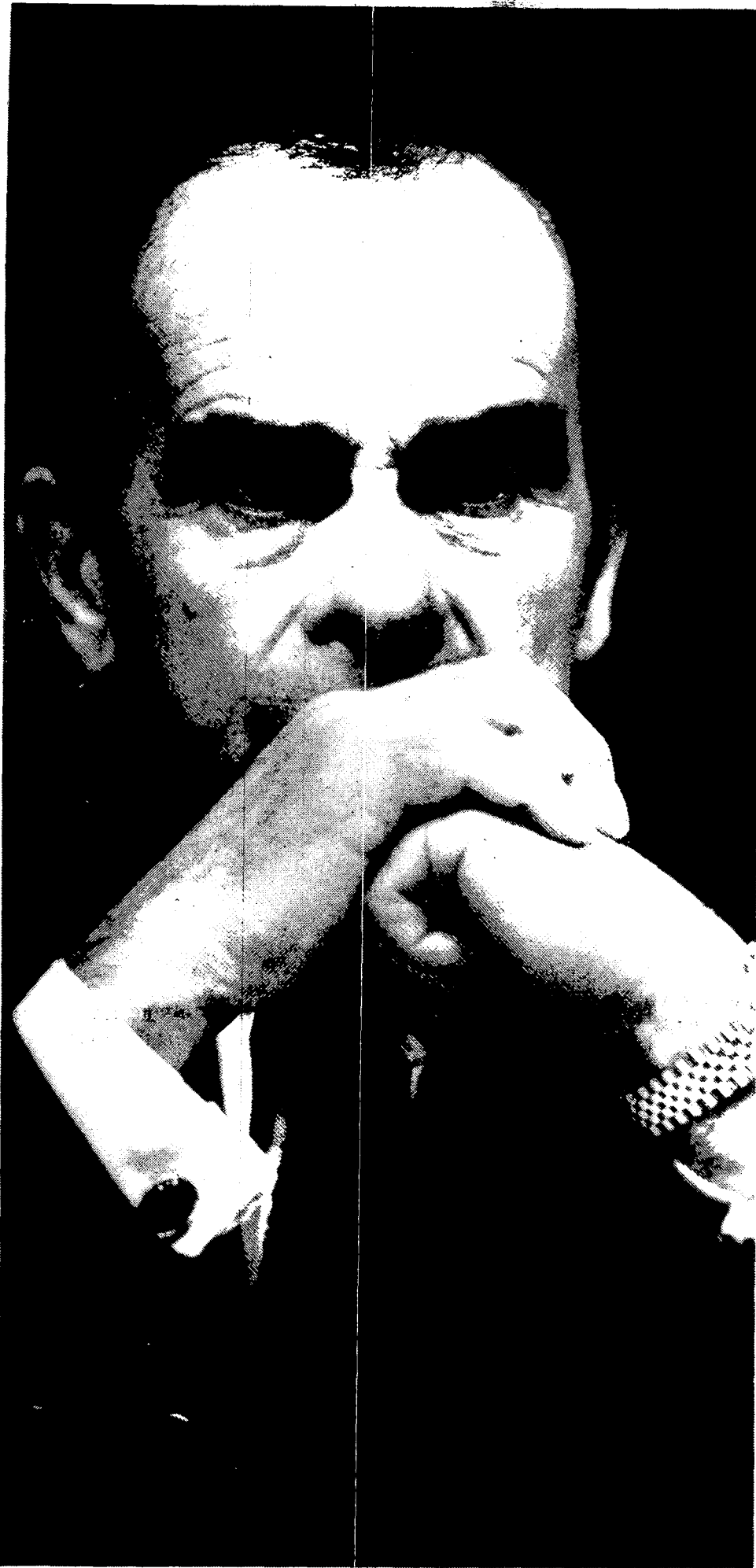


FRANCE

Communists hold key to left victory



George Marchais

By Carl Weiner

PARIS

YOU'VE GOT TO HAND IT TO the French. They're really putting on one hell of an election this year, a real political cliff-hanger replete with hero-martyrs, harried pollsters with foreboding tidings and best of all an evil prince scuttling about, eyebrows cocked, his face a mask of treachery. It takes an American washed in the blood of the lamb, a veteran of the Watergate passion play truly to appreciate the wonder and hype of it all. Since January 7, when Communist party leader, Georges Marchais said that if PCF didn't get between 21-25 percent of the vote in the first round of elections, the Communists would have to leave the Left Union, the local press has indulged in obsessive daisy plucking: "*Desisteraient-ils, Desisteraient-ils pas?*" Will the Communists behave with "republican discipline" and vote with the much-battered Left Union in the second round?

With scarcely three weeks to go, the latest polls find little has changed in the last month. A six point spread (45-51) in

favor of the left is projected for the first round and, albeit with some monumental and reciprocal teeth gnashing, eye rolling, stomach turning misgivings, the Left Union would win in the second round *if*—if the Communists behave. There it is: after Feb. 20th and by law, no more polls may be published. "The Communists hold the key to victory," says *Le Matin*. Will they or won't they?

