

Introduction to "A Fundamental Critique of the PCF"

The following brief historical introduction is being provided to give a background to the events discussed by Louis Althusser in his article.

The Communist Party of France (PCF), founded at Tours in 1920 when a majority of the Socialist Party congress voted to affiliate with the Third International, is today a party of 450,000 members, commanding over 20% of the French electorate, and maintaining 86 seats in the French Chamber of Deputies.

In June, 1972, in preparation for forthcoming legislative elections, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party (later joined by the Left Radicals) drew up a "common program" for a Socialist France as the basis for an electoral union of the left¹. This union effectively "breathed new life" into the weak Socialist Party. The historical antecedent of this union was the French Popular Front of the 1930's which resulted in a popular front government, 1936-38, headed by the Socialist Party with the support of the Communists.

The common program lasted through the 1973 legislative elections; the presidential elections of 1974, the district elections in 1976 and the 1977 municipal elections. In this period the socialist vote rose from less than 18% to nearly 30%, while that of the communists remained around 20%; a situation which made the socialists the dominant party in the union of the left.

This increase in the socialist vote led the party to move increasingly to the right, a move which was made public at the Socialist Party congress in June, 1977. The party also began secret negotiations with President Giscard d'Estaing about a possible Socialist -Independent Radical alliance.

In response to what it saw as a socialist threat to the Communist electoral base and to their possible defection from the union of the left, the Communist Party leadership secretly resolved to take a hard line against the Socialists. In September, 1977, the communists exerted strong pressure in negotiations with the socialists and Left Radicals for an updating of the common program, to expand the program of nationalizations and take a firmer line on other points. This position was rejected by the two parties and it appeared that the union of the left had broken down.

In January, 1978, G. Marchais, general secretary of the Communist Party, insisted that the communists would have to get more than 21% of the vote in the first round of the March parliamentary elections if the union of the left was going to be resumed. The day after the first round, however, with only

20.5% of the vote going to the Communists, Marchais capitulated on all the points which the Communists had argued for in September, and quickly concluded an agreement with the Socialists for the second round of voting March 19.

In the second round, however, the left's expected victory, predicted by the pollsters, failed to materialize: the left received 49% of the vote and 201 seats to the right's 51% and 290 seats. The failure of the left resulted in a storm of mutual recrimination, with each party blaming the other for the defeat. In the internal debate within the PCF, many voiced dissatisfaction with the way that the party had handled the entire campaign. One of the most important critiques from the left wing of the PCF came in the form of a four part article by Louis Althusser, in *Le Monde*, a leading Paris daily². It is this article, only slightly abridged, which follows.

Endnotes

1. Excerpts from the Common Program were published in English in *Marxism Today*, journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain, in October, 1972.
2. *Le Monde*, April 25, 26, 27, 28, 1978. Copyright by Louis Althusser and *Le Monde*.

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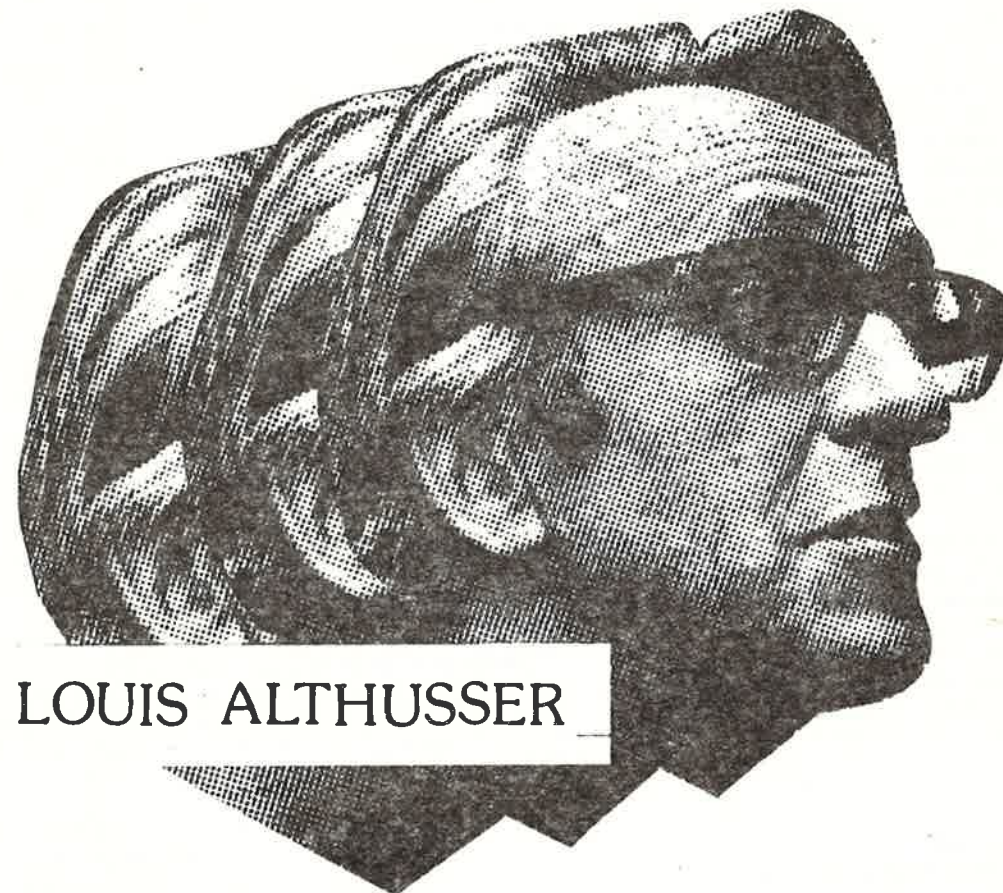
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