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Intellectuals and the Politics of the French Socialist Party Since 2002

Harriet Lynne Morgan

Abstract

There has historically been a deep, if unstable, connection between intellectual culture and the French socialists. However, in the 1980s and 1990s historians were arguing that the decline of confidence in Marxism, the nature of François Mitterrand's politics, the growth of expertise and professionalization, the rise of the mass media (especially television) and the more educated nature of the public, were breaking down historic intellectual models. The terms of the debate have moved on significantly and this thesis attempts to update the analysis by re-examining the connections between left-wing intellectuals, the French Socialist Party and wider society since 2002, when the socialist candidate Lionel Jospin failed to make the run-off in the presidential elections, being pushed into third place by the Front National candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen. This thesis opens up the central problem of why, in the country that gave birth to the very notion of intellectual engagement, intellectuals have been struggling to help the PS to develop a deeper reflection on its social mission. It takes three examples: one, the 2002 socialist defeat; two, an intellectual figure - Vincent Peillon - who has been trying to renew socialist politics from within the PS and three, an issue of profound significance within society itself - equality - from the angle of intellectual debate. It argues that a combination of the problems of socialist party culture and the difficulties of contemporary democracy, have significantly reduced the space for left-wing intellectuals to make an impact in socialist politics. These interlocking examples cover the different ways in which intellectuals, party and civil society interact in contemporary democracy, allowing for a better understanding of how left-wing intellectual culture can strive - and fail - or strive - and succeed modestly - to rebuild an intellectual connection between party and society in contemporary times.

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Contents

Introduction	pp. 6-18.
Chapter One: The 2002 Presidential Elections	pp. 19-54.
Chapter Two: Vincent Peillon (1960-)	pp. 55-92.
Chapter Three: Equality	pp. 93-136.
Conclusion	pp. 137-141.
Bibliography	pp. 142-165.

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Introduction

In March 2015, faced with the far-right Front National (FN) party's anticipated success in the upcoming local elections, Prime Minister Manuel Valls deplored the silence of left-wing intellectuals: 'Où sont les intellectuels? Où sont les grandes consciences de ce pays, les hommes, les femmes de culture qui doivent monter eux-aussi, au créneau [contre le FN] ? Où est la gauche?'¹ On a superficial level this outcry was a scapegoating exercise, but it is also a testament to the persistent place of intellectuals in socialist political culture. Intellectuals have become a collective 'site of memory' in France. This thesis draws on Sudhir Hazareesingh's argument that intellectuals remain a central component of French civic pride. He asks how far the socialist movement in France has lost touch with its intellectual roots and to what extent this has been a long-term problem affecting French political culture more generally.²

Historically, there has been a deep connection between intellectual culture and the French socialists. The relationship has rarely been smooth, as was demonstrated during the Popular Front Government of 1936-7, when left-wing intellectuals rallied enthusiastically to the government before becoming quickly disillusioned.³ Christophe Prochasson suggested: 'Jusqu'à la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, le Parti socialiste entretint avec le monde des intellectuels des relations, certes heurtées, mais finalement confiantes.' Leading figures of the French socialist movement, Prochasson continued, all shared a significant intellectual culture; they spent time reading and their speeches were peppered with precise intellectual references.⁴

¹ Manuel Valls cited in 'Manuel Valls, les intellectuels et l'inculture triomphant', *Le Figaro* (20.03.2015) at www.lefigaro.fr (viewed 23 October 2015).

² Sudhir Hazareesingh, *How the French think. An affectionate portrait of an intellectual people* (London 2015), p. 10.

³ Christophe Prochasson, 'Les intellectuels et le Parti socialiste: vieux schémas, nouvelle donne', *Recherche socialiste* 39-40 (June-September 2007), p. 112.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

The loss of confidence in this historic relationship between the intellectual world and the socialists, expressed by Manuel Valls, was not new. His statement consciously echoed that of the socialist government's spokesperson Max Gallo who, in 1983, provoked a protracted debate about the 'demise' of the French left-wing intellectual when he lamented the 'silence of the intellectuals' and asked: 'Has the left abandoned the battle for ideas?...Where are the Gides, Malraux, the Alains and the Langevins of today?'⁵ This sense of doubt about the place and identity of left-wing intellectuals in French politics and society has also given rise to the study of intellectuals as a discrete field of study in French history, and this has been driven forward through the work of Jean-François Sirinelli, Pascal Ory, Jacques Julliard, Michel Winock and Christophe Prochasson.⁶ In the 1990s, these French analyses were challenged and deepened by the publication of significant Anglophone studies, which were concerned with a comparative perspective on the phenomenon of intellectual engagement.⁷ These works all suggested that a combination of the decline of confidence in Marxism, the nature of Mitterrand's politics (in the French context), the growth of expertise and professionalization, the rise of the mass media (especially television) and the more educated nature of the public, were breaking down historic intellectual models. Thus, by 1990, Sirinelli was wondering: 'Faut-il sonner le glas des intellectuels?'⁸

Despite the conscious parallels between the words of Valls and Gallo, the terms of the debate have moved on significantly since the 1980s and 1990s. This thesis thus seeks to update the analysis by re-examining the connection between intellectual culture and the PS since 2002,

⁵ Max Gallo cited in Martyn Cornick, 'The silence of the left intellectual in Mitterrand's France' in Mairi Maclean (ed.), *The Mitterrand years. Legacy and evaluation* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 301.

⁶ Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, *Les intellectuels en France de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris, first edition 1986, second edition 1992); Jean-François Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions français. Manifestes et pétitions au XX^e siècle* (Paris, 1996); Christophe Prochasson, *Les intellectuels et le socialisme* (Paris, 1997); Julliard and Winock, *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français. Les personnes, les lieux, les moments* (Paris, 1996); Michel Winock, *Le siècle des intellectuels* (Paris, 1997).

⁷ For example, Jeremy Jennings and Anthony Kemp-Welch (eds.), *Intellectuals in politics. From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (London, 1997).

⁸ Sirinelli, *Intellectuels et passions français*, p. 249.

when the socialist candidate Lionel Jospin failed to make the run-off in the presidential elections, being pushed into third place by the FN candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen. The question remains a pressing one. Since the turn of the century, there has been a mounting sense of crisis in France, which has undoubtedly intensified since the tragic terrorist attacks in 2015 and the gains of the FN in subsequent regional elections. Valls' comment demonstrates that the contemporary crisis has been, in part, an intellectual one. This has particularly been the case for the French centre left, whose recent turbulent history has been characterized by a repeated inability to articulate what its own values are when it comes to the questions of globalization, identity and citizenship, which have dominated the politics of the twenty-first century. The socialists' traditional working and lower-middle-class electorate has been increasingly turning to the FN and there has thus been a continued search for an intellectual counter-discourse to the populist rhetoric of the far right. Hazareesingh, however, has demonstrated that the intellectual response in the public sphere has been increasingly monopolized by the rise of neo-conservative declinist thought, dominated by pessimism, nostalgia and an inward-looking republicanism which has, at times, descended into 'ethnic nationalism', and which has been fuelling extreme right-wing ideas.⁹

This thesis opens up the central problem of why, in the country that gave birth to the very notion of intellectual engagement and where there has historically been such a profound, if unstable, connection between intellectual life and the socialists, intellectuals have been struggling to help the PS to develop a deeper reflection on its social mission and to devise a social democracy and discourse adapted to both the nature and concerns of contemporary society. The problem has not been a uniquely French one. Since the 1990s, the decline of

⁹ Hazareesingh, *How the French think*, pp. 310-311; Hazareesingh, 'Ce pays qui aime les idées', *la Cité des livres studio de Sudhir Hazareesingh*, Fondation Jean-Jaurès (19.11.2015) at [www.jean-jaures.org/Evenements/Cite-des-livres/Ce-pays-qui-aime-les-idees-la-Cite-des-livres-studio-de-Sudhir-Hazareesingh/\(language\)/fre-FR](http://www.jean-jaures.org/Evenements/Cite-des-livres/Ce-pays-qui-aime-les-idees-la-Cite-des-livres-studio-de-Sudhir-Hazareesingh/(language)/fre-FR) (viewed 21 November 2015).

communism and the increasingly global and financial nature of capitalism have sparked a crisis of social democracy across Europe. The problem has, however, been particularly interesting, acute and profoundly felt in the French context due to a combination of the long-term pre-eminence of the French Communist Party and the historic importance of intellectual reflection.

The French concept of intellectual engagement dates back to the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), a crisis of civic political culture which gave rise to the intellectual in the modern sense. It set the precedent for a uniquely French functional definition of the intellectual, as someone who uses a prestige gained in the cultural and/or academic sphere to intervene in the public political sphere as a guardian of universal humanitarian values. Since the Dreyfus Affair, the model of intellectual engagement has been continually constructed and deconstructed and has been a source of enduring debate.¹⁰ Determining whether an individual should be classed as an ‘intellectual’ is thus no easy task, especially in the twenty-first century when there is a sense that historic models have broken down. This thesis defines the intellectual according to the *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français*, which focuses on the criteria of political engagement and authority. An intellectual is ‘un homme ou une femme... qui applique à l’ordre politique une notoriété acquise ailleurs’. This notoriety, however, must be based on legitimate and relevant expertise; an intellectual is someone who ‘entend proposer à la société tout entière une analyse, une direction, une morale que ses travaux antérieurs le qualifient pour élaborer’.¹¹

In order to tackle the problem of the decline of the intellectual in French socialist politics and structure the thesis, it is suggested that since the Dreyfus Affair intellectual engagement has

¹⁰ Jeremy Jennings, ‘Of treason, blindness and silence. Dilemmas of the intellectual in modern France’, in Jennings and Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in politics*, p. 71.

¹¹ Jacques Julliard and Michel Winock, *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français*, p. 12.

centred on a complex triangular relationship between intellectuals, socialist politics and society (both in terms of intellectuals *engaging with* and *reflecting on* society). In an analysis of the Dreyfus Affair, the historian Jacques Julliard, for example, noted that while the French political left like to claim the event as their own, it actually marked the separation of the left into a political and an intellectual component: ‘C’est comme si, à ce tournant du siècle, la gauche jusqu’alors unijambiste se mettait à marcher sur deux pieds: d’une part l’action politique, de l’autre l’action intellectuelle.’¹² The problem of the intellectual deficit in French socialist political culture is thus addressed by looking at how intellectuals have struggled to rebuild, or perhaps simply to build, an authoritative voice as part of the relationship between party and society in contemporary times. It is argued that during the last fifteen years the space for intellectual voices to make an impact in PS politics has been significantly restricted. There are therefore several interlinked sub-questions, which relate to three elements: why have intellectuals been unable to connect with the PS? Why have they been struggling to interact with civil society? What impact might these broken connections between intellectuals and politics, on the one hand, and intellectuals and society, on the other hand, have for the relationship between socialist politics and society (politicians and the electorate)?

Since the sense of disillusionment with Marxism in the 1980s and early 1990s, some historians have begun to recognize the long-term drawbacks of Jean Jaurès’s decision to seek party unity in 1905. Gérard Grunberg and Alain Bergounioux argued that due to the dominance of a commitment to revolutionary rupture in the political culture of the French left, which harks back to the Marxist orthodox line of Jules Guesde, the socialist movement’s relationship with power has been characterized by an unstable mix of ambition and remorse: the desire to gain power in order to enact a revolutionary programme, followed by a pragmatic reformism necessitated by the constraints of government, then a remorseful return

¹² Jacques Julliard, *Les gauches françaises 1762-2012: histoire, politique et imaginaire* (Paris, 2012), p. 431.

to an orthodox left-wing programme.¹³ This thesis takes Grunberg and Bergounioux's argument in a slightly different direction, arguing that the downsides of unity are about more than the issue of power. The orthodox strain's focus on a rigid doctrine has marginalized intellectual voices, yet the socialists have largely abandoned the revolutionary reference since the Jospin years.¹⁴ The far left's response, which has become increasingly backward-looking and inward-looking and has been opposing contemporary developments like globalization, combined with its long-term pre-eminence on the left, has prevented the socialists from engaging with left-wing intellectuals who have been attempting to articulate post-Marxist ideas. This line of argument draws on the work of left-leaning historians, including Vincent Duclert and Jacques Julliard. Duclert has argued that intellectual reformists like Léon Blum, Pierre Mendès-France or Michel Rocard, who tried to develop centrist policies in the PS, were, necessarily, dissident voices.¹⁵ Julliard, coming from his own Proudhonian socialist perspective, which advocates an alternative federalist model of socialism and argues against the top-down models of state socialism, has contended that moral authority within socialist argument has historically resided with the far left, which explains the socialists' inability to articulate a coherent intellectual response to society's contemporary problems.¹⁶

Although socialist politicians never stop calling for a renewal of their ideas, the socialist movement has been increasingly reduced to political management, which has created a distance between the political elite on the one hand and party militants and the electorate on the other. This trend was recognized by some at the time of party unity over a century ago. Eugène Fournière, one of the leaders of the 'independent' socialist strand, wrote: 'Socialist action [is] enclosed more than ever within the world of politics, where classic formulae

¹³ Alain Bergounioux and Gérard Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords. Les socialistes français et le pouvoir (1905-2005)* (Paris, 2005).

¹⁴ Julian Wright, 'Socialism and political identity: Eugène Fournière and intellectual militancy in the Third Republic', *French Historical Studies* 36.3 (2013), p. 458.

¹⁵ Vincent Duclert, *La gauche devant l'histoire. A la reconquête d'une conscience politique* (Paris, 2009).

¹⁶ Jacques Julliard, *Le malheur français* (Paris, 2005), pp. 65-68.

replace ideas and where a handful of men... participate in the real action and reduce the mass of the party to being like a crowd at a race meeting, praising their horses when they win and abusing them when they lose.’¹⁷ These long-term problems, identified by Fournière and particular to the French socialists, have then been exacerbated in recent years by more general developments in French political life.

The presidentialization of the Fifth Republic, for example, has intensified the reduction of the party to an inward-looking electoral machine. Prochasson also used a sporting metaphor to describe the internal workings of the PS since the 1980s: the trend has been one of ‘footballization’; the role of militants has been reduced to cheering on the PS leadership ‘team’ during election campaigns.¹⁸ A further contributing factor has been the increasing professionalization and mediatization of contemporary politics. Hazareesingh noted how, rather than being products of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, political elites have been formed in *grandes écoles* like the Ecole Normale d’Administration (ENA). These *énarques*’ weaknesses, he suggested, include ‘an inability to think creatively, a tendency towards formalism and rule-following, a socially exclusive and metropolitan outlook [and] a corporatist, bunker mentality’.¹⁹ The historian of ideas and political theorist Pierre Rosanvallon has thus reflected that since 1983 the socialists have adopted a ‘culture of government’; but they have continually confused it with a ‘culture of management’: ‘La culture de gouvernement est nécessaire, car on ne peut pas se cantonner à la protestation et à

¹⁷ Eugène Fournière cited in Wright, ‘Socialism and political identity’, p. 461.

¹⁸ Christophe Prochasson, *La gauche est-elle morale?* (Paris, 2010), pp. 99-100.

¹⁹ Sudhir Hazareesingh, ‘From left bank to left behind: where have all the French thinkers gone?’, *The guardian* (13.06. 2015) at www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/13/from-left-bank-to-left-behind-where-have-the-great-french-thinkers-gone (viewed 17 June 2015).

l'utopie irréalisable. Mais la gauche ne peut se contenter d'accompagner la modernisation du monde, elle doit aussi inventer une culture de transformation sociale.²⁰

Such trends have thus combined to reduce the authoritative space for intellectuals within socialist political institutions. The political analysts Laurent Bouvet and Laurent Baumel, for example, observed that the divorce between intellectuals and the PS dates back to the Mitterrand era. Intellectuals distanced themselves from PS structures after the Grande Arche Congress (December 1991) which, promising to be the long-awaited 'Bad Godesberg à la française' (a reference to the German Social Democratic Party's 1959 Bad Godesberg convention, when the commitment to a 'break with capitalism' was abandoned for more social-democratic ideological positions) sounded the death knell for partisan intellectual engagement with the socialists.²¹

This thesis argues that there has been an increasing lack of space for thoughtful, more challenging intellectual voices in the public and media sphere, because of the simple ways in which an intelligent public and the mass media have been responding to, and influencing the nature of, political debate in this period. The intellectual's relationship with the public has always required them to manipulate the media, since the days of Emile Zola's article 'J'Accuse', launching the intellectual campaign for revision of the Dreyfus case in a front-cover newspaper splash. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, scholars were already reflecting upon the intellectual constraints of modern forms of communication and suggesting that it was increasingly the media that was defining the agenda and form of intellectual debates.²²

The left-wing philosopher Régis Debray, for example, argued that developments in the

²⁰ Pierre Rosanvallon, 'Les chantiers de Hollande', *L'Obs* (30.05.2012) at <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20120518.OBS5839/les-chantiers-de-hollande-par-pierre-rosanvallon.html> (viewed 22 July 2016).

²¹ Laurent Bouvet and Laurent Baumel, *L'année zéro de la gauche. Fragments d'un discours réformiste* (Paris, 2003), pp. 23-25, 78-79.

²² Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford, 1997), p. 185.

distribution of symbolic power in France could be divided into three cycles: the university cycle of the academic (1880-1930), the publishing cycle of the writer in the literary review (1920-1968) and the media cycle dominated by the television celebrity (1968-) and epitomized by Bernard-Henri Lévy (B-HL) and the New Philosophers.²³ He denounced the latter as ‘an Americanised intelligentsia in a Europeanised France [which] puts the emphasis on smiles, good teeth, nice hair and the adolescent stupidity known as petulance’.²⁴

This thesis updates these discussions by taking into account the key developments in French cultural and political life since the turn of the twenty-first century. It thus intersects with significant and ongoing debates about the problems of contemporary democracy. It particularly draws on Pierre Rosanvallon’s recent series of publications on contemporary democracy and political culture.²⁵ He rejects the conventional thesis that, since the 1990s, citizens have become increasingly passive and politically apathetic.²⁶ He has demonstrated instead that democracy has been evolving from a direct to an indirect form, made possible by new media (especially the internet) and the better-educated and more informed nature of today’s public.²⁷ Civil society has become more involved than ever in political life, but it has been challenging political power and registering its discontent in new ways.²⁸ Until these different forms of ‘counter-democratic’ action are consolidated and institutionalized, however, he contends that there is a danger of them descending into populism.²⁹ In a similar vein, Jacques Julliard has argued that contemporary democracy is characterized by the

²³ Régis Debray, *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France* (Paris, 1979), pp. 61-143.

²⁴ Régis Debray cited in Jeremy Jennings, ‘Introduction’ in Jeremy Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in twentieth-century France. Mandarins and samurais* (London, 1993), p. 7.

²⁵ Pierre Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie. La politique à l’âge de la défiance* (Paris, 2006); *La légitimité démocratique. Impartialité, réflexivité, proximité* (Paris, 2008); *La société des égaux* (Paris, 2011); *Le bon gouvernement* (Paris, 2015).

²⁶ Pierre Rosanvallon translated by Arthur Goldhammer, *Counter-democracy. Politics in an age of distrust* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 1-2, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25, 55-56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70, 295-296.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 265-273, 299-300.

permanent intervention of public opinion in representative democracy. This trend, he reflected, is particularly problematic for the left because it represents the disintegration of the historic relationship between science and the left that has traditionally provided it with intellectual and moral hegemony over society.³⁰

The historic model of the intellectual from aristocratic times – someone who intervenes in the public political sphere in order to enlighten and speak on behalf of the masses against an over-mighty state – has thus entirely broken down.³¹ In the twenty-first century there has, so far, increasingly been a direct line between public opinion and politicians and it is more and more public opinion and its manifestation through the internet which holds the power. Michel Winock thus even went so far as to suggest that, in the contemporary period, ‘nous sommes tous des intellectuels.’³² Such a comment, which implies that to be an intellectual no longer requires any external authority or expertise, demonstrates how nebulous the contemporary treatment of intellectuals has, at times, become. It has, however, been increasingly difficult for deeper intellectual voices to be heard in a cacophonous public sphere. In response, many intellectuals have retreated into their research, a trend that has been exacerbated by the nature of the contemporary research environment; since the 1980s, the number of academics has expanded exponentially and research has become increasingly narrow and specialized. Those intellectuals who have been visible in the public sphere have often been skilled communicators with a tenuous relationship to the world of academic research.³³ The expansion of the mass media over the past two decades (the proliferation of private television and radio channels) has replaced the intellectual media celebrity with a greater number of

³⁰ Jacques Julliard, *La reine du monde. Essai sur la démocratie d'opinion* (Paris, 2009), pp. 19-20.

³¹ Michel Winock, ‘A quoi servent (encore) les intellectuels?’, *Le débat* 110 (2000), pp. 42-43.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³³ Prochasson, ‘Les intellectuels et le Parti socialiste’, pp. 116-119.

‘professional intellectuals’, who are drafted in to make general comments on the day’s events. In 2000, B-HL, for example, referred to his ‘métier intellectuel’.³⁴

It is important to put the current crisis into historical context. It is, of course, just the latest episode in a long running saga where the left wrings its hands for not being intellectual enough. There has never been a golden age when the relationship between intellectuals, the PS and wider society was functioning perfectly and when intellectuals were both willing and able to prompt the socialists to continually renew and rethink their ideology and discourse as society evolved. Prochasson reflected: ‘Il n’est pas... certain que les grands noms qui peuplent encore le Panthéon de la vie intellectuelle française aient beaucoup fait pour enrichir le stock d’analyses et de propositions dont disposait la gauche.’³⁵ Furthermore, the Liberation generation of left-wing intellectuals (c.1945-1956), epitomized by Jean-Paul Sartre, who succeeded in both capturing the imagination of the public and in maintaining close ties with left-wing political structures (in this case not the socialists but the French Communist Party), arguably led the political left into an ideological impasse. The British historian Tony Judt, for example, virulently criticized the intellectual engagement of these post-war French intellectuals for their conscious blindness towards soviet totalitarianism.³⁶ This thesis attempts to shed light on the nature of the problem in contemporary times, while also suggesting that the disintegration of the connections between intellectuals, socialist politics and wider society has, so far, been particularly acute and problematic in the twenty-first century. On the one hand, the old Marxist answers have no longer been resonating with the rapidly changing nature of capitalism and of society and, on the other hand, the public has

³⁴ Bernard-Henri Lévy cited in Winock, ‘A quoi servent (encore) les intellectuels?’, p. 40.

³⁵ Prochasson, ‘Les intellectuels et le Parti socialiste’, p. 118.

³⁶ Tony Judt, *Past imperfect. French intellectuals, 1944-1956* (Oxford, 1992).

been clamouring for a more direct and unmediated involvement in political life, made possible by modern forms of communication.

Prochasson reflected that historians have approached the study of intellectuals from either a political, sociological or an intellectual angle. Each of these methods, Prochasson contended, have weaknesses: political history focuses on actions at the expense of the person; sociological history views intellectuals' work as a product of their sociological environment, therefore denying autonomy to their ideas, and intellectual history ignores the influence of the social and political context. He believed that these approaches were not incompatible and that any serious attempt at intellectual history should combine the three.³⁷ This thesis seeks to rise to Prochasson's challenge. It develops its arguments through three different and concrete examples. Chapter one approaches the problem from the perspective of a political moment - the 2002 presidential elections. Analysing the before, during and after of the catastrophic socialist defeat in the first round of those elections, it is argued that this political event reflected how, for some time, intellectuals, the socialists and society had been moving in different directions. Having set up the problem of the breakdown of these connections, chapters two and three move on to look at two intellectual attempts to rebuild them, by fashioning a social democracy for contemporary times. Chapter two turns to look at an individual - Vincent Peillon - a rare example of an intellectual who is also a socialist politician and has been trying to bridge the gap between the intellectual and political worlds. It explores the difficulties encountered by this figure and highlights the tension between his personal theory of intellectual engagement and how it has spun out in practice in PS politics. The third and final chapter looks at an issue of profound significance within society itself - equality - from the angle of intellectual debate. It focuses on Pierre Rosanvallon's individual

³⁷ Christophe Prochasson, 'Intellectuals as actors: image and reality' in Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in twentieth-century France*, pp. 59-79.

work, as well as the production of his ‘atelier intellectuel’ - the République des idées - founded in 2002.³⁸ It appraises the progress that has begun to be made on the issue of equality in intellectual circles, both in terms of rethinking social democracy and in terms of fashioning a new form of intellectual engagement more suited to the demands of contemporary democracy.

These three interlocking examples cover the different ways in which intellectuals, party and civil society interact in contemporary democracy. They move from a presidential moment in which these connections collided in the public sphere, to an individual intellectual working to renew socialist politics from within the PS, to attempts to rethink social democracy in the intellectual sphere and to make an impact on PS politics from the outside, through civil society itself. The three chapters thus allow for a better understanding of how left-wing intellectual culture can strive – and fail – or strive – and succeed modestly – to rebuild an intellectual connection between political party and civil society in contemporary times.

³⁸ Agnès Chauveau and Nicolas Truong with Ivan Jablonka and Florent Guénard, ‘Peut-on refonder la pensée politique? A l’occasion des 10 ans de la collection « La République des idées » aux éditions du Seuil’, *Les retours du dimanche 12-13*, France culture (21.10.2012) at www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-retours-du-dimanche-12-13/peut-refonder-la-pensee-politique-loccasion-des-10-ans-de-la (accessed 27 July 2016); for the République des idées see www.repid.com/ (viewed 01 June 2016).

Chapter One: The 2002 Presidential Elections

This chapter contends that the historic defeat of the incumbent Prime Minister and socialist party candidate, Lionel Jospin, in the first round of the 2002 French presidential elections by the far-right FN candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen (16.1% and 17% respectively) was a political moment that reflected the breakdown of the relationship between intellectuals, socialist politics and society. It thus sets up the problem of the disintegration of these connections through a history of this particular event, looking at the before, during and after of the disastrous first round result.

There was something incongruous about the result itself and it is reasonable to suggest that it was, in part, an historical 'accident'. The five-year period of Plural Left government (1997-2002) was widely perceived to have been one of the most successful in the Fifth Republic, both in terms of economic and social reforms and in terms of Jospin's leadership and popularity. Furthermore, the incumbent President and Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) candidate, Jacques Chirac, had lost considerable credibility, due to a combination of the defeat of the right in the 1997 parliamentary elections and a series of alleged corruption cases from his time as Mayor of Paris (1977-1995) (he was granted immunity while he remained President).³⁹ The PS spokesperson, Vincent Peillon, asserted that 'Le clef [to explaining the defeat], c'est que tout le monde pensait que Jospin serait président.'⁴⁰ The French two-round election system allows minor parties to come to the fore in the first round. But this arrangement proved problematic in 2002; there is plenty of evidence to suggest that

³⁹ Laurent Bouvet, 'The tragedy of the French left', *Open democracy* (07.08.2002) at www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-newright/article_393.jsp (viewed 03 April 2016).

⁴⁰ Vincent Peillon cited in Eric Dupin, *Sortir la gauche du coma. Comprendre les racines d'un désastre* (Paris, 2002), p. 13.

voters would have selected Jospin in round one, had it not been for the widely held assumption that there would be a Jospin-Chirac second round run-off.⁴¹

Despite this element of accident, the disaster of the first round for Jospin and the PS was highly revealing. There was a sense that the socialists had been in crisis since the Mitterrand era, when the PS had become the dominant party on the left and had reconciled both with the market economy and with being a party of government, but had failed to bring about a concurrent doctrinal renewal.⁴² The 2002 political moment can thus be viewed as the first time that these deep-seated problems began to have clear electoral consequences. Several historians, for example, have suggested that the socialists' electoral successes since the 1980s had only been due to the weaknesses and tactical mistakes of the right.⁴³ This chapter argues that the 2002 political moment demonstrated that intellectuals, politics and wider society had all increasingly been moving in different directions.

Part one of this chapter argues that the connections between intellectuals, the PS and voters, already unstable since the Mitterrand era, was becoming increasingly so after 2000. It takes the March 2001 municipal elections as a starting point as, one year before the presidential elections, they foreshadowed many of the problems that were then exposed in 2002. It assesses Jospin and the PS's inability to analyse, and respond to, the issues of society revealed by the municipals and thus to prepare effectively for the presidential election. Such immobility both reflected and exacerbated the lack of institutional space for intellectual voices within the PS. Outside the party left-wing intellectuals, due to a combination of the socialists' state of ideological disarray, the increasing monopoly of the media sphere over

⁴¹ Alistair Cole, 'The presidential and legislative election campaigns of 2002: a strange play in four acts' in John Gaffney (ed.) *The French presidential and legislative elections of 2002* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 36-37.

⁴² Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, p. 413.

⁴³ For example: Vincent Duclert, *La gauche devant l'histoire*, p. 151; Christophe Prochasson, 'La gauche en quête d'une nouvelle culture politique' in Vincent Duclert, Christophe Prochasson, Perrine Simon-Nahum (eds.), *Il s'est passé quelque chose... le 21 avril 2002* (Paris, 2003), p. 182.

public political discussions and their own actions, had in many cases become increasingly cut off from contemporary realities and, thus, from politics and the concerns of society. In the face of this dearth of political and/or intellectual responses to twenty-first century problems, many people were turning to populist discourses that, at the very least, recognized and gave a voice to their concerns.

Part two of this chapter moves on to look at how the links between intellectuals, the socialists and the wider voting public played out during the campaign itself (broadly defined as from the moment when Jospin declared his candidacy on 21 February 2002). It argues that Jospin and the socialists, unable to reflect upon and devise a new vision for contemporary times, peddled a highly technocratic programme, obsessively focused on Chirac's personality and, constrained by their long-term ideological confusion and the amount and diversity of left-wing candidates, gave contradictory messages about their political positioning. Many people were cut out of the campaign at a time when they were desperate for explanations of, and responses to, the contemporary challenges of globalization and identity. The reflection of those few intellectuals who were directly involved in the socialist campaign was swallowed up by the party machinery and by the PS's internal difficulties. Other intellectuals, finding little in the socialist programme to inspire debate or engagement, and faced with the challenges of being heard in the public sphere, largely watched passively on as the FN rose in the polls.

Part three begins to consider the wider ramifications of the 2002 political moment, which chapters two and three of this thesis then expand. It begins by looking at the political responses to the result and analyses how socialist politics unfolded until the Dijon Congress (16-18 May 2003). It is argued that the obsessions of the politicians, notably blaming Jospin, the other left candidates, or ideological positioning, pushed intellectual reflection to the sidelines and prevented a convincing doctrinal clarification, which may have helped to put

the PS back in touch with society. Given that there was so little room for intellectual renewal from within PS structures, this part then turns to the immediate aftermath of 2002 in the intellectual sphere. It takes the project *Il s'est passé quelque chose... le 21 avril 2002*, a collection of essays by researchers in the social sciences, which all analysed 2002 from the perspective of their own specialisms, as a case study. It argues that some intellectuals did seek to engage with the wider significance of the defeat and to rethink the connections between intellectuals, the socialists and the rest of society. These attempts, however, floundered in the face of the challenges to intellectual engagement in the contemporary context, beyond just the lack of space in PS politics. It then contends that these continued difficulties, in both the political and intellectual spheres, were compounded by the 2005 referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. This new shock repeated and intensified many of the problems revealed in 2002.

Part I: Before the Presidential Campaign

The disastrous result of the first round of the 2002 presidential elections has often been referred to as a 'shock' or 'earthquake', yet there were signs that the socialists had ingrained problems long before 2002.⁴⁴ A combination of a deep-seated inability to update their doctrine since the decline of Communism, and the demands of upholding the unity of the Plural Left while in government, meant that Jospin and the socialists largely failed to take on board the setback of the March 2001 municipal elections and retreated into political management and ministerialism respectively. Pierre Moscovici and Pierre Mauroy tried to get their voices heard, to involve intellectuals and to re-launch doctrinal debates in preparation for the presidential elections. While first and foremost politicians and not intellectuals, the fact that they found themselves on the margins of PS discussions illustrates the lack of space

⁴⁴ For example Ben Clift, 'Lionel Jospin's campaign and the socialist left: the 'earthquake' and its aftershocks', in Gaffney (ed.), *The French presidential and legislative elections of 2002*, pp. 149-168.

for intellectual renewal in socialist politics at this time. In the intellectual sphere, left-wing intellectuals had themselves also become increasingly insular; many had either retreated into their own research, settled into a far-left radicality, or were reasserting strong nationalist neo-republicanism. By the time the campaign got underway in earnest at the end of February, there were already signs of a marked and problematic separation between intellectuals, socialist politics and the rest of society.