All of which, as some commentators acidly noted a while back, is just what the man with the eyebrows and the perfervid hard sell, George Marchais, wanted. Or is it?

Of all the politicians and parties eying the big brass ring, Marchais and the PCF are at the center of an almost universal condemnation. That Marchais and his minions should be considered preternaturally vile by all right thinking trilateral pundits, foreign and domestic, is nothing new. That he and they should find themselves pilloried by the Socialists as jealous spoilers of an abundantly merited Socialist victory was to be expected. But that the PCF should be perceived by a broad spectrum of left opinion, including many of their own militants and sympathizers, as

the despoilers of hope, as burnt out *aparatchiks* callously delaying the "bread and roses" of new beginnings—that was something unforeseen, at least in its violence and ubiquity.

The Communists have been increasingly on the defensive. They have responded by maintaining, even sharpening their polemic. The unpalatable choices they face seem apparent and whether they bite the bullet or spit it out the future of their own party may be at risk. Trying to cut through all the breast-beating calls for quiet comprehension and considerable sympathy, depending upon your loyalties.

PCF's problem.

The core of the PCF's political problem can be simply stated: a victory of the Left Union bestows the lion's share of political profit on the Socialists. Their political sex appeal as a formidable new force in politics would be enhanced, and their ability to attract old social democrats and new social activists would give them the weight to insure their hegemony in a government.

A historic change will be in the making; leadership on the left will have passed from the Communists to the Socialists. Mitterand and the Socialists come out the winners, the twin segments of his astute and generous vision fully vindicated: first, that the legitimacy of a revised Socialist Party depended upon its ability to elicit Communist endorsement of a program of basic structural reforms to be carried out by a popularly elected left coalition and second, that this left coalition wouldn't come to power if the Communists were its dominant element. The Communists hold the keys to victory, but they are not the keys to the kingdom.

To understand why the PCF fell in with these plans requires an immense and perilous leap of the imagination. You must entertain the idea, at least as a working hypothesis, that they are neither egregious fools nor paranoid, power mad autocrats but, for all their manifold rigidities, serious and responsible people who have honorably upheld the interests of the French working class through a time of intense social change.

The point is that the PCF has a large constituency that believes the party has frequently been the sole clear voice fighting for social justice in France. In essence their kamikaze tactics in risking the break-up of the left coalition have been an attempt to force the best deal they can get from the Socialists before they bow to the inevitable and settle for what they can get. The French rather disdainfully call this vote grubbing, but it doesn't appear different from the power plays of various interest groups (blacks, labor unions, cities, or women) in American electoral politics. It seems obvious that the Socialists are playing the same game, which provokes great indignation from the Communists. Mitterand's steadfast refusal to come back to the bargaining table is at the center of their discontents.

High stakes.

Of course the stakes are much higher than in most American elections. The extent of nationalization and the number and relative importance of the ministries to be given the Communists are not fake bargaining counters. The Socialists fear that more nationalizations would let the Communists occupy the commanding heights of the economy through PCF control of the largest trade union the CGT, and ongoing implantation of PCF cells in many industrial concerns. The Communists fear the worst: the marginality of their minority status if they ended up with Posts and Telegraph and not much else. Besides they've been there before back in the grim days of the immediate post war era and guess who pulled a dirty trick on them then?

Received wisdom has it that France has passed through its post-industrialist revolution during the past twenty to twenty-five years. The profits from this "econom-

ic miracle" have been very unequally distributed so far as long term benefits to the working population are concerned. What's more, France is still very much a "closed society" and perhaps nowhere else do the economic and social distances separating classes count so heavily as they do in labor relations. One can still get fired in France for not saying hello to your boss in the morning. The barriers of deference, exclusivity and social disdain have withstood the winds of change quite well.

The great strides made in the sixties and early seventies have not been repeated during the last five years. Take, for example, one index frequently cited as evidence of the social mutation France has undergone: the percentage of children of working class parents entering institutions of higher education. From a scandalously low 5 percent in 1960, the figure now hovers somewhere around 10 percent; the percentage has doubled but most of the increase took place in the '60s and early '70s. In other words, the curve has flattened out drastically. Just under 60 percent of French men and women earned less than 3,000 francs a month in 1977, and with the rise in the cost of living index at 9.7 percent, and the cutback in hours, a 12 percent rise in hourly wage rates translates out to an actual 1 percent increase in real wages for the year. And despite almost hourly announcements by the Barre regime of a fall in the numbers, unemployment will have increased by more than 13 percent during 1977. Stagflation and unemployment reign. The Arabs and the Americans are calling the shots, everybody has to tighten their belts and guess who gets to tighten their belts first?

Communist aims.

Marchais insists that he is not about to enter a left government in order to help *gerer la crise*, manage the crisis. The Communists have advanced far more optimistic projections as to what the economy might accomplish than either the Socialists or most certainly the current majority think possible or practicable. Marchais has thