibility and legitimacy within the Left.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Hanley 1986.

and militant resources to displace the PCF as the dominant component of the Left.<sup>30</sup> Collective actors like the CFDT, which controlled these resources were not likely to respond favorably to the individualistic appeal and weak message associated with catch-allism. Steeped in the anti-politics ethos of 1968, and deeply committed to identities and forms of collective action which had grown largely outside of, if not against, traditional political channels, these groups put a high premium on ideological consistency and direct political participation and distrusted parties as inherently bureaucratic and opportunistic. Factions helped to bridge the ideological and institutional gap between newly mobilized groups and the PS in a variety of ways.

First of all, factionalism offered potential recruits a rather extensive menu of choice and a strategy of "qualified entry." By joining a faction, activists could selectively embrace those elements of party ideology and program, like *autogestion* or extensive nationalization, which they shared, while neglecting, or even combatting, those with which they disagreed.<sup>31</sup> As a former CFDT official, put it: "One joined the CERES, not the PS."<sup>32</sup> This combination made party membership congruent with a variety of prior beliefs and militant practices. Second, factionalism appeared to offer a counterweight to the stifling of debate and participation associated with large organizations. By channeling participation into smaller politically-defined sub-units, factions multiplied the symbolic and, in part, also the selective incentives that sustain activism, thus replicating within the PS the energizing dynamic that tends to develop in small and cohesive groups (Olson 1965). Third, factionalism was seen as guarantor of pluralism, leading newcomers to believe they could reconcile their pre-existing ideological affinities and solidarities with party membership.<sup>33</sup> For all these reasons, factions facilitated the recruitment of key groups of activists who brought to the PS extremely valuable skills and linkages to the labour movement and other less traditional movements.

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<sup>30</sup> The underlying assumption here is that the composition and size of a party's membership are important components of party performance: They anticipate electoral growth and, more importantly, are crucial to the renewal of the party in programmatic, ideological and personnel terms. See Kitschelt 1989.

<sup>31</sup> In other words, factionalism helped the PS to resolve the tensions between what Kitschelt (1990) has termed the constituency and representational logics of party-building.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted from Lewis (N.d.).

<sup>33</sup> This was the case with the CFDT union confederation, for example, whose most politicized unions affiliated informally to the PS in this period by identifying closely with particular factions. See Lewis (N.d.).

In addition to facilitating the absorption of the "new", factions also eased the shedding of the old. The PS had inherited a rather decentralized organization in which party notables were free to pursue a variety of alliance strategies depending of local specificities. This power structure was likely to produce strong pockets of resistance to the innovations endorsed by the PS in 1971 and, in particular, to the nationwide alliance with the PCF. By creating direct links between the national and local levels that cut across geographic locales, factionalism recast intra-party lines of loyalty and solidarity and provided national leaders with a chain of command that bypassed territorial structures.<sup>34</sup> Since in most federations factional loyalties were stronger than geographically-based ones, this system of internal governance was quite effective in overcoming parochialism within the party.

Moreover, factionalism promoted a style of party politics which accelerated the renovation of party personnel, a feature which was critical to the new PS' credibility. As ideological and political-programmatic considerations informed by factional solidarities and inter-factional rivalries took precedence over territorial loyalties, the criteria for access to leadership shifted from technical expertise, personal notoriety and seniority to more explicitly political ones.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the existence of competing factional networks encouraged the spread of political vocations and increased the supply of new leaders, thereby making the selection process more competitive.<sup>36</sup> As a result, many territorially-based party leaders and power brokers who remained outside the symbolic discourse set by the factional axes of conflict were disarmed. In their place, new types of leaders came to the fore: ideologues bred by the factional system, and militants whose activist background entitled them to speak on behalf of mobilized societal actors. Hence, renewal at the rank-and-file level quickly extended to the

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<sup>34</sup> The SFIO's national leadership had usually observed a strategy of non-interference in the internal affairs of its departmental federations and possessed few resources for intervening in local party politics. The redistribution of power to the advantage of the party's central leadership was particularly important in light of the Socialists' strategy of "competitive alliance" with the PCF which required a high degree of coordination and internal discipline.

<sup>35</sup> By casting competition among leaders in ideological terms, factionalism also ensured that such conflicts for the most part took on a political aspect, thereby reducing the negative effect of purely personal rivalries on the PS' morale and image.

<sup>36</sup> During the years of party rebuilding, semi-official leadership positions within the factional networks were valued as much as, if not more than, official territorial office. On the importance of symbolic and power rewards for participation, see Olson 1965 and Pizzorno 1966.

party's intermediate level. This, in turn, enhanced the PS' presence in social struggles and lent credibility to its rhetoric.

Finally, factionalism helped buffer the strains caused by increased differentiation. By organizing recruits on the basis of explicit political projects, factions softened the confrontation between sociological and religious identities at a time when the inflow of both Catholics and Marxists into the party made such conflict inevitable. Most notably, the fact that the two most politically opposed factions, the CERES and the Rocardians, recruited heavily among left Catholics lessened the relevance of the religious-laique cleavage as a raw source of intra-party conflict. In addition, factions, by effectively compartmentalizing their followers within distinct micro-parties, played a role similar to that of vertically integrated "pillars" in consociational societies.<sup>37</sup> In this way, factions contributed not only to the PS' capacity to host multiple political projects and audiences, but also to contain the conflicts engendered by this diversity.

For all these reasons, throughout the 1970's, factional pluralism and inter-factional competition were major causes of party extroversion and a powerful instrument of party building. They gave credibility to the Socialists' claim of representing both traditional left wing demands, ranging from nationalizations to a more labour-inclusive system, and new ones, like *autogestion* and gender issues and they largely explain the PS' ability to satisfy apparently incompatible requirements through a hybrid strategy that combined elements associated with different party types.

### **Organizational Mismatch: Factionalism in the 1980's**

As the political circumstances that attended the birth of the new PS changed, however, factions degenerated from instruments of flexibility and adaptation into factors of conservation

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<sup>37</sup> As mentioned above, factions possessed distinct channels of recruitment, participation, debate and socialization which limited their members' contacts with those of rival groups. At the time of the Portuguese Revolution, for example, factions organized separate delegations; and the CERES discouraged its single members from fraternizing with those of rival factions, and was even known to require its own delegates to stay in a distinct hotel during party congresses.

and paralysis. To be sure, many of the difficulties encountered by the PS from the mid-1980's onwards were not related to the party's organizational format. Access to power in an international conjuncture that was highly unfavorable to the Left's expansionary economic program, a variety of policy failures and political errors weighed heavily in the disarray of, and disillusionment with, French Socialists.<sup>38</sup> Yet, as the favorable circumstances of the 1970's are not sufficient to explain the PS' success, so the difficult context of the 1980's cannot fully account for the party's inability to consolidate its earlier gains.<sup>39</sup> This inability, which was dramatically anticipated by the stagnation of the PS' membership from 1978 onwards, I argue in this section, was largely due to the growing mismatch between the party's organizational format and its environment.<sup>40</sup>

Three developments, related to changes in the party's external environment and in the institutional logic of factionalism itself, were especially important to this outcome. First of all, from the late 1970's onwards, France witnessed a sharp decline of mobilization. This depleted the reservoir of ideas and activists which had nurtured the PS' renewal. It also somewhat devalued many of the societal linkages on which factions had been built. Second, the reduction of the Socialist-Communist alliance to a purely electoral one and the retreat of the Socialist-led government in 1983 from many of its more controversial and radical policy commitments undermined the factions' programmatic *raisons d'être*.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, economic stagnation and the emergence of new issues, such as those related to immigration, the environment and European integration, confronted the Socialists with a new agenda. Third, the PS' victory of 1981 consolidated the Mitterrandists' hegemony over the party and gave them extensive access to governmental resources. All these factors transformed the logic of inter-factional rivalry from

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Hall, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Significantly, in 1990, Socialist activists were more satisfied about the Socialist government than about their Party, *Libération*, 03-14-1990.

<sup>40</sup> Party membership increased from about 70,000 in 1970 to 180,000 in 1978, peaked briefly to 213,000 in 1982 and subsequently declined to about 170,000 by the end of the 1980's. See Kergoat 1983 and Philippe and Hubscher 1991.

<sup>41</sup> On the substantial irrelevance of factional cleavages in the debate over economic policies in the early 1980's, see Cameron 1988.

a competitive and extroverted one into a collusive and introverted one.<sup>42</sup>

While the capacity of the PS to adapt to the new challenges of the 80's cannot be assumed, factionalism rendered such a response practically impossible. As they sought to maintain their bases of support, factions reproduced within the party a freezing of cleavages and alignments similar to that which political parties strive to maintain in the political system at large (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Sartori 1976). This tendency was strengthened, especially among the Mitterrandists, by the centrality of factional criteria in the allocation of governmental and party posts.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the 1980's, factions clung to ideological frameworks which the narrowing of policy options and the decline of mobilization had rendered obsolete and which seemed especially misplaced in light of the transformation of factions into instruments of power acquisition and maintenance. As new initiatives were blocked or delayed by factional preoccupations, the politics of the PS appeared increasingly detached from the concerns and issues facing the Left and labour movement.<sup>44</sup> Having lent the PS ideological and programmatic credibility, factions became associated in the public mind with the most byzantine and opaque aspects of intra-party politics. Even for socialist sympathizers, the need to align with a faction upon joining the party became a deterrent from maintaining or acquiring membership in the PS (Philippe and Hubscher 1991).

As it became clear that no faction or coalition of factions could challenge the hegemony of the Mitterrandists, moreover, party leaders came to value the preservation of the complex constellation of delicate and interdependent local and national factional deals more than the uncertainty of growth. In many federations and sections where power equilibria were vulnerable to marginal shifts in membership, party officials, irrespective of their factional affiliation, saw the entry of new members of uncertain factional allegiance as a source of destabilization and a risk which was not worth taking.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the PS even developed a new term for disparaging

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<sup>42</sup> The case of the PS confirms Panebianco's analysis of stable factional equilibria leading to organizational stasis and the absence of recruitment drives. See Panebianco 1988: 99ff.

<sup>43</sup> The founding leaders of the main factions enjoyed such a monopoly on power positions in the party as well as in the government that, by the mid' 1980's, they were commonly known as "the elephants".

<sup>44</sup> See for example the debate on modernization in the mid-1980's.

<sup>45</sup> See the case of Ille-et-Vilaine discussed below and D. Deleris, *La section socialiste d'Epinay-sur-Seine de 1947*

this negative attitude towards recruitment: "malthusianism." Needless to say, this did little to arrest the haemorrhage of members. Losses were especially pronounced in federations where intense factional rivalries had corroded territorially-based forms of partisan sociability and participation and among those groups who most symbolized the horizontal growth of the 1970's, and who were particularly disgusted by the discovery that factional politics meant "power politics as usual."<sup>46</sup>

Similar diminishing returns were evident in the effectiveness of factions as instruments of party governance. As personal ambitions and loyalties displaced ideological convictions, in fact, factions lost much of their cohesiveness. This impaired the ability of national leaders to enforce on their own troops the inter-factional deals through which the party was governed. The breakdown at the local level of national agreements which apportioned among factions the expected shrinkage of the party's parliamentary representation at the 1986 legislative elections, is a typical example of the factions' reduced capacity to act as vertical chains of command.<sup>47</sup> Since, as noted above, factions also bequeathed to the party a "surplus" of leaders armed with distinct networks of support, their diminished capacities to command loyalty led to bitter local infighting and to the appearance of rival socialist slates at national and regional elections.

This implosion of factions was particularly destabilizing since the PS, having always relied on factional mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts, lacked explicit and routinized procedures for handling party matters. Hence, conflict tended to spread from issues to procedures endangering the very legitimacy of decision making. In 1986, for example, the fight surrounding the choice of a new party secretary centered not only on the identity of Lionel Jospin's successor, but also on which party instance was entitled to designate him. Moreover, as conflict became more personalized, it also proved more difficult to mediate. This was nicely illustrated by the 1991 Party Congress, which ended with the factions' failure to agree on a

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a 1981, *Mémoire de maîtrise d'histoire contemporaine*, Paris XII, 1983.

<sup>46</sup> By the late 1980's, relations among factions had so deteriorated that in many urban centers with multiple sections factional criteria had displaced geographical ones in determining the members' affiliation to a section. (Philippe and Hubscher 1991). On the importance of sociability as a reason for membership, see also Subileau 1988.

<sup>47</sup> On the procedure to apportion losses and the conflicts it created, see F. Sawicki, "Application de la sociologie des organisations à l'étude du PS", *Maîtrise de Sociologie*, Paris V, 1986.

common platform. This outcome, which was both unprecedented and paradoxical since the draft versions presented by the factions were, unlike in the past, virtually identical, was a major blow to the PS' image.

### **Variations within One Model or Plurality of Models?**

Thus far we have seen how organizational reforms helped the PS adapt to the political and social context of the 1970's and impeded adaptation when this context changed. I hope to have shown that much can be learned about the PS by relating its trajectory to its organizational format. Yet, this national perspective only brings us part of the way in understanding the nature of the PS and oversimplifies the relationship between organizational and environmental variables. The evolution of the PS in the period under discussion, in fact, was marked by two parallel and partly contradictory sets of developments. On the one hand, organizational and programmatic reforms increased the party's uniformity and homogenized its performance across locales. The shift to a factional format was a major source of "nationalization" of party life. Standardization of local alliances was another. Moreover, horizontal growth narrowed regional variations in the PS' electoral performance and partly redressed the imbalance of power between strong and weak federations. On the other hand, however, internal reforms interacted with pre-existing local traditions and leadership styles in ways that differed from one federation to the other, producing a less-noticeable longer-term tendency towards the reproduction of internal differentiation.<sup>48</sup> Far from representing minor deviations, I argue, these regional variations resulted in distinct modes of party functioning and vulnerability to environmental changes. Rather than being sacrificed to the temptation of seeing the PS' trajectory through the lenses of a unitary organizational mould, they should be put to use in an effort to reach a better understanding of organizational dynamics and party development. This is what I seek to do in the remainder of the paper.

The interaction between factionalism and territorialism could generate three major

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<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the SFIO's internal differences, see Sadoun 1989.

organizational configurations: factions could eclipse federal structures; territorial structures could resist factional inroads; or a hybrid pattern based on the interpenetration of factionalism and territorialism could emerge. Which outcome prevailed was not accidental, but largely depended on local structural and political factors. At the most general level, the permeability of territorialism tended to be inversely related to the strength of the SFIO's implantation.<sup>49</sup> In departments where the SFIO controlled substantial electoral resources and posts, leaders were both more hesitant to jeopardize this capital and better positioned to coopt factional challengers. Since these tended to be "red" departments with strong intra-left competition for local hegemony, Socialists also feared that pronounced divisions would play into the hands of the PCF. In addition, these federations underwent a predominantly vertical growth, a factor which lessened internal differentiation and favored the party's more traditional factions. Resistance to factionalism was especially effective in federations where the transition to the PS was successfully negotiated by a dominant notable who would then combine his local and national influence to fend off factional competition and reforms.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, factionalism tended to dominate territorialism in regions which had a strong Catholic tradition, directly experienced the mobilizations of the 1970's, and lacked a dominant notable able to lead the transition to the new PS. While these structural factors shaped the field for the confrontation between factionalism and territorialism, the strategic behavior of the local leadership could also, as shown by the existence of important intra-regional variations, tilt the balance one way or another. In particular, a cooperative and inclusive behavior which contrasted with the adversarial stance which prevailed at the national level was crucial to the emergence of the hybrid organizational format in which territorial and factional structures blended together.<sup>51</sup>

The following table traces the PS' evolution in terms of these configurations.

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<sup>49</sup> See Hanley (1986) for a discussion of the CERES' implantation.

<sup>50</sup> The most obvious example here is Defferre in the Bouches-du-Rhone.

<sup>51</sup> This is exemplified by the successful melting of territorialism and factionalism by the Loire-Atlantique and by the Pas-de-Calais, two federations which, on the basis of more structural indicators, ought to have fallen into the factional and territorial models.

**Table 2**

Organizational Basis	Type of growth	
	Horizontal	Vertical
Faction-based	1. Ideological and Organizational Renewal: PS in the 1970's and some "Melting Pot" Federations in the '80s.	2. Retrenchment and Malthusianism: PS and factional federations in the 1980's.
Territorial	3. Classic "Catch-allism.". Does not apply to the PS at the aggregate level, but it could be applied to few Federations with an hegemonic leader.	4. Enclave party: Uneven Reproduction. Post-war SFIO and some Notable-based PS Federations in the 1970's.

The next section takes a closer look at two Socialist federations which exemplify opposite growth trajectories and organizational modes. The Ille-et-Vilaine federation replicates in magnified form the PS' faction-driven dynamic. By contrast, the Pas-de-Calais, developed an original synthesis between territorialism and factionalism. In the 1970's, the Ille-et-Vilaine federation symbolized the dynamism and promises of the new PS while its stagnating Pas-de-Calais counterpart appeared as an anachronistic remnant almost untouched by the shift from the SFIO to the PS. By the end of the 1980's, however, the relative standing of the two federations had been reversed: while the Ille-et-Vilaine stagnated, the Pas-de-Calais had become one of the few bright points in an electorally declining and conflict-ridden party.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> For a synopsis of the PS' regional implantation and electoral performance see Philippe and Hubscher 1991 and, for a more in-depth analysis of these two federations, Sferza (N.d.).

## **The Factional Model: The Ille-et-Vilaine Federation**

Brittany, once a missionary land for the Left, is the region where the PS has realized its greatest electoral gains. The SFIO's weak implantation; the relatively low threat posed by the PCF; the presence of a vital Catholic subculture and strong mobilization on a variety of social, regional and new politics issues meant that the Breton PS was built primarily through a process of horizontal growth. To an even greater extent than at the national level, the success of the Breton PS hinged on the capacity to incorporate new themes and activists and break free from the religious cleavage into which the Left had previously been confined. Perhaps nothing best conveys this new brand of socialism than the profile of Socialist Breton leaders in the 1970's: departing from the Right's *notabiliaire* tradition and from the Left's *laïque* mold, they were mostly young and unknown but for their involvement in a dense associational and militant network, and their biographies cut across the religious divide of Breton politics. In Ille-et-Vilaine, for example, the department's largest socialist sections were headed by Catholics, a teacher in a private school and a small farmer who had been a major protagonist of the peasants' struggles in the early 1970's. Socialist candidates no longer campaigned for the abolition of private schools but for a much wider range of issues, from the maintenance of schools in small rural communes to the economic, cultural and political empowerment of Brittany against the domination of the central state. This often led to spectacular victories as unconventional Socialists reached across the religious divide to socially progressive Catholics.<sup>53</sup> Organizational growth followed suit: between 1973 and 1979, the Breton PS grew from 800 to 6,500 members (Philippe and Hubscher 1991).

The near absence of pre-existing party structures and influential leaders meant that factions met with very little resistance. At the same time, the availability of a wide pool of activists and themes which did not belong to the mainstream Left benefitted the party's most

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<sup>53</sup> One such case, leading to the victory of Charles Josselin over a well entrenched notable, is discussed by J. Lebullenger, "Un scrutin exemplaire: L'élection législative de Mars 1973 à Dinan", Mémoire D.E.A., Rennes, 1973.

innovative factions and the most open to *autogestion*, the CERES and the Rocardians.<sup>54</sup> Far from being simple receptacles for members, ideas and leaders, these factions played a constitutive role in seeking out and forming activists and they shaped the local political context by countering the localism that might have resulted from the regionalist mobilizations of the 1970's. Here the Rocardians, with their capacity to link Breton concerns for decentralization and cultural specificities to a global vision of bottom up societal transformation, are a case in point. By the same token, factions gave an edge to the most "political" among potential leaders who could articulate both national and local concerns at the expense of the more technocratic or territorial ones. In the absence of a solid territorially-based apparatus that could arbitrate conflicts and enforce apprenticeship requirements, moreover, factions became the primary channels of party governance and leadership allocation.

The Ille-et-Vilaine federation well exemplifies this regional pattern. Here it was the CERES which propelled the PS' renewal. *Laique* leaders opposed to the Union of the Left were expelled, sections which clung to centrist alliances were dissolved, and new ones were created which exemplified the cultural and sociological opening of the party.<sup>55</sup> The influx of members into the PS via the CERES and, later on, the Rocardian faction, connected the party with a variety of mobilized groups, from peasants to neighborhood and Third Worldist associations and Catholic workers. Many of these new members privileged political principles over electoral success. In the Rennes mayoral races of 1971 and 1978, these criteria led to the designation as the party's candidate a young and unknown CERES representative, Edmond Hervé, over a much more widely known and experienced leader who, even in the eyes of his opponents, could have won the election on the strength of his personal reputation but was criticized for being too much

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<sup>54</sup> On the CERES, see Hanley 1986. In 1979, at the bitterly divided congress of Metz, it was among the Breton federations that Rocard's motion obtained its best score; in 1981, 8 out of Brittany's 14 Socialist deputies were Rocardian and at the 1985 Socialist congress, Rocard's motion scored a regional average of 55% as against a national one of 30%; three out of the ten departments where Rocard obtained a majority of mandates were located in Brittany.

<sup>55</sup> Many of the new members were peasants, catholics and newly urbanized white and blue collar workers with no previous ties to the left. In Rédon, not a single member in the PS section had belonged to the SFIO; in others, like Fougères, working class members, affiliated to the catholic organizations like the CFDT and the JOC, provided most of the recruits. In Rennes, while only few members of the Socialist list at the 1978 municipal election were practicing catholics, a majority came from practicing families and was heavily involved in the CFDT and the local associational networks. See Sferza (N.d.).

of a technocrat.<sup>56</sup> When Hervé became mayor of Rennes in 1977, after a campaign that spurred unprecedented grass-roots mobilization and swelled the ranks of the party, this was seen as a vindication of the CERES aggressive strategy of party building and as major sign of party renewal.

The hopes and expectations raised by this success, however, were short-lived. In fact, the mayoral campaign of 1977, the one episode which is still fondly remembered by many current and past members, was the high point of the PS in Ille-et-Vilaine. Some of the difficulties experienced by the federation were rooted in regional specificities and were shared by most of its Breton counterparts. The conquest of local and national office diverted the energies of most capable leaders from party building to municipal and national political matters at a time in which the PS' foundations remained very fragile. In Ille-et-Vilaine, this was notably the case of Hervé, the mayor and deputy of Rennes who served as a minister in several Left governments. Moreover, the Socialists' shift from opposition to power undermined the symbiosis between the party and the constellation of regional and social movements. In part, this was to be expected as the PS ceased to be a magnet for cultural and political contestation and became, instead, a target of protest.<sup>57</sup> In part, however, this was the paradoxical byproduct of the Socialists' responsiveness to demands for change. As the Left's decentralizing reforms and the cooperative stance of Socialist elected officials offered new points of entry and leverage, they also reduced the dependence of regional and local actors on party-specific resources.

While these regional problems alert us to the difficulties of party building, others stemmed from the dominance of unfettered factionalism and the adversarial strategy of local leaders. Due to the type of growth experienced by the Ille-et-Vilaine PS, the development of territorial structures of arbitration and socialization hinged upon the emergence of an hegemonic leader, as in the neighboring federation of Cotes d'Armor, or, alternatively, on the local leaders' adoption of a cooperative and inclusive behavior, as in Loire-Atlantique (Philippe and Hubscher 1991). Neither condition developed in Ille-et-Vilaine. The abandonment by the CERES, the federation's dominant faction, of *autogestionnaire* themes for an increasingly statist approach

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<sup>56</sup> Personal interviews.

<sup>57</sup> This was especially obvious in the case of the ecologists.

disillusioned many of its local supporters. This, however, did not lead to an understanding with the federation's substantial Rocardian minority. Instead, past and current CERES leaders continued to cooperate in combatting the Rocardians, while simultaneously engaging in a competitive effort to move closer to the party's Mitterrandist core. This promised to be a rewarding strategy in a region whose major leaders belonged to the more peripheral CERES and Rocardian factions. Since the PS' ideologically charged climate prevented open migration across factions, it also translated into a politics of *trasformismo* based on personal and cross-factional alliances resting on procedural tricks and ad hoc conversions.<sup>58</sup> Ironically, Hervé, who had initiated this strategy was also one of its victims: by the mid 1980's, he stood out among national Socialist leaders as one of the very few who had no control over their federations. More broadly, the manipulation of factional allegiances for personal goals emptied factions of their ideological legitimacy, rendered intra-party conflicts more pervasive and hermetic and encouraged a highly conspiratorial mode of party politics from which rank-and-file members were excluded, and embittered the substantial Rocardian minority and poisoned inter-personal relations within the federation.<sup>59</sup>

As a result, the Ille-et-Vilaine PS experienced the drawbacks of factionalism earlier and in a more magnified form than the party at the aggregate level. In a department which offered few opportunities for upward mobility and where factionalism had produced both excess leadership and a lack of arbitral powers or accepted criteria for promotion to harness it, the presence of multiple leaders became a source of paralysis and introversion. Moreover, since the small size of the federation and the tight balance between the dominant coalition and the Rocardians meant that relatively minor changes in membership could swing control of the federation from one camp to the other, majority leaders became highly suspicious of expansion turning the Ille-et-Vilaine PS into a perfect illustration of that lamented by Socialist leaders.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> CERES exponents strongly encouraged the formation of a Mitterrandist faction. Later on, Mitterrandists and CERES cooperated in creating a fake "neo"-Rocardian faction to weaken their "truly" Rocardian opponents, and, in 1990, they were hedging their bets by tactically splitting their support between the two competing Mitterrandist streams.

<sup>59</sup> While immune from *trasformismo*, the Rocardians, drained by factional struggles, gave up efforts to reform the federation.

<sup>60</sup> In 1990, only 1 out of every 100 Socialist Ille-et-Vilaine voters belonged to the Party. This ranked the

By the early 1980's, the Ille-et-Vilaine PS was practically absent from the local political scene and had reverted to a pattern of narrowly vertical recruitment. The federation organized virtually no public meetings and had no sustained contacts with outside groups, recruitment efforts were limited to the cooptation of "safe" individuals, and important organizational and militant resources had been purposefully squandered. In some cases, prominent sympathizers were discouraged from joining; in others, valuable cadres who belonged to the "wrong" factions were deliberately wasted in the wrong posts.<sup>61</sup> Not surprisingly, membership declined steeply, with losses being most pronounced among groups less fit to survive, or most unwilling to stomach, the Federation's florentine politics. Catholic peasants, representatives of associations, CFDT unionists and workers and, more generally, activists who lacked the intellectual capital or the ambitions to fare well in inter-factional squabbles had either left the party altogether or were confined to peripheral sections.<sup>62</sup> The federation had fallen back on the *laïque* milieu, with public school teachers and principals providing an estimated 80 percent of its section secretaries.<sup>63</sup> Whatever broader societal linkages the party did conserve, they were increasingly the doing, and, by the same token, the personal capital, of isolated activists and leaders.

In a department where the Left remained minoritarian, Socialist cadres who had won, or hoped to win, electoral office reacted to the growing introversion of the Federation by extricating themselves from party politics and developing their own networks of support. In one case, this led to the building of a parallel quasi-party, several hundreds strong, which had no ties with, nor paid dues to, the much smaller local PS section.<sup>64</sup> In Rennes, where the Socialists' had

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Federation's recruitment capacity well below a national average of 1,9. (Philippe and Hubscher 1991: 354).

<sup>61</sup> Thus, for example, a CFDT Rocardian unionist, who had been one of the protagonists of the Union's renewal, was "exiled" to a neighboring department to preside over the PS' regional bureau, a post for which he was not particularly suited. In a personal interview, the federal secretary who had made the decision prided in this trick which allowed him to eliminate a serious adversary but which also deprived the PS of what arguably represented its best chance to recruit a working class following and establish its presence in the enterprises.

<sup>62</sup> Many activists lamented the Federation's lack of effort to educate and train its members. Personal interviews.

<sup>63</sup> The Federal youth branch was now actively recommending its members to join Force Ouvrière, a Union that especially in Brittany represents the old mixture of *laïcité*, narrow social basis and conservatism that characterized the old SFIO. Personal interviews.

<sup>64</sup> The past mayor of St. Malo and past federal secretary claimed to have organized a personal network of about six hundred activists, as against a PS section of 30 members. Personal interview.

derived their strength from the support of a myriad of diverse groupings, contacts with associations were maintained nearly exclusively through municipal channels. Moreover, relations between the Federation and the Socialist administration were poor: Hervé barred the party from even the small privileges, such as access to xeroxing machines and to the municipal bulletin, that in most French municipalities are considered a basic right of the governing party, whereas Federal officials could barely wait until the end of the 1983 municipal elections to remove Hervé's campaign posters from the party's headquarters. Paradoxically, the retrenchment produced by factionalism in the end contributed to the disengagement of the Socialist local elite from party affairs, thereby contributing to the very notabilism the CERES had initially sought to combat.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Mixed Model: The Pas-de-Calais Federation**

The Pas-de-Calais Socialist federation followed an altogether different path, one which combined elements of the territorial and the factional formats in a mutually beneficial way. The resilience of territorialism has many roots.<sup>66</sup> First, here the PS was grafted onto a strong pre-existing Socialist tradition with a large, if not very active, working class following. This implantation offered ample career opportunities which could be best preserved through the revitalization of the federation's accumulated capital rather than its overhaul. Second, the Pas-de-Calais had long been dominated by the Left, with the Socialists and the Communists vying for hegemony. The smallness of the centrist reservoir left the Socialists no choice, but for a strategy of vertical growth at the PCF's expense.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, first-hand familiarity with a very aggressive and orthodox Communist Federation had demystified the PCF in the eyes of

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<sup>65</sup> To be sure, the distancing of elected officials from party control is a much lamented and pervasive phenomenon. Still this process was particularly blatant in Ille-et-Vilaine.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed analysis of these points, see Sferza (N.d.).

<sup>67</sup> The federation's new leadership, for example, was primarily recruited from the National Schoolteachers' Union which, after having drifted towards the PCF, was recaptured by the Socialists in the mid 1970's, and the enterprise sector was partly built by the PCF's transfuges.

local Socialists: even supporters of the Union of the Left, doubted its reforming impact on their Communist partner. Third, the department-- dominated by a heavily state-dependent coal industry and with a narrow new middle class-- had been relatively untouched by the social and cultural upheavals of the 1970's. In addition, because of tight intra-left competition, progressive Catholics had locally joined the Socialists prior to the identification of the CFDT and other Catholic organizations with *autogestion* and other radical themes, and hence on a more individual basis and with a less distinct political identity than in other regions like Brittany. For all of these reasons, the Pas-de-Calais presented factions with a relatively infertile terrain.

Yet, unlike what happened in other departments where similar conditions applied and where territorialism survived practically unreformed, in Pas-de-Calais the territorial model was modified through the selective assimilation of innovations elsewhere associated with factionalism. In this way, territorial solidarities were preserved while the federation benefitted from the renewal induced by factions. This in turn largely explains why the Federation thrived throughout the 1980's, whereas most erstwhile Socialist strongholds experienced a decline as steep or even steeper than that of the PS at the aggregate level.<sup>68</sup> To account for this outcome, less structural factors, such as local leaders' strategies and party craft, need to be considered.

Ironically, the cross-fertilization between territorialism and factionalism was partly the byproduct of opposition to party renewal. Having fought Mitterrand's take-over of the SFIO at Epinay, the Pas-de-Calais Federation lacked leaders who could successfully negotiate the transition to the new PS.<sup>69</sup> This created a political space for a young group of activists who wanted to bring the federation into line with the PS' national leadership and strategy. At the same time, the resistance they encountered pushed these renovators to emphasize their common interests and join forces against the old guard.

Their strategy was two-pronged. On the one hand, members of the reformist coalition downplayed their links with national factions in order to limit the spill-over of factional conflict

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Philippe and Hubscher 1991.

<sup>69</sup> Closely identified with Guy Mollet, the SFIO's secretary from 1947 to 1969, the Pas-de-Calais was the only major Socialist Federation which opposed Mitterrand in 1971 and it remained controlled by the Mollettists until the mid 70's.

into departmental politics.<sup>70</sup> They closed ranks behind a Mitterrandist, Daniel Percheron, in order to take control of the federation; and they continued to cooperate after this goal was achieved. Even when factional infighting was at its highest, the Pas-de-Calais was one of the very few federations which maintained a unitary secretariat where all factions were represented. To preserve this unitary mode of governance, most innovations adopted by the party or sponsored by individual factions were sifted and re-interpreted through territorial concerns.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, differently from what happened in other SFIO's strongholds, exponents of the new PS in the Pas-de-Calais succeeded in reforming the foundations on which the territorial model rested. In particular, they curbed the power of local notables by simultaneously strengthening the party at its base through the recruitment and education of new members, and at its top, by greatly expanding the logistical, propaganda and ideological capacities of the federal leadership.<sup>72</sup> This double strategy changed both the federation's territorial power structure and the local impact of factions in mutually beneficial ways.

This is best exemplified by the success of the Pas-de-Calais federation in renewing its links to the working class. While this was a major goal of the new PS nationwide, efforts to establish the party's presence in the factories soon became entangled with, and bogged down by, bitter struggles on the form this presence should take. The CERES, which was in charge of the enterprise sector wanted to establish fully autonomous factory sections. Most other factions, however, saw the factory sector as a trojan horse for the CERES and boycotted it altogether, or supported factory groups whose members would remain under the jurisdiction of territorial sections. Not surprisingly, the Pas-de-Calais renovators took the path which was most compatible with the party's local power structure, and hence chose, CERES included, factory

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<sup>70</sup> Cooperation was made easier by the fact that in keeping with the department's predominantly vertical path of growth, the background of these younger leaders was not so different from that of the old leadership.

<sup>71</sup> Thus, for example, the Pas-de-Calais ignored the PS's new statutes calling for the splitting of all sections with more than 200 members, a measure specifically intended to undermine the hold of elected officials over party life. Most socialist municipalities in the Pas-de-Calais maintain sections with 500 or even 1,000 members.

<sup>72</sup> By 1977, membership had grown by 45,62 percent. The influx of new members did not significantly alter the party structure or its sociological composition. Although women, farmers, blue-collar workers and youth were seriously underrepresented, the Pas-de-Calais, with blue-collar and white-collar workers accounting for respectively 29 percent and 14,3 percent of its membership, remained one of the most working class Socialist Federations. See J.P. Vasseur, "*Le Parti Socialiste dans le Pas-de-Calais de 1971 à 1977. La renovation d'une vieille federation socialiste*", *Memoire d'histoire contemporaine*, Lille III, 1971.

groups rather than sections. At the same time, however, the federal leadership also went out of its way to give these groups visibility and resources.<sup>73</sup> In the end, whereas the development of the PS's factory sector nationally fell victim to factional rivalry, it locally produced respectable results: by the early 1980's, the Pas-de-Calais had the strongest and the least conflict-ridden enterprise sector of the whole PS.<sup>74</sup>

To be sure, inter-factional cooperation in a highly factionalized party carried a price. At a time in which the PS was deeply split between supporters of state and society centered views of Socialism, for example, the Pas-de-Calais search for a synthesis produced an outstanding aberration *Guesdisme autogestionnaire*.<sup>75</sup> Coined by the Pas-de-Calais federal secretary Daniel Percheron, this formula associated what were in fact two radically opposed terms in the iconography of the French left and would have been rejected as blasphemous in any other context. Its acceptance in the Pas-de-Calais testifies to the extent to which factions had been actually disarmed and their leaders were willing to sacrifice participation in national debates and even risk ridicule in order to pursue a primarily territorial strategy.

In the 1970's, the Pas-de-Calais' reformed territorial format hardly seemed a blueprint for success. The federation stagnated in terms of members and voters and was marginalized in the party's faction-based power system. In the longer period, however, as shown by the example of the enterprise sector, this mixed format outperformed both the factional and unreformed territorial alternatives. First, it made possible an extremely effective allocation of leadership resources, one in which the federation promoted the emergence of promising cadres and orchestrated their moves, displacing its most dynamic candidates from one newly acquired district to a still unconquered one.<sup>76</sup> This system of resource allocation gave the PS a decisive

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<sup>73</sup> The Federation skillfully exploited its notables' desire for publicity to promote the enterprise sector. The decision to reserve a page on the widely circulated federal newspaper to illustrate the activities of the enterprise sector, did wonders as parliamentarians and general councillors flocked to factory gates to distribute leaflets and hold early morning meetings in exchange for a photograph in *L'Espoir*. The local PS also went out of its way to print and circulate guidelines to explain the Auroux Laws.

<sup>74</sup> Asked publicly by Georges Sarre, the CERES leader and in charge of the national enterprise sector, about his factional leanings, the Pas-de-Calais representative simply dismissed the question by answering: "I am a Pas-de-Calais Socialist". Personal interview.

<sup>75</sup> Personal interview and editorials in *L'Espoir*.

<sup>76</sup> This was most notably the case of Jacques Mellick, the current mayor of Bethune.

edge in its longstanding war of position against the PCF. Its impact can best be appreciated by contrasting the Pas-de-Calais Socialists' success in capturing nearly all Communist-controlled municipalities with the total failure to do so of their counterparts in the neighbouring Nord.<sup>77</sup> Second, reformed territorialism enhanced the Federation's capacity for self-governance. Throughout the years, the Pas-de-Calais secretary, Daniel Percheron, relied on consultation of the rank-and-file to overcome the notables' resistance against controlled renewal and to protect the federation from the interference of the party's national leadership.<sup>78</sup> Third, territorial governance maximized the federation's pressure power vis-a-vis Socialist governments and its capacity to obtain subsidies for the local economy.<sup>79</sup> Fourth, territorialism kept alive a type of participation that emphasized local solidarity and sociability. As a result, when the most ideological reasons for being in the party began to crumble in the mid 1980's, the Pas-de-Calais federation managed to contain the haemorrhage of members that characterized its factionalized counterparts. By the end of the decade, the Pas-de-Calais had become a standing example of the comparative advantages of territorialism and an authoritative spokesman for internal party reform.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued that the recent trajectory of the French Socialists can be best understood by focussing on the party's organizational format. The example of the PS suggests

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<sup>77</sup> Only Calais escaped the PS' siege, partly because of regional and national interferences. By the end of the 1980's, whereas the Pas-de-Calais Socialists had won 5 out of 6 municipalities controlled by the PCF, in the Nord, none of the Communist municipalities had been taken by the PS. See Giblin 1984.

<sup>78</sup> In 1986, the shift to proportional representation confronted the federation with the inevitable shrinkage of its parliamentary representation. In this occasion the Pas-de-Calais was the only department which rejected the quota-by-currents system nationally adopted by the PS and organized, instead, a referendum letting its members choose among the various candidates. Confronted with a unique case of internal democracy, local losers and national factions alike could find no grounds for complaining.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, the shelving of the planned demolition of several mining towns and the transfer of the housing stock owned by the Charbonnage de France to the elected officials; the trajectory of the new TGV; the building of two new universities in the department and a massive effort to retrain a workforce that remains among the least skilled in France.

that in a highly mobilized context characterized by high intra-bloc competition, factionalism is more conducive to party renewal than territorialism. This is because factions axed around ideological issues allow a party to diversify its appeal without renouncing its programmatic content. Moreover, factionalism tends to "shrink" the institutional and political gulf that often separates political parties from more dynamic social forces, while at the same time "stretching" the space for political-ideological activism within parties, thereby increasing parties' proximity to mobilized collective actors.<sup>80</sup> Hence the shift to factionalism was crucial to the PS's expansion in the 1970's and early 1980's. This analysis is confirmed by the fact that it was precisely those federations which most closely conformed to the factional model that grew most in terms of voters and members.

Factionalism, however, is a mode of party organization whose comparative advantages are highly contextual. As suggested by the PS' evolution, factionalism tends not to "age" well. Once the conditions which preside over the formation of factions and ensure their vitality subside, this format is likely to degenerate into a vehicle for acute intra-party rivalries and party disadaptation. If not severely curtailed or counterbalanced by territorialism in the longer run, factionalism has a high potential to turn into an instrument of party introversion and sclerosis. In the case of the PS, factionalism proved unsuited to consolidating the growth it had made possible and directly contributed to the squandering of the party's resources. It is significant, in this regard, that in federations where factionalism had been kept at bay by a strong departmental leadership, or where local factional leaders adopted unorthodox conciliatory choices, the drop in members, and to a lesser extent votes, that characterized the PS from the mid' 80's onwards appeared less pronounced and took place later than at the aggregate level.

At the same time, once in place, factionalism is a remarkably sticky format. This is not only because it provides private benefits to powerful groups in the party, but also because it is supported by normative arguments. Contrary to territorialism, factionalism is a politically-motivated format, rooted in the notion that internal party democracy should satisfy the same criteria

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<sup>80</sup> The emphasis on the impact of organizational formats on recruitment is based on the assumption that party membership matters. While absolute levels of recruitment as well as the ratio between members and voters vary enormously across countries and parties, the composition and size of a party's membership are important components of party performance: they anticipate electoral growth, and, more importantly, they influence the party's programs, ideology and leadership. See Kitschelt 1989.

of competition and pluralism that obtain in the broader political system. As a result, it cannot be easily defeated on efficiency grounds.

In the case of the PS, a variety of factors made factionalism especially difficult to dislodge. A first set of factors has to do with party-specific legacies. Factionalism, although suppressed after WWII, is a genetic component in the organizational repertoire of French Socialism and in its historically transmitted political culture.<sup>81</sup> In 1906, the SFIO was created out of a merger of different parties which maintained their distinctiveness long after their fusion; in the 1970's, most factions sought legitimation in the party's past by claiming a close affiliation with the founders of the SFIO.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, competition with the PCF had lent factionalism additional legitimacy as the proof of the Socialists' commitment to democratic tolerance and pluralism.<sup>83</sup>

A second set of factors has to do with institutional arrangements, both at the systemic and party level. Among the many aspects of the national power structure (such as the electoral system) which inhibit or encourage factionalism, the relationship between party and government seems particularly important. In the case of ideologically-based factions, in particular, the smaller the distance between party and government is, the stronger the pressures against factionalism are likely to be.<sup>84</sup> This is because factionalism requires a broad ideological space, whereas party-based government encourages intra-party uniformity and consensus.<sup>85</sup> Due to the relatively marginal role of majority parties in policy making in France, the faction-inhibiting

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Noland 1956 and Bergougnoux and Grunberg 1992.

<sup>82</sup> This is particularly evident in the factional press. See also Roucaute 1983.

<sup>83</sup> At the Congress of Tours, Leon Blum's indictment of the PCF rested primarily on the latter's adoption of non democratic principles of organization. It was these organizational principles, rather than doctrinal divisions, that Blum saw as the source of the divide between Socialists and Communists. From then onwards, French Socialists have prided in the democratic functioning of their party, often using it as a paragon with which to denounce the Communists' disregard for democratic procedures and internal pluralism.

<sup>84</sup> Of course, this applies to ideological but not to patronage based factions. While the motivations for factionalism may shift from ideology to patronage, the state structure in France was not conducive to this transformation. See Shefter 1977.

<sup>85</sup> In this respect, France appears very different from Britain, where the constraints of "party-government" are such that even when a party is in the opposition it has to adopt an internal format which closely mimicks the one it would assume when in government. This, together with close ties to the Trade Unions, has been a major obstacle to the viability of factionalism in the Labour Party. See Kogan and Kogan 1982.

impact of power on faction-prone parties like the PS has been rather limited and, to the extent to which it has been present, largely countered by the importance of factions as informal channels of presidential influence and launching pads for would-be presidential candidates.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, in the case of the PS, these system-wide influences were strengthened by the institutional make-up of the party, in which powerful intermediate structures, the federations, provide factions with stable bases of existence.<sup>87</sup>

Last, but not least, the social and political movements that emerged in the 1980's, lacked the mobilizational strength to break the hegemonic hold of existing factions by launching new ones that would reflect their specific concerns or even by forcing old factions to update their agendas.<sup>88</sup> In sum, factionalism was too embedded in the ideological and power structures of the PS to be easily displaced from inside the party, and external pressures were too weak to impose a major realignment among factions.

When looked at from this organizational perspective, the trajectory of the PS also suggests some broader considerations concerning the current debate about the future of parties. First, party trajectories cannot be read off their institutional and social environments. The inherent ambiguity of these environments and the different capacity of parties to adapt create substantial blindspots which can be eliminated only by getting inside the black box of party functioning. Hence we may continue to witness major variations in party performances and trajectories.

Second, the search for the "one best" fit between specific constellations of party strategy and organization and environmental challenges is largely an illusory one. Whereas different organizational formats carry distinct comparative advantages that are environment specific,

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<sup>86</sup> Throughout the 1980's, for example, weekly meetings with the Mitterrandist faction allowed Mitterrand to control the PS while professing the aloofness from party matters required by his institutional position.

<sup>87</sup> Panebianco (1988) sees this factor as a major reason for the stability of factions in the French Socialist Party.

<sup>88</sup> The 1980s witnessed several attempts to transcend the old factional cleavages, the formation of the so-called "transcourants", the flourishing of less formal political clubs loosely linked to the PS, and the efforts of some factions to capture social movements like the BEURS, the students and the ecologists. Differently from what happened in the 1970's, however, these attempts did not lead to a revitalization of the PS but rather ended up undermining and splitting the movements they targeted, as in the case of S.O.S racism or encouraging a haemorrhage of socialist activists away from the party towards outside groups, as in the case of the ecologists.

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these advantages are highly contingent and parties are heavily constrained by the organizational repertoires they inherit from their past. Moreover, parties rarely conform to a coherent model. Rather, they encompass a variety of traits drawn from more than one model which combine in different ways in different historical periods and different locales. Far from being minor nuances, these variations are important sources of flexibility and rigidity that are crucial to our understanding of organizational dynamics and party development. In spite of the relevance of party organization for party performances, therefore, it is arguably impossible to arrive at an organizationally driven model of party development. Indeed, and this is my third point, the existence of important regional intra-party variations in adaptive strategies and organizational formats should lead us to be quite skeptical about models that impose a false coherence on party forms. My analysis, at least for the PS, suggests that we may do better by looking instead at how parties really work.

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