The electoral analyst Pierre Martin stated that the results of the March 2001 municipal elections ‘ont confirmé la faiblesse de l’assise électorale du gouvernement Jospin, la percée de l’extrême gauche antigouvernementale, la force des Verts, le déclin du parti communiste et la persistance de l’influence électorale de l’extrême droite malgré sa division’.⁴⁵ These elections therefore revealed some troubling trends for the left in general, and for the PS in particular. The socialists lost twenty-three towns of more than thirty-thousand inhabitants and leading PS ministerial figures, notably Pierre Moscovici, Catherine Trautmann, Jack Lang and Elisabeth Guigou, all lost their seats. The results also suggested that the PS electorate was shifting sociologically. The PS won traditionally conservative and bourgeois cities like Paris and Lyon, but were defeated in many predominantly working-class towns.⁴⁶

These defeats were acknowledged by the PS leadership, which diagnosed some of the central problems at their conseil national on 27 March 2001. Principally, the socialists identified a rising preoccupation with insecurity amongst the lower classes, now that unemployment had begun to be tackled, and a growing frustration over what were felt to be the insufficient benefits of economic growth.⁴⁷ Those socialist figures who tried to produce a more cogent

⁴⁵ Pierre Martin, ‘Chronique des élections françaises. Les municipales et cantonales des 11 et 18 mars’, *Commentaire* 94 (2001/2), p. 370.

⁴⁶ See Ministère de L’Intérieur, French municipal election results (March 2001) at [www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Municipales/elecresult_Resultats-des-elections-municipales-2001/\(path\)/Resultats-des-elections-municipales-2001/index.html](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Municipales/elecresult_Resultats-des-elections-municipales-2001/(path)/Resultats-des-elections-municipales-2001/index.html) (viewed 03 April 2016).

⁴⁷ *L’Hebdo des socialistes*, 187 (March 2001) and conseil national du PS (27 March 2001) cited in Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L’ambition et le remords*, p. 463.

critique of the results and to provoke a renewal of socialist doctrine, however, were continually frustrated. In *Un an après*, which considered the 2002 presidential election defeat one year on, Pierre Moscovici, then Minister for European Affairs, claimed that in the wake of the municipal elections he had conversations with intellectuals and specialists and then wrote a note to Jospin that highlighted how the government and the socialists had lost the support of the working classes.⁴⁸ The attempt to build an alliance between the excluded, the working classes and the middle classes, he contended, had squeezed them out. Moscovici considered that the working classes were not feeling the benefits of the improved economic climate, which could ‘accentuer une forme de divergence entre les classes moyennes, qui pourraient maintenant se contenter de mesures de régulation économiques et sociales, et les classes populaires, qui demeurent inquiètes et demandeuses de mesures plus interventionnistes tout en se sentant parfois frustrées des bienfaits de l’embellie’.⁴⁹ The socialists, he suggested, needed to be more in touch with social realities, stop focusing on the successes of their governmental record and start work on a revised project for 2002. Moscovici, who has connections with the progressive intellectual think tank the Fondation Jean-Jaurès, thus indicated that a lack of reflection by the government and the PS on the nature of contemporary society was leading to a popular dissatisfaction with socialist supply.⁵⁰

Moscovici claimed that he had reflected on the lack of ideas and debate within the PS, which he had then tried to address by encouraging Jospin to set up a group, which would have included intellectuals, to work on a revised project from the spring of 2001. Jospin, he maintained, had rejected the idea, asserting that the best way to regain credibility with the

⁴⁸ See La Fondation Jean-Jaurès at <https://jean-jaures.org> (viewed 08 May 2016); Pierre Moscovici, *Un an après* (Paris, 2003), pp. 165-167, 194.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167, 194.

public was simply to see the government through.⁵¹ Such a managerial attitude, and the corresponding resistance to any change of direction, is corroborated by the leading PS minister and the founder of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Pierre Mauroy.⁵² Mauroy wrote in his memoirs that as early as 1999, and especially since the municipal elections, he had repeatedly drawn attention to a destructive gap between a government which believed it was enacting positive reforms and many citizens who, on an individual level, felt excluded from this ‘France qui gagne’. Like Moscovici, he held that his analyses were ignored.⁵³

These examples, while only two accounts and written with hindsight and perhaps an element of self-justification, suggest that there was little room for intellectual reflection in socialist politics, which was, in turn, rendering Jospin and the PS unable to take on board the element of sanction already being expressed by the electorate. Rather than using the election period to look to the future, an approach which is arguably central to the socialist movement whose political culture focuses on the idea of social transformation, they fell into political management and an off-putting defence of their governmental record to date.⁵⁴ The relationship between intellectual reflection, the PS and the electorate, was already looking increasingly dysfunctional. The literature produced by PS members between September 2001 and April 2002 further demonstrates that the socialist approach to the campaign was, from the outset, often inward and backward looking. Bénédicte Delorme-Montini, for example, observed that the predominant theme in such writings was ‘autosatisfaction’.⁵⁵ The first 70% of Jospin’s campaign book, for example, focused on his political career and the government’s record, leaving only eighty-one pages for the ‘réflexions et projets’ section, the first part of which was spent denouncing Chirac.⁵⁶ Jospin’s wife, the intellectual Sylviane Agacinski,

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁵² The Fondation Jean-Jaurès was founded in 1992 and Pierre Mauroy was its president up until 2013.

⁵³ Pierre Mauroy, *Mémoires “Vous mettez du bleu au ciel”* (Paris, 2003), pp. 474-476.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 475-476.

⁵⁵ Bénédicte Delorme-Montini, ‘La campagne présidentielle à travers des livres’, *Le débat* 21 (2002/4), p. 22.

⁵⁶ Lionel Jospin with Alain Duhamel, *Le temps de répondre* (Paris, 2002).

even admitted in her published diary that Jospin dedicated most of his time to the first section and rushed to complete the final part.⁵⁷

The turn towards political management is particularly revealing because it could be argued that Jospin, despite being an *énarque*, has been one of the most reflective socialist politicians of recent years. In the 1990s, he seemed to be making considered attempts to reduce the Mitterrandian gap between discourse and practice and to articulate an intelligent and modern left-wing reformism around the distinction ‘Oui à l’économie de marché, non à la société de marché.’⁵⁸ The progressive inability to theorize his social democracy, and to adapt it to the early twenty-first century context, therefore illustrates the extent to which long-term issues were continuing to haunt the PS. Julliard, for example, has contended that in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, revolution as a means of change has been discredited and that the revolutionary reference has even been largely abandoned by the socialists. Reformism, however, he argued, has continued to be demonized, despite the lack of a credible alternative. The socialists’ internal debates have therefore no longer been between revolution and reform but, paradoxically, between reform and the maintenance of the status quo. Such arguments, he reflected, have been preventing the socialists from articulating a global vision, which could respond to society’s increasingly diverse and conservative tendencies.⁵⁹ The only progressive discourse that has been able to unite the left in recent years, he noted, has been a vague human rights moralism (the defence of minority rights). Pursued on its own, Julliard asserted, such a discourse has been putting the socialists

⁵⁷ Sylviane Agacinski, *Journal interrompu. 24 janvier-25 mai 2002* (Paris, 2002), pp. 32-33.

⁵⁸ Lionel Jospin cited in Bourgounioux and Grunberg, *L’ambition et le remords*, p. 528.

⁵⁹ Julliard, *Le malheur français*, pp. 65-68.

increasingly out of touch with their traditional electorate, which has therefore been turning to populist groups like the FN.⁶⁰

In the context of the lead-up to the 2002 presidential campaign, Julliard's understanding of the triangular relationship between intellectual reflection, the PS and wider society, is evidenced by the ramifications of maintaining unity across the Plural Left, which was becoming increasingly difficult to manage due to the pull of the 2002 elections. The challenge was particularly problematic since the changes to the electoral calendar (the presidential elections would, for the first time, precede the legislative elections) had put an extra focus on the presidentials. Jospin progressively pursued a vague pluralism. The first detailed study of Jospin's social and economic policy, published in this pre-campaign period, for example, was entitled *Monsieur ni-ni, l'économie selon Jospin* and it highlighted Jospin's tendency to define his positions in the negative and to prioritize balance over a clear way forward.⁶¹ As the socialist historian and member of the PS Alain Bergounioux observed, Jospin's reformism had become inward-looking, making PS ideology simply 'la résultante moyenne des idées et des courants qui vont du centre à l'extrême gauche'.⁶² PS doctrine was formed in relation to the other left parties and to the PS's own *courants*, rather than by analysing society and its demands as they evolved.

In the aftermath of the municipal elections, for example, Jospin and the socialists proved unable to provide a cogent response to the electorate's rising concerns about insecurity. Security has been a particularly divisive issue for the left. Hervé Algalarrondo, a journalist for the *Nouvel Observateur*, for example, demonstrated that it has been too problematic for

⁶⁰ Vincent Trémolet de Villers with Jacques Julliard, '« La gauche vit une crise fondamentale »', *Le Figaro* (04.06.2015) at www.lefigaro.fr/voix/politique/2015/06/04/31001-20150604ARTFIG00321-jacques-julliard-la-gauche-francaise-vit-une-crise-fondamentale.php (viewed 04 April 2016).

⁶¹ Erik Izraelewicz and Christine Mital, *Monsieur ni-ni. L'économie selon Jospin* (Paris, 2002).

⁶² Alain Bergounioux, Claude Evin, Alain Richard, Michel Sapin, Bernard Soulage, 'Quel renouveau pour le Parti socialiste ?', *Le Monde* (21.06.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 03 April 2016).

the PS to take a tougher stance on security because of the continued strength of human rights and libertarian discourses.⁶³ At the PS's conseil national immediately following the municipal elections, Jospin thus explained that he was not willing to run the risk of 'making his plural left explode' over security policy.⁶⁴ This inability to articulate a clear social-democratic response to society's contemporary issues, of which insecurity is just one example, risked legitimizing further-left discourses. This perhaps goes some way to explaining the multiplicity of candidates on the left in 2002 and the continued strength of the extreme anti-capitalist and anti-globalization left, as well as that of the far right.⁶⁵

While politicians like Moscovici and Mauroy tried to get their voices heard and to renew socialist ideology, there seems to be little evidence of intellectuals themselves directly attempting to have an influence within the PS in this period. The aftermath of the municipal elections therefore illustrated and exacerbated the long-term decline of partisan intellectual engagement with the PS which, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, had been particularly marked since the Grande Arche Congress (December 1991).⁶⁶ Unable to engage with the socialists, many left-wing intellectuals had themselves retreated from contemporary realities, severing the connections between intellectuals and wider society. Highly interlinked developments in the intellectual sphere were thus further compounding the disintegration of the relationship between intellectual reflection, the socialists and society.

The decline of partisan intellectual engagement, for example, was particularly problematic in France due to the lack of alternative spaces for intellectuals to get involved in political discussions. In particular, in 2002, France largely lacked the think-tank culture that had developed in other countries, like the United Kingdom. Contemplating the reasons for the

⁶³ Hervé Algalarrondo, *Sécurité. La gauche contre le peuple* (Paris, 2002).

⁶⁴ Lionel Jospin cited in Baumel and Bouvet, *L'année zéro*, p. 47.

⁶⁵ Bouvet, 'The tragedy of the French left'.

⁶⁶ Bouvet and Baumel, *L'année zéro*, pp. 23-25, 78-79.

2002 result, the historians and socialist sympathizers Vincent Duclert, Christophe Prochasson and Perrine Simon-Nahum wrote:

Il existe bien un problème de réflexion au sommet... comment ne pas remarquer que la France se caractérise à la fois par une séparation, quasiment inédite dans les autres grandes démocraties, entre les mondes académique, politique, administrative et économique, et par une connivence, détachée de toute exigence de penser, d'une fine couche non représentative de ces différents sphères ? Quels sont, dans l'Hexagone, les lieux communs de réflexion sur le réel et d'élaboration de projets pour l'avenir, qui réunissent ces univers qui s'ignorent ?⁶⁷

The media sphere was consequently being given a significant monopoly over political discussions and, as these intellectuals explained from their own experiences with the media, it was often hostile to researchers.⁶⁸ This twofold marginalization of intellectuals, both by the PS and by the media, caused many to withdraw into their own specialisms, creating a distance between their work and contemporary French politics and society.⁶⁹ Contemplating the 2002 result, the left-wing philosopher Nicolas Tenzer, for example, noted that many intellectuals were actively defending their work against any possible practical implications.⁷⁰ While intellectuals had to be responsible and aware of the limitations of what research could do in politics, he argued, they nonetheless had a role to play in, for example, the political battle against the far right.⁷¹ In a similar vein, Duclert deplored the lack of serious academic studies on the far right and criticized historical work on the Republic, which, he observed, often failed to explain its possible implications for the here and now.⁷²

The decline of 'realist' intellectuals, who were otherwise sympathetic to the socialist cause, was being exacerbated by the increasing dominance of oppositional (to the PS) left-wing

⁶⁷ Vincent Duclert, Christophe Prochasson and Perrine Simon-Nahum, 'Ce que peuvent les sciences sociales' in Duclert, Prochasson, Simon-Nahum (eds.), *Il s'est passé quelque chose*, pp. 264-265.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁶⁹ Vincent Duclert, 'L'espace perdu de la République', in *ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁰ Nicolas Tenzer, 'Le politique à l'épreuve de l'inconnu' in *ibid.*, pp. 252-253.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

⁷² Duclert, 'L'espace perdu de la République', p. 55.

groupings which, moreover, were receiving much more media attention. Hazareesingh demonstrated, for example, that nostalgia for a perceived golden era of intellectual engagement has meant that the media and the wider French public have retained a soft-spot for intellectual radicality which, as opposed to more moderate intellectual reflection, is more in touch with the legacy of intellectual engagement.⁷³ Since the mid-1980s, after the cooling down of the anti-totalitarian critique, there had been a breakdown of the liberal intellectual consensus and the rise of a hard left that has been rethinking Marxism, anarchism or the green agenda (for example the eminent sociologist and ‘public intellectual’ Pierre Bourdieu, the sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin, the sociologist Christian Laval and the philosophers Etienne Balibar, Miguel Abensour, Jancques Rancière, Pierre Dardot and Bernard Stiegler). This radical left seems to have been little involved in the 2002 presidential election campaign, but the movement demonstrates that many intellectuals had, for some time, no longer been PS sympathizers. Furthermore, Julliard argued that these intellectuals, specifically the grouping around Bourdieu, were themselves cut-off from the working classes. Disappointed with the working classes’ growing conservatism, Julliard contended, they had substituted immigrants for the proletariat, creating a sense of mutual distrust between intellectuals and the working classes which, in turn, was feeding populism.⁷⁴

Another group of opposition left-leaning intellectuals, which particularly emerged in response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in America, was the disparate group of media-savvy neo-republican intellectuals, many of whom rallied to Jean-Pierre Chevènement’s candidacy (announced as early as 4 September 2001).⁷⁵ They were reasserting strong nationalist and secularist republicanism, as a response to questions of globalization, immigration and identity. Those directly supporting Chevènement notably

⁷³ Hazareesingh, *How the French think*, p. 252.

⁷⁴ Jacques Julliard, *La faute aux élites* (Paris, 1997), p. 105, 109.

⁷⁵ Winock with Makarian, ‘« Désormais, c’est le média qui fait l’intellectuel »’.

included the eminent intellectual and student of French left-wing republicanism Régis Debray, the journalist, politician and biographer of Jaurès Max Gallo, the philosopher and journalist Paul Thibaud, the historian and specialist of political ideas and institutions Claude Nicolet, the historian Emmanuel Todd, the writer and founder of the French news magazine *Marianne* Jean-François Kahn, and the eminent historian of ideas, philosopher and political analyst Pierre André Taguieff. In a polemical essay published in the aftermath of 2002, the liberal historian Daniel Lindenberg, close to Rosanvallon, argued that these intellectuals, which he derisively termed the ‘new reactionaries’, were complicit in Jospin’s elimination.⁷⁶ There are problems with the essay; Lindenberg tended to criticize individuals rather than truly tackling their ideas and he conflated the views of ideologically diverse figures. However, he convincingly demonstrated the early signs of a breakup of the left liberal progressive grouping and the retreat of these intellectuals into various forms of ‘declinism’.⁷⁷ In the 2002 campaign year, these intellectuals produced a large amount of literature deploring France’s ‘collapse’.⁷⁸ One such essay, for example, was Patrick Bloch, Emmanuel Pierrat and Marc Gauchée’s *La culture, quand même! Pour une politique culturelle*, which argued that European and international regulations threatened France’s cultural exception.⁷⁹ As with the radical intellectual movement, this phenomenon was undermining the relationship between intellectuals, the PS and the voting public. Not only were these intellectuals opposing the socialists, they also largely failed to connect with the electorate yet, due to the media coverage they received, they influenced the intellectual climate of the campaign and, by espousing similar themes, they actively, if unwittingly, legitimized the far right. While Chevènement was credited with as much as 15% in the polls at the beginning of 2002, for

⁷⁶ Daniel Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l’ordre* (Paris, 2002), p. 8.

⁷⁷ Hazareesingh, *How the French think*, pp. 310-311.

⁷⁸ Delorme-Montini, ‘La campagne présidentielle à travers les livres’, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Patrick Bloch, Emmanuel Pierrat and Marc Gauchée, *La culture quand même ! Pour une politique culturelle* (Paris, 2002).

example, his score rapidly began to flag once Le Pen entered the field.⁸⁰ Chevènement's movement was above all an intellectual one. Delorme-Montini therefore reflected: 'le Pôle républicain [the organization of committees supporting Chevènement] est plus un phénomène intellectuel qu'un rassemblement politique, dont le succès s'estime au regard du nombre d'auteurs qu'il attire plus qu'au nombre de suffrages qu'il récolte.'⁸¹

The aftermath of the municipal elections thus illustrates the extent to which intellectuals, the socialists and the public were out of step. A combination of the socialists' state of ideological confusion and the demands of the public media sphere meant that socialist politicians and many left-wing intellectuals had become increasingly insular. They were thus isolating themselves both from each other and from the public, which, as a result, was already turning to populism and abstention.⁸²

Part II: The First Round Presidential Campaign

At the end of February, Jospin was polling 23 % of voter intentions, yet on 21 April he scored only 16 %.⁸³ This crucial drop of seven percentage points suggests that the campaign itself played a significant part in the final outcome. The flawed and lacklustre nature of Jospin's campaign was a sign of the continued breakdown of the connections between intellectual reflection, the socialists and the concerns of the electorate, which had already become increasingly apparent in the lead up to the campaign. The presidential platform, the significance and implications of the electoral slogan 'Présider autrement', Jospin's contradictory comments about his political positioning and the lack of involvement of those intellectuals who were supposedly sympathetic to the socialist cause all played their part.

⁸⁰ David S. Bell, 'France: the left in 2002 – the end of the Mitterrand strategy', *Parliamentary Affairs* 56 (2003), p. 31.

⁸¹ Delorme-Montini, 'La campagne présidentielle à travers les livres', p. 31.

⁸² In the municipal elections 37% of Plural Left sympathizers did not come out to vote. Amongst the working classes abstention was 40% and 53% for under 25s. Figures taken from Mauroy, *Mémoires*, p. 474.

⁸³ Denis Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite* (Paris, 2002), p. 10.

Unable to formulate a vision for the future, Jospin and the socialists armed themselves with a technocratic and uninspiring programme, focused on criticizing Chirac above and beyond ideas and convictions and struggled to articulate what it meant to be on the left. In the process, many people were cut out of the socialist campaign. Those few intellectuals who were directly involved in setting out the presidential platform ended up fulfilling a largely technocratic role, while others found little of inspiration in the socialist campaign. Faced with the continued hostility of the public media sphere, intellectuals largely failed to get involved publicly with the campaign.

The Socialist Campaign

Prochasson argued that since Communism has largely been discredited, the French left has either been stuck in realism, in the case of the centre left, or dogmatism and moralism, in the case of the far left, and that neither of these discourses are in touch with the humanist values of the left's political culture, which could help clarify its identity in the present. He reflected that, no longer knowing what they are aiming for, socialist programmes have become increasingly technical - a sign of their 'presentism':

Son programme n'est plus porté par une vision ambitieuse de transformation. Ce qui ne signifie pas qu'il faille en revenir aux vieilles lunes des lendemains qui chantent et de la rupture avec le capitalisme qui n'est pas à l'échelle humaine. Mais un programme confié aux technocrates qui réduisent la politique au règlement de problèmes qui tous auraient une solution... conduit la gauche à perdre sa vocation et sa singularité... En bref il manque à la gauche une ossature morale et intellectuelle.⁸⁴

Prochasson's analysis is supported by Jospin's presidential programme, released on 18 March. The project contained many practical and discernibly left-wing proposals, including

⁸⁴ Christophe Prochasson with Nicolas Vidal, 'Christophe Prochasson: « Les socialistes consomment des symboles »' (12.07.2011) at [www.jean-jaures.org/Acces-direct/Revue-de-presse/Christophe-Prochasson-Les-socialistes-consomment-des-symboles/\(language\)/fre-FR](http://www.jean-jaures.org/Acces-direct/Revue-de-presse/Christophe-Prochasson-Les-socialistes-consomment-des-symboles/(language)/fre-FR) (viewed 11 April 2016).

the creation of a right to life-long training, the reduction of housing tax, a universal housing provision, a new stage in administrative decentralization, a constitutional commitment to the development of a European federation of nation states and the abolition of the debt of developing countries.⁸⁵ Both the media and the public, however, saw little difference between Jospin's programme and Chirac's; the platform thus largely failed to connect with the public and did little to advance the campaign.⁸⁶ The discrepancy between the content of the document and its reception can partly be explained by the damaging effects of cohabitation, which had blurred the distinction between the two candidates.⁸⁷ In line with Prochasson's analysis, however, it also further demonstrated that Jospin and the socialists had largely abandoned reformism for a culture of management and were increasingly unable to define and project what they stood for. The long-winded, forty-page, document lacked an overarching theme and was, above all, an unmemorable catalogue of practical measures.⁸⁸

Jospin's presidential programme thus epitomized the PS's retreat into a managerial, as opposed to a theoretical, reformism, which came at the expense of a wider vision to engage and inspire the public. The programme also provides a further insight into the dysfunctional nature of the connection between the PS and intellectuals because it was actually put together by those few intellectuals who were still actively engaged with socialist politics. The team in charge of the programme was headed by Moscovici, supported by his political advisor and the managing director of the Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Gilles Finchelstein, Vincent Peillon, the party spokesman but also a philosopher and devotee of late nineteenth and early twentieth-

⁸⁵ Lionel Jospin, *Je m'engage*, accessible at <http://miroires.ironie.org/socialisme/www.psinfo.net/> (viewed 10 March 2016).

⁸⁶ Even *Le Monde* interpreted the programme as centrist. See, for example, Ariane Chemin and Michel Noblecourt, 'Lionel Jospin présente, à son tour, son programme aux Français', *Le Monde* (18.03.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 12 April 2016); According to *L'Express*, 74% of the electorate could not tell the difference between Jospin's programme and Chirac's: *L'Express* (12.04.2002) cited in David Howarth and Georgios Varouxakis, *Contemporary France. An introduction to French politics and society* (London, 2003), p. 81.

⁸⁷ Bouvet, 'The tragedy of the French left'.

⁸⁸ Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite*, p. 178.

century left-wing thinkers, and the socialist historian Alain Bergounioux. These intellectuals have all produced detailed and thoughtful work on questions of social democracy in the academic sphere.⁸⁹ The final nature of the programme, however, demonstrates that they largely failed to make an impact intellectually in the campaign. Bouvet's and Baumel's comments about the death of partisan intellectual engagement should therefore be nuanced. There was still a small intellectual core within the PS, but there was such a marked lack of space for considered reflection, that any intellectual impact was often lost in favour of more technocratic work.

These intellectuals were highly frustrated with the process of creating the document. The film director Denis Pingaud, who was helping to make a documentary about the PS campaign and had regular access to socialist meetings, related that Moscovici and Finchelstein took themselves for an hour-long walk around Paris together after the final meeting about the programme because they were so infuriated that Jospin's penchant for synthesis across the left's ideological spectrum had perverted their ideas.⁹⁰ Although there is an element of hindsight and, probably, self-defence to their comments, Bergounioux and Moscovici have corroborated this sense of exasperation. Bergounioux asserted that the project 'a été discuté, à de nombreuses reprises, par les principaux ministres socialistes du gouvernement et les dirigeants socialistes. Ce mode d'élaboration lui a donné plus l'aspect d'un programme législatif, que le caractère d'une vision pour la France.'⁹¹ Continuing his comments on the aftermath of the municipal elections, Moscovici wrote that Jospin, still believing that the governmental record would speak for itself, had failed to prioritize the programme and

⁸⁹ For example: Vincent Peillon, *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée* (Paris, 2008); Bergounioux (with Grunberg), *L'ambition et le remords*; Gilles Finchelstein (with Matthieu Pigasse), *Le monde d'après: une crise sans précédent* (Paris, 2009).

⁹⁰ Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite*, p. 126.

⁹¹ Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, p. 467.

simply did not give the team the time to think deeply (work on the project only got started properly in February). Recognizing the limitations of the project, he noted:

Etait-il vraiment possible de faire autrement, quand nous n'avions eu que peu de semaines pour prendre de nouvelles options sur la sécurité, pour faire nos choix sur les institutions, pour redéfinir une politique internationale et européenne, pour imaginer une nouvelle perspective économique et sociale? Il fallait, en même temps, réfléchir, écrire, arbitrer, inventer, trancher entre les positions fortement antagoniques.⁹²

The PS campaign therefore struggled because it lacked a sense of vision, which could challenge Chirac's and the FN's excessive focus on insecurity. This lack of imagination was further demonstrated, and consolidated, by the socialists' presidential campaign slogan 'Présider autrement'. It was designed to 'presidentialize' the incumbent Prime Minister Jospin, but it increasingly translated into an excessive focus on Chirac's lack of credibility and on his 'failure' to keep the promises he made in the 1995 presidential elections.⁹³ The focus on Chirac was partly due to an understandable, if tactically risky, focus on the second round, as well as a need, after cohabitation, to draw attention to the differences between the two candidates. On a deeper level, however, it signified that, lacking ideas, the socialists had subordinated imagination and debate to personalities and, in the process, had become increasingly detached from the electorate.

The disconnection between the socialist campaign and the wider voting public is particularly demonstrated by one of the great gaffes of the socialist campaign. On 10 March on a plane journey back from La Réunion, Jospin commented, in earshot of several journalists, that Chirac was 'vieilli, 'fatigué' and 'usé'.⁹⁴ When Jospin's remarks were reported in the press, they provoked a storm of criticism and Jospin dropped four points in the polls, demonstrating

⁹² Moscovici, *Un an après*, pp. 198-199.

⁹³ Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite* (Paris, 2002), pp. 41-43.

⁹⁴ Lionel Jospin cited in *ibid.*, p. 190.

a public distaste for such personal attacks.⁹⁵ The comment undermined Jospin's decency, which, up to this point, had been one of his key strengths.⁹⁶ Prochasson, for example, has argued that personal behaviour is crucial on the left as it goes to the heart of socialist values: 'Rien ne mine plus sérieusement l'homme de gauche que de ne pas savoir mettre en accord ses mœurs avec l'éthique exigeante que lui imposent les valeurs de générosité et d'honnêteté dont le socialisme est fait.'⁹⁷ Jospin's comment was unfortunate and was not intended to be a public statement. However, it became an issue because Jospin had already made the campaign about personalities. Jospin's insults undermined his promise to 'Présider autrement', while further giving the impression that the socialist campaign was, above all, a personal battle with Chirac.⁹⁸ Chirac was quick to capitalize on the gaffe, stating: 'J'ai fait des propositions que je croyais utiles sur la sécurité, la santé, l'économie, l'emploi, et j'attends les propositions des autres candidats et notamment celles de M. Jospin. Et qu'est-ce que j'entends ? Des propos sur le physique, le mental, la santé. C'est tout de même un peu curieux.'⁹⁹

The technical nature of the campaign, brought about by the socialists' state of intellectual vacuity, combined with the interrelated narrow focus on Chirac, isolated Jospin's campaign from much of the electorate. Moscovici, for example, stated:

« Présider autrement »: c'était suggérer, même si ce n'était évidemment pas notre conviction, que l'enjeu central de l'élection n'était pas la lutte contre l'insécurité, la bataille contre les inégalités, la maîtrise de la mondialisation, mais bel et bien, simplement de changer de Président »... Lionel Jospin, qui avait tant fait, qui en était si capable, n'a jamais dit aux Français pendant la campagne présidentielle: « J'aime la France, je suis des vôtres, je veux vous servir, je suis attaché à des

⁹⁵ Irene Hill, 'The television campaigns for the French elections of 2002', in Gaffney (ed.), *The French presidential and legislative elections of 2002*, p. 126.

⁹⁶ Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite*, p. 91.

⁹⁷ Christophe Prochasson, *La gauche est-elle morale ?* (Paris, 2010), p. 249.

⁹⁸ Moscovici, *Un an après*, p. 191.

⁹⁹ Jacques Chirac cited in Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite*, p. 93.

valeurs qui nous sont communes, je souhaite une France plus juste dans un monde plus sûr, voilà où nous irons ensemble si vous m'élisez Président ».¹⁰⁰

The struggle to connect with the electorate was also starkly revealed by another of the great gaffes of the campaign. The only time that Jospin truly met with the working-class electorate was an unplanned, but highly televised, conversation with delegates from the Lu factory in the Essonne on 13 March. Asked what he was going to do to help workers who were being laid off by highly profitable international companies, Jospin cited the government's record on reducing unemployment. There was then an embarrassed silence when Jospin was asked: 'Monsieur, est-ce que vous pouvez vivre avec 4000 francs par mois?'¹⁰¹ The delegate was an activist from the Trotskyite Lutte Ouvrière party, so this episode was, to a certain extent, a stitch up. All the same, Jospin should have been trying to reach out to this far-left electorate. His statistical response, followed by his complete lack of a response, to what were reasonable concerns about the implications of globalization on job security, sharply demonstrated that the retreat into political management was rendering the socialists unable to take on board the new and complex challenges faced by their traditional working-class electorate.

Towards the end of March, the polls began to reveal that Jospin's popularity was declining in favour of other candidates, especially Lutte Ouvrière's Arlette Laguiller.¹⁰² The socialists finally began to recognize that they were losing the support of the working classes. On 19 March, at the bureau national du Parti socialiste, Mauroy stated: 'Quand je feuillette le projet... je cherche les travailleurs.' He insisted a few days later: 'Il faut utiliser les mots de travailleurs, d'ouvriers ou d'employés: ce ne sont pas des gros mots ! La classe ouvrière existe toujours.'¹⁰³ How Jospin and the socialists attempted to reverse this trend, and to win the far-left votes, however, further reveals the breakdown of the relationship between

¹⁰⁰ Moscovici, *Un an après*, p. 190, 200.

¹⁰¹ Conversation cited in Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite*, pp. 95-96.

¹⁰² Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite*, p. 151.

¹⁰³ Pierre Mauroy cited in *ibid.*, p. 151.

intellectual reflection, the socialists and the public. The socialists had great difficulty articulating what it meant to be on the left in the contemporary context.

Duclert has argued that due to the long-term demands of unity, the socialists have lost touch with the issues raised by nineteenth and early twentieth-century libertarian socialism, which could provide some insight into questions of socialist identity in the present.¹⁰⁴ This struggle has been demonstrated, he contended, by the socialists' superficial and mythological relationship with history.¹⁰⁵ The lack of a critical relationship with their history has been preventing the PS from forming a vision of the world, which could engage the public in the present. The left, having marginalized intellectual reformist voices, he wrote, have become purely political, focusing on parties, elections and government.¹⁰⁶ Duclert's grasp of the connections between intellectuals, the socialists and wider society, which is closely related to Prochasson's, is supported by Jospin's confused and contradictory attempt to position himself ideologically during the campaign. When he announced his candidacy, probably in an attempt to open up to the centre, Jospin declared that 'The programme I represent is not socialist.'¹⁰⁷ At the end of March, however, Jospin tried to reclaim a position on the left. He stated that he was 'le candidat de la France qui travaille... [de ceux qui] travaillent dans une chaîne d'usine, derrière la caisse d'un supermarché, auprès des malades dans un hôpital ou sur un tracteur' and he cited Victor Hugo: 'Parce que la misère n'attend pas, les reformes, mêmes partielles, doivent être réalisées dès à présent.'¹⁰⁸ Rather than attempting to give a left-wing vision, which could satisfy the early twenty-first century fears of the working classes about globalization and insecurity, Jospin's definition of what it meant to be on the left was sociological, mythological and nostalgic. Studies have demonstrated that this

¹⁰⁴ Vincent Duclert, *La gauche devant l'histoire*, pp. 1-2, 147-148.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Lionel Jospin on France 2 (21.02.2002) cited in Clift, 'Lionel Jospin's campaign', p. 152.

¹⁰⁸ Lionel Jospin cited in Pingaud, *L'impossible défaite*, pp. 162-163.

rhetorical shift had no positive impact on the electorate.¹⁰⁹ The unsubtle left-turn further blurred the socialists' message and gave the impression that the campaign was about tactics rather than convictions.¹¹⁰

In one sense, the flaws of Jospin's presidential campaign were about poor campaign management; however, on a deeper level they thus also reflected the PS's state of intellectual existential confusion. The socialists struggled to articulate what their values were when it came to the questions of globalization that were beginning to dominate twenty-first century politics. This difficulty was then isolating the socialists from much of their electorate, by preventing them from recognizing, analysing, and responding convincingly and holistically to, their contemporary concerns.

Intellectuals and the Socialist Campaign

It has already been demonstrated that those intellectuals who were directly involved with the campaign, working within or alongside the PS, had to sacrifice their intellectual identity for more technocratic work. There is also, however, very little evidence of intellectuals sympathetic to the socialist cause attempting to connect with the public, to influence public political discussions, and thus the intellectual climate of the campaign, in order to combat the appeal of the largely non-intellectual populist discourses of the far left and far right. Taking *Le Monde* as a case study, there was a flurry of intellectual engagement trying to rally an anti-Le Pen vote between rounds. To give just two examples, and there are many more, the filmmaker Laurent Heynemann called for artists to 'relevez la tête' and the historian and specialist of Republican institutions, Maurice Agulhon, wrote an article explaining the meaning of the Republic for the present; he criticized Chevènement's use of the term and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

¹¹⁰ Pierre-Luc Séguillon, 'Campagne de promotion', *Le Monde* (09.04.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 08 April 2016).

explained how security, one of the rights of man, had historically been a fundamental left-wing value.¹¹¹ The high level of intellectual engagement between rounds, however, contrasted with the dearth of intellectual commentary during the campaign itself. The notable exception to a general intellectual passivity was the mathematician Michel Broué's prophetic and passionate article published on 19 April, which warned of the rise of the FN in the polls and called for the public to vote for Jospin despite the limitations of his campaign:

Etes-vous devenus fous ? Le Pen talonne Jospin dans certains sondages!... Vous avez voulu lui donner une leçon. Marre des slogans creux, marre des ambiguïtés, des paillettes, du « projet socialiste », de la campagne de second tour un mois avant le premier tour, de l'électorisme remplaçant les utopies. Bon, d'accord. Mais ne savez-vous donc plus ce qui nous attend, nous, notre France, nos services publics, nos hôpitaux, notre école laïque, nos protections sociales, nos chemins de fer, si la droite revient au pouvoir... ? Chirac-Jospin, c'est pareil ? Comme Clinton et Bush sans doute !... Si la liasse génération revient aux affaires le 6 mai, il sera trop tard. Vous l'aurez pour longtemps, la gueule de bois, et nous avec vous, et nos enfants avec nous tous. Réveillez-vous, avant le 21 avril, vite!¹¹²

It is difficult to determine whether the lack of engagement was due to the general vacuity of the PS campaign, which meant that there was little for intellectuals to engage with, or the continued struggle to get their voices heard in the media. Drawing on the evidence from the lead up to the campaign, it was probably a combination of the two. Moscovici, for example, argued: 'L'éloignement des intellectuels, leur désintérêt par rapport à notre projet, ont sans doute été un des signes avant-coureurs de notre défaite de 2002.'¹¹³ Duclert then cited the nature of the media sphere as a central reason for the lack of intellectual involvement during the campaign.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Laurent Heynemann, 'Artistes, relevez la tête', *Le Monde* (26.04.2002); Maurice Agulhon, 'Comment être républicain aujourd'hui', *Le Monde* (03.05.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 08 April 2016).

¹¹² Michel Broué (with Bernard Maurat), 'A nos amis de gauche qui deviennent fous', *Le Monde* (18.04.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 01 May 2016).

¹¹³ Moscovici, *Un an après*, p. 267.

¹¹⁴ Duclert, 'L'espace perdu de la République', p. 55.

The PS had therefore largely abandoned reflection for a form of non-intellectual political management and their campaign was thus unable to seduce the contemporary electorate. The separation between reflection, the socialists and the public was then further compounded by the unprecedented lack of intellectual engagement during the campaign.

Part III: The Ramifications of 2002

2002 had longer-term ramifications for the relationship between intellectuals, the socialists and wider society. By analysing developments in socialist politics between April 2002 and the party's Dijon Congress (16-18 May 2003), we understand better how the PS's obsessions with purely contingent factors, combined with the rise of a reformed far-left flank, prevented any coherent doctrinal reform. 2002 also made an immediate impact in the intellectual sphere, where the project *Il s'est passé quelque chose* provides an illuminating case study for intellectuals' reaction to the shock of the first round defeat of Jospin. Expanding on the impassioned debates that unfolded between the two presidential rounds, some intellectuals sympathetic to the socialist cause did seek to make an impact on PS politics in light of the 2002 defeat. The collection attempted to modernize and rebuild the connections between intellectuals, the socialists and society, by reconceptualizing the intellectual's role and by making academic work more politically relevant. The project, however, had little impact on the PS due to a combination of the problems of party culture and the specialized and disparate nature of the project itself. The 2005 referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe then demonstrated how little progress had been made since 2002. The victory of the 'no' campaign in 2005 represented a repeat of the problems revealed by the 2002 defeat and illustrated the continued, and perhaps even exacerbated, breakdown of the connections between intellectuals, the PS and wider society.

The Politicians

In the wake of the first round result, socialist politicians often failed to recognize and analyse the wider significance of the defeat. The first lengthy and highly publicized analyses of the event, for example, largely dismissed it as an ‘accident’ or blamed it on Jospin’s personality and campaign blunders, or on the behaviour of the other left candidates. The first response, published in August 2002, was Jospin’s secretary of state for housing Marie-Noëlle Lienemann’s testimony *Ma part d’inventaire*.¹¹⁵ The work included some thoughtful analysis on the changing nature of the working classes, the need to engage with reality and to recognize issues such as insecurity and the dangers of Euroscepticism as a response to globalization on the left.¹¹⁶ Her overriding diagnosis, however, was that 2002 represented ‘la vengeance du peuple de gauche contre Jospin’ and she virulently attacked him, stating that he was ‘un peu court pour être Président’ and had an ‘ego hypertrophié’.¹¹⁷ The second, more official and less personal, response was a note for the Fondation Jean-Jaurès written by Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, who was close to Dominique Strauss-Kahn.¹¹⁸ His analysis is much more nuanced than Lienemann’s and he claimed to be actively trying to ‘appropriier intellectuellement [cet échec] pour mieux le dépasser politiquement’.¹¹⁹ While he did attempt to look at the bigger picture, suggesting that French society suffered from an ‘ambivalence’ brought about by globalization, the dominance of neo-liberalism, increasing individualism and a lack of confidence in progress, he could have gone much deeper. Like Lienemann, he also focused largely on contingent factors: ‘tout d’abord le séisme politique intervenu le 21 avril dernier et qui a scellé la défaite de la gauche est pour une part essentielle d’ordre conjoncturel et même accidentel. Il n’était donc pas fatal... Sans [les] attaques de nos

¹¹⁵ Marie-Noëlle Lienemann, *Ma part d’inventaire* (Paris, 2002).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14, 93-108, 128-131.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22, 26, 45.

¹¹⁸ Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, ‘L’étrange échec’, *Notes de la Fondation Jean-Jaurès* 33 (November 2002).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

partenaires contre le gouvernement auxquels ils participaient, Jospin aurait été présent au second tour.¹²⁰ Both Lienemann's and Cambadélis's assessments were not unfounded, yet they failed to recognize the extent to which the 2002 result also reflected, as discussed above, long-term and profound problems on the left. Such analyses thus rendered the PS unable to address the problems raised by the event and to begin a process of reform, which could have helped to put their politics back in line with the nature, concerns and demands of contemporary society. Rather than truly taking on board 2002, and reflecting upon, reaching out to, and incorporating society, such interpretations gave the impression that the PS was more divided than ever, remained inward-looking and defensive and was descending into a battle of egos. These problems of party culture risked further isolating socialist politics from intellectuals and from society. A review of Cambadélis's essay in the far-left-leaning newspaper *l'Humanité*, for example, noted with exasperation that Cambadélis continued to 'sous-estimer des attentes des électeurs de gauche... qui... étaient... bien réelle'.¹²¹

Some of the less detailed analyses, however, did move beyond contingent explanations and did constitute attempts to rethink and rebuild the connections between intellectual reflection, the PS and the electorate. Vincent Peillon, François Rebsamen and Manuel Valls, for example, co-authored an article published in *Le Monde* at the end of August 2002 in which they argued that 21 April represented 'une crise politique profonde', which required the socialists to transcend their internal difficulties, to embark on genuine and novel debates and to start a new cycle in socialist history:

L'histoire frappe à notre porte. Il faut entendre et répondre... Le 21 avril ne peut ni ne doit être un simple anneau dans la chaîne du temps. Il doit être une fin et un commencement. La fin d'un cycle politique qui a vu la gauche accéder aux

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 14, 49.

¹²¹ Maurice Ulrich, 'Une journée particulière ? Dans l'étrange échec, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis donne sa version de la défaite de Lionel Jospin et de la gauche', *l'Humanité* (16.11.2002) at www.humanite.fr/ (viewed 03 March 2016).

responsabilités et par trois fois être battue, n'arrivant pas à répondre dans la durée et en même temps aux exigences des siens et à l'intérêt du pays. Le début d'un cycle nouveau capable de résoudre cette équation et de mettre en œuvre un réformisme radical, populaire sans être populiste, attentif aux contraintes du réel, mais ne cédant ni au conformisme ni au renoncement.¹²²

Furthermore, the suggestions of individuals linked to the jospino-rocardian 'socialisme et démocratie' *courant* represented explicit attempts to reinvigorate PS ideas and to incorporate civil society. Bergounioux, for example, called for 'une reconstruction idéologique' and insisted on the need to reconnect with the public by being more representative and open to society.¹²³ Strauss-Kahn called for a 'réformisme réfléchi' and encouraged research into forms of 'association citoyenne... sous la forme de forums avec des associations, des intellectuels et des acteurs sociaux.' Close to the Policy Network think tank chaired by Peter Mandelson, Strauss-Kahn was also keen that socialist reflection transcend national boundaries.¹²⁴

The Dijon congress (16-18 May 2003), the first congress after the 2002 defeat, however, demonstrated that these various attempts at reform were constrained by the continued moral hegemony of discourses from the far left of the PS. While Hollande's 'réformisme de gauche' prevailed, the three minority far-left motions polled a strong 38 %.¹²⁵ This resurgence of the far left influenced the atmosphere of the congress and meant that there was no genuine ideological renewal, or attempt to theorize the 'réformisme de gauche'. Only Strauss-Kahn, for example, seemed to think, or be willing to admit, that the congress truly represented 'le

¹²² Vincent Peillon, François Rebsamen and Manuel Valls, 'Le 26 avril et après', *Le Monde* (30.08.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 14 November 2015).

¹²³ Alain Bergounioux with Béatrice Gurrey, 'une confédération des composantes de la gauche', *Le Monde* (24.08.2002) at <http://miroirs.ironie.org/socialisme/www.psinfo.net/entretiens/bergounioux/confederation.html> (viewed 17 March 2016).

¹²⁴ Dominique Strauss-Kahn cited in Michel Noblecourt and Nicolas Weill, 'En attendant la refondation', *Le Monde* (08.06.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 04 March 2016).

¹²⁵ Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, p. 479.

choix de réformisme'.¹²⁶ Looking back on the aftermath of 2002, Hollande, then party secretary, stated:

J'ai beaucoup sacrifié à l'unité, peut-être trop... On a souffert d'un manque de lisibilité... la ligne réformiste a été largement validée [après 2002] mais constamment contredite par la mauvaise conscience, la suspicion de ceux qui pensent que nous ne sommes pas suffisamment à gauche. C'est un contresens. Ce que demandent les catégories populaires, ce n'est pas de la surenchère; c'est la lisibilité et du concret.¹²⁷

In line with Bergounioux and Grunberg's thesis, the ramifications of 2002 thus included a strong revival of far-left voices within the PS, arguing that the socialists had been defeated because they not been left-wing enough and had therefore 'betrayed' and lost the support of the electorate.¹²⁸ Such a stance was epitomized by Henri Emmanuelli and Jean-Luc Mélenchon and their *courant* Nouveau Monde, founded in September 2002. They accused the Jospin government of 'social liberalism' and argued that their *courant* would oppose it with 'une contestation sans equivoque de la mondialisation libérale'.¹²⁹ They openly sought to 'move the [PS's] centre of gravity leftward' and to bring in the Greens, the Communist Party and the anti-globalization movements.¹³⁰ In a polemical article in the *Nouvel Observateur*, Julliard highlighted how paradoxical and defective this far-left understanding of the relationship between the socialists and the public was:

Si j'ai bien compris Henri Emmanuelli, les ouvriers ont voté Le Pen parce que Jospin n'était pas assez à gauche... Voilà qui est intéressant. Original. Décoiffant. Si dans une usine de sodas que les consommateurs n'achètent plus parce qu'ils les trouvent trop sucrés l'ingénieur conseille de rajouter du glucose, il se fait

¹²⁶ Dominique Strauss-Kahn cited in *ibid.*, p. 477.

¹²⁷ François Hollande with Françoise Fressoz, 'François Hollande: « J'ai beaucoup sacrifié à l'unité, peut-être trop », *Le Monde* (05.07.2011) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 04 April 2016).

¹²⁸ Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*.

¹²⁹ The 'Appel d'Agelès' project cited in Michel Noblecourt, 'MM. Emmanuelli et Mélenchon créent le courant Nouveau Monde', *Le Monde* (29.09.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 16 March 2016).

¹³⁰ Henri Emmanuelli cited in Bell, 'France: the left in 2002', p. 88.

proprement virer... si l'électorat du PS a tendance à glisser à droite, ses militants, eux, ont tendance à glisser à gauche.¹³¹

Julliard's comment was a slightly glib assessment; the electorate had not really moved right but, rather, had turned to populist discourses on the left and right, or to abstention. Julliard identified, however, how debilitating this historic reflex response was for the PS. A return to, or even an intensification of, the stigmatization of reformism and the call for a leftward shift distracted attention from any reflection on what it really meant to be on the left in the contemporary context. It made it very difficult to rethink social democracy and to come up with new and imaginative responses to contemporary issues. Making 'social liberalism' into an insult, for example, continued to obscure the importance of liberty in socialist political culture and tainted any discussions about how to reconcile individualism with solidarity.¹³²

In the aftermath of 2002, those few attempts to rethink social democracy for contemporary times within the political sphere were thus undermined by, and they are highly interlinked, a dismissal of the significance of the event and the renewed authority of the historic obsessions of the French left. At a time which required contemplation, debate and reform, in order to put socialist ideology back in step with the times, and with society, the PS instead descended into archaic and immobilizing arguments. While, uncharacteristically, the defeat did not lead to a marked leftward shift in the official line, a resurgence of the far left bubbled under the surface and the demands of unity thus led to a continued state of ideological confusion. None of the questions raised by 2002 were convincingly tackled and the PS's continued ideological vagueness risked further marginalizing both intellectuals and the public.

¹³¹ Jacques Julliard in *Le Nouvel Observateur* cited in 'Dans la presse française', *Le Monde* (04.10.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 21 April 2016).

¹³² Julliard, *Le malheur Français*, pp. 125-131.

The Intellectuals: *Il s'est passé quelque chose... le 21 avril 2002*

In the intellectual sphere, the project *Il s'est passé quelque chose... le 21 avril 2002*, published a year after the 2002 result, constituted a direct attempt by intellectuals to reflect upon, and respond to, the socialists' defeat. The premise of the collection was that 2002 was both a political and an intellectual crisis, which had been overlooked and quickly forgotten.¹³³ The left-leaning historians who directed the project hoped that the collection of essays would constitute a first step in overcoming the state of mutual distrust between the intellectual and the political spheres. They wanted to demonstrate that intellectuals, particularly those whose academic work was in the social sciences, had a crucial role to play in the future and survival of French democracy.¹³⁴ The collection as a whole, as well as each individual contribution, was therefore all about rethinking the connections between intellectual work and French socialist politics and society. The historian Marion Fontaine, for example, analysed the historic left-wing mining region Lens, which had turned to the FN in both rounds of the presidential elections.¹³⁵ She suggested that a use of history could renovate the PS's political culture and help the socialists to reengage with the working classes.¹³⁶ Rather than viewing the Lens region's mining heritage nostalgically, she thus advocated a complex historical understanding of its contemporary relevance.¹³⁷ Such an approach, she contended, would shed light on the disconnection between the local and the national and the working classes and the political elites. She concluded: 'la redéfinition d'une identité et d'une culture de gauche semble... être en partie liée à une nouvelle articulation des rapports entre classes populaires, partis politiques et intellectuels.'¹³⁸ The historian Yves Cohen, whose work on

¹³³ Duclert, Prochasson and Simon-Nahum, 'Ce que peuvent les sciences sociales', p. 9.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-12; Vincent Duclert, Christophe Prochasson, Perinne Simon-Nahum and Nicolas Tenzer, 'Conclusion « le premier acte »', p. 263.

¹³⁵ Marion Fontaine, '« L'étrange défaite », ou la crise du modèle politique lensois', pp. 77-89.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 81-88.

l'histoire de l'action has often taken on a transnational dimension, argued that the 2002 presidential election campaign demonstrated that the only issue able to form a consensus in France was that of police and immigration, which, he contended, showed how inward-looking French politics had become.¹³⁹ The role of the social sciences, he proposed, should be about bringing global issues into political and public debates, in order to form a consensus around universal issues. Intellectuals, he suggested, should thus ‘*intervenir dans la cité-monde*’.¹⁴⁰ The sociologist Eric Fassin then posited that the 2002 defeat was all about confused understandings of ‘*le peuple*’ and their relationship to the elites and to ‘*representation*’.¹⁴¹ The socialists’ state of stasis, he argued, could be explained by the fact that they were stuck between an Enlightenment understanding and a Marxist understanding, both of which view representation as either coming from above or from below, rather than being in any way reciprocal.¹⁴² He argued that the social sciences could help the socialists to overcome this historic difficulty, as they understand that representation is not about reflection, for example politicians following public opinion, but the construction of a social world.¹⁴³

Il s'est passé quelque chose thus demonstrates that 2002 served as a catalyst for increased intellectual engagement. There was a sizeable young generation of intellectuals (twenty-six individuals contributed to the collection) who, at least in the short term, were keen to make their research relevant, to shed light on contemporary democracy and to try to influence socialist politics. However, the project struggled to make an impact and in 2005 Duclert and Perrine Simon-Nahum, two of the historians who directed the project, lamented that neither

¹³⁹ Yves Cohen, ‘*Intervenir dans la cité-monde*’, p. 219.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

¹⁴¹ Eric Fassin, ‘*Haut/bas: fragile. Le peuple et les élites en politique et en sociologie*’, pp. 240-242.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 243, 247.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

socialist politicians nor intellectuals had taken up the themes of the collection.¹⁴⁴ On the one hand, the project's failure can be put down to the fact that, as discussed, the 2002 political moment had paradoxically further reduced the room for reflection within the PS. On the other hand, the project also sheds light on some of the wider problems with contemporary intellectual engagement, notably the often very specialized and disparate nature of the twenty-first century research environment. What is striking about the collection, when compared to twentieth-century intellectual engagement, which centred on certain key figures and grand theories, for example, is both the number of intellectuals involved and the diversity of their comments. As demonstrated, they range from close historical work on a region, to philosophical and sociological understandings of representation. Far from providing an easily accessible, or succinct, analysis of 2002, with concrete suggestions on how to move forward, the collection is a patchwork of specialized and complex responses whose political utility, when taken individually or together, is far from immediately obvious.

In the aftermath of 2002, the obsessions of the socialist politicians and the problems of party culture meant that there was even less room for intellectual reflection within the PS, while the nature of the intellectual response was ill adapted to respond to such challenges. These problems risked intensifying the state of distrust between the intellectual and the political spheres. Socialist politics and left-wing intellectuals continued to move in different directions, both largely failing to address the demands of the electorate and the issues of society that had been revealed by 2002.

The Referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (2005)

The referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe in May 2005 demonstrated that little progress had been made by the PS since 2002; it illustrated the

¹⁴⁴ Vincent Duclert and Perrine Simon-Nahum in Philippe Ridet and Nicolas Weill, 'Le choc du 21 avril aura-t-il une réplique le 29 mai 2005 ?', *Le Monde* (20.04.2005) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 28 February 2016).

continued and accentuated breakdown of the connections between intellectuals, socialist politics and wider society. In many respects, it represented a repeat and an intensification of the problems of 2002.

Europe has historically been a particularly divisive issue for the socialists because it constitutes a microcosm of historic socialist debates; it necessarily pits Jaurès's internationalist and reformist understanding of socialism against Guesde's Jacobin, nationalist, understanding.¹⁴⁵ However, despite continued tensions over Europe, it has been a central part of the socialists' programme, at least since the Mitterrand era. In the 2005 referendum, however, the PS split over Europe and fought two campaigns: the official campaign in favour of the treaty and another, of more or less equal strength, which, merging with dissident Greens, Left Radicals and left-wing union elements, opposed the treaty on anti-globalization grounds. Given that the European Constitution project largely consolidated existing treaties that PS ministers had pioneered in the 1980s and 1990s, this dissident 'no' campaign represented a rejection of the reformist line pursued in practice, if not in theory, since the 1983 reformist turn under Laurent Fabius. The referendum on the European Constitution therefore demonstrated that the PS had failed to evaluate and renew their doctrine since 2002. The PS's existential programmatic debates remained unresolved and, specifically, the socialists had been unable to reflect upon, and articulate a coherent attitude and response to, globalization. The 2002 defeat had actually resulted in the renewed strength of increasingly nationalist, inward-looking, far-left responses.

Faced with the ongoing question of the 2007 presidential candidacy, after Jospin's withdrawal from the political scene, the referendum also demonstrated that personal rivalries were taking over from ideas and convictions. The Dijon consensus had broken down and the

¹⁴⁵ Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L'ambition et le remords*, p. 466.

two PS campaigns were highly personalized. Hollande headed the ‘yes’ campaign and Fabius the ‘no’ campaign, giving the impression of an early presidential primary. Fabius’s opposition to the party’s official policy, for example, seems to have been particularly motivated by personal ambition; it was highly hypocritical because, as Mitterrand’s prodigy, he had been one of the primary advocates of the steps towards further European integration in the 1980s.

The result of the 2005 referendum also confirmed that the gap between the PS and the public had not been bridged since 2002. The French public rejected the treaty, and thus a big component of the PS programme, by 54%. Furthermore, a breakdown of the results estimated that 59% of the socialist electorate voted ‘no’.¹⁴⁶ This can partly be explained by a desire to sanction Chirac and to avoid reinforcing his reputation after 2002, as well as the general unpopularity of the Jean-Pierre Raffarin government. It also, however, demonstrated the continued triumph of populism, the public’s growing nationalism and conservatism and their tendency to blame Europe for all the challenges and downsides of globalization. Michel Rocard thus noted that the left-wing electorate had chosen to ‘voter Guesde’.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Julliard identified that 2005 illustrated that many people were continuing to move away from the idea of progress at the heart of the historic relationship between the proletariat, intellectuals and the socialists: ‘Historiquement, qu’est-ce que donc la gauche? L’alliance des savants et des prolétaires... Désormais [dès 2005], il manquait à ce véritable front du progrès un catalyseur essentiel: la confiance dans l’avenir ! Désormais, l’éternel débat entre la Révolution et la Reforme était tranché au profit d’un tiers parti inattendu: celui de la conservation.’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Bergounioux and Grunberg, *L’ambition et le remords*, p. 490.

¹⁴⁷ Michel Rocard, *Si la gauche savait. Entretiens avec Georges-Marc Benamou* (Paris, 2005), p. 345.

¹⁴⁸ Julliard, *Le malheur français*, p. 24.

The 2005 referendum also confirmed the continued, or perhaps even increased, absence of intellectual intervention in French politics and society. With a few notable exceptions (B-HL, Agacinski, Bronislaw Geremek, Philippe Sollers, Rosanvallon and Alfred Grosser together launched a ‘comité de soutien à la campagne du PS’ in *Le Monde*) intellectuals largely did not get involved publicly in the campaign and, when they did, their intervention was somewhat lacklustre.¹⁴⁹ Intellectuals continued to be squeezed out of public political discussions and the 2005 referendum demonstrated that it was now not only due to the lack of space in the PS, the hostility of the media sphere and intellectuals’ own actions. The situation was being exacerbated by the growing strength of the horizontal era of internet communication. There was an unprecedented level of citizen participation in the 2005 referendum campaign. The ‘no’ campaign, for example, was dominated by the interventions of the economics and management schoolteacher and blogger Etienne Chouard. Hazareesingh thus lamented: ‘the European project, the brainchild of Jean Monnet and one of the most distinguished creations of Gallic thought, was... effectively pushed to one side by a blogger from Marseille.’¹⁵⁰

The aftermath of 2002 therefore revealed the continuation, and even intensification, of the dangerous state of mutual distrust between socialist politics, left-wing intellectuals and the electorate. The attempts of both intellectuals and politicians to reconstruct and modernize these connections after the catastrophic first round result were unsuccessful due to a resurgence of the PS’s historic difficulties, the continued challenges of getting heard in the media sphere (to which could increasingly be added the rise of the internet and the blogosphere) and intellectuals’ own actions - their inability (and/or unwillingness) to respond to these obstacles. Faced with the insularity of both socialist politics and left-wing

¹⁴⁹ Nicolas Weill, ‘Les intellectuels français entre un oui critique et un non hésitant’, *Le Monde* (29.03.2005) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 04 June 2016).

¹⁵⁰ Hazareesingh, *How the French think*, p. 247.

intellectuals, anti-globalization and populist discourses effectively went unchallenged and continued to seduce the public.

Conclusion

This chapter has used the 2002 political moment to reflect, explore and set up the problem of the breakdown of the connections between left-wing intellectuals, the PS and wider society in the contemporary context. Looking at the before, during and after of this historic event has demonstrated that intellectual socialist sympathizers were struggling to make an impact within or outside political structures, or were even actively reasserting the benefits of non-engaged research. These developments were due to a combination of the problems of socialist party culture, the nature of twenty-first century research and the demands of the media sphere. The absence of thought-out responses to society's contemporary problems was, in turn, stimulating populist and reactionary voices and contributing to a growing separation between the PS and their traditional electorate. Since 2005, the socialists have continued to struggle to rethink the relationship between intellectuals, the socialists and wider society. The socialist defeat in 2007, for example, demonstrated the lack of progress made between presidential elections. Ségolène Royal, the socialist candidate in 2007, for example, tried to rekindle a connection between the PS and wider society through 'participatory democracy'. However, while she correctly identified the need to integrate public opinion into socialist politics, she largely overlooked the intellectual element and failed to clarify and renew PS doctrine.¹⁵¹ Her attempt to rebuild the connections between intellectuals, the socialists and the public was highly superficial, as demonstrated by her close, and highly publicized, association with the media intellectual B-HL.

¹⁵¹ Julliard, *Le malheur français*, p. 27.

Chapter Two: Vincent Peillon (1960-)

In 2009, Pierre Moscovici referred to Vincent Peillon as ‘Docteur Vincent et Monsieur Peillon’.¹⁵² The slur has been ubiquitous ever since and it effectively highlights Peillon’s unusual hybridity. Since the early 1990s, he has been at once an academic and a socialist party apparatchik; he has been so dedicated to this double life that he once claimed to get up at four each morning in order to read, research and write before commencing his political work.¹⁵³ Having laid out the problem of the disintegration of the connections between intellectuals, socialist politics and wider society from the political perspective, this chapter moves on to look at an example of an intellectual and political figure. It assesses Vincent Peillon’s attempt to rethink and to reconstruct these connections after the socialist defeats in the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections through his own personal form of intellectual engagement. It argues that his efforts have so far been largely unsuccessful and that he has actually been incarnating the contemporary breakdown of the relationship between intellectual reflection, socialist politics and wider society.

Peillon’s mixed identity poses an interesting question about the definition of an ‘intellectual’ in the French sense. In the *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français*, Julliard and Winock, in collaboration with other historians, discussed whether politicians like Charles de Gaulle and Georges Clemenceau, both of whom had a very significant intellectual culture behind them, could be classed as ‘intellectuals’. They decided to exclude them, arguing that to be an intellectual one must reflect on politics by using expertise gained in another domain. De Gaulle and Clemenceau were always firmly planted in the professional, political sphere. They

¹⁵² Marie-Laure Delorme, ‘Vincent Peillon, un intellectuel en politique’, *Le Journal du Dimanche* (15.08.2009), at www.lejdd.fr/Politique/Actualite/Vincent-Peillon-un-intellectuel-en-politique-126742 (viewed 18 January 2016).

¹⁵³ Peillon cited in Maryline Baumard, ‘Vincent Peillon, un candidat de longue date à l’éducation’, *Le Monde* (16.05.2012) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 07 November 2015).

did, however, class figures like Léon Blum and Jean Jaurès as intellectuals, as both of them had been intellectuals before they became politicians.¹⁵⁴

Peillon falls into this latter category. He comes from a middle-class Jewish, communist, family and was immersed in history and academia from an early age. His mother was a researcher and his father a communist banker. He thus frequently encountered left-wing intellectuals and he noted that he was particularly inspired by the eminent historian, philosopher and engaged intellectual Jean-Pierre Vernant, who was a close family friend.¹⁵⁵ Peillon had an impressive trajectory as a student, gaining his *baccalauréat* at sixteen and his *licence* from the Sorbonne aged twenty. He taught from 1984 to 1997, obtaining the *agrégation* in philosophy, and completed his doctoral thesis on the left-wing philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1992). Throughout his political career, Peillon has continued varying levels of academic work. He was a senior research fellow at the Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) between 2002 and 2004, has published several philosophical essays and set up, and has been leading, the Bibliothèque républicaine with the *éditions* Bord de l'eau, which has been republishing primary documents by nineteenth and early-twentieth-century left-wing thinkers.¹⁵⁶

Peillon has a very specific and detailed understanding of the ideal of intellectual engagement, outlined in his essay *Eloge du politique*. Here, he subsumed the relationship between intellectual reflection, politics and wider society into his historical concept of '*le politique*', which he defined as '*la recherche du bien commun et la participation de tous à cette*

¹⁵⁴ Juliard and Winock, *Dictionnaire des intellectuels*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁵ Peillon cited in Baumard, 'Vincent Peillon, un candidat de longue date à l'éducation'.

¹⁵⁶ Vincent Peillon, *La tradition de l'esprit. Itinéraire de Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Paris, 1994); *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme* (Paris, 2000); *Pierre Leroux et le socialisme républicain. Une tradition philosophique* (Paris, 2003); *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée; Une religion pour la République. La foi laïque de Ferdinand Buisson* (Paris, 2010); *Eloge du politique. Une introduction au XXIème siècle* (Paris, 2011). For the Bibliothèque républicaine see www.editionsbdl.com/fr/books/collection/Biblioth%C3%A8que%20r%C3%A9publicaine/ (viewed 17 June 2015).

recherche'.¹⁵⁷ He argued that politics in its true sense is all about a relationship with philosophy which has its origins in Greek antiquity. He contended that the central problem of the modern era has been the disintegration of this connection. Philosophy has become increasingly narcissistic and elitist and has retreated from its practical responsibilities, forgetting that 'nous sommes des créatures finies, des créatures mortelles, et nous devons savoir que nous ne pouvons accéder à l'universel qu'à partir d'un coin du temps et de l'espace'.¹⁵⁸ Politics, in turn, has abandoned reflection; '*le politique*' has descended into '*la politique*', which he defined as the base search for power.¹⁵⁹ Updating Merleau-Ponty's analyses, Peillon argued that contemporary 'ultraliberal' society is dominated by two deplorable figures, the 'coquin', '[le] technocrate qui réduit la politique à un art des moyens', and the 'cynique' who 'se satisfait, au milieu du malheur du monde, de la bonté de sa volonté et la noblesse de ses sentiments' and abhors the people rather than seeking practical ways to improve their lives.¹⁶⁰

Peillon's theory of intellectual engagement thus differs from traditional models. It is not about mass popular interventions as in May '68, a blind commitment to a political ideology as demonstrated by Sartre, or a retreat into lofty ideals as was the case with Julien Benda, nor was it close to Raymond Aron's uncompromising reason. Peillon understood the intellectual to be someone whose thought was inherently engaged by virtue of always keeping in mind '*la recherche du bien commun*', which he viewed as the fundamental goal of both politics and society.¹⁶¹ What he meant by this in the modern age was reformist socialism, which he interpreted as a thought-driven movement which engages with the fundamental concerns of society in the present.¹⁶² This is evidenced by Peillon's desire to redeem Merleau-Ponty's

¹⁵⁷ Peillon, *Eloge du politique*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194, 199.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-195.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163, 191-192.

political thought, notably the liberal socialism he laid out in the essay ‘l’avenir du socialisme’ (1959) which, Peillon contended, converged with Mendès-France’s approach.¹⁶³ Peillon concluded that the way forward for the left was to re-establish the age-old link between politics and philosophy, allowing it to revisit fundamental questions like ‘Qu’est-ce que la jouissance? Qu’est-ce que le désir? Qu’est-ce qu’une vie bonne?’ and thus to re-engage with the day-to-day concerns of the electorate.¹⁶⁴

This chapter analyses Peillon’s attempt to put his personal conceptualization of the connections between intellectual reflection, politics and wider society - ‘*le politique*’- into practice in the twenty-first century. What is most fascinating and exceptional about Peillon is the extent to which he has intertwined his academic work with a political career that has placed him so close to the party mainstream. An analysis of Peillon, an intellectual who has been so much in the thick of socialist politics, thus provides a unique window into the relationship between intellectuals and the socialist political movement more broadly.

Peillon steered clear of any direct self-analysis in *Eloge du politique*, yet the date of publication (2011) suggests that it should, at least partially, be read as an oblique meditation on his own two decades’ experience as an intellectual in politics. The fact that he felt compelled to write the essay, as well as the virulence of the critique which, in a necessarily indirect way, railed against his colleagues in both the academic and the political spheres is a testament to his own personal sense of frustration. Peillon clearly encountered serious obstacles, some of which he has briefly identified: the tendency towards political management, the retreat of many intellectuals into their own specialisms and the challenges of the modern media age. Peillon’s attempt to bridge the gap between intellectuals, politics and society has so far proved largely unsuccessful due to a combination of Peillon’s own

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 154-156.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 191-192, 195.

limitations, the PS's state of ideological confusion and the nature of contemporary democracy.

Part one of this chapter looks at Peillon's more distinctly academic work, his published philosophical essays and the Bibliothèque républicaine. It argues that Peillon's effort to articulate, in collaboration with other intellectuals, a progressive republican socialism which could reconcile individualism with solidarity, has so far largely remained in specialist academic circles and has failed to find its way into party ideology. His lack of success can be explained partly by understanding the socialists' troubled relationship with intellectual reformism, partly by the mediatization of contemporary politics and partly by grasping the limitations of Peillon's form of intellectual engagement which, by tending towards historical specialization, has so far failed to respond to these challenges.

Part two moves on to Peillon's political action and media presence in the period when he began to pave his way to high office in the build up to the 2012 presidential elections. In an interview in 2009, Peillon insisted that his political generation 'doit maintenant prendre ses responsabilités.'¹⁶⁵ Peillon's political ambition has gained him a reputation for treachery in the PS. Hollande, for example, pointedly remarked in 2009 that 'Peillon est un serpent. Avec lui, c'est tout pour sa gueule. Vous verrez, il trahira Royal. Il trahit toujours.'¹⁶⁶ This section looks closely at three moments when Peillon's political action and media presence coincided: his essay *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée*, his public falling out with Royal in 2009 and his decision to boycott a debate on 'national identity' on France 2 in 2010.¹⁶⁷ Despite his continued academic work, Peillon's personal ambition meant that he increasingly played the political media game. His academic work has tended towards historical

¹⁶⁵ Vincent Peillon cited in Mathieu Castagnet, 'Docteur Vincent et Mister Peillon, la double vie d'un intellectuel', *La Croix* (06.03.2009) at www.la-croix.com (viewed 28 December 2015).

¹⁶⁶ Vincent Peillon cited in Ann Rovon, 'Peillon le « serpent » a encore frappé', *Le Figaro* (16.10.2012) at www.lefigaro.fr (viewed 27 January 2016).

¹⁶⁷ Peillon, *La Révolution Française n'est pas terminée*

specialization while his political action has, at times, descended into a search for power. Far from being at once a thinker and an actor in the mode of Jaurès, Peillon has pursued the two simultaneously, but separately. In this period, Peillon paradoxically incarnated the very divorce between philosophy and politics which he had hoped to overcome.

Part three turns to Peillon's time as Education Minister (May 2012-March 2014), which was his opportunity to put '*le politique*' to the test in the context of education. It argues that, once in office, Peillon played the political media game less and tried to follow his intellectual vision. In a world dominated by professional politicians, however, Peillon increasingly looked like a 'philosopher lost in politics'.¹⁶⁸ It takes the controversy over the school week as a case study to demonstrate that Peillon lacked the political skill to build the consensus promised by his summer *concertation* and central to '*le politique*'. Peillon's intellectualism got in the way of his attempt to communicate what were, for the most part, very sensible and necessary reforms. Furthermore, the strength of his intellectual convictions translated into an inflexible style. Far from bringing together politics, intellectuals and society, Peillon acted alone both in relation to the rest of government, a trend that was exacerbated by the vacuity of 'Hollandisme', and to civil society.

Part I: Peillon's Philosophical Essays and La Bibliothèque Républicaine

Inherent to '*le politique*' is the idea that one's intellectual work should always be inspired by and striving for the political. Peillon's academic work has sought to influence the nature and direction of present-day French left-wing politics. Through the Bibliothèque républicaine, Peillon has been trying to construct a new discourse for the PS by redeeming the reformist thought of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century left-wing thinkers. Contrasting Peillon's essay *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme* with political uses of Jaurès, a

¹⁶⁸ Maryline Baumard, 'Le style « Peillon », un certain flou', *Le Monde* (02.09.2013) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 08 November 2015).

towering figure in the political culture of the French left, however, demonstrates that there has been a marked discrepancy between Peillon's academic work on historical figures and how these same figures and their thought have been utilized, if indeed they have been made use of at all, by the PS's political elite.¹⁶⁹ So far, Peillon's more distinctly academic work has had minimal impact in the political sphere and has remained very much on the margins of the PS. This has been due to the PS's state of existential confusion and a clash between the nature of Peillon's intellectual engagement and the demands of contemporary democracy.

Peillon's academic work is engaged because it is all about furnishing the PS with the intellectual foundation to take on the challenges of the twenty-first century. His method has been to take a fresh look at the left's political culture and to explore the reformist thought of historic thinkers, which he believes could usefully be taken up once more. His essays, for example, have focused on Jean Jaurès (1859-1914), Pierre Leroux (1797-1871) and Ferdinand Buisson (1841-1932).¹⁷⁰ Peillon's attempt to put '*le politique*' into practice in the context of his academic work has therefore been about constructing a new progressivism for the French left, which is particularly demonstrated by the work of the Bibliothèque républicaine. On the project's homepage, Peillon contends that reformism is much more than pragmatism. Rather than being dismissed, he writes, this school of thought deserves to be looked into in depth. The project seeks to promote, and render accessible, the forgotten voices of figures marginalized from the political culture of the French left. Peillon asserts that a false opposition between communism and liberalism has prevented important discussions about how to reconcile individualism and solidarity. The project thus aims to redeem a republicanism which is more flexible and inclusive, which is '*plus religieuse, à tout le moins plus métaphysique, plus spirituelle et plus morale*'. The political agenda of this historical

¹⁶⁹ Peillon, *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme*.

¹⁷⁰ Peillon, *La tradition de l'esprit; Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme; Pierre Leroux et le socialisme républicain; Une religion pour la République*.

work is explicit: the hope is that this alternative French socialist tradition will permit a renovation of the PS and provide it with the historical and intellectual foundation to tackle contemporary questions, notably those ‘sur la laïcité, la place des religions dans les démocraties ou l’esprit public, mais aussi sur les solidarités, le droit au travail, les droits de l’homme, les services publics ou la propriété sociale’.¹⁷¹ Books published by the Bibliothèque républicaine include Jaurès’s *Pour la laïque* and Ferdinand Buisson’s *La foi laïque*, both of which explore secularism; Paul Brousse’s *La propriété collective et les services publics*, Léon Bourgeois’s *Solidarité* and works by Louis Blanc, which tackle the role of the state and how to reconcile individualism and solidarity; and Benoît Malon’s *La morale sociale*, Charles Andler’s *La civilisation socialiste* and Frédéric Rauh’s *L’expérience morale*, all of which deal with questions of morality and the left.¹⁷²

Peillon’s attempt to put his idea of intellectual engagement into practice has therefore intersected with the increasing interest in Republicanism since the 1980s, which has been posing particular problems for the left. The relaxation of anti-totalitarianism sparked a return to the Jacobin republican tradition, epitomized by intellectuals like Régis Debray and Marcel Gauchet, as a means to respond to the problems of globalization, immigration and identity that have been progressively dominating political debates.¹⁷³ Hazareesingh has contended that republicanism is particularly appealing to intellectuals because it revives the

¹⁷¹ Bibliothèque républicaine at www.editionsbdl.com/fr/books/collection/Biblioth%C3%A8que%20r%C3%A9publicaine/ (viewed 17 June 2015).

¹⁷² Jean Jaurès, presented by Laurence Loeffel, *Pour la laïque et autres textes* (Paris, 2006); Ferdinand Buisson presented by Mireille Gueissaz, *La foi laïque* (Paris, 2007); Paul Brousse presented by Bruno Antonini, *La propriété collective et les services publics* (Paris, 2011); Léon Bourgeois presented by Marie-Claude Blais, *Solidarité* (Paris, 2008); Louis Blanc presented by Jean-Fabien Spitz, *Textes politiques 1839-1882* (Paris, 2011); Benoît Malon presented by Philippe Chaniel, *La morale sociale* (Paris, 2007); Charles Andler presented by Christophe Prochasson, *La civilisation socialiste* (Paris, 2010); Frédéric Rauh presented by Stéphane Soulié, *L’expérience morale* (Paris, 2011).

¹⁷³ Michael Scott Christofferson, *French intellectuals against the left* (Oxford, 2004), p. 269; Michael Behrent, ‘Religion, republicanism, and depoliticisation: two intellectual itineraries - Régis Debray and Marcel Gauchet’ in Julian Bourg (ed.), *After the deluge. New perspectives on the intellectual and cultural history of postwar France* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 325-349.

universalism which has always been so inherent to French thought, but which has floundered since the decline of communism. Hazareesingh has also observed that contemporary understandings of republicanism have increasingly manifested themselves in a nationalist retreat on the left, providing the philosophical foundation for those hostile to identity-based diversity.¹⁷⁴ The ideas of those intellectuals who supported Jean-Pierre Chevènement in the 2002 presidential elections, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, support this observation. Peillon's attempt to practise '*le politique*' in his academic work has therefore been part of a counter-intellectual movement, which has been attempting to highlight the flexibility of republicanism and thus make it 'work' for socialist politics in contemporary France.¹⁷⁵

It is difficult to come to any firm conclusions about the impact of this work in the political sphere and thus the success, or otherwise, of this more distinctly academic side of '*le politique*'. Ideological evolutions are influenced by a wide range of factors; Peillon has not been the only person trying to redeem forgotten elements of the left's political culture and, perhaps most significantly, these things take time. There is often a substantial delay between ideas and their practical applications as, by its very nature, intellectual work seeks to be ahead of, and therefore to influence the direction of, the times. Comparing Peillon's work on Jean Jaurès with the socialists' use of Jaurès in the political sphere, however, sheds some light on the question, especially because Jaurès was both one of the first and best known of the figures Peillon researched. Peillon's essay *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme* (2000) was at the forefront of an academic revival of interest in Jaurès's philosophy, which coincided with an increasing fascination with Jaurès in the political sphere, especially during the 2007 and 2012 election campaigns.¹⁷⁶ In contrast to Peillon's work, which sought to

¹⁷⁴ Hazareesingh, *How the French think*, pp. 310-311.

¹⁷⁵ Emile Chabal, 'Introduction. French politics in an age of uncertainty' in Emile Chabal (ed.), *France since the 1970s. History, politics and memory in an age of uncertainty* (London, 2015), pp. 15-17.

¹⁷⁶ Peillon, *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme*.

understand Jaurès's philosophy and political thought in all its depth and complexity and to underscore its contemporary relevance, political uses of Jaurès have been increasingly superficial. Peillon's academic work has so far failed to resonate with the PS. The nature of party culture and the PS's state of ideological confusion has taken the socialists a long way from Jaurès's ideas and values.

In *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme*, Peillon noted that the study of Jaurès tends to be defined either by a superficial political engagement with his memory, or by a restrictive academic debate between historians.¹⁷⁷ He aimed to address this gap by looking behind Jaurès the individual to his philosophy, arguing that Jaurès the philosopher and Jaurès the politician were inseparable.¹⁷⁸ Peillon's central aim was to demonstrate this coherence and bring to the fore the religious, metaphysical Jaurès whose thought, marginalized by the dominance of the Jules Guesde tradition which dominated socialist politics after 1918, had the potential to 'réveiller l'espérance du socialisme' in the twenty-first century.¹⁷⁹ Peillon began by revisiting Jaurès's early work on metaphysics, as laid out in his first doctoral thesis *De la réalité du monde sensible* in which, Peillon contended, Jaurès overcame the antinomy between the denial of the 'monde sensible' on the one hand and the denial of 'l'esprit' on the other: 'Il y a bien, chez Jaurès, un monisme métaphysique, qui le conduit à dépasser les antithèses traditionnelles entre la matière et l'esprit, le corps et l'âme, le fini et l'infini.'¹⁸⁰ Peillon maintained that this belief in harmony, which is what philosophically distanced Jaurès's socialism from Marx's, could usefully be taken up once more:

Parce qu'il [Jaurès] réfute toute forme du dualisme, entre la matière et l'esprit, entre la nature et l'idée, entre le collectivisme et l'individualisme, entre la tradition et la nouveauté, entre la nation et l'internationalisme, entre la classe bourgeoise et

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-19.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 14, 17.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

le prolétariat, entre la sensibilité et la raison, Jean Jaurès met en œuvre un effort qui désarme toutes les simplifications dont notre siècle s'est repu jusqu'à l'éccœurement.¹⁸¹

Furthermore, given the current professionalization of the political sphere, Peillon contended that the socialists could benefit from Jaurès's understanding of politics; Jaurès refused to separate thought and action: 'à aucun moment il [Jaurès] n'accepte de séparer la politique comme engagement, choix, action, combat, d'une réflexion sur l'homme, la nature, l'histoire, la science, la justice, la raison ou la liberté'.¹⁸² Finally, Peillon highlighted that, first and foremost, Jaurès's republican socialism, and his interpretation of the Revolution, was religious and moral. Peillon argued that, by reengaging with the battle for the ideal of justice, the political left could regain a sense of direction and, thus, the optimism that is so fundamental to its political culture.¹⁸³

Peillon could perhaps have gone slightly further in his understanding of Jaurès's philosophy. The American political scientist Geoffrey Kurtz, like Peillon, sought to decipher Jaurès's philosophy in order to draw out what it had to say to the floundering social democratic tradition today.¹⁸⁴ He also embarked on a close reading of Jaurès's doctoral theses, but he painted a slightly more nuanced picture.¹⁸⁵ Notably, he emphasized the necessary 'awkwardness', paradoxes and occasional contradictions at the heart of Jaurès's thought.¹⁸⁶ In particular, Kurtz maintained that while Jaurès did seek to reconcile principles, he also recognized the extent to which they remained distinct.¹⁸⁷ The idea that reconciliation is never total, Kurtz insisted, is crucial to understanding the place of the ideal, reality and hope in Jaurès's conceptualization of social democracy. Jaurès's reformism, Kurtz argued, is about

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁸² Ibid., pp. 274-275.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 259-266, 275.

¹⁸⁴ Geoffrey Kurtz, *Jean Jaurès. The inner life of social democracy* (Pennsylvania, 2014), pp. 4-6.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-46.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 157-167.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

the hopeful day-to-day work to reconcile a commonly shared ideal with a political reality that can never quite live up to it.¹⁸⁸

Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme was at the forefront of serious attempts to delve into Jaurès's philosophy. It was well received in the academic sphere and, alongside other works, sparked an academic revival of interest in debates about morality and the left.¹⁸⁹ Since the publication of Peillon's essay, the slightly mysterious fascination with Jaurès in the political sphere has intensified. The interplay between scholarship and politics is therefore particularly intriguing in the case of Jaurès and sheds some light on the relationship between intellectual work and the socialists more broadly. Far from drawing on his thought and values, as Peillon encouraged, Marion Fontaine observed that Jaurès has been quoted in an excessive and clichéd manner, which has been more a case of dutiful reverence than a genuine attempt to make use of his thought.¹⁹⁰

Firstly, Gilles Candar noted that discussions of Jaurès in the political sphere have particularly focused on who has a legitimate right to quote him rather than on what was actually said.¹⁹¹ The then presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy, for example, provoked outrage on the left when in one speech during the 2007 election campaign he claimed to be a closer heir to Jaurès than either Hollande or Royal and mentioned him some thirty-two times.¹⁹² As Candar highlighted, there is no reason why the right should not also be drawing on Jaurès who sought to engage with those across the political spectrum and whose thought centred on an holistic understanding of humanity.¹⁹³ The reduction of Jaurès's thought to petty electoral squabbles,

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 165-167.

¹⁸⁹ Marion Fontaine, 'Usages politiques de Jaurès', *Cahiers Jaurès* 200 (2011), pp. 31-32. See also Christophe Prochasson's comments in his review of Peillon, *La Révolution Française n'est pas terminée*, 'Un livre politique et savant', *L'histoire de la gauche française*, *Cahiers Jaurès* 193-194 (2009/3), p. 36.

¹⁹⁰ Fontaine, 'Usages politiques de Jaurès', p. 123.

¹⁹¹ Gilles Candar, 'Jaurès en campagne', (16.07.2007) at www.jaures.info/bibliotheque/File/etudes/Candar-Jaures-Sarkozy.pdf?PHPSESSID=e9cd28ba18abff6477acf79b38189479 (viewed 04 August 2015), p. 5.

¹⁹² Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 5.

to the simple denunciation of the opponent, demonstrates just how far the socialists have drifted from Jaurès's values.

Secondly, Jaurès has been held up as a moral exemplar by the socialists. Specifically, he has been cast as an 'apolitical saint', remembered for not having held ministerial office.¹⁹⁴

Peillon's essay encouraged the left to re-engage with the moral Jaurès, yet this weary nostalgia was certainly not what he had in mind. Peillon highlighted that political action was inseparable from Jaurès's philosophy and central to his understanding of morality and justice and to his conceptualization of socialism as a religion. Peillon can perhaps be criticized for excessively focusing on Jaurès's philosophy at the expense of the individual when, in fact, Jaurès's personal political ambition remains little understood. Certainly, however, Jaurès was a politician through and through and the vague moral references to him in the political sphere have been a sign of the socialists' confused relationship with the morality and optimism so central to Jaurès's understanding of social democracy.¹⁹⁵

Peillon had been hoping to trigger a productive reengagement with Jaurès's republican socialism, which would encourage the socialists to think, to regain a sense of what they were aiming for and to fight for it passionately. The socialists' superficial and uncomfortable relationship with Jaurès's legacy has sharply contrasted with this attempt, which more broadly demonstrates that Peillon's effort to put '*le politique*' into practice has so far seen little by way of concrete results. While the PS may have finally accepted reformism in practice, it has been closer to pragmatism and political management than to the thought-driven spiritual republican socialism Peillon has been advocating. There has thus not been

¹⁹⁴ Julian Wright, 'What would Jaurès do?', *TLS* (02.05.2012) at www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1029552.ece (viewed 17 June 2015).

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

space in the PS for the level and coherence of thought inherent to Peillon's intellectual understanding of reformism.

Peillon's academic work has also been struggling to make an impact due to the fact that his form of intellectual engagement has been ill suited to the nature of contemporary democracy. An historical examination of the socialist movement's political culture could help renovate a PS in need of different ideas. Whether Peillon's method, which has been to write such specialized essays and to republish primary documents, is a viable means of getting these ideas into the public political sphere, however, is questionable. It is difficult to find evidence to determine the extent to which Peillon's academic work has been looked at in the political sphere. *L'Hebdo des socialistes*, the PS's official newspaper, included an interview with Peillon which allowed him to promote and explain his book on Jean Jaurès, suggesting that the party was aware of, and at least wanted to be seen to be engaging with, Peillon's academic work. The interview, however, is brief and only scratches the surface of Peillon's book.¹⁹⁶ Another example that sheds some light on the impact of Peillon's work is a blog that included a book review of *Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme* by 'Daniel', a member of the PS seemingly close to Peillon. While only the thoughts of one individual, it provides a useful insight into how party members may have been engaging with Peillon's work. Overall the author was positive; he claimed to have been able to follow the thrust of Peillon's essay and ended with 'Merci Vincent de m'avoir fait mieux comprendre Jaurès.' That said, it required some gentle persuasion on Peillon's part to get him to read past the first few pages. He also admitted that 'quelques pages m'ont paru assez rébarbatives' and that he found some sections hard to follow. Furthermore, it was only because Jaurès remains such an important figure in the memory of the French left that Daniel elected to read the essay. He confessed

¹⁹⁶ Vincent Peillon with Claude Polak, 'Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme', *L'Hebdo des socialistes* (26.05.2000) at <http://miroirs.ironie.org/socialisme/www.psinfo.net/entretiens/peillon/jaures.html> (viewed 08 October 2015).

that he did not believe that Peillon's other essay on Merleau-Ponty was worth the effort: 'Merleau Ponty: connais pas... ça ne me semblait pas être d'actualité et ce n'était donc pas la peine que je m'impose un mal de tête.'¹⁹⁷ It seems even less likely that the PS's busy political elites would have taken the time to read and reflect on Peillon's work. Dominique Reynié, member of the think tank Fondapol, for example, reflected: 'Les acteurs politiques se sont mis en situation de préférer toute réunion à tout moment de lecture. Quand ils veulent des notes, c'est deux pages maximum. Quand on commence à leur expliquer quelque chose, au bout de trois minutes ils sont sur leur portable à regarder leurs messages. Ils enchaînent les rendez-vous, galopent en permanence.'¹⁹⁸ In *Eloge du politique*, Peillon deplored the distance between philosophy and the public.¹⁹⁹ However, Peillon's own academic work, despite being engaged, has often been highly specialized and thus not easily accessible. In particular, his conscious focus on poorly known figures has been working against him. Peillon has been struggling because the relevance of his work is far from immediately apparent.

In an interview in *Le Monde* in 2008, Peillon was asked about the lack of intellectual involvement with the PS and the so-called 'silence of the intellectuals'. He responded that the real issue was not a deficit of intellectuals with things to say to the left, but an absence of politicians who were willing to listen.²⁰⁰ In a sense, Peillon's work makes this point; the academics involved with the Bibliothèque républicaine, for example, are all relatively young and the majority are either philosophers, historians or sociologists. This has, of course, been a deliberate choice on Peillon's part, but it also highlights that there has been a sizeable generation of intellectuals who have been wanting to rethink social democracy. So far,

¹⁹⁷ Daniel, 'A livre ouvert... Jean Jaurès et la religion du socialisme', *niduab* (28.09.2009) at <http://niduab.com/article-36635600.html> (viewed 08 October 2015).

¹⁹⁸ Dominique Reynié cited in Marion van Renterghem and Thomas Wieder, 'Intellectuels et politiques, une planète en recomposition', *Le Monde* (29.04.2012) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 22 October 2015).

¹⁹⁹ Peillon, *Eloge du politique*, p. 187, 193.

²⁰⁰ Vincent Peillon cited in Constance Baudry, 'M. Peillon: « Je souhaite que Ségolène Royal puisse conduire la rénovation du PS »', *Le Monde* (18.03.2008), www.lemonde.fr (viewed 17 November 2015).

however, there has not been room for this academic work to find its way into socialist politics. Peillon's attempt to practise '*le politique*' in the context of his academic work has, thus far, floundered in the face of a combination of the PS's state of ideological disarray and the demands of the mediatized public and political spheres.

Part II: Peillon's Interlinked Political Action and Media Presence (2008-2010)

Central to '*le politique*' is the idea that thought and political action should come together in '*la recherche du bien commun*' in order to guard against politics becoming a simple search for power, or intellectual work retreating to its ivory tower. Peillon summed this up sharply elsewhere: '*Le politique ne peut se débarrasser du savant, lequel ne peut se débarrasser du politique. Penser faux est une faute politique. Agir mal est une faute intellectuelle.*'²⁰¹

Peillon's first published philosophical essay appeared in 1994, the same year that he joined the PS's national bureau, illustrating the extent to which Peillon's academic and political careers developed in tandem.²⁰² While Peillon's academic work has tended towards historical specialization, his political action has, at times, been closer to '*la politique*' than '*le politique*'. Ironically, while Peillon had hoped to combine philosophy and political action, he merely succeeded in incarnating the separation between the two. This is demonstrated by taking three case studies from 2008 to 2010: firstly, his essay *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée* (2008), which has received much more media attention than his previous academic work but, in some respects, to the detriment of more rigorous academic practices; secondly, his public falling out with Royal in 2009 and, thirdly, his decision to boycott a debate on 'national identity' on France 2 in 2010.²⁰³ Peillon's personal ambition, combined with how politicians often feel they need to act and to present themselves in order to achieve

²⁰¹ Vincent Peillon with François Bazin, *Conversations républicaines* (Paris, 2011), p. 187.

²⁰² Peillon, *La tradition de l'esprit*.

²⁰³ Peillon, *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée*.

political success, meant that he often failed to incarnate ‘*le politique*’. Peillon increasingly played the political media game and often behaved like a ‘*coquin*’ in the public and political spheres.

La Révolution française n’est pas terminée (2008)

La Révolution française n’est pas terminée differed from Peillon’s other essays and is a fascinating example of what happened to Peillon’s intellectual work when it met his political ambition. The immediately striking difference is the front cover, which is dominated by an American-style black and white portrait of the author, suggesting that the essay was partially a self-promotion exercise.²⁰⁴ That Peillon adopted this tactic is telling: he clearly believed that a status as a man of ideas would help sell his political position on the left. That said, in direct contrast to his other works, *La Révolution française n’est pas terminée* provoked a much more positive and expansive response in the mainstream media and a storm of criticism from historians, demonstrating the very different demands of the academic sphere and the media sphere.²⁰⁵ Peillon struggled to reconcile his political ambition with intellectual depth and integrity.

La Révolution française n’est pas terminée was the culmination of Peillon’s attempt to get contemporary progressive intellectual voices heard in the public political sphere and to redeem the moral and spiritual elements of the French socialist tradition. Peillon argued that the current sense of lassitude in French politics and society was due to an inability to transcend artificial and restrictive oppositions: ‘l’individu contre l’Etat, la République contre la démocratie, la liberté contre l’égalité, le libéralisme contre le socialisme, la politique contre

²⁰⁴ Laurent Bouvet, ‘Savant ou politique?’, *Less spin, more spine* at <http://laurentbouvet.net/2008/10/13/savant-ou-politique/> (viewed 07 November 2015).

²⁰⁵ Ibid; for example Nicolas Weill, ‘« La Révolution française n’est pas terminée », de Vincent Peillon: ni Marx ni Tocqueville’, *Le Monde* (01.09.2009) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 07 November 2015).

la morale, la laïcité contre la religion, la Troisième République contre la Deuxième'.²⁰⁶ He contended that, in opposition to the historian François Furet's assertion that 'the Revolution is over', there had been a revival of interest in an alternative republicanism in recent years, which represented a serious attempt by a new generation of intellectuals to write their own history in order to move forward in the present.²⁰⁷ Peillon drew on these secondary analyses (notably Jean-Fabien Spitz, Serge Audier and Marie-Claude Blais) and attempted to rehabilitate the thought of nineteenth century and Third-Republican figures. He asserted that the dominance of positivism, Marxism and, most recently, Furet's militant historical liberalism had marginalized a republican socialist tradition which was 'liberal', 'social', 'fraternal', 'spiritual' and 'secular' and could provide the left with the intellectual foundation to overcome the current national sense of pessimism in France.²⁰⁸

The work was a serious and original reflexion on republicanism and socialist ideology, which built on, and brought together, Peillon's longstanding efforts to redeem a liberal, social and spiritualist republican tradition. The unprecedented attention that this particular essay received was due to his attempt to take on François Furet, one of the most controversial and best known of French historians. In *Interpreting the French Revolution*, Furet criticized the approach of 'Jacobin' historians for 'commemorating' rather than truly analysing the Revolution. Furet reemphasized instead the analyses of nineteenth-century authors like Tocqueville and Cochin and asserted that the ideology of 1789 led directly to the 1793 terror, much as Marxism had led to the Soviet oppression. What was positive about the Revolution, he contended, was thus not the promise of a future socialist revolution, but rather the birth of a modern democratic political culture. His central claim was that the Revolution was now

²⁰⁶ Peillon, *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée*, pp. 206-207.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 12-13; François Furet translated by Elborg Forster, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1981).

²⁰⁸ Peillon, *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée*, pp. 36-46, 207. 'La République libérale', 'La République sociale', 'La République fraternelle', 'La République spirituelle', 'La République humanitaire', 'La République laïque' are all chapter titles.

‘over’, the passionate left-right revolutionary battles had ended with the acceptance of the institutions of the Fifth Republic.²⁰⁹

Critiques of the essay, however, all highlighted that Peillon’s provocative title did not correspond with the content of the essay. They suggested that Peillon had created a false controversy with Furet that undermined what was otherwise an important contribution to historical understanding. Prochasson, the author of a biography on Furet, asserted that Furet, like Peillon, was on the left and was trying to rethink its political culture, thus ‘Vincent Peillon se prive même d’un allié qui eût pu être très éclairant s’il avait été lu avec plus de soin et moins de préjugés.’²¹⁰ Similarly, the historian Mona Ozouf, who was close to Furet, and the philosopher Philippe Raynaud accused Peillon of not having read Furet’s works. Raynaud stressed that Furet had argued that there was no longer a counterrevolutionary force in contemporary France and that he was referring to the republican regime and its institutions, not to its ideology.²¹¹ In a particularly stinging article in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Ozouf denounced Peillon’s ‘witchcraft trial’ and claimed that some of the key quotations Peillon used were from her and not from Furet. Furthermore, she maintained that, far from ignoring the religious dimensions of the Revolution, as Peillon contended, Furet was highly preoccupied with the spiritual deficit that resulted from the revolutionary clash with the Catholic Church.²¹²

Given the portrait on the front cover, it seems reasonable to suggest that the unnecessarily provocative nature of the essay was part and parcel of Peillon’s self-promotion. *La*

²⁰⁹ Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*.

²¹⁰ Christophe Prochasson, *François Furet. Les chemins de la mélancolie* (Paris, 2013); Christophe Prochasson, ‘un livre politique et savant’, p. 36.

²¹¹ Philippe Raynaud cited in François Bazin, ‘Faut-il brûler François Furet ?’, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (29.08.2008) at <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/essais/20080829.BIB1920/faut-il-bruler-francois-furet.html> (viewed 07 November 2015).

²¹² Mona Ozouf, ‘Avez-vous lu François Furet ?’, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (10.09.2008) at <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/essais/20080910.BIB1971/avez-vous-lu-francois-furet.html> (viewed 07 November 2015).

Révolution française n'est pas terminée did find its way into the mainstream media in a way that his other essays and his Bibliothèque républicaine project did not. That it was Peillon's most controversial and, at times, most academically questionable work that received the most media attention, and which remains by far the best known of his essays, says something about contemporary media culture, illustrating its penchant for controversy above and beyond deep and serious reflection. Peillon clearly believed that his identity as an intellectual and being known for having written an ideological book would help advance his political career within the PS, which further demonstrates that intellectuals remain a collective 'site of memory' on the left, of real importance to political culture. Paradoxically, however, Peillon's intellectual rigour was partially undermined in the process. A lot of academic criticism, for example, centred on the extent to which Peillon-the-politician broke through in the essay, undermining the value of his scholarship. Notably, Prochasson labelled the work 'Un livre politique et savant' and wrote that the politician came through in Peillon's often dogmatic tone, which denounced alternative understandings of republicanism as 'incorrect' and 'ignorant'.²¹³ Furthermore, the political commentator Laurent Bouvet identified that the ambiguity between being a 'vrai savant' and a 'bon politique' was the essay's central flaw.²¹⁴

Peillon's desire to bring together thought and politics in order to prevent '*le politique*' descending into '*la politique*' was thus undermined by his inability to synthesize his intellectual work and his political ambition. Moscovici's label 'Docteur Vincent et Monsieur Peillon' was apt; in this period, Peillon was very much an intellectual and a politician rather than an intellectual in politics. These arguments are further evidenced by two moments when Peillon's political action and media presence coincided: the Dijon Meeting (2009) and the France 2 Debate on 'National Identity' (2010). Peillon manipulated his way into the media

²¹³ Prochasson, 'un livre politique et savant', p. 35.

²¹⁴ Bouvet, 'Savant ou politique ?'.

and failed to transcend the battle of egos which has been an increasing part of socialist party culture. Peillon's intellectual identity did little to set his behaviour apart and his political action in this period thus strayed significantly from the sincere, moral and thought-driven nature of this ideal of '*le politique*'.

The Dijon Meeting (2009) and the France 2 Debate on 'National Identity' (2010)

Peillon played a central role in organizing a meeting at Dijon to discuss education led by the *courant* *Esprit à gauche*, set up by Royal for the Reims congress (2008). The meeting included leaders from Europe Ecologie Les Verts, Le Mouvement Démocrate and ex-communists and was part of a drive to promote collaboration across the political spectrum. Peillon decided not to invite Royal, arguing that he did not want presidential ambitions to get in the way of proper debate.²¹⁵ Royal turned up unannounced, an act which Peillon denounced venomously in the media. Notably, he underlined her 'isolation', accused her of putting her personal ambitions above all else and insisted that she had disqualified herself as a candidate for the 2012 presidential elections.²¹⁶ Any ideas that came out of the meeting were thus quickly eclipsed by a very public and personal falling out between Peillon and Royal, which marked the beginning of the end of their political alliance.

Royal was adamant that she did not need to be invited to a meeting held by her own *courant*.²¹⁷ That she gave no advance warning, combined with her track record as a particularly astute manipulator of the media, however, suggests that Peillon's comment that her action was a deliberate 'media coup' was reasonable.²¹⁸ Royal consciously turned what

²¹⁵ 'Ségolène Royal règle ses comptes avec Vincent Peillon', *Le Nouvel Observateur* (16.11.2009) at www.nouvelobs.com (viewed 04 December 2015).

²¹⁶ Vincent Peillon cited in Jean-Michel Norman, 'Ségolène Royal revient avec fracas dans les débats du PS', *Le Monde* (16.11.2009) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 04 December 2015).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Robert Harneis, *Ségolène Royal: A Biography* (Petersfield, 2007), pp. 135-136, 168; 'Vincent Peillon dénonce les « coups médiatiques » de Ségolène Royal', *Le Monde* (14.11.2009) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 04 December 2015).

could have been a private disagreement into an ‘event’. It seems fair to conjecture that she was attempting to get herself back into the public eye and at the forefront of her *courant* after a period of withdrawal in the wake of her failed attempt to become Party Secretary (2008). When denouncing Royal, Peillon insisted: ‘Je ne voulais pas... que des gens, que l’ambition individuelle affichée prennent le pas sur les idées du rassemblement.’²¹⁹ He was right to identify the extent to which socialist politics had been deteriorating into a fight between individuals. Furthermore, he correctly identified the media’s taste for this soap opera-style politics, noting that the media focused on Royal’s surprise arrival at the expense of the content of the meeting.²²⁰ Peillon’s response, however, which he claimed was a matter of principle, only served to intensify such a shift in focus.²²¹ Had he simply invited her in the first place, or played down the significance of her arrival, he could probably have salvaged the meeting’s legacy. It seems reasonable to suggest that Peillon was playing Royal at her own game, had ambitions to control the *courant* himself and, like Royal, used the controversy for his own publicity. With hindsight, this interpretation is supported by the fact that Peillon has switched allegiances and changed *courants* more than most, moving from the far-left Nouveau Parti Socialiste *courant* to support firstly Royal, then Dominique Strauss-Kahn and then Hollande. Peillon has continuously highlighted that disreputable personal battles have been the primary obstacle to the ideological and moral overhaul of the PS.²²² This episode, however, suggests that Peillon often failed to rise above such petty manoeuvring. The result was that, yet again, infighting presented a confused and divided PS to the public and played into the hands of the right.²²³

²¹⁹ Vincent Peillon cited in ‘Ségolène Royal règle ses comptes avec Vincent Peillon’.

²²⁰ ‘Vincent Peillon: un intello en politique’, *Déshabillons-les* (16.03.2010), Public Sénat at www.dailymotion.com/video/xcsduu_deshabillons-les-vincent-peillon-un_news (viewed 07 December 2015).

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² For example see Vincent Peillon cited in Paul Quinio, « Un sursaut s’impose au PS », *Libération* (28.06.2002) at www.liberation.fr (viewed 01 December 2015).

²²³ François-Xavier Bourmaud, ‘Ségolène Royal et Vincent Peillon règlent leurs comptes’, *Le Figaro* (16.11.2009) at www.lefigaro.fr (viewed 04 December 2015).

Just two months later, in January 2010, Peillon was due to appear on a programme of ‘A vous de juger’ for a live primetime debate on ‘national identity’ which was to feature Eric Besson, the Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP) Minister for Immigration, Integration and National Identity, and Marine Le Pen, Vice-President of the Front National. Peillon boycotted the programme, leaving his chair empty and, during the course of the programme, issued a communiqué explaining his actions: ‘Parce que tout mon engagement politique et citoyen est fondé d’abord sur les valeurs de la République, de la raison et de l’antifascisme, j’ai décidé de ne pas participer au débat d’indignité nationale’. He criticized the nature and implications of the ‘national identity’ debate launched by the Sarkozy administration more generally, arguing: ‘Ce débat a provoqué et provoque encore des dérapages xénophobes, racistes, islamophobes qui font honte à la France, dressent les français les uns contre les autres et remettent le Front National et ses thèses de haine au cœur de notre vie politique’. He objected to the format of the debate, which had relegated him to the second half, thus allowing the extreme views of Besson and Le Pen to dominate. He ended by deploring the media’s lack of independence and even called for the resignation of Arlette Chabot, the head of France 2’s editorial team.²²⁴

Peillon portrayed his actions as those of an intellectual in politics. In an interview about the event in *Le Monde* he stated: ‘On aime les philosophes lorsqu’ils n’agissent pas et restent à leur place dans leur bibliothèque. Je m’y refuse. Leur place est dans la cité.’²²⁵ As demonstrated, Peillon’s intellectual work had been highlighting the importance of individualism to republicanism. On the contrary, the debate pioneered by Besson directly linked the nation’s identity crisis to immigration and was thus hostile to identity-based

²²⁴ Vincent Peillon, ‘France 2: l’indignité nationale!’, originally posted on his blog (now deactivated). Accessible at <http://blog.edgarquinet.com/post/2010/01/14/%22France-2-%3A-l-indignit%C3%A9-nationale-!%22,-par-Vincent-Peillon> (14.01.2010) (viewed 07 December 2015).

²²⁵ Vincent Peillon with Raphaëlle Bacqué et Jean-Michel Normand, ‘Vincent Peillon juge « serviles » les patrons de la télévision publique’, *Le Monde* (25.01.2010) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 07 December 2015).

diversity. It is unsurprising that Peillon objected, on an intellectual level, to a programme which, by inviting Besson and Le Pen, publicized such a means of framing the debate. The manner in which Peillon went about translating this admirable intellectual stance into action, however, demonstrates that he often failed to incarnate his attempt to promote an ideological and moral renovation of PS politics.

Several commentators accused Peillon of hypocrisy and made a link between his denunciation of Royal's 'media coup' at Dijon and his behaviour with France 2.²²⁶ The psychoanalyst Jean-Pierre Winter even suggested that Peillon had made a connection between 'not invited - present' and 'invited - not present'; he contended that Peillon hoped to provoke the sort of media storm Royal had conjured up.²²⁷ This link is tenuous as the empty-chair tactic is an age-old technique, yet his motivations were undoubtedly questionable.

Despite advocating the importance of sincerity in politics, Peillon's boycott was premeditated. He confirmed his attendance on the morning of the programme, yet later admitted: 'J'avais pris ma décision depuis plusieurs jours... Je voulais qu'il y ait un incident. Il fallait que ça fasse un peu scandale.'²²⁸ He legitimized his actions by arguing that, had he tried to act collectively with the PS someone else would have taken his place on the show, which would have undermined his intention to 'casser le spectacle': 'Il y a une concurrence pour passer à la télévision... qui va au-delà des solidarités de parti.'²²⁹ Winter noted that appearing on France Inter to denounce 'la société de spectacle' was simply creating his own 'spectacle' and suggested that the affair was more about getting himself known than about transmitting a message.²³⁰ Similarly, the political commentator Stéphane Rozès reflected that,

²²⁶ E.g. Vincent Peillon, 'Il fallait casser le spectacle', France Inter (28.01.2010) accessible at <http://peillon.typepad.fr/index/2010/01/france-inter.html> (viewed 27 January 2016).

²²⁷ Jean-Pierre Winter in 'Vincent Peillon: un intello en politique'.

²²⁸ Vincent Peillon cited in Julien Martin, 'Peillon plante France 2: « Je voulais qu'il y ait un incident », *Rue89* (14.01.2010) at <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2010/01/15/peillon-plante-france-2-je-voulais-qu-il-y-ait-un-incident-133784> (viewed 08 December 2015).

²²⁹ Peillon, 'Il fallait casser le spectacle'.

²³⁰ Winter in 'Vincent Peillon: un intello en politique'.

in his political career to date, Peillon had played second fiddle to two flamboyant media types - Montebourg and Royal. He suggested that Peillon was attracted to this sort of political figure and now increasingly wanted to be in the media himself.²³¹ Except for the (largely negative) publicity, Peillon's actions backfired. Marine Le Pen ironically suggested that Besson, who had defected from the PS, could play the role 'du socialiste et du responsable de l'UMP'. Peillon's call for the resignation of Arlette Chabot and others, a move that Aubry refused to support, then led to accusations of totalitarianism.²³² In an interview in March, Peillon admitted that he did not have the moral or political authority to pull off the boycott.²³³ Such a tendency to admit one's mistakes is rare in politics and Peillon certainly dedicated less time to the media than either Montebourg or Royal.²³⁴ All the same, Peillon increasingly, and hypocritically, sought to manoeuvre his way into the media, often at the expense of his political integrity.

In 2009, an article in *Le Journal Du Dimanche* hit on the implications of Peillon's hybrid identity: 'Ses [Peillon's] laudateurs disent: "Il est mieux que les autres" (un foreur de concepts); ses contempteurs disent "il fait comme les autres" (un danseur de tango). On dira donc: il est (sans doute) mieux que les autres mais il fait (au final) comme les autres.'²³⁵ Peillon's understanding of '*le politique*', of intellectual reformism, centred on its ability, through the reunion of thought and action, to transcend power politics in the name of the common good. Despite continuing his academic work, in this period between presidential elections when Peillon was particularly focused on forging his political career, his political action succumbed to the demands of the media sphere and to the personality-dominated

²³¹ Stéphane Rozès in 'Vincent Peillon: un intello en politique'.

²³² Marine Le Pen cited in 'Peillon rate le débat et fait parler de lui', *l'Express* (15.01.2010) at www.lexpress.fr (viewed 27 January 2016); 'Aubry assure que le PS ne veut pas « boycotter France 2 »', *Nouvel Observateur* (16.01.2010) at www.nouvelobs.com (viewed 08 December 2015); Vincent Peillon in 'Vincent Peillon: un intello en politique'.

²³³ Vincent Peillon in 'Vincent Peillon: un intello en politique'.

²³⁴ Thierry Vedel in *ibid.*

²³⁵ Delorme, 'Vincent Peillon, un intellectuel en politique'.

nature of contemporary politics. Vincent Duclert thus marginalized Peillon, arguing that there have been no intellectual reformists in the PS since Michel Rocard:

L'histoire et le savoir sont inaudibles pour les dirigeants du parti et les courants qui le composent... Vincent Peillon continue... d'œuvrer pour la redécouverte des grands textes du socialisme, ou encore d'interroger le rapport des socialistes avec l'histoire du XIXe siècle. Mais il se montre aussi... un parfait manœuvrier des courants et des réseaux.²³⁶

Peillon was unable to find a path between his identity as an intellectual and his identity as a politician. Rather than embodying '*le politique*', by synthesizing his intellectual work and his political action, Peillon embarked on a schizophrenic pursuit of the two.

Part III: Peillon's Education Ministry (May 2012-March 2014)

'*Le politique*' is a theory of action in the here and now. Peillon, like all reformists, therefore sought a governmental position. He viewed the Education Ministry as his calling and stated shortly after gaining the post: 'Je suis aujourd'hui confronté à ce que j'ai le plus désiré... cette fonction incarnait une sorte d'accomplissement de tout ce que j'ai vécu depuis que je suis enfant. Me voilà là pour reformer l'école.'²³⁷ It has been demonstrated that Peillon achieved the ministerial position, in part, at the cost of his attempt to practise a new, more honest, form of politics. Once appointed to government, Peillon's attempt to intellectualize the contemporary question of republicanism and to construct a new progressivism was focused on the centrality of schooling to the Republic. He believes that schooling has the potential to change society and vice versa and he constantly emphasized this in interviews in the lead up to the 2012 presidential elections. As early as 2009, for example, in an extended interview entitled 'Peut-on améliorer l'école sans dépenser plus?', which contrasted Peillon's

²³⁶ Duclert, *La gauche devant l'histoire*, p. 12, 15.

²³⁷ Vincent Peillon cited in Maryline Baumard, *L'école: le défi de la gauche. La première rentrée de Vincent Peillon* (Paris, 2013), e-book.

vision for education with that of the UMP ex-Education, Minister Xavier Darcos, Peillon insisted: ‘La France républicaine n’est pas née dans un chou. Elle est le produit de son école, façonnée par elle... En France, l’école est beaucoup plus que l’école. Elle est l’âme de la France... La France a besoin d’une refondation républicaine. Cela suppose le courage d’une grande réforme de l’école.’²³⁸ He had a unique opportunity to put his vision into effect as the president had pledged to prioritize education; it would be the ‘quinquennat pour la jeunesse’. The government promised not just educational reform but a complete ‘*refondation de l’Ecole de la République*’.²³⁹

There is a broad consensus in France that the education system is in need of a serious overhaul and Peillon succeeded in passing, although with significant delays, a ‘loi d’orientation et de programmation’ which was published in July 2013 and aimed to create ‘une école exigeante et égalitaire’.²⁴⁰ This legislation continues to be gradually translated into concrete changes on the ground. It is perhaps too early to assess the impact of Peillon’s measures on the French school system and it is certainly too soon to come to any sort of judgement about their effect on French society more widely; it is commonly estimated that it takes ten years to see the results of educational reform.²⁴¹ This section thus focuses instead on Peillon’s method and approach. Once in office, Peillon tried to follow his intellectual vision but he quickly lost popularity with the media, the public and the rest of government, which took the energy out of his ministry and led to his replacement by Benoît Hamon in the 2014 cabinet reshuffle. These arguments are illustrated by looking at Peillon’s summer

²³⁸ Vincent Peillon in Vincent Peillon and Xavier Darcos with Emmanuel Davidenkoff, *Peut-on améliorer l’école sans dépenser plus ?* (Paris, 2009), pp. 38-56.

²³⁹ Baumard, *L’école: le défi de la gauche*.

²⁴⁰ Vincent Peillon, ‘Communiqué de presse’ (09.07.2013) at www.education.gouv.fr/cid72962/publication-au-journal-officiel-de-la-loi-d-orientation-et-de-programmation-pour-la-refondation-de-l-ecole-de-la-republique.html (viewed 01 December 2015); proposals included prioritizing primary education, reforming teacher training by opening new ‘écoles supérieures du professorat et de l’éducation (ESPE)’, modernizing teaching and learning through a ‘service public du numérique éducatif’, restructuring the school timetable and introducing ‘un nouvel enseignement moral et civique du primaire à la terminale’.

²⁴¹ Baumard, *L’école: le défi de la gauche*.

concertation on schooling (June-October 2012) which, by bringing together society, intellectuals and politicians, was the epitome of ‘*le politique*’. Despite a promising start, however, the *concertation* method was progressively undermined by Peillon’s style and approach, which failed to resonate with the nature of contemporary democracy. The *rythmes scolaires* controversy, which dominated the first year of Peillon’s ministry, demonstrates that, while Peillon had a real vision for schooling, he failed to distinguish between an intellectual discourse and a political discourse, which got in the way of what were, for the most part, necessary, progressive and down-to-earth proposals. Furthermore, the strength of his own intellectual conviction, combined with his limited communication skills, translated into a slightly blinkered style which bordered on arrogance and undermined the art of dialogue central to ‘*le politique*’. Peillon acted unilaterally rather than in concert with the rest of government or with civil society, a problem that was then exacerbated by the confused nature of ‘Hollandisme’.

As discussed, Peillon defined ‘*le politique*’ as ‘la recherche du bien commun et la participation de tous à cette recherche’.²⁴² In the context of education in France, this meant overcoming longstanding sectarian interests, divisions and a deep-seated sense of distrust. Furthermore, it meant reconciling historic tensions, including those between the democratic aims of the *école républicaine* and the elitist demands of ‘meritocracy’ and whether education should be teacher or student led.²⁴³ Peillon’s academic work has been seeking to redeem a philosophical strand of republicanism which is able to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable and he sought to apply this republican synthesis to education: ‘On a laissé se durcir des positions antagonistes. Et chacun s’est laissé aller à des caricatures néfastes.’²⁴⁴

²⁴² Peillon, *Eloge du politique*, p. 12.

²⁴³ Lucy Mitchell, ‘French education: equal or elitist?’ in William Kidd and Siân Reynolds (eds.), *Contemporary French cultural studies* (London, 2000), p. 52.

²⁴⁴ Peillon with Bazin, *Conversations républicaines*, p. 105.

Ayrault's and Peillon's method was to start the ministry with a large-scale 'concertation pour la refondation de l'École de la République'. There were meetings in Paris and in the regions, which brought together all those concerned; there was even space on a dedicated website where the public could post their own comments.²⁴⁵ The *concertation* then led to the production of a report which would form the basis of the 'loi d'orientation et de programmation'. The government chose a 'concertation', as opposed to the more common 'consultation'. In an analysis of the differences between the two, the social psychologist Hubert Touzard argued that a 'consultation' collected the opinions of various actors on a provisional project while a 'concertation' was about 'l'action collective en vue d'un accord, d'un but commun', noting: 'l'objectif de la concertation est pour des acteurs, individuels ou collectifs, de trouver un accord, de résoudre ensemble un problème qui se pose à eux, de prendre ensemble une décision collective, ou (the case here) de préparer une décision prise en final à un autre niveau.'²⁴⁶

The *concertation* was thus Peillon's attempt to put his ideal of *le politique* into action by bringing together politics, intellectuals and civil society to debate education and to reach a consensus, in the name of the common good, which could then be translated into political action. These aims were made explicit in the final report, which stated:

La concertation s'est appuyée sur une démarche novatrice de démocratie participative. Pour dégager les principes fondateurs qui serviront de base à l'édifice, elle a réuni le plus largement possible, sur des thématiques prédéfinies, toutes les forces vives de l'éducation : des enseignants, des élèves, des parents, des directeurs d'école et des chefs d'établissement, des administrateurs, des élus, les organisations représentatives, des personnalités qualifiées, des représentants des

²⁴⁵ See Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 'Refondons l'école de la République' at www.education.gouv.fr/archives/2012/refondonslecole/ (viewed 25 November 2015).

²⁴⁶ Hubert Touzard, 'Consultation, concertation, négociation; une courte note théorique' *Négociations* 1/2006 (n° 5), pp. 67-74 at www.cairn.info/revue-negociations-2006-1-page-67.html (viewed 15 December 2016).

mondes économique, associatif, culturel, sportif, scientifique. Les ministères concernés ont également été associés.²⁴⁷

The *concertation* approach was seen as successful at the time and there was some sense that, above and beyond previous attempts, a consensus had been achieved. The final report noted that there had been a constructive discussion and that, despite a wide range of opinions, those involved had managed to agree on a common approach.²⁴⁸ Such a sentiment is supported by the almost exclusively positive reports in the mainstream media and the comments made by the representatives of some of the key groups involved. The educational historian Claude Lelièvre, for example, despite his initial scepticism, stated early on in the *concertation* process: ‘J’ai le sentiment... que l’envie de dépasser les points de blocage est aujourd’hui partagée... On sent chez chacun d’entre nous le désir de sortir de la situation actuelle, délétère et confuse, et de trouver une issue plutôt que de s’affronter.’²⁴⁹

The remarkable sense of optimism and solidarity, which translated into a fifty-two page synthesis report, however, was short-lived. Peillon lacked the political acumen to build on and maintain the apparent consensus, and this is evidenced by the controversy over the changes to the school week. The reform of the school week was viewed as one of the most popular of the *concertation*’s proposals and Nathalie Mons, who copiled the *concertation*, noted: ‘La nécessité d’un réaménagement des rythmes scolaires au primaire, au-delà de la semaine de quatre jours, fais consensus, même si les conditions restent à définir.’²⁵⁰ As such, during the official release of the report, Hollande was quick to announce that the school week

²⁴⁷ Ministère de l’Éducation, ‘Refondons l’école de la République. Rapport de la concertation’ at www.education.gouv.fr/archives/2012/refondonslecole/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/refondons_l_école_de_la_republique_rapport_de_la_concertation1.pdf (viewed 25 November 2015), pp. 3-4.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁴⁹ Aurélie Collas, ‘Ecole: « les grands débats ne permettent pas toujours d’aboutir à de grandes réformes »’, *Le Monde* (05.07.2012); Claude Lelièvre cited in ‘La concertation sur l’école: semaine 1’, *Le Monde* (11.07.2012) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 14 November 2015).

²⁵⁰ Nathalie Mons, ‘Concertation: un nouvel art de gouverner’, *Le Monde* (04.09.2012) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 14 November 2015).

would be increased to four and a half days and that this reform should be able to come into effect from September 2013.²⁵¹ The length of the primary school week was a necessary structural reform that would put France back in line with the rest of Europe. France had the smallest number of school days per year, yet one of the highest number of hours of classes and the Académie nationale de médecine was adamant that children's welfare was not best served by the four-day week.²⁵² Despite the logic of the reform, it provoked huge opposition from parents and teachers in 2013 and there were a series of large-scale strikes.²⁵³ Hollande thus felt compelled to announce that communes could opt to wait until September 2014 to implement the change. The problems with the reform of the school week overshadowed and delayed Peillon's other proposals, undermined his credibility and was probably one of the main reasons for his replacement.

The disintegration of the consensus achieved during the *concertation* demonstrates just how difficult it is to make changes in education and how sensitive and frustrated those involved were after so many failed reforms and the hostility and cuts of the Sarkozy administration. It also evidences the limitations of Peillon's attempt to put '*le politique*' into practice in contemporary politics. Despite his background in teaching, Peillon quickly lost popularity with both teachers and parents and one explanation for this was his intellectualism. His philosophical vision frequently manifested itself in a retreat into specialist historical references, which proved to be an obstacle to the communication of what were sensible and necessary reforms. In particular, Peillon's rhetoric failed to resonate with the media. He was especially frustrated, for example, that the media focused on the *rythmes scolaires* controversy at the expense of his other reforms, insisting in an interview in *Le Monde* that his

²⁵¹ François Hollande cited in Maryline Baumard, 'François Hollande dessine l'école du quinquennat', *Le Monde* at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 14 February 2016).

²⁵² L'Académie de médecine in 'L'Académie de médecine défend la semaine de quatre jours et demi', *Le Monde* (05.03.2013) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 20 April 2013).

²⁵³ Baumard, *L'école: le défi de la gauche*.

vision for education ‘n’a de sens que dans un ensemble’.²⁵⁴ In February 2013, at the height of difficulties over the school week, Peillon thus sought to bypass the media by publishing a short book, which aimed to explain his vision to ‘Refonder l’école de la République et refonder la République par l’école’ in its totality and to lay out ‘simplement’ the priorities of the ‘loi d’orientation et de programmation’.²⁵⁵ The book was a real attempt to wear his learning lightly; it is written in the first person, in simple language and is clearly laid out, with a chapter dedicated to each of his central aims. Peillon kept his historical and philosophical references to a minimum, while still outlining the intellectual vision behind his practical policies. Despite these efforts, the book was scarcely commented on in the media. The educational journalist for *Le Monde*, Maryline Baumard, for example, unfairly dismissed the work as ‘jus de crâne intellectuel’.²⁵⁶ It seems that Peillon’s attempt to adapt his register and to adopt a more distinctly political discourse was too little too late. Furthermore, the fact that he tried to reconnect with the public in book form is an ironic testament both to Peillon’s naivety regarding the nature of contemporary democracy and to his refusal to play the media game once in office. Peillon’s republican vision for education was all about giving it a sense of direction, yet he was unable to articulate what that meant to the public. Imagining what the French school system might be like at the end of Hollande’s presidential term, Baumard thus wrote: ‘En 2017, les résultats scolaires de la France étaient encore bien mauvais. On ne voyait toujours pas vraiment ce qu’une refondation allait donner une fois à maturité. Et pas peine de compter sur Vincent Peillon pour expliquer la chose. Trop « intello », on ne voyait pas assez où il voulait en venir.’²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Vincent Peillon cited in David Revault d’Allonnes, ‘Peillon: « ne comptez pas sur moi pour nous excuser d’être de gauche »’, *Le Monde* (12.11.2013) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 18 November 2015).

²⁵⁵ Vincent Peillon, *Refondons l’école pour l’avenir de nos enfants* (Paris, 2013) p. 8, 144.

²⁵⁶ Baumard, *L’école: le défi de la gauche*.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

As Education Minister, Peillon's intellectual identity and rhetoric did not chime with the mediatization of contemporary politics, and this undermined his attempt to bring together philosophy, politics and civil society. These problems are further demonstrated not just by his increasing unpopularity with the media but also, and it is closely related, with the general public. Brice Teinturier, political scientist and managing director of the polling company Ipsos, suggested that it was, in part, Peillon's intellectualism which caused his popularity to stagnate in the polls. Polls undertaken for *Le Point*, for example, showed that his satisfaction rating did not get beyond around 30%.²⁵⁸ In terms of the *rythmes scolaires* debate, Peillon proved unable to retain the support of parents. He failed to communicate the positives of the reform and, in particular, the ideology behind it. The restructuring of the school week aimed to reduce inequalities by expanding the availability of free extracurricular activities, yet parents increasingly viewed the reform as nothing more than an organizational problem.²⁵⁹

The strength of his intellectual convictions, combined with his inability to articulate his vision in a way that would allow it to be heard and understood in the public sphere, also translated into an inflexible and often arrogant style, which compromised the art of dialogue that had been central to the *concertation*. As such, while Sébastien Sihr, the general secretary of the main teachers' union, complained: 'On voulait un ministre, on a eu un philosophe', others disagreed, however: 'On pensait avoir un philosophe, et on a un ministre comme les autres.'²⁶⁰ With the exception of the *concertation*, Peillon did not work sufficiently well with the rest of government or with civil society, as evidenced by the series of 'gaffs' he made as Education Minister; they were so frequent that one trade unionist allegedly dubbed him 'Gaston la gaffe' after the bumbling office junior in the comic strip *Gaston*.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Polls undertaken for *Le Point* in *ibid*.

²⁵⁹ Baumard, 'le style « Peillon », un certain flou'.

²⁶⁰ Sébastien Sihr cited in *ibid*.

²⁶¹ Marie-Christine Corbier, 'Vincent Peillon part en laissant une « refondation » de l'école inachevée', *Les Echos* (02.04.14) at www.lesechos.fr (viewed 04 February 2016).

Again, the *rythmes scolaires* controversy serves as an illuminating case study. Peillon was so sure of his personal intellectual vision for schooling and, inseparably, for French society more widely, that he overlooked the strength and depth of the potential opposition. On 17 May 2012, the day he entered office and well before the *concertation*, Peillon provoked controversy when he stated that ‘Tous les enfants auront cinq jours de classe.’²⁶² The statement was a twofold gaff; firstly, Hollande’s election promise had been four and a half days not five and, secondly, he made the announcement before his appointment as Education Minister had been made official. Furthermore, on 24 February 2013, at the height of the debate over the structure of the school week, Peillon stoked the fire by declaring his plan to extend the school year and to make changes to the timing of summer holidays.²⁶³

Peillon’s intellectualism thus often translated into a naïve self-confidence, which got in the way of his attempt to build a consensus and to negotiate his reforms. A poll conducted by the polling organization BVA in February 2014, for example, demonstrated that 50 % of those who had heard of Peillon felt that he ‘joue trop perso’, while only 36% viewed him as an ‘homme de dialogue’.²⁶⁴ Peillon blamed the media for allowing the *rythmes scolaires* dispute to eclipse his other proposals and to distract from the totality of his vision for schooling, yet it is hardly surprising, given that Peillon pushed the reform so dogmatically from his first day in office.

It was not just his comments within the sphere of education which undermined his credibility and, in turn, weakened his ministry. He had a strong personal vision for society more broadly and was only too ready to make it known.²⁶⁵ In October 2012, for example, during a live interview with France Inter, Peillon implied, in contrast to the official government position,

²⁶² Peillon cited in Baumard, *L'école: le défi de la gauche*.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ BVA cited in Maryline Baumard and Thomas Wieder, ‘Vincent Peillon, nouvelle cible du peuple de droite’, *Le Monde* (03.02.2014) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 30 November 2015).

²⁶⁵ Baumard, ‘le style « Peillon », un certain flou’.

that he was in favour of the decriminalization of cannabis.²⁶⁶ The comment was jumped on by the right and exasperated Hollande and Ayrault. Notably, Ayrault declared: ‘Les ministres ont à se concentrer sur la mission qui est la leur... Lorsqu’ils sont à la radio et la télévision, ils doivent défendre à la fois la politique de leur ministère et la politique du gouvernement, et rien d’autre.’²⁶⁷

Peillon’s attempt to put ‘*le politique*’ into practice in the context of education in the twenty-first century was thus progressively undermined by the fact that his intellectual vision, and the way in which he tried to put it across, did not resonate with the media or the majority of the public. Furthermore, due to his own personality, experiences and intellectual identity, Peillon was so wrapped up in his own convictions that he often lost sight of the rest of government and of the art of dialogue and compromise so crucial in the particularly thorny issue of education. Baumard reflected: ‘Vincent Peillon veut faire du Peillon et rien d’autre. Parce qu’il a été habitué à décider seul de ses stratégies après toutes ses années dans l’opposition, son expérience de chercheur au CNRS et d’écriture. Et puis aussi parce qu’il a de lui-même et de ses analyses une très haute idée.’²⁶⁸

These problems were also exacerbated by the fact that his intellectual vision and ideology were not truly shared, and therefore not supported and promoted, by the rest of government and, most importantly in the context of the Fifth Republic, by the president. Hollande is the epitome of the modern day professional politician and Hazareesingh has underlined the technocratic nature of this *énarque*’s intellectual outlook.²⁶⁹ Hollande is a reformist, like Peillon, but his reformism, even more so than Jospin’s, has been managerial not theoretical.

²⁶⁶ ‘Vincent Peillon pour un débat sur la dépénalisation du cannabis’ AFP (14.10.2012) at www.youtube.com/watch?v=jK91Quhr4wE (viewed 20 February 2016).

²⁶⁷ Jean-Marc Ayrault cited in ‘« Il n’y aura pas de dépenalisation du cannabis », recadre Matignon’, *L’Obs* (15.10.2012) at tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/ (viewed 13 February 2016).

²⁶⁸ Baumard, *L’école: le défi de la gauche*.

²⁶⁹ Hazareesingh, ‘From left bank to left behind’.

In 2012 Julien Dray, a socialist on the left-flank of the PS, thus stated: ‘On a beaucoup trop le sentiment d’une stricte continuité avec ce qui se faisait auparavant dans le pays.’²⁷⁰

Furthermore, the vagueness of Hollandisme has been compounded by the fact that those governmental figures (2012-2014) whose political positions did have a more intellectual foundation were not from Hollande’s political family and were therefore unable to contribute to the definition of ‘Hollandisme’. Montebourg, for example, is on the far left of the party, while Valls, Moscovici and Peillon all have very different interpretations of ‘reformism’. Valls believes that the very word socialism is obsolete and has been wanting to ‘finir avec les tabous du PS’; Moscovici has been advocating a ‘réformisme ambitieux et continu’, while Peillon has been championing a ‘republican socialism’ inspired by Merleau-Ponty and Mendès-France.²⁷¹ Peillon’s tendency to go solo and his struggle to articulate his republican vision can therefore, in part, be explained by the doctrinal confusion that has been haunting the socialists and which lies at the heart of the Hollande presidency; there has been little space for a more distinctly intellectual reformism. In the context of education, for example, Baumard highlighted that there was a clash between ‘un Peillon agrégé de philosophie et un Hollande diplômé d’HEC’. Hollande, in contrast to Peillon, wanted education to be primarily a means of achieving a more productive society and of boosting the economy.²⁷²

Peillon’s ministry episode cannot be taken out of the particular context of education, an area of society dominated by strong views and powerful interest groups. John Ambler highlighted that education has provoked some of the most passionate debates and demonstrations in the Fifth Republic and that ‘power on the streets’ has frequently caused proposals to be withdrawn and has forced ministers out of office.²⁷³ When his ministry fell into difficulties,

²⁷⁰ Julien Dray cited in Michel Noblecourt, ‘Hollandisme recherche exégètes’, *Le Monde* (22.12.2012) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 28 November 2015).

²⁷¹ Noblecourt, ‘Hollandisme recherche exégètes’.

²⁷² Baumard, *L’école: le défi de la gauche*.

²⁷³ John S. Ambler, ‘Politics and policy in education’ in Alain Goyomarch, Howard Machin, Peter A. Hall and Jack Haywood (eds.), *Developments in French politics* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 227.

Peillon thus legitimately highlighted that, on average, education ministers have only lasted two years in the Fifth Republic.²⁷⁴ Education is a notoriously controversial subject, not just in France but also, for example, in Britain. The Conservative Education Minister Michael Gove (May 2010-July 2014), who tackled education from a political, as opposed to an intellectual, perspective, was also replaced due to the toxic nature of educational reform. History may well subsequently judge many of the reforms of both Gove and Peillon as on target and positive in the long-term. That said, the way in which Peillon failed to communicate his vision for education and to build a profound and lasting consensus has demonstrated that there has, so far, been little room for his ideal of '*le politique*' in PS politics. Peillon's personal intellectual understanding of reformism hit up against the mediatization of contemporary politics and the socialists' state of doctrinal confusion. Peillon was unable to negotiate these obstacles and '*le politique*' rapidly descended into lofty intellectualizing and a thrust-from-the-top approach, both of which undermined his popularity, credibility and any chance he may have had to negotiate the notoriously destructive Education Ministry. Peillon finally admitted in December 2014: '*J'étais dans les dossiers, je communiquais peu, c'est peut-être une faute politique.*'²⁷⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the difficulties encountered by an intellectual and political figure trying to negotiate and reconstruct, in a very specific and personal way, the connections between intellectuals, politics and wider society in the twenty-first century. It has highlighted the tension between Peillon's theory of intellectual engagement and how it unfolded in practice in PS politics. Peillon's attempt to reconnect intellectuals (philosophy), politics and

²⁷⁴ Peillon, *Refondons l'école*, p. 7.

²⁷⁵ Vincent Peillon cited in Mariana Grépinet, 'Il sort de sa réserve. Vincent Peillon, confidences sur sa vie d'après', *Paris Match* (12.12.2014) at www.parismatch.com (viewed 11 February 2016).

society, by constructing and promoting a flexible reformist republican socialism, has so far proved unsuccessful. The reconciliation that is central to 'le politique' quickly disintegrated in the face of the realities of contemporary democracy. Peillon has been unable to synthesize his own complex and hybrid identity as an intellectual and a politician. He has come up against a series of interlinked barriers, notably the socialists' inability to engage with the thought-driven nature of his reformism, the professionalization of contemporary politics and the demands of the media sphere. Ironically, Peillon has so far exemplified the contemporary breakdown of the connections between intellectuals, socialist politics and wider society.

Chapter Three: Equality

In his 2011 work, *The society of equals*, Rosanvallon reflected: ‘Inequalities have never before been so widely discussed while so little has been done to reduce them... a generalized sense that inequalities have grown “too large” or even become “scandalous” coexists with tacit acceptance of many specific forms of inequality and with silent resistance to any practical steps to correct them.’²⁷⁶ Rosanvallon asserted that this paradox, which he termed the *Bossuet paradox* (after the seventeenth-century theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet who said that ‘God laughs at men who complain of the consequences while cherishing the causes’) lies at the heart of the current crisis of the political left.²⁷⁷ The left’s identity, he argued, has historically centred on ‘the promotion of equality’. The fact that the left has been losing ground across Europe is therefore neither coincidental nor transitory, but ‘structural’: ‘The left has lost the historic source of its strength and legitimacy’. While left-wing parties can still win elections, he concluded, it is only because ‘elections turn as much on the weaknesses of one’s enemies as on one’s own strengths.’²⁷⁸

Having looked at Vincent Peillon’s individual form of engagement, which has been straddling the intellectual and political spheres, this third and final chapter moves on to evaluate intellectual attempts to rebuild a connection between the PS and society through an issue of vital importance within society itself – equality – from outside the PS.

As Rosanvallon has suggested, the PS has been having great difficulty engaging with the issue of equality in contemporary times. The fall of the Berlin wall symbolized, to many, the failure of the communist understanding of equality as ‘uniformity’. On the other side, the ‘uniformity’ implied by the market through management techniques like Taylorism has been

²⁷⁶ Rosanvallon, *The society of equals*, pp. 3-5.

²⁷⁷ Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet cited in *ibid.*, p. 204; *ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

undermined by globalization; contemporary capitalism has been increasingly structured around ‘initiative’ and ‘singularity’.²⁷⁹ At the same time, the public has become increasingly ill-disposed to the idea of equality as redistribution. One 2014 survey, for example, showed that 84% of French people believed that money gained through taxation was subsequently wasted.²⁸⁰ Levelling, state-planned conceptions of equality have thus been progressively challenged by a society that appears to resist uniformity both ‘ideologically’ and ‘technically’.²⁸¹

Inequality, however, has remained a pressing issue both in terms of the actual level of inequality and in terms of public concerns. Inequalities have been on the rise within developed countries.²⁸² Simply looking at income inequality, for example, in France between 1998 and 2006, the average income of the top 1% increased by 14%, that of the top 0.01% increased nearly 100%, while the income of the bottom 90% increased by a mere 4%.²⁸³ Furthermore, the French seem to be particularly sensitive to inequalities: a 2014 survey showed that 60% of the French public felt that the gap between the rich and the poor was a ‘very big problem’, making France one of the developed countries the most worried about inequalities.²⁸⁴

In the past fifteen or so years, in the face of these far-reaching ideological and social transformations, to which can be added the political problems of the 2002 and 2007 defeats and the floundering Hollande presidency, equality has become an increasingly central focus

²⁷⁹ Dominique Strauss-Kahn, *La flamme et la cendre* (Paris, 2002), pp. 387-388.

²⁸⁰ « Les Français et la solidarité », sondage Opinion Way for Finsquaire (November 2014) in Gilles Finchelstein, *Piège d’identité. Réflexions (inquiètes) sur la gauche, la droite et la démocratie* (Paris, 2016), p. 198.

²⁸¹ Strauss-Kahn, *La flamme et la cendre*, p. 24.

²⁸² François Bourguignon translated by Thomas Scott-Railton, *The globalization of inequality* (Princeton, 2015), p. 2.

²⁸³ Rosanvallon, *The society of equals*, p. 2.

²⁸⁴ Pew Research Centre (2014) in Finchelstein, *Piège d’identité*, pp. 155-156.

in those intellectual circles that have been trying to influence the PS. The Fondation Jean-Jaurès, for example, made equality their ‘priority’ research topic from 2015.²⁸⁵

This chapter argues that many intellectuals have been attempting to think differently about equality in order to construct a post-Marxist vision of a just world, which could help reconnect the socialists with both the nature and concerns of contemporary society through the battle for equality. The equality debate is important to the socialists’ political culture and could, in turn, help reinvigorate the left-right divide, possibly allowing the PS to redefine its position more clearly.²⁸⁶ The Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio, for example, argued that the criterion most often used to distinguish the political right from the political left is the attitude taken towards the issue of equality. At the most basic level, he contended, the right views inequalities as ‘natural’ in origin and therefore ‘inevitable’, while the left believes they are ‘social’ in origin and therefore ‘eliminable’.²⁸⁷ In many commentators’ eyes, socialism has, above all, been about fighting inequalities.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, the battle has been particularly central to French socialism because equality is a value perceived to be at the heart of the French Republic more widely and a fundamental component of French ‘exceptionalism’.²⁸⁹

It is beyond the confines of this chapter to provide an exhaustive treatment of intellectual discussions on equality over the past fifteen years; but useful conclusions can be drawn from a focus on Pierre Rosanvallon, one of the dominant intellectual influences in contemporary left-wing thinking.

²⁸⁵ ‘Les grandes axes de 2015. L’égalité première priorité’, Fondation Jean Jaurès at <http://plaquettenumerique.jean-jaures.org> (viewed 21 July 2016).

²⁸⁶ Finchelstein, *Piège d’identité*, p. 172.

²⁸⁷ Norberto Bobbio in *ibid.*, p. 172.

²⁸⁸ Strauss-Kahn, *La flamme et la cendre*, p. 15.

²⁸⁹ Vincent Peillon, ‘Conclusion’ in Vincent Peillon (ed.), *Inégalités & justice sociale. Débats et défis contemporains* (Paris, 2008), p. 284.

Part one of this chapter looks at Rosanvallon's 'atelier intellectuel' - the République des idées - founded in 2002, and focuses on the collection of short essays it has been releasing each year in partnership with the *Editions du Seuil*.²⁹⁰ It argues that significant progress has begun to be made in terms of developing updated social democratic ideas about equality and in terms of formulating and practising a form of intellectual engagement more suited to the demands of contemporary democracy. There have, however, still been clear problems. Firstly, the group has been struggling to strike a balance between the demands of the media and high academic standards. Secondly, despite the intellectuals' attempt to make an impact in politics by influencing public opinion via the media, they have still been largely unable to overcome the obstacles of socialist party culture and the mediatized and professionalized nature of contemporary politics more broadly.

Part two turns to Rosanvallon's individual work through a critical reading of his essay *The society of equals*. It appraises the work as a form of intellectual engagement and argues that Rosanvallon has elucidated the issue of equality in all its historical depth and has thus enhanced the République des idées's attempt to fashion a post-Marxist idea of equality. This part then analyses the connection between Rosanvallon's work and the socialists' approach to equality under Hollande, thus shedding light on the relationship between an intellectual like Rosanvallon, who has been working in a largely academic vein, and socialist politics. It demonstrates that the PS has struggled to engage with Rosanvallon's idea for a comprehensive political and social theory of equality; the socialists are yet to convince the public that there is more to equality than redistribution. Instead, they have gradually stopped

²⁹⁰ Chauveau and Truong with Jablonka and Guénard, 'Peut-on refonder la pensée politique?'.

talking about the issue and have thus been having great difficulties formulating a vision of social progress for contemporary times.²⁹¹

Part I: La République des idées (2002-)

As a group, the République des idées has been attempting to clarify social democracy by analysing the social and territorial inequalities of contemporary French society.²⁹² Ivan Jablonka, historian and co-director of the project, for example, claimed that inequalities were the group's 'ligne de force'.²⁹³ The intellectuals in the République des idées, responding to the problems revealed by the socialist defeats in the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections, have been attempting to practise a different form of intellectual engagement. These intellectuals, largely in the social sciences, have rejected the historic model of the universal intellectual and have instead adopted a more modest scientific approach. Their methodology has been allowing them to think about inequalities in a different way and they have begun to formulate a convincing post-Marxist vision of a just society. Furthermore, the group has tried to overcome the problems of socialist party culture and to adapt to the nature of contemporary democracy by first and foremost targeting civil society and the media in order to influence the PS from the outside. However, while the project has successfully found its way into the media, it has so far struggled to square publicity and accessibility with academic rigour. Taking the essay *Pour une révolution fiscale. Un impôt sur le revenu pour le XIXe siècle* as a case study sheds some light on the République des idées's actual impact on socialist politics. It demonstrates that while some of the collection's ideas have managed to capture the imagination of the public and have even found their way into political programmes, the group has so far continued to struggle to overcome the obstacles of socialist

²⁹¹ Finchelstein, *Piège d'identité*, p. 197.

²⁹² Chauveau and Truong with Jablonka and Guénard, 'Peut-on refonder la pensée politique?'.

²⁹³ Ivan Jablonka in *ibid.*

party culture.²⁹⁴ Thus far, the socialists have failed to engage in any depth with the group's ideas; the intellectuals have often simply been names to be invoked and the socialists have had a largely superficial and instrumental relationship with the project.

Intellectual 'penseurs'²⁹⁵

The République des idées has been attempting to reconnect the PS and society through a deeper and more accurate understanding of inequalities: 'Ce que je [Rosanvallon] cherche avec cette collection de livres... c'est d'aider à un supplément d'intelligibilité dans les domaines où l'on sent confusément que des choses se passent mais sans bien arriver à les identifier.'²⁹⁶ The République des idées thus represents an attempt to transcend Marxism and to clarify social democracy by establishing a more rigorous understanding of the issues of contemporary society which, as demonstrated in chapter one of this thesis, have been talked about so vaguely by both politicians and also by many intellectuals. When asked about the nature of the evolution from the Fondation Saint-Simon, a think-tank founded in 1982 which Rosanvallon ran with the historian François Furet, to the République des idées, for example, Rosanvallon stated that in the 1980s :

'Le problème-clé était la modernisation d'une gauche qui avait gagné les élections avec un programme commun inscrit dans la tradition séculaire du socialisme de la fin du XIXe siècle. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes entrés dans le monde de l'après-communisme et dans celui d'un nouvel univers du capitalisme. Il ne s'agit plus d'aggiornamento, mais de refondation intellectuelle, pour reconstruire une analyse de la réalité.'²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Camille Landais, Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, *Pour une révolution fiscale. Un impôt sur le revenu pour le XXIe siècle* (Paris, 2011).

²⁹⁵ Michel Winock in Marie-Laure Delorme and Jean-Maurice de Montremy, 'Michel Winock: « On a besoin de penseurs »', *Le Journal du Dimanche* (23.12.2009) at www.lejdd.fr/Culture/Actualite/Michel-Winock-On-a-besoin-de-penseurs-160178 (viewed 05 August 2016).

²⁹⁶ Pierre Rosanvallon with Jean Birnbaum, '« Il faut refaire le bagage d'idées de la démocratie française »', *Le Monde* (22.11.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 12 April 2016).

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

The Fondation Saint-Simon therefore aimed to modernize the political left by reconciling it with the market economy.²⁹⁸ The République des idées, however, has been trying to help the socialists to define their politics more precisely now that they have largely abandoned any practical commitment to a break with capitalism. Thierry Pech, the first secretary-general of the group, for example, stated: ‘Les socialistes croient qu’il suffit de se dire moins marxistes davantage sociaux-démocrates, et qu’ils peuvent repartir ainsi. C’est une grave erreur... [La gauche doit fournir] une relecture profonde de la société, de l’individu moderne, de reconstruire, à la racine, une compréhension de l’économie.’²⁹⁹

Given its post-Marxist ideological ambitions, the project has been deliberately trying to distance itself from global theories and thus from the historic model of the universal intellectual. The authors first and foremost analyse data and statistics which they use to question general perceptions, to illustrate the nature of contemporary inequalities and then to make informed suggestions about how to tackle them politically. Eric Maurin, whose essay opened the collection emphasized: ‘Nos questions sont produites à partir de l’examen des faits plutôt que des théories.’³⁰⁰ Reflecting on the République des idées around its tenth anniversary, Florent Guénard, the project’s general secretary, thus suggested that the researchers involved with the collection have been practising Michel Foucault’s model of the ‘specific’ intellectual.³⁰¹ The political analyst Agathe Cagé, however, has observed that while Foucault’s model resonates with the République des idées’s methodology, because it rejects totalizing thought in favour of expert analyses, the end aim is subtly different. The analyses

²⁹⁸ Agathe Cagé, ‘Vers une nouvelle figure de l’intellectuel de gauche?’, *Université Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne, UFR de Science Politique, Master 2 recherche (2007-2008)* at www.univ-paris1.fr/fileadmin/Centre_doc_ufr11/M2R_SIP-Cage.pdf (viewed 26 July 2016), p. 68.

²⁹⁹ Thierry Pech cited in Thierry Leclère, ‘Ça s’appelle « La République des idées »’, *Télérama* (07.06.2008) at www.telerama.fr/idees/la-pensee-plus-a-gauche-qu-a-droite.29814.php (viewed 28 July 2016).

³⁰⁰ Eric Maurin, *L’égalité des possibles. La nouvelle société française* (Paris, 2002); Eric Maurin cited in Thomas Wieder, ‘La République de idées: un atelier intellectuel’, *Le Monde* (19.05.2006) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 28 July 2016).

³⁰¹ Florent Guénard in Chauveau and Truong with Jablonka and Guénard, ‘Peut-on refonder la pensée politique?’.

of the ‘specific’ intellectual are supposed to help citizens to speak for themselves by providing information about the power relations that influence their thought processes. The République des idées, however, has been aiming to ‘rendre à la société la force et la capacité de se changer’.³⁰² The project’s form of intellectual engagement still contains an element of protest and a desire for change, albeit a modest one. Michel Winock therefore suggested that Rosanvallon’s team of intellectuals should be classed not as ‘specific’ intellectuals but as a new type of contemporary intellectual ‘penseur’: ‘Le souci de protester [contre toutes sortes d’inégalités] passe après le besoin de comprendre le monde indéchiffrable... Le penseur a quitté le registre de “J’accuse” pour celui de “Je veux comprendre”’.³⁰³

Rosanvallon’s group has therefore sought to adopt a more humble and thoughtful form of intellectual engagement adapted to the fact that contemporary French politics and society has little confidence in grand ideological theories. One of the standard criticisms of more modest and scientific forms of intellectual engagement and of the ‘specific’ intellectual model, however, is that its focus on expertise eliminates the more comprehensive or human ideas and values associated with the Dreyfusard model of the intellectual as moral guardian.³⁰⁴

Historians like Prochasson and Duclert, for example, have both seemed to be suggesting that a return to the intellectual as moralist could help the socialists to get back in touch with their political culture.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, Aquilino Morelle, one of Hollande’s political advisors lamented the influence of think tanks and foundations on socialist political programmes after 2002, stating: ‘Ça donne un diagnostic sophistiqué, mais pas de prescription ni de vision

³⁰² Cagé, ‘Vers une nouvelle figure de l’intellectuel de gauche?’, pp. 76-77.

³⁰³ Winock in Delorme and de Montremy, ‘« On a besoin de penseurs »’.

³⁰⁴ See for example van Renterghem and Wieder, ‘Intellectuels et politiques’; Vincent Duclert, ‘Intellectuels à l’Élysée, la dérive’, *Le Monde* (07.07.2008) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 30 October 2015).

³⁰⁵ Prochasson, *La gauche est-elle morale?*; Duclert, *La gauche devant l’histoire*; Duclert, ‘Intellectuels à l’Élysée, la dérive’.

globale. La pensée fragmentée, c'est épuisant, ça ne permet pas de vivre. Il faut un sens, quelque chose de plus global et de plus humain.³⁰⁶

Despite not complying fully with the 'specific' intellectual model, the République des idées has been reflective of the contemporary trend towards expert analyses. Contrasting the essay *L'élitisme républicain. L'école française à l'épreuve des comparaisons internationales*, written by the sociologists Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, with that of the economist Eric Maurin, *L'égalité des possibles. La nouvelle société française*, however, demonstrates that, while in some cases the scientific approach has led to insightful but narrow conclusions which, when taken alone, do fail to provide a wider reconceptualization of the issue of equality, the statistical approach has also been able to provide the basis for more complex attempts to rethink the idea of equality more broadly.³⁰⁷

Baudelot and Establet examined what they saw as the acute problems with the French education system and hoped to promote a 'nationwide debate' by rendering accessible the studies produced by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).³⁰⁸ They argued that, in France, PISA's results have been oversimplified by the media and unfairly distrusted and ignored by politicians and teachers who have tended to believe that PISA's criteria fail to take into account the unique nature of the French republican education system.³⁰⁹ Baudelot and Establet advocated the benefits of an international comparative approach as a means to transcend the inward-looking and interest-driven nature of debates on schooling in France.³¹⁰ Drawing on PISA, they questioned the French system's elitist viewpoint by demonstrating that the countries with the best school performance have been

³⁰⁶ Aquilino Morelle cited in van Renterghem and Weider, 'Intellectuels et politiques, une planète en recomposition'.

³⁰⁷ Maurin, *L'égalité des possibles*; Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, *L'élitisme républicain. L'école française à l'épreuve des comparaisons internationales* (Paris, 2009).

³⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 10-11, 118.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 15-17.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

those that most effectively fight inequalities. The success of the elites and the success of the masses, they concluded, are linked; justice and efficiency thus go hand in hand.³¹¹ The idea behind *L'élitisme républicain* is very simple as, working from this central observation, they then deduced: 'On voit bien dans quel sens on peut améliorer les résultats: supprimer tout ce qui fait obstacle à la constitution d'une véritable école unique.'³¹²

For Maurin, however, re-reading and redeeming statistical analyses is the starting point for a much more ambitious attempt to redefine a theory of equality which, he contended, could help the left to fashion a political project aimed at justice and social protection, adapted to the nature of contemporary social inequalities. He argued that the problem with the contemporary political discourse on equality, particularly on the left, is that it has been focusing on redistribution rather than equal opportunity because the left has been afraid of being accused of tolerating actual inequalities (*inégalités de fait*) and of having converted to liberalism.

Maurin stated that such reasoning ignores the link between the two types of inequality.³¹³ He took French schooling as a case study and argued that the focus (popularized by Pierre Bourdieu) on the inequalities created by the school system itself had caused the impact of social inequalities on school performance to be underplayed.³¹⁴ He demonstrated that factors like the state of a child's housing could have a significant impact on their success at school: 'plus du tiers des personnes qui ne disposaient pas d'une pièce pour faire leurs devoirs au calme quand ils avaient onze ans est sorti sans diplôme du système éducatif'. These statistics, Maurin contended, support the idea that there is a connection between actual inequalities and inequalities of opportunity because 'La pauvreté parentale est un facteur très défavorable aux conditions de logements des enfants et des conditions de logement précaires sont un facteur

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 13.

³¹² Ibid., p. 117.

³¹³ Maurin, *L'égalité des possibles*, pp. 55-56.

³¹⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

massif d'échec scolaire.'³¹⁵ Maurin thus called for a change of perspective: the reduction of actual inequalities should be a means and not an end and equality of opportunity should not just be about yet another school reform but part of a society-wide project.³¹⁶

The République des idées's scientific approach has therefore not prevented the individual essays in the collection from, at times, taking a more philosophical attitude to the issue which could, in turn, help the socialists to devise an updated and comprehensive discourse on equality. Furthermore, Cagé emphasized that the difference in aims between the République des idées group and the 'specific' intellectual has meant that the project as a whole has been actively keeping a broader vision in mind.³¹⁷ The focus on equalities as the central line of inquiry has allowed the intellectuals in the group to begin to build a post-Marxist vision collectively. Rosanvallon, for example, explicitly hoped that the essays could come together to form a coherent whole:

Il y a un certain nombre de travaux récents qui commencent à éclairer d'un jour nouveau la question des territoires, de l'exclusion, du travail. C'est donc cela qu'on commence à mieux connaître et à mieux comprendre. Il faut maintenant les rassembler et construire une vision d'ensemble. Nous pourrions alors forger des outils pour l'ambition politique légitime qui est de vouloir changer vraiment la société.³¹⁸

In 2011, presumably with the 2012 presidential elections in mind, the République des idées thus published an edited collection of shorter essays which aimed to 'ouvrir des pistes pour répondre au délitement du lien social'.³¹⁹ In the concluding essay, François Dubet drew out how one could 'faire la société par le côté gauche'.³²⁰ He suggested that, because society had evolved, it was time to transcend the principles and institutions which had historically been

³¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³¹⁶ Ibid., p.13, 74.

³¹⁷ Cagé, 'Vers une nouvelle figure de l'intellectuel de gauche ?', p. 82.

³¹⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon cited in *ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

³¹⁹ Pierre Rosanvallon (ed.), *La République des idées. Refaire la société* (Paris, 2011), p. 8.

³²⁰ François Dubet, 'Faire société par le côté gauche', in Rosanvallon (ed.), *Refaire société*, pp. 77-90.

deemed to ensure social cohesion. He reflected that society had been broken down by neoliberalism but had also been restructured around positive principles like ‘autonomie’, ‘singularité’, ‘capabilité’ and ‘empowerment’.³²¹ He contended that, in order to combat destructive populist responses, the left therefore needed to work out how to create a common world adapted to contemporary realities. Dubet proposed that a project to remodel society should be organized around three principles: equality (relative equality of social positions), the individual (aspirations) and democracy.³²²

Beyond this explicit attempt to come up with a common perspective, there is also a sense that the ideas from many of the essays in the collection have been starting to build on one another. Maurin’s idea that the reduction of inequalities should be a society-wide and life-long project, for example, has notably since been complemented by the sociologists Camille Peugny’s essay *Le destin au berceau. Inégalité et production sociale* and Dubet’s *L’école des chances. Qu’est-ce qu’une école juste?*³²³ Taken together, these works, in different ways, challenge France’s and the left’s historic focus on schooling as the central means to create an equal society. They advocate, instead, a broader society-wide understanding of the fight against inequalities. Peugny, like Maurin, for example, criticized theories which had declared the end of a class society by demonstrating that in France social reproduction has in fact been intensifying.³²⁴ He then similarly contended that reforming the school system was not enough in itself; even a perfect democratization would not lead to a meritocratic society. Statistics show that those children from disadvantaged backgrounds who leave school with the same qualifications as more privileged children have remained at a disadvantage in the job market.³²⁵ In order to equalize conditions throughout all stages of life, he thus suggested a

³²¹ Ibid., p. 78, 80.

³²² Ibid., pp. 82-90; Rosanvallon, ‘Refaire société’ in Rosanvallon (ed.), *Refaire société*, p. 12.

³²³ Camille Peugny, *Le destin au berceau. Inégalité et reproduction sociale* (Paris, 2013); François Dubet, *L’école des chances. Qu’est-ce qu’une école juste ?* (Paris, 2013).

³²⁴ Peugny, *Le destin au berceau*, pp. 59-60.

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

universal life-long training package which would be guaranteed and funded by the state.³²⁶ In a slightly different vein, observing that in France the level of one's qualifications plays a strong determining role throughout one's professional life, Dubet called for the development of an 'individual equality of opportunity'. He argued that rather than simply viewing school inequalities (those determined by merit) as a means to eliminate social inequalities, one should also consider the impact that these school inequalities then have on social inequalities (on society). Dubet criticized the intellectual descendants of the Saint-Simonians who have been arguing that inequalities resulting from a meritocracy are just, contending that while one sphere of activity may produce reasonably fair inequalities, it is not fair if those inequalities then automatically lead to inequalities in another sphere (for example inequalities which transfer from education to the economy).³²⁷

The République des idées has therefore chosen to practise a modest scientific form of intellectual engagement better suited to making sense of a rapidly evolving society in the absence of grand explanatory theories. At the same time, they have succeeded in largely overcoming the potential downsides of expert analyses by working collectively and by focusing on the underlying theme of inequalities and how to reduce them.

The République des idées, the PS and the Media

The République des idées has been seeking to achieve 'la diffusion la plus efficace, sans renoncer à la double exigence de rigueur et de qualité indispensable à tout travail intellectuel'.³²⁸ The project is undeniably politically engaged; each essay ends with more or less specific suggestions on how their findings and ideas could translate into practical policies and Florent Guénard noted that the République des idées was 'left-leaning'.³²⁹ As opposed to

³²⁶ Ibid., pp. 94-105, 110-11.

³²⁷ Dubet, *L'école des chances*, pp. 73-76.

³²⁸ La République des Idées at <http://www.repid.com/>.

³²⁹ Guénard in 'Peut-on refonder la pensée politique ?'.

think tanks like the Fondation Jean-Jaurès or Terra Nova, however, the team has been consciously trying to distance themselves from the PS. Guénard insisted that the group was not ‘en téléphone rouge avec le PS’.³³⁰ Furthermore, when Ségolène Royal’s 2007 election campaign book included many of the group’s analyses, Rosanvallon, despite having signed a petition in support of Royal’s candidacy, was quick to assert the group’s independence, stating that it had ‘aucune relation de travail avec la candidature à l’investiture du Parti Socialiste pour l’élection présidentielle’.³³¹

The group has thus recognized the challenges of contemporary socialist party culture and has sought to adapt its form of intellectual engagement accordingly. The project has been actively seeking to influence the PS from a distance. In 2006 at Grenoble, for example, the République des idées held a forum to discuss ‘la nouvelle critique sociale’, which deliberately excluded politicians. The 2006 forum can be contrasted with the *colloque socialiste*, also held at Grenoble in 1966. The latter was co-organized by the PSU, a party which had close links with many of the intellectuals, especially Rosanvallon, who have since been involved with the République des idées. Alongside intellectuals, citizens and unions, the *colloque socialiste* tried to fashion a programme for a modern form of socialism. Contemplating the differences between the two events and the reasons for the exclusion of politicians in 2006, Thierry Pech, the République des idées’s first secretary, stated that in the 1960s ‘les partis restaient des lieux où pouvait se faire la synthèse entre les attentes sociales, les projets et les stratégies de conquête du pouvoir. Aujourd’hui, il ne reste que les stratégies de conquête.’³³²

The project’s distance from the political sphere has not only been a response to the PS’s internal problems but also an attempt to take on board and adapt intellectual engagement to

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Pierre Rosanvallon cited in Jean Bruno, ‘La République des idées’, *La République des lettres* at www.republique-des-lettres.fr/1242-republique-des-idees.php (viewed 28 July 2016).

³³² Thierry Pech cited in Wieder, ‘La République des idées: un atelier intellectuel’.

the nature of contemporary democracy more broadly. Laurent Bouvet, who was part of the project's founding team, and who has himself worked closely with the PS in his role as editor of the *Revue Socialiste* (1988-2001), has progressively distanced himself from the group. He criticized its strong detachment from political institutions, stating: 'La République des idées a publié de formidables bouquins, mais elle reflète cette vision d'intellectuels positivistes qui ne croient qu'en la science et en la parole des experts. Pourquoi refuser d'aller dans l'arène et se méfier autant des politiques quand on prétend être un laboratoire des idées ?'³³³

Responding to Bouvet's criticism, however, Pech insisted: 'on influence les partis quand on vende les livres à 50,000-60,000 exemplaires et quand on structure le débat.'³³⁴ Unlike the Fondation Saint-Simon, which targeted 'le monde dirigeant, politique ou économique', the République des idées has thus been focusing on the public sphere itself.³³⁵ Rosanvallon's aim for 'la diffusion la plus efficace' has thus been about recognizing the combined challenges of party culture and the vibrancy of contemporary civil society.

The République des idées has thus been hoping to influence politics via public opinion. Rather than fostering links with the PS, the group has thus developed important ties with the media, no doubt aided by Rosanvallon's own high public profile and his connections with newspapers like *Le Monde*, where he is an associate editorialist. The 'nouvelle critique sociale' forum, for example, was organized in partnership with *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *France Culture* and was prepared with the review *Esprit*, the magazines *Alternatives Economiques*, *Les Inrockuptibles*, *Les Cahiers du Cinema* and the review *Mouvement*. Furthermore, each essay in the collection has tended to be systematically

³³³ Laurent Bouvet cited in Leclère, 'Ça s'appelle « La République des idées »'.

³³⁴ Pech in 'Peut-on refonder la pensée politique?'.

³³⁵ Cagé, 'Vers une nouvelle figure de l'intellectuel de gauche?', p. 66.

presented in, at the very least, *Le Monde* and *Alternatives Economiques* and many of the authors have also subsequently been invited for interviews.³³⁶

The project has therefore successfully found its way into the media sphere and, as opposed to ‘professional, ‘media’ intellectuals like B-HL, the intellectuals linked to the République des idées have managed to enter the media in a much more academic vein.³³⁷ The publicity has largely centred on discussions of their specific essays, ideas and thus the overarching theme of inequalities. That said, the demands of the media sphere and the desire to make the essays accessible to the widest possible audience do seem to have put constraints on both the content and form of the works. The project has thus far struggled to reconcile academic rigour with the need for publicity and accessibility. Edgar Morin’s essay, for example, was summed up in *Le Monde* as a ‘petit livre synthétique mais parfois abscons.’³³⁸ The limited coverage of this essay will have a lot to do with the fact that it was the first essay in the collection, coming out before the results of the 2002 presidential elections started to draw increased attention to the state of the left. The word ‘abscons’, however, perhaps says something about the particular demands of the media sphere. In January 2016, Gilles Finchelstein published an essay which also sought to reconceptualize ‘equality of opportunity’. Like Maurin, he called for a form of ‘pre-distribution’ and he referred in detail to Maurin’s work and to the idea of an ‘égalité des possibles’.³³⁹ Rather than using the phrase ‘égalité des possibles’ himself, however, Finchelstein instead advocated a ‘redefinition’ of ‘equality of opportunity’. In a talk about the essay, he reflected that it is more effective and simpler to try to redefine subtly an idea

³³⁶ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

³³⁷ Winock in Delorme and de Montremy, ‘« On a besoin de penseurs »’.

³³⁸ *Le Monde* cited in Cagé, ‘Vers une nouvelle figure de l’intellectuel de gauche?’, p. 57.

³³⁹ Finchelstein, *Piège d’identité*, p. 200.

already in common usage in the public sphere than it is to try to popularize a seemingly new concept.³⁴⁰

It was Daniel Lindenberg's *Le rappel à l'ordre. Enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires* which launched the République des idées into the media limelight.³⁴¹ As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Lindenberg's essay lacked rigour because it denounced individual intellectuals rather than deeply criticizing or challenging their ideas. Bouvet thus felt that Lindenberg's book 'est déplacé par rapport aux autres titres de la collection' because it reduces intellectual disputes to 'une affaire de postures et non de convictions'.³⁴² Despite largely defending the work, even Rosanvallon admitted that 'sur la forme, son mode d'exposition pointilliste, son choix de citer nombre d'auteurs assez rapidement entraînent des rapprochements et des risques d'amalgames.'³⁴³ That it was the République des idées's least academically rigorous essay which received so much media attention and launched the project, points, much like the media reception of Vincent Peillon's essay *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée*, to the media's continued taste for controversy over and above intellectual depth and clarity.³⁴⁴

To make the essays accessible and attractive to the media, they are short (rarely exceeding one hundred pages) and aim to be as non-technical as possible. Given that statistics can often be interpreted in many different ways and that the source of statistics should be considered in any convincing and balanced academic analysis, the group's attempt to adapt to the media sphere and to target a large and general audience has also, at times, risked undermining their aim to overcome unsubstantiated discussions about inequalities through a scientific approach.

³⁴⁰ Finchelstein, 'L'égalité des chances, une chance pour l'égalité ?', *Treize minutes* (26.05.2016) at <https://vimeo.com/169208616> (viewed 21 July 2016).

³⁴¹ Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l'ordre*; Cagé, 'Vers une nouvelle figure de l'intellectuel de gauche ?', p. 57.

³⁴² Laurent Bouvet cited in Jean Birnbaum and Nicolas Weill, 'Ce livre qui brouille les familles intellectuelles', *Le Monde* (22.11.2002) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 10 March 2016).

³⁴³ Rosanvallon in Birnbaum, '« Il faut refaire le bagage d'idées de la démocratie française »'.

³⁴⁴ Peillon, *La Révolution française n'est pas terminée*.

The desire to redeem certain statistics, combined with the need for brevity, has often been at the expense of a wider and more complicated picture. In Maurin's essay, for example, his focus on the impact of economic inequalities on school performance overlooked the part played by cultural inequalities.³⁴⁵ Additionally, as the project has progressed it has become noticeably less academic. Contrasting Maurin's 2002 work with Peugny's 2013 essay which, as discussed, deals with very similar questions, it is striking that the latter is much more poorly footnoted. Peugny failed to distinguish between different types of sources and, in particular, he did not note whether they came from private or public institutions.³⁴⁶

Impact on socialist politics

It is difficult to determine to what extent the République des idées and its form of intellectual engagement has succeeded in influencing politics. Politicians often combine ideas from a variety of different places, add their own and do not necessarily acknowledge their sources. The frequent references to the République des idées in the media, however, do seem to have been mirrored in politics. Looking at the project between 2002 and 2008, for example, Cagé observed that the works have been cited regularly in debates in the national assembly.³⁴⁷ Referencing intellectuals and even their ideas, however, is not the same as the group's work translating into ideological reform or concrete policies. Despite succeeding in getting its presence felt in the political sphere via civil society, the République des idées has still, so far, struggled to transcend the problems of socialist party culture and of the political sphere more widely. Much as historical figures like Jean Jaurès have been cited superficially by the

³⁴⁵ Jean Braus, 'Une nouvelle société', *Alternatives Economiques* 203 (May 2002) at www.alternatives-economiques.fr/une-nouvelle-societe_fr_art_158_16904.html (viewed 6 July 2016).

³⁴⁶ Delphine Moraldo, 'Camille Peugny, *Le destin au berceau. Inégalités et reproduction sociale*', *Lectures* (02.04.2013) at <http://lectures.revues.org/11102> (viewed 06 July 2016).

³⁴⁷ Cagé, 'Vers une nouvelle figure de l'intellectuel de gauche ?', p. 19.

socialists, so the intellectuals at the République des idées have often been used in a largely symbolic fashion. In 2006, for example, Rosanvallon lamented:

Beaucoup d’auteurs de La République des idées sont sollicités par les entourages politiques. Mais ce qui me frappe, c’est que l’on attend d’eux des éléments de langage, des expressions neuves... reprise ici ou là – mais pas le supplément de complexité et d’intelligibilité qu’ils peuvent apporter. Or la démocratie suppose l’intelligibilité de la société qu’elle entend reformer.³⁴⁸

The way in which the socialists under Hollande have been struggling with the issue of equality is discussed in detail later in this chapter. However, taking the essay *Pour une révolution fiscale. Un impôt sur le revenu pour le XIXe siècle*, by the economists Thomas Piketty, Camille Landais and Emmanuel Saez, as a case study serves as a useful brief illustration of how the project has continued to hit up against the problems of socialist party culture, despite its success in the media and with the public.³⁴⁹ The three economists analysed the French tax system as a whole and demonstrated that ‘Le système est légèrement progressif jusqu’au niveau des « classes moyennes » puis devient franchement régressif au sein des 5% les plus riches - et surtout à l’intérieur des 1% les plus riches.’³⁵⁰ They then proposed a ‘fiscal revolution’ which they believed would make the tax system simpler, fairer and easier to understand and would thus help to rebuild a sense of civic confidence in taxation.³⁵¹ In particular, they advocated a new revenue tax which would replace many of the existing taxes; it would be individualized, deducted at source and would result from combining the existing tax on revenue (IR) and the generalized social contribution (CSG).³⁵²

³⁴⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon in Gérard Courtois and Eric Le Boucher with Pierre Rosanvallon, ‘Conjurer l’impuissance politique’, *Le Monde* (19.05.2006) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 29 July 2016).

³⁴⁹ Landais, Piketty and Saez, *Pour une révolution fiscale*.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Pour une révolution fiscale demonstrates that the République des idées has been having some remarkable successes in terms of capturing the imagination of the public. The essay was published in January 2011 and from then until the end of the 2012 presidential elections it was frequently discussed in the press, radio and television and had sold 40,000 copies by the end of 2012.³⁵³ Such popularity seems remarkable for a book about the French tax system and can probably partly be attributed to Piketty's already well-established fame. It was also due, however, to the intellectual's effective use of the internet; the essay is accompanied by a website where the public can simulate their own tax reform and in 2011 the innovative tool succeeded in creating a buzz on social media.³⁵⁴

The essay was thus able to partially set the agenda for the 2012 presidential elections by first and foremost influencing and forming public opinion. Piketty, for example, recalled a frustrating meeting he had in January 2011 with Hollande, Fabius, Jérôme Cahuzac and Michel Sapin, before *Pour une révolution fiscale* had become such a public success: 'Je leur ai dit que je trouvais qu'ils n'allaient pas assez loin dans leur façon d'envisager la fusion entre l'impôt sur le revenu et la CSG. Ils m'ont expliqué en gros que, « si c'était si facile, ça se saurait ». J'ai compris qu'à leurs yeux, j'apparaissais un peu naïf.' Contemplating the difference between this meeting and the election campaign, Piketty then noted: 'Ce n'est pas en les [hommes politiques] rencontrant autour d'une table que nous, chercheurs, avons le plus d'impact sur les politiques. Il est beaucoup plus efficace d'intervenir dans les medias, de faire vivre le débat avec un livre... et de les obliger ainsi à s'emparer d'un sujet qui s'impose dans

³⁵³ Ivan Jablonka in 'Peut-on refonder la pensée politique ?'; see www.revolution-fiscale.fr/dans-les-medias (viewed 11 July 2016) - for example between January 2011 and March 2012 there were eight articles/interviews/spreads in *Le Monde*, thirteen in *Libération* and five in *Le Nouvel Observateur*.

³⁵⁴ See www.revolution-fiscale.fr/simulez-votre-propre-reforme-fiscale (viewed 11 July 2016); Guillaume Saint-Jacques (whose PhD project was to make the fiscal simulator) with Oliver Levard, '150, 000 français ont fait leur révolution fiscale', *TF1 news* (31.01.2011) at www.revolution-fiscale.fr/dans-les-medias/64-qplus-de-150-000-francais-ont-fait-leur-revolution-fiscaleq-tf1-news-31-janvier-2011 (viewed 11 July 2016).

l'opinion.³⁵⁵ While partly a response to the rise of the far-left Front de gauche presidential candidate, Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the polls, Hollande's U-turn on a high revenue tax should, in part, be credited to Piketty, Landais and Saez and their essay's ability to mobilize public opinion.³⁵⁶ In a heated television debate with Piketty in January 2011, Hollande had stated: 'Je considère que les taux faciaux pour un tout petit nombre de contribuables sont des taux inefficaces' and he had wryly insisted: 'Je préfère un impôt payé à un impôt fraudé.'³⁵⁷ In late February 2012, however, Hollande pledged a 75% tax rate for those earning over one million euros. Piketty thus noted: 'en disant 75%, il [Hollande] est même allé au-delà de ce que nous proposons. Comme quoi les idées font leur chemin.'³⁵⁸

Despite the popularity of the work, however, Hollande and the socialists progressively abandoned the ideas of Piketty, Landais and Saez for a fundamental transformation of the French taxation system. Faced with divisions in the socialist party over whether to have a radical or more gentle reform, Hollande's 'grande réforme fiscale' became increasingly vague and non-committal as the 2012 presidential election campaign progressed. He refused, for example, to fix a timetable for the combining of the IR and the CSG laid out in the 2010 socialist party programme. In February 2012, Cahuzac, who was in charge of budget and taxation matters in the campaign, stated that the combining of the IR and the CSG would only happen in the upcoming *quinquennat* 'si les conditions permettent'.³⁵⁹ Without any engagement to make taxation more coherent and equal across the system, the promise of a

³⁵⁵ Thomas Piketty cited in van Renterghem and Weider, 'Intellectuels et politiques, une planète en recomposition'.

³⁵⁶ Ben Clift, 'Le changement? French socialism, the 2012 presidential election and the politics of economic credibility amongst the eurozone crisis', *Parliamentary Affairs* 66 (2013), p. 109.

³⁵⁷ François Hollande in 'Débat entre François Hollande et Thomas Piketty', *Mediapart* (28.01.2011) accessible at www.revolution-fiscale.fr/dans-les-medias/52-debat-avec-francois-hollande-mediapart (viewed 28 July 2016).

³⁵⁸ Piketty cited in van Renterghem and Weider, 'Intellectuels et politiques, une planète en recomposition'.

³⁵⁹ Thomas Piketty, 'La Révolution fiscale aura-t-elle lieu?', *Le Monde* (31.03.2012) at <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/fr/articles-de-presse/38> (viewed 28 July 2016); Jérôme Cahuzac cited in Christian Losson with Thomas Piketty, 'Hollande passe un peu à l'action', *Libération* (28.02.2012) at www.revolution-fiscale.fr/dans-les-medias/97 (viewed 28 July 2016).

75% taxation rate for individuals earning over one million euros, a level which was significantly higher than the essay had suggested and extremely high by international comparative standards, was largely a symbolic and unthought-out measure. It also represented a return to the socialists' historic tendency to make far-left promises when in opposition, only to revoke them once in power.³⁶⁰ The 75% tax has since been a major source of embarrassment for the Hollande presidency and was eventually shelved in January 2015, after just two years in place.³⁶¹ Piketty, who was publicly very close to Hollande and to the PS in the lead up to the 2012 presidential elections, has thus since distanced himself from them and become virulently critical of Hollande and the socialist government. In 2013, for example, he stated: 'On a devant nous le sommet de la technocratie socialiste au pouvoir, très confidante dans ses compétences. Je n'ai pas de doute sur le fait qu'ils ont fait de très bonnes dissertations à 20 ans, mais je ne suis pas certain que cela suffise pour entrer dans le XXI^e siècle.'³⁶²

The République des idées is an example of how left-wing intellectuals, since 2002, have been attempting to rethink the issue of equality in order to help the socialists to better understand the evolutions of capitalism and of society, so they can articulate a post-Marxist vision of a common world which could resonate with the public. The project is also an example of how intellectuals have been adapting their form of engagement to contemporary times; they have been trying to find a space for themselves within civil society so they can influence politics from below. The République des idées has been making significant progress both in terms of attracting the media, engaging the public and influencing politics. Despite such advances, there are still clear problems and the project has been struggling both with the intellectual

³⁶⁰ Ben Clift, 'Le changement ?', p. 111.

³⁶¹ Maxime Vaudano, Clément Parrot et Corentin Dautreppe, 'Taxe à 75%: histoire d'une promesse', *LuiPrésident, Le Monde* (05.02.2013) at <http://luipresident.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/02/05/taxe-a-75-histoire-dune-promesse/> (viewed 01 August 2016).

³⁶² Thomas Piketty cited in Julie Clarini, 'Les espoirs déçus des intellos de gauche', *Le Monde* (30.04.2013) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 04 November 2015).

limitations imposed by the media sphere and with the socialists' continued resistance to wider intellectual reform proposals.

Part II: Pierre Rosanvallon, *La société des égaux* (Paris, 2011)

Pierre Rosanvallon's *The society of equals* is the third book in a series which attempts to elucidate the problems of contemporary society through historical analysis and political theory.³⁶³ This volume, however, differs from the first two works because it moved on from a discussion of institutional mechanisms and procedures to look at an issue of society itself (equality):

In this book I have been guided more than ever by a desire to maintain a connection between scholarly research and the concerns of citizens... The political point is to demonstrate that the idea of socialism in the twenty-first century will be shaped by the reinvigoration of the democratic ideal through an in-depth study of its societal manifestations. The time has come to fight for integral democracy, which will come about through the mutual interaction of two ideas that have been kept apart for too long: namely socialism and democracy.³⁶⁴

In *The society of equals* Rosanvallon thus complemented and built on the République des idées's attempt to rethink and promote a form of social democracy for contemporary times through the issue of equality. Given that his own area of expertise is history and political theory, however, Rosanvallon more directly attempted to turn the nebulous idea of equality into a coherent vision and discourse which could help reconnect the socialists with their political culture and with their traditional working and middle-class electorate. Furthermore, he approached the topic of equality in a much more academic and conceptual vein.

Rosanvallon consciously chose to move into the academic sphere rather than to pursue a career in politics in the late 1970s, after his previous close involvement with the

³⁶³ Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie; La légitimité démocratique; Le bon gouvernement*.

³⁶⁴ Rosanvallon, *The society of equals*, p.11.

Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT) trade union and with Michel Rocard.³⁶⁵ Additionally, despite being a public intellectual, Rosanvallon has rarely intervened actively during political moments. His individual form of intellectual engagement has been firmly anchored in the intellectual sphere and has been deliberately and necessarily non-partisan. Reflecting on his tendency to conclude books with rough outlines Rosanvallon thus wrote:

L'objet étant à chaque fois de suggérer les conséquences pratiques et institutionnelles que l'on pouvait tirer des analyses historiques et des conceptualisations élaborées. Suggérer, car il ne pouvait être question de présenter ce qui se serait apparenté à un programme détaillé de réformes ou à un dispositif institutionnel précis. Pour plusieurs raisons. La première est qu'une telle conception aurait risqué de polariser l'attention et de conduire les lecteurs à négliger l'apport historique et conceptuel, en limitant les commentaires à des considérations superficielles sur les dispositifs pratiques. La seconde, et la plus importante, était de laisser ouvert le débat sur ces dispositifs, en ne donnant pas l'impression que l'analyse conduit à imposer un modèle... c'est ainsi au nom de la conception que je me fais du rapport entre le travail intellectuel et la vie politique. Mon but est en effet de donner des instruments d'analyse, d'accroître la capacité des citoyens de s'impliquer dans la cité et non de les faire adhérer à un système.³⁶⁶

As a form of intellectual engagement, Rosanvallon's use of history in *The society of equals* has complicated understandings of the issue of equality, while the inclusion of political theory has allowed Rosanvallon to both eschew the contemporary trend towards increased academic specialization and to begin to formulate a conceptual solution which could be practically useful to the PS. Rosanvallon's complex and academic approach has risked isolating some of the public and his concluding conceptual outline has left a lot of practical questions open. Rosanvallon has, however, largely succeed in shedding light on the issue of

³⁶⁵ Pierre Rosanvallon with J.F. Sebastián, 'Intellectual history and democracy: an interview with Pierre Rosanvallon', *Journal of the history of ideas* 68.4 (October, 2007), p. 705.

³⁶⁶ Pierre Rosanvallon, 'Bref retour sur mon travail', in Sarah Al-Matary and Florent Guénard (eds.), *La démocratie à l'œuvre de Pierre Rosanvallon*, p. 250.

equality in all its historical complexity and has thus deepened intellectual discussions on how to conceive a post-Marxist idea of equality for contemporary times.

When Rosanvallon was asked about his understanding of intellectual engagement, he stated:

The role of the intellectual... can be plotted out by his work itself... his work has and ought to have the function of rendering contemporary society's difficulties more intelligible. For me, an intellectual is someone who makes Condorcet's wager. A more lucid society that better understands its questions will perhaps be more rational, will be a society in which political deliberation will be able to be stronger and more active. Hence I've defined the intellectual as someone who first and foremost possesses tools of comprehension, tools which may become instruments of action.³⁶⁷

Much like the République des idées group, Rosanvallon the individual has therefore been principally seeking to raise and shed light on current problems. His means of achieving this, however, has been to put them in their historical context. Rosanvallon's understanding of history and its relationship to contemporary civic concerns, which he terms 'l'histoire conceptuelle du politique', has been at the heart of his form of intellectual engagement.³⁶⁸ He believes that the historian's role 'consists in giving the past back its present, so that this present of the past helps us consider our own present more effectively, instead of merely expounding what might be the necessity of this present'.³⁶⁹

Rosanvallon shed light on the contemporary crisis of equality by tracing the history of the idea of equality, alongside its relationship to changes in the political economy, from the eighteenth century to the present. Rosanvallon's use of history allowed him to demonstrate the centrality of equality to the revolutionary democratic project. Daniel Sabbagh thus noted that it is Rosanvallon's historical approach which has rendered his analysis distinctive,

³⁶⁷ Rosanvallon with Sebastián, 'Intellectual history and democracy', p. 713.

³⁶⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon cited in Florent Guénard, 'Introduction. Le système conceptuel de Pierre Rosanvallon' in Al-Matary and Guénard (eds.), *La démocratie à l'œuvre de Pierre Rosanvallon*, pp. 13-16.

³⁶⁹ Rosanvallon with Sebastián, 'Intellectual history and democracy', p. 710.

compared to that of Anglophone theorists who have also analysed equality as a democratic concept.³⁷⁰ Rosanvallon reflected that the French and American revolutions introduced an idea of equality as a ‘social relation’. Revolutionary thinkers envisaged the creation of ‘a society of equals’ and equality was viewed as ‘a way of making society, of producing and living in common’.³⁷¹ Rosanvallon was thus able to elucidate the current democratic crisis by portraying it not just as the result of recent changes to the political economy, but also as the long-term breakdown of the revolutionary philosophical ideal. Since the revolutions, he demonstrated, there has not been a convincing, universal and positive philosophical theory of equality, which could sit behind and legitimize egalitarian public policies.³⁷²

Rosanvallon argued that the revolutionary ideas of democratic equality were undermined by the industrial revolution and the advent of capitalism, which led to a ‘crisis of equality’ characterized by a series of ‘pathologies of equality’.³⁷³ The crisis was overcome by the introduction of welfare states and policies of redistribution in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. Rather than being the result of a commonly shared ‘coherent theory of equality’ as a social relationship, however, the movement was driven forward by three objective factors. The threat of revolution created a ‘reformism of fear’ by rendering social reforms a political necessity; the experiences of the First World War ‘nationalized existences’ which generated a ‘sentiment of solidarity’ and an intellectual and moral revolution ‘de-individualized’ the economy and society.³⁷⁴ These exogenous factors, he wrote, no longer exist, which explains the contemporary ‘second crisis of equality’, which has been characterized by many of the same pathologies as the first, notably ‘nationalism,

³⁷⁰ Daniel Sabbagh, ‘Pierre Rosanvallon, théoricien de l’égalité démocratique’ in Al-Matary and Guénard (eds.), *La démocratie à l’œuvre de Pierre Rosanvallon*, p. 173.

³⁷¹ Rosanvallon, *The society of equals*, p. 10.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8, 10.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

protectionism [and] xenophobia'.³⁷⁵ Rosanvallon contended that, lacking a natural consensus in favour of redistributive policies, it has now become necessary to formulate a conceptual framework that would justify such measures in their own right.³⁷⁶ Attempts since the 1980s, he demonstrated, have so far failed to constitute a robust, universal and positive theory of equality. Alternatives to populist pathologies of equality, for example, have been increasingly radical variations of the liberal concept of 'equality of opportunity'. By viewing equality in the negative and by focusing exclusively on individuals, these 'theories of justice' have been ignoring the societal dimension. Policies of equal opportunity, Rosanvallon asserted, are a necessary and valuable component of any attempt to reduce inequalities, but they need to be supported and legitimized by a positive theory of equality that is not just economic but also political and social.³⁷⁷

Rosanvallon's historical approach has its limitations because, despite attempting to give an added historical depth to understandings of the contemporary situation, he has paradoxically risked oversimplifying it in the process. He portrayed the historical evolutions in the political economy and their ramifications for levels of inequality in a general way, which suggested that they had been broadly the same across Western Europe.³⁷⁸ The economist and policy maker François Bourguignon, however, has demonstrated that, despite the importance of the external effects of globalization, a nation's specific internal policies, institutions and culture can also determine the level of inequality within a particular country.³⁷⁹ Furthermore, Pierre Serna, an historian who specializes in the French Revolution, while praising Rosanvallon's scholarship, criticized his reading of the French and American revolutions.³⁸⁰ While

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 257-285.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 255-258.

³⁷⁸ Paul Starr, 'A different road to a fair society', *The New York Review* (May, 2014), p. 34.

³⁷⁹ Bourguignon, *The globalisation of inequality*, p. 185.

³⁸⁰ Pierre Serna, 'La société des égaux. D'accord mais laquelle ?', *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* 2 (2011), p. 140.

Rosanvallon argued that the revolutionary political upheavals limited the long-term equalizing possibilities of the promise of 1776 and 1789, Serna contended that the violence flowed from the fact that the revolutions were first and foremost civil wars founded on at least two irreconcilable ideas of equality: ‘Ce n’est pas la Révolution qui fut le cadre dans lequel se développa l’égalité, c’est l’égalité qui fut la révolution elle-même et les violences de la Révolution le cœur même des conquêtes de cette égalité.’³⁸¹

The idea of ‘l’histoire conceptuelle du politique’ has given Rosanvallon’s work wider purchase, beyond the field of the history of ideas. It has incorporated political and social theory and Florent Guénard thus wrote: ‘L’œuvre de Pierre Rosanvallon est inclassable: elle échappe aux découpages académiques traditionnels, elle convoque dans son élaboration plusieurs disciplines qu’on a l’habitude de dissocier.’³⁸² As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, Vincent Peillon’s academic work, which has also been making use of the history of ideas to indicate a way forward for socialism in the present, has struggled to make an impact outside its own narrow historical specialism. Rosanvallon, however, has really thought about how to position his work so that it can provide the widest possible intellectual conversation: ‘What I am trying to do is to cross different approaches, and to strive - as an ideal - to find a way to write a kind of book that could go beyond the usual disciplinary divisions, to be read and considered not just by historians, but also by political philosophers and sociologists.’³⁸³

Contemplating his target audience, Rosanvallon wrote: ‘Le public universitaire ne forme qu’une partie de celui que je n’ai cessé de viser plus fondamentalement, celui des citoyens impliqués et cultivés.’³⁸⁴ The hybridity of Rosanvallon’s work has certainly rendered it more

³⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 142-143, 148.

³⁸² Guénard, ‘Introduction’, in Al-Matary and Guénard (eds.), *La démocratie à l’œuvre de Pierre Rosanvallon*, p. 9.

³⁸³ Rosanvallon with Sebastián, ‘Intellectual history and democracy’, p. 708.

³⁸⁴ Rosanvallon, ‘Bref retour sur mon travail’, p. 236.

accessible within the academic world and perhaps partly explains its global appeal.³⁸⁵

Whether it has aided his attempt to engage with the public and with politicians, however, is more questionable. The combination of history, philosophy and, especially, the inclusion of quite technical and abstract political and social theory, has complicated Rosanvallon's work and could make it difficult for the uninitiated reader to follow the thrust of his argument.

Additionally, Hazareesingh noted that 'Rosanvallon's professorial and rather austere prose lacks the playfulness and the rhetorical elegance of his mentor Furet, to say nothing of the captivating quality of the French intellectual tradition in its golden age. (He could do with Sartre's rhetorical gift: to make readers feel they are participating in a collective conversation.)'³⁸⁶

The complexity and unfamiliarity of Rosanvallon's interdisciplinary approach, combined with his very academic style of writing, has therefore risked isolating the public and less intellectually minded politicians. Such criticisms, however, should perhaps be considered alongside the observation that the *République des idées*'s attempt to seduce the media and maximize accessibility has, at times, been at the expense of academic rigour. Given that Rosanvallon runs the *République des idées*, his intellectual engagement on the issue of equality can be taken as a whole. The more academic nature of his individual form of engagement, through his position at the *Collège de France*, has been complementing the *République des idées* by pursuing a deeper analysis of the problem, which has the potential to develop a wider range of ideas amongst others in turn.

Including political theory meant that Rosanvallon was able to combine his analysis of the problems of equality with a possible conceptual solution. He sketched out a framework which

³⁸⁵ His books have been translated into 22 languages and have been published in 26 countries. See www.college-de-france.fr/site/pierre-rosanvallon/biographie.htm (viewed 16 December 2015).

³⁸⁶ Hazareesingh, *How the French think*, pp. 251-252.

he believed could constitute a positive theory of equality for the present. It is, however, difficult to determine how his ideas on equality might come together in terms of formulating specific policies and thus be useful to the PS. Despite insisting that his idea for a contemporary ‘society of equals’ was a ‘perfectly realistic utopia’, the final chapter is a very open-ended reflection on how this might work in practice and is even subtitled ‘A Preliminary Outline’.³⁸⁷ Rosanvallon sought to update the principles that formed the basis of the revolutionary idea of a ‘society of equals’ by considering how society had changed since the revolutions. Firstly, the revolutionary principle of ‘similarity’, he proposed, should become ‘singularity’ in recognition of the advent of the ‘age of singularity’ in which ‘everyone wants to be *someone*’.³⁸⁸ Secondly, the inescapable interdependence of modern life has rendered the revolutionary idea of ‘a society of autonomous individuals’ obsolete.³⁸⁹ Rather than ‘independence’, ‘singularity’ should therefore be linked instead to ‘reciprocity’ which is, above all, ‘equality of treatment and involvement’.³⁹⁰ Finally, in order to recognize that the contemporary problem has no longer been simply about ‘shar[ing] political sovereignty’, but also about participating together in the making of society, the revolutionary concept of ‘citizenship’ should be extended beyond its legal definition to include ‘citizenship as a social form’, which Rosanvallon termed ‘commonality’.³⁹¹ While the revolutionary understanding of a ‘society of equals’ was understood as a ‘*world* of like human beings... a *society* of autonomous individuals, and a *community* of citizens’, the contemporary vision would therefore be founded on the singularity of individuals, reciprocal relations between them, and a social commonality.³⁹²

³⁸⁷ Rosanvallon, *The society of equals*, p. 255, 296.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 228, 257.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 260, 277.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Serna criticized Rosanvallon's choice of 'singularity', 'reciprocity' and 'commonality', arguing that in a globalized world any vision of equality should transcend individual nations. He instead suggested a European political model of equality centred on 'solidarity', 'federation' and 'republicanité'.³⁹³ Rosanvallon's call for a 'renationalization of democracy', however, is convincing. Since the 1990s, social inequality *within* countries has been growing while levels of inequality *between* countries have been declining. A national vision of a 'society of equals' has therefore once more become a priority because 'classes are... once again becoming the equivalent of separate nations within the nation.'³⁹⁴

Rosanvallon did make some practical suggestions about how to approach reinforcing 'singularity', 'reciprocity' and 'commonality', although they remained underdeveloped. To allow 'singularity' to flourish, he emphasized the importance of fighting against discrimination because it constitutes a 'pathology of singularity'.³⁹⁵ Quite innovatively, however, he highlighted the need to focus on individuals rather than groups and for social policies to be redirected with the aim of 'remov[ing] obstacles that limit the individual's view, confine him to his condition, and prevent him from hoping for a different future'.³⁹⁶ He therefore advocated more 'individualized' and 'expansive' policies of equal opportunity.³⁹⁷ Secondly, Rosanvallon argued that 'reciprocity' has broken down, which has been undermining the legitimacy of the welfare state and encouraging an aversion to taxation. Rightly or wrongly, he noted, there has been a widely held belief that privileged elites at one end of the spectrum and poor immigrants at the other have been taking advantage of the exploited working and middle classes.³⁹⁸ He suggested that reciprocity could be rebuilt by

³⁹³ Serna, 'La société des égaux', pp. 152-153.

³⁹⁴ Rosanvallon, *The society of equals*, pp. 300-301.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 266-267. Sabbagh highlights the originality of this approach in 'Pierre Rosanvallon, théoricien de l'égalité démocratique', pp. 172-173.

³⁹⁷ Rosanvallon, *The society of equals*, p. 267.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-275.

forcefully opposing abuse of the tax and welfare system, making state operations more transparent and by moving from the current ‘assistance state’ back to a more universalist ‘redistributive state’ which would include the middle classes.³⁹⁹ Finally, to restore ‘commonality’, Rosanvallon advocated policies to combat ‘social separatism’.⁴⁰⁰ Most concretely, for example, he promoted increased social mixing through a return to public services and a more ‘dynamic urban policy’.⁴⁰¹

Beyond means of fostering ‘singularity’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘commonality’, Rosanvallon also discussed how a ‘general economy’ of equality might work in ‘an age of singularity’ or, in other words, how to deal with the tensions between the various dimensions of a democratic concept of equality. He focused, in particular, on how to reconcile equality and difference conceptually.⁴⁰² His attempt to answer the question ‘How can we be similar and singular, equal and different, equal in some respects and unequal in others’, however, was limited to a slightly evasive ‘broad conceptual approach’.⁴⁰³ To determine which inequalities would be acceptable and unacceptable and thus what sort of policies to prioritize, Rosanvallon talked of an ‘equilibrium of inequality as a social idea, equilibrium being achieved when no individual considers himself to be in an irreversible or psychologically destructive situation of inequality in a multiplicity of dimensions.’⁴⁰⁴ To work out the extent to which economic and social inequalities should be reduced, Rosanvallon then suggested a ‘lexical order of equality’ and contended that because ‘equality as relation’ is universal it should come before ‘equality as distribution and equality as redistribution’. Distribution and redistribution then become necessary only at the point where economic inequalities threaten ‘equality as relation’.⁴⁰⁵

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 276.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 280.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 288, 299.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 289.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 289, 293.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 294-295.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 296-297.

Rosanvallon's 'preliminary outline' has therefore left fundamental and challenging practical and conceptual questions unanswered. To highlight just a few of the most glaring ones: is a more individualized approach to inequality possible financially? How would an individualized policy of singularity maintain a universal dimension and not appear arbitrary and thus risk undermining reciprocity? What level of economic inequalities would be compatible with equality as a relation? How can we calculate this? How can national policies oppose social separatism in a world of global mobility?

Trying to draw specific policies from Rosanvallon's work, however, perhaps misunderstands his form of intellectual engagement and fails to appreciate the complex ambition of *The society of equals* as a work. Rosanvallon was not attempting to formulate a political programme, but to shed light on the nature of the contemporary crisis of equality, to provoke, and to suggest the terms of, a conversation about what sort of new redistributive policies could suit contemporary social demand and to lay the groundwork for a theory of equality and a vision of a 'society of equals' which could help bring society along with such policies. It is, however, worth noting that Rosanvallon's assertion that a revitalized conceptual framework is the answer to the contemporary crisis is contradictory. The majority of *The society of equals* demonstrated, on the one hand, how easily philosophical ideas of equality as a 'social relation' have been perverted throughout history by changes to the political economy and, on the other hand, the importance of external factors in bringing about a society favourable to redistributive policies. By clinging to quite an abstract understanding of equality, there is a risk that Rosanvallon has himself been further contributing to the *Bossuet paradox*.

Overall, however, Rosanvallon's academic discussion of equality further illustrates the progress being made on the centre left in engaged intellectual circles. While it remains open-ended and Rosanvallon himself clearly intends to develop his ideas further, *The society of*

equals has suggested that reconciling socialism and democracy with a vision of equality at its heart could be a way forward for the left today. Rosanvallon's individual conceptual work has been complementing and deepening the work of the République des idées by seeking to reconnect and develop a more reciprocal relationship between society and socialist politics through complex historical analysis and political theory.

Rosanvallon, Equality and the Socialists (2011-)

The society of equals was published shortly before the PS's primary elections in October 2011. The work was presumably timed to make an impact on PS discussions about equality and to influence the intellectual climate of the upcoming elections more widely. Comparing Rosanvallon's idea for an updated positive political and social theory of equality with the socialists' approach to the issue demonstrates that the problems of party culture and the nature of contemporary politics have, so far, largely prevented the socialists from rethinking equality and from engaging convincingly and in the long-term with the modern social-democratic ideas being progressively formulated in some intellectual circles. Unable to move beyond a concept of equality as redistribution, a discourse which no longer resonates with the public, the socialists have gradually stopped talking about equality and have thus been having great difficulty devising an inspiring vision of social progress for contemporary times.⁴⁰⁶

In 2011, the PS, for the first time, held 'open' (to all French citizens on the electoral register) primaries as a means to appoint their candidate for the 2012 presidential elections. On the one hand, such a significant institutional change represented an attempt to respond to the problems revealed by the 2002 and 2007 defeats.⁴⁰⁷ It was hoped that open primaries would help to reconnect the party with the electorate through a more participatory form of

⁴⁰⁶ Gilles Finchelstein, *Piège d'identité*, p. 197.

⁴⁰⁷ The idea of 'open' primaries was actually formulated in think tanks close to the PS. See, for example, Olivier Duhamel, Olivier Ferrand and Matthias Fekl, 'Pour une primaire à la française', Terra Nova (August, 2008) at <http://tnova.fr/rapports/pour-une-primaire-a-la-francaise> (viewed 15 August 2016).

democracy. Open primaries have the potential to encourage the candidates to take on board the concerns of society and to open the party up to a broader range of ideas. The 2011 socialist primaries were a great success in the sense that it was the first time that so many French citizens were involved with a political event outside standard elections; 2.8 million people voted in the second round.⁴⁰⁸ On the other hand, Rémy Lefebvre has argued that rather than being a solution to the crisis of contemporary democracy, open primaries are another symptom.⁴⁰⁹ He contended that they do not allow for ideological renewal because they intensify both the personalization and mediatization of contemporary politics: ‘Dans le discours médiatique, le jeu, entendu comme la dimension concurrentielle de la compétition entre personnalités, tend à prévaloir sur les enjeux, c’est-à-dire la confrontation de visions du monde, d’idées, de programmes. Cette tendance contribue à la fermeture du champ politique sur lui-même et à la déréalisation des questions politiques aux yeux des citoyens les moins politisés.’⁴¹⁰

In 2011, the risk that the primaries would become de-ideologized and descend into a mediatized battle of egos was heightened by the fact that Dominique Strauss-Kahn had been viewed as the sure winner before he was arrested on 14 May 2011, accused of assaulting a hotel maid in New York. Strauss-Kahn’s removal from the race flung the primaries wide open between the six remaining candidates: Martine Aubry, Jean-Michel Baylet (the

⁴⁰⁸ Laurent Bouvet, ‘Hollande carries the flame for French socialism’, Policy network, *State of the Left* (October, 2011) at www.policynetwork.net/pno_detail.aspx?ID=4077&title=Hollande+carries+the+flame+for+French+Socialism (viewed 20 July 2016).

⁴⁰⁹ Rémi Lefebvre, *Les primaires socialistes: La fin du parti militant* (Paris, 2011); Thomas Weider, ‘« Les primaires socialistes: la fin du parti militant », de Rémi Lefebvre: la primaire en question’, *Le Monde* (08.09.2011) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 20 July 2016).

⁴¹⁰ Rémi Lefebvre, ‘Vers une démocratie sondagière’, *Le Monde* (26.09.2011) at www.lemonde.fr (viewed 20 July 2016).

president of the Parti radical de gauche), François Hollande, Arnaud Montebourg, Ségolène Royal and Manuel Valls.⁴¹¹

Two case studies in which Rosanvallon and the PS interacted on the issue of equality in the context of the 2011 primaries demonstrate that, despite being a rousing and novel political event, which succeeded in mobilizing swathes of the French public, the primaries also exacerbated the problems of party culture and of contemporary politics more generally. They were largely devoid of considered reflection and nothing akin to Rosanvallon's coherent vision of equality was able to emerge from the process.

In an interview with *Libération* on 27 August 2011, Rosanvallon criticized the PS document 'égalité réelle', which had been unanimously adopted by the party in October 2011 and which laid out their programme on equality.⁴¹² He stated: 'Quand on regarde le document du Parti Socialiste, on n'y voit pas de ligne directrice, mais un catalogue de mesures diverses... On peut éventuellement gagner les élections avec un catalogue - si l'on a eu en face un adversaire médiocre -, mais on ne change pas la société sans une philosophie sociale et politique.' When invited to respond to Rosanvallon's comments at the PS's Summer University at La Rochelle, supporters of the candidates for the primaries, rather than truly tackling Rosanvallon's criticisms, or discussing the socialists' programme for equality, promoted their own favoured candidate.⁴¹³ The primaries thus intensified the personalization of socialist politics and made it difficult for the PS to establish a coherent political programme and to renew their ideology and discourse on equality after the 2002 and 2007 defeats. Rather than opening the party up

⁴¹¹ Davis S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *Exceptional socialists. The case of the French Socialist Party* (London, 2014), pp. 98-99.

⁴¹² Sylvain Bourmeau with Pierre Rosanvallon, '« Nous sommes des sociétés en panne de réciprocité », *Libération* (27.08.2011) at www.liberation.fr/france/2011/08/27/nous-sommes-dans-des-societes-en-panne-de-reciprocite_757375 (viewed 04 July 2016); 'Convention égalité réelle. Texte adopté par le Conseil national (09.11.2010), *Parti Socialiste* at www.etats-generaux-des-socialistes.fr/assets/grands-textes/pdf/convention-egalite-reelle-2010.pdf (viewed 04 July 2016).

⁴¹³ Matthieu Ecoiffier, Envoyé spécial à La Rochelle, 'PS et égalité, le combat des ego', *Libération* (27.08.2011) at www.liberation.fr/france/2011/08/27/ps-et-egalite-le-combat-des-ego_757371 (viewed 21 July 2016).

to a greater breadth of ideas, these open primaries paradoxically risked further reducing the party to an inward-looking electoral machine. Christian Paul, who was backing Aubry, for example, despite giving the most coherent response to Rosanvallon, still insisted on peddling her candidacy, concluding: ‘Elle [Aubry] est sur l’idée qu’il faut s’attaquer aux racines des inégalités.’ Pierre Moscovici, who was managing Hollande’s campaign, refused to comment on Rosanvallon’s book, which he was yet to read, and instead simply said: ‘La lutte contre les inégalités est centrale. On ne cherche pas à faire une campagne triple A, mais de gauche crédible, de gauche qui marche.’ Furthermore, rather than engaging with Rosanvallon’s ideas, Najat Belkacem, who was supporting Royal, was determined to demonstrate how they were in total agreement. She insisted that Royal and Rosanvallon shared the same objective that ‘Il faut s’attaquer au pouvoir incontrôlé du finance, à tous ces sujets économiques qui conditionnent l’égalité entre individus’, adding that Royal was promoting ‘plus de radicalité et d’efficacité en matière économique et sociale que ses concurrents.’

A debate between Rosanvallon and Hollande for the *Philosophie Magazine* in the lead up to the final round of the primaries then illustrates that even when the elections had progressed to a run-off (between Hollande and Aubry) Hollande, who was the favourite, was advancing a very vague vision of equality.⁴¹⁴ Moreover, his somewhat superficial understanding of the corresponding problems of contemporary society clashed with Rosanvallon’s complex historical approach. There was a clear disparity, for example, between Hollande’s simplistic and largely economic perception of the fundamental challenges and that of Rosanvallon.

During the conversation Rosanvallon, in line with *The society of equals*, insisted that politicians needed to be talking about and conceptualizing equality in order to rebuild society

⁴¹⁴ Pierre Rosanvallon and François Hollande with Alexandre Lacroix and Martin Legros, ‘Y a-t-il des idées pour avancer la gauche ?’, *Philosophie Magazine* 53 (October 2011) accessible at <http://cerclesdesconnaissances.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/y-a-t-il-des-idees-pour-sauver-la-gauche.html> (viewed 12 July 2016).

because ‘Le problème clé aujourd’hui, c’est la panne de l’idée de l’égalité.’ Rather than using the term ‘equality’, however, Hollande focused on a vague vision of the republic as the means to bring about solidarity and to reconnect the PS and the popular classes. He only used the word equality when actively prompted by Rosanvallon and argued instead that ‘republicanism’, which he left undefined, was the theme that would unite the public, legitimize his policies on schooling, housing and discrimination and ‘fédère aussi bien les salaires victims des délocalisations que ceux qui travaillent dans les nouvelles technologies’. Rosanvallon, however, convincingly suggested that Hollande, by failing to talk about equality, had not grasped the nature of social demand. In particular, he contended that Hollande needed to take on board the fears of the middle classes who ‘ont l’impression d’être à une distance qu’elles ne combleront jamais avec le haut de la société et se sentent menacés de retomber du côté des plus mal lotis’.

While equality scarcely emerged as a theme in the primaries, however, Hollande changed his register and rhetoric for the presidential campaign and there was a genuine sense that the PS was trying to reconnect with this historic left-wing theme. Equality was central to Hollande’s speech at Le Bourget, which launched his campaign on 22 January 2012.⁴¹⁵ In contrast to the above discussion with Rosanvallon, Hollande mentioned the word ‘equality’ forty-one times and gave the impression that it would be the priority of a socialist presidency. He stated:

‘Chaque nation a une âme. L’âme de la France, c’est l’égalité’ and insisted:

Les Français doivent savoir que, s’ils m’élisent, je ne poserai comme président qu’une seule question: avant tout effort supplémentaire, avant toute réforme, avant toute décision, avant toute loi, avant tout décret, je ne me poserai qu’une seule question: est-ce que ce que l’on me propose est juste ? Si c’est juste, je le prends, si ce n’est pas juste, je l’écarte. Seule la justice doit guider notre action.

⁴¹⁵ François Hollande, ‘L’intégralité du discours de François Hollande au Bourget’, *L’Obs* (26.01.2012) at <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/election-presidentielle-2012/sources-brutes/20120122.OBS9488/l-integralite-du-discours-de-francois-hollande-au-bourget.html> (viewed 22 July 2016).

Furthermore, Hollande, like Rosanvallon, attempted to put the battle for equality into historical perspective, by referencing French history in general and the socialists' history in particular:

C'est pour l'égalité que la France a fait sa révolution et a aboli les privilèges dans la nuit du 4 août 1789. C'est pour l'égalité que le peuple s'est soulevé en juin 1848. C'est pour l'égalité que la IIIe République a instauré l'école obligatoire et l'impôt citoyen sur le revenu. C'est pour l'égalité que le Front populaire a œuvré en 1936. C'est pour l'égalité que le gouvernement du général de Gaulle a institué la sécurité sociale en 1945. C'est pour l'égalité que François Mitterrand a été élu en 1981. C'est pour l'égalité que nous avons fait, avec Lionel Jospin, la couverture maladie universelle et l'allocation personnelle à l'autonomie.

There was also a sense that the idea of equality that Hollande was advocating constituted a more holistic vision and that he was attempting to move beyond the increasingly unpopular levelling state-planned approach to the issue: 'Qu'on m'entende bien, l'égalité ce n'est pas l'égalitarisme, c'est la justice. L'égalité, ce n'est pas l'assistanat, c'est la solidarité. Les Français n'ont rien à craindre de l'égalité, rien à craindre de la justice, rien à craindre de la redistribution.' Moreover, Hollande seemed to be promising a more social form of equality adapted to contemporary values. He stated that 'L'égalité doit concerner tous les domaines de la vie en société' and painted a picture of 'une France du travail, du mérite, de l'effort, de l'initiative, de l'entreprise, où le droit de chacun s'appuiera sur l'égalité de tous'.

During the 2012 election campaign, the socialists, at least in their rhetoric, therefore seemed to be reengaging with the battle for equality. Hollande's concept of equality appeared to have moved closer to Rosanvallon's idea for a coherent political and social vision adapted to the nature of contemporary society. Rosanvallon, for example, recognized his ideas in Hollande's speech: 'L'insistance de François Hollande sur la question de l'égalité dans toutes ses

dimensions, dans son discours du Bourguet, est pour moi de bon augure. Ce discours a pris en charge les interrogations dont je m'étais fait l'écho dans « la Société des égaux ».⁴¹⁶

While there was no fundamental ideological renewal, the context of the financial crisis, combined with Sarkozy's reputation for increasing inequalities, created a campaign environment favourable to a more radical equality-based reformism and Hollande tried to position himself as the 'president to end all privileges'.⁴¹⁷ Once in office, Hollande and the Ayrault government (May 2012-March 2014) did try to reduce inequalities through several classic left-wing measures, for example making the taxation of capital revenues the same as work revenues and increasing the Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune (ISF).⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, L'INSEE demonstrated that such measures reduced the levels of inequalities in France for the first time in fifteen years.⁴¹⁹ By analysing Hollande's press conferences, however, Finchelstein has demonstrated that, despite these successes, the socialists progressively stopped talking about equality. He reflected that the issue of equality has thus become a rare example of politicians actually doing a lot more work than they admit to.⁴²⁰ While the left has historically spoken in a way that is much further to the left than their actions, between 2012 and 2014, they were acting and not speaking at all.⁴²¹ Despite the promising Le Bourget speech, the socialists have continued to struggle to transcend equality as redistribution, a rhetoric which no longer captures the imagination of the public.⁴²² Finchelstein thus noted that when Manuel Valls finally outlined the government's successful record on the issue of

⁴¹⁶ Pierre Rosanvallon, 'Les chantiers de Hollande', *L'Obs* (30.05.2012) at <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20120518.OBS5839/les-chantiers-de-hollande-par-pierre-rosanvallon.html> (viewed 22 July 2016).

⁴¹⁷ Clift, 'Le changement ?', p. 108; Hollande, 'Discours du Bourguet'.

⁴¹⁸ Gilles Finchelstein with Renaud Dély, '« La gauche est devenue moins désirable »', *L'Obs* (25.02.2016) at <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20160222.OBS5096/la-gauche-est-devenue-moins-desirable.html> (viewed 22 July 2016).

⁴¹⁹ L'INSEE cited in Finchelstein, 'L'égalité des chances, une chance pour l'égalité ?'.

⁴²⁰ Finchelstein, *Piège d'identité*, p. 185.

⁴²¹ Finchelstein with Dély, '« La gauche est devenue moins désirable »'.

⁴²² Finchelstein, *Piège d'identité*, p. 198.

equality and tried to relaunch the theme through the Fondation Jean-Jaurès in 2014, the public was distracted or even actively reluctant.⁴²³

During the Hollande presidency, the socialists have therefore so far failed to remodel the idea of equality and they have not managed to articulate a coherent vision in line with Rosanvallon's analyses. Unable to renew their ideology, the governing socialists have again retreated into political management, which has been preventing any historical approach to contemporary problems. In the 2011 debate between Hollande and Rosanvallon, discussed above, there was already a sense that Hollande lacked the historic perspective on how French society had reached its current point, which has been so central to Rosanvallon's form of intellectual engagement as an historian and to his understanding of equality. As has been the case with Vincent Peillon, Rosanvallon's use of history as a means to contextualize and complicate the present has been clashing with the short-termism of contemporary politics and with the socialists' struggle to engage convincingly with historic left-wing themes, like equality. There can be no questioning Hollande's intelligence but, as discussed in chapter two of this thesis, he is a professional politician with a highly technocratic intellectual outlook. In government, this has manifested itself in a tendency to govern in a reactive fashion. Rocard, for example, stated: 'Le problème de François Hollande, c'est d'être un enfant des médias. Sa culture et sa tête sont ancrées dans le quotidien... Le petit peuple de France n'est pas journaliste. Il sent bien qu'il est gouverné à court terme et que c'est mauvais.'⁴²⁴ In a similar vein, Christophe Prochasson, historian and advisor to the Elysée, insisted, in reference to the Hollande presidency, that 'La politique, ce n'est pas aussi simple que: un problème, une

⁴²³ Finchelstein, 'L'égalité des chances, une chance pour l'égalité ?'; Manuel Valls, 'Egalité-Inventer, mobiliser: allocution de Manuel Valls', Fondation Jean-Jaurès (10.12.2014) at www.businessimmo.com/system/datas/66373/original/10_12_2014_discours_de_manuel_valls_premier_ministr_e_devant_la_fondation_jean-jaurès.pdf?1418283622 (viewed 22 July 2016).

⁴²⁴ Michel Rocard with Arthur Berdah, 'Pour Rocard, Macron et Valls « sont loin de l'Histoire »', *Le Figaro* (23.06.2016) at www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2016/06/23/25002-20160623ARTFIG00170-pour-rocard-macron-et-valls-sont-loin-de-l-histoire.php (viewed 24 June 2016).

solution. Penser ainsi, c'est la dévitaliser, oublier que la rationalité n'est pas tout. Si on ne croit plus au sens de l'Histoire, on se retrouve avec des plombiers, qui s'avèrent plus ou moins bons.⁴²⁵ Much like the socialists' superficial contemporary use of historical left-wing figures like Jaurès, a short-termism, which goes hand in hand with presentism, and a mythological and nostalgic sense of history, has been cutting Hollande and the socialists off from more complex and academic intellectual analyses. After interviewing intellectuals involved with the Hollande presidency, the political journalist Marcelo Wesfreid noted that meetings between the government and intellectuals had become increasingly superficial. He thus concluded that the intellectual's role had been reduced to being wheeled out for historical commemorations, from the First and Second World Wars to the eightieth anniversary of the Front Populaire.⁴²⁶

The socialists under Holland have thus far failed to get past their old ideas about equality and have consequently been struggling to articulate an engaging vision of social progress which could resonate with both the realities and concerns of contemporary society. Unable to get excited about the fight for equality, the socialists have been turning to other themes, such as 'la lutte contre le terrorisme' or 'la compétitivité des entreprises', which have been making it very difficult for them to distinguish themselves from the right.⁴²⁷ Despite his optimism at the time of Hollande's Le Bourget speech, in an article for *L'Obs* four years later, Rosanvallon gave a damning 'autopsy' of Hollande's presidency.⁴²⁸ He stated that 'la gauche est en coma artificiel et le gouvernement y a sa très grande part de responsabilité.' He reflected that, on the one hand, the governing socialists had descended into a '« gauche de l'adaptation », qui

⁴²⁵ Christophe Prochasson cited in Clarini, 'Les espoirs déçus des intellos de gauche'.

⁴²⁶ Marcelo Wesfreid, 'Où sont passées les intellos qui soutenaient Hollande?', *Histoires Politiques*, France Inter (02.05.2016) at www.franceinter.fr/emissions/histoires-politiques/histoires-politiques-02-mai-2016 (viewed 12 August 2016).

⁴²⁷ Finchelstein with Dély, '« la gauche est devenue moins désirable »'.

⁴²⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon, 'Hollande, autopsie d'une présidence', *L'Obs* (10.08.2016) at <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20160331.OBS7509/hollande-autopsie-d-une-presidence.html> (viewed 29 July 2016).

se définit surtout par la lutte contre les « archaïsmes », dont le seul objectif est « modernisation » au sens plus large du terme et qui ne s'inscrit pas dans une vision progressiste » and, on the other hand, into a '« gauche de l'autorité », qui réinvente le vieux radicalisme et l'intransigeance laïque, incarnée par Manuel Valls: une gauche qui ne se définit plus tant dans le domaine économique et social que sur le terrain de la sécurité et de l'identité ». He insisted that neither of these approaches were in any sense truly of the left.

Conclusion

Looking at the idea of equality through Rosanvallon's République des idées group and his more academic individual work, this chapter has demonstrated that significant progress has begun to be made in some progressive intellectual circles. The advances have been both in terms of the development of post-Marxist ideas and in terms of fashioning forms of intellectual engagement more suited to the demands of the media sphere and to the more educated, informed and involved nature of today's public. There have still, however, been significant obstacles to a well-functioning relationship between left-wing intellectuals, socialist politics and wider society. Firstly, by attempting to influence politics from within civil society, intellectuals have been struggling to strike a balance between the constraints of achieving accessibility and publicity and the need to maintain high academic standards. Moreover, despite adopting novel means to get their ideas into politics, their efforts have, so far, been blocked by the challenges of socialist party culture and the mediatized and professionalized nature of contemporary politics. Different and intelligent intellectual ideas about equality are yet to translate into ideological reform or political programmes and it is impossible to say whether, or when, the headway being made in the intellectual sphere may be mirrored by genuine advances in the political sphere. Finchelstein was optimistic that intellectual ideas on equality have already begun to filter through. He observed that at a meeting on the theme of 'La gauche et le pouvoir' with the Fondation Jean-Jaurès in May

2016, Hollande had talked about equality in terms similar to his own ideas and to those being put forward by the République des idées. Here, Hollande promoted an idea of equality linked to life-long personal achievement: ‘c’est cette conception singulière... de l’égalité que nous portons, de la chance que nous voulons donner à chacun, à chaque âge de la vie, quelle que soit sa condition, son origine, de pouvoir réussir.’⁴²⁹ Laurent Bouvet, however, has reflected that there remains lot of work to be done in terms of rethinking social democracy for contemporary times: ‘Une page de l’histoire de la gauche s’est tournée avec la chute du Mur. Il faut tout réinventer. Je me demande, d’ailleurs, si ce ne sera pas le travail d’une génération. Nous sommes comme des amphibiens qui commencent à peine à s’aventurer hors du milieu aquatique et à poser leurs deux pattes sur terre !’⁴³⁰ There is thus still a long way to go in the intellectual sphere, let alone in the political sphere, which is historically always a few steps behind.

⁴²⁹ Finchelstein, ‘L’égalité des chances, une chance pour l’égalité ?’; François Hollande, ‘Allocution du président de la République, « Ici et maintenant »; la gauche et le pouvoir. La conclusion, par François Hollande’, Fondation Jean-Jaurès (May 2016) at <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/la-gauche-et-le-pouvoir-0> (viewed 30 June 2016).

⁴³⁰ Laurent Bouvet cited in Leclère, ‘Ça s’appelle « La République des idées »’.

Conclusion

The three examples explored in this thesis have shed some light on the dysfunctional relationship between left-wing intellectuals, the PS and wider society in the past fifteen years. The space for left-wing intellectuals to make an impact in politics has perhaps always been limited. However, a combination of the problems of socialist party culture and the difficulties of contemporary democracy more broadly, has meant that it has become increasingly restricted, even more so now than in the 1980s and 1990s.

The socialist defeat in the first round of the 2002 presidential elections, and its aftermath, was one moment that profoundly revealed the problem of the decline of the intellectual in French socialist politics. A combination of the issues of socialist party culture, the media's hegemony over the content and form of public debates and intellectuals' own actions, largely emptied the socialist campaign of intellectual voices. For some time, the PS had been failing to connect with intellectual questions. The continued moral authority of a far left which, despite having largely abandoned a commitment to revolutionary rupture, remained hostile to wider intellectual reform proposals, was preventing the PS from renewing their ideology after the decline of communism. Instead, the party had adopted a culture of management, which was significantly limiting the potential for intellectual reflection. Intellectuals who were directly involved with the party were largely confined to a technocratic role, while intellectuals working outside the PS struggled with the contemporary media culture, which was courting controversy and marginalizing more reasoned intellectual voices. Consequently, many university academics were no longer striving to perform an intellectual role, a trend exacerbated by the narrow disciplinary specialization of the contemporary research world. Those intellectuals who were visible in the media were deliberately, or in some cases inadvertently, cut off from the socialists; they were not helping to build an intellectual connection between the PS and the electorate.

It is perhaps tempting to suggest that, in the contemporary period, politics no longer needs intellectuals. Could not a culture of management suggest that the socialists have finally transcended an erroneous belief in grand totalizing theories? Is the decline of intellectuals not, in fact, the sign of a healthy democracy in which civil society has become willing, and able, due to new forms of communication, the greater availability of information and higher levels of education, to intervene, unmediated, in political life? As Winock suggested, are we now perhaps simply all intellectuals?⁴³¹ On the contrary, the 2002 moment elucidated the potential significant wider ramifications that the breakdown of the connection between both intellectuals and the PS and intellectuals and society may have been having for the relationship between the socialists and the electorate.

The nature of the defeat in the first round of those elections suggests that the deficit of new progressive ideas in French socialist politics lies at the heart of the contemporary crisis of the socialist left and, to a certain extent, of French democracy more widely. Ideas and politics must connect if the French socialists are to confront the increasing impact of the FN on political life and, particularly, its capacity to seduce the socialists' traditional working-class electorate. The 2002 presidential elections, and then the 2005 referendum on the Treaty of Europe, demonstrated that the socialists' failure to analyse contemporary society deeply, and to respond to its needs intelligently, was allowing old motifs, such as the French nation and anti-immigration, to both take over from historic left-wing political themes and to translate into FN votes. A renewal of their ideas is crucial if the socialists are to discover and convey a new sense of purpose in the twenty-first century, when Marxist ideas have run their course in mainstream politics, when global capitalism is so profoundly and rapidly transforming social realities, and when the public is pressing for a more direct involvement in political life.

⁴³¹ Winock, 'A quoi servent (encore) les intellectuels?', pp. 42-43.

The two very different examples of those few intellectuals who have been trying to respond to the problems revealed by the 2002 defeat, by relocating French political and intellectual life more deeply in social debates and issues, have allowed for a better understanding of how and why intellectual culture can fail - or have a partial success - in providing a bridge between the PS and wider society in the contemporary context.

Vincent Peillon's failed attempt to reconstruct what he believes to be an historic connection between philosophy, virtuous politics and wider society, has further elucidated the difficulties of partisan intellectual engagement. Peillon's attempt to promote a republican socialism, in the tradition of Merleau-Ponty and Mendès-France, has so far failed to overcome the PS's continued resistance to deeply intellectual understandings of reformism, which would require them to confront historic internal arguments. Thus far, his partisan form of intellectual engagement has also been unsuccessful due to the mediatized and professionalized nature of contemporary politics. Furthermore, Peillon's narrow and specialized academic work has found little echo in the media and, once in office, his intellectualism manifested itself in a tendency to preach from on high. While such an approach was, partly, necessitated by a lack of support for his vision for education amongst wider government, it was ill-adapted to a twenty-first century public clamouring for more participation in politics.

The République des idées and Rosanvallon's individual academic work has demonstrated how some intellectuals, consciously working outside the PS, have been striving to reflect modestly, and scientifically, on the nature and concerns of contemporary society. They have been striving to remodel, in a practical way, the historic left-wing theme of equality in a post-Marxist intellectual framework. To date, they have had more success than Peillon, although their achievements remain limited. The République des idées, by working collectively and by always keeping in mind the wider and practical implications of its work, has been able to harness the potential benefits of more expert analyses, without them becoming too disparate.

At times, the group has also made effective use of the internet and social media, allowing the public to interact with their ideas.

The example of the République des idées thus suggests that working within, and alongside, civil society, in order to mould public opinion, could offer a way forward for left-wing intellectuals seeking to help the PS to rethink its social mission today. That said, Rosanvallon and the République des idées, like Peillon, have also continued to struggle with the PS's internal problems and with the broader challenges of contemporary democracy. They have managed to achieve a better balance between the academic quality of their work and accessibility than Peillon has. However, they have continued to have great difficulties contending with the constraints of contemporary media culture and their successes within civil society are yet to translate into political reform.

If there has been a relationship between left-wing intellectuals, socialist politics and wider society in the past fifteen years, it has been largely instrumental. Due to the importance of intellectuals in French political culture, and especially left-wing French political culture, the PS has been eager to associate with intellectuals. Peillon was able to advance his career by selling himself as an intellectual in politics and Rosanvallon and the other intellectuals in the République des idées group have been courted regularly by socialist politicians. In neither case, however, have these connections represented a genuine attempt by the PS to engage with intellectual ideas and to renew their ideology. Both Peillon's and Rosanvallon's historical approaches to reform have been conflicting with the short-termism of contemporary socialist politics and with the fact that mediatized power struggles have been overshadowing intellectual debates.

There is thus still a long way to go, both in terms of rethinking social democratic ideas in the intellectual sphere and in terms of fashioning forms of intellectual engagement which could

resonate with contemporary democracy. It remains difficult to see how, and for what purpose, the connections between left-wing intellectuals, socialist politics and society at large could be reactivated. If, however, historic socialist battles, such as reducing inequality, are to have a political future; if France wishes to combat the dangerous and growing environment of intolerance that has been creeping into political life; and if the working classes are to be won back from populism so that public opinion can be integrated more positively into contemporary democracy, then new progressive ideas must, in some way, find their way into PS politics.

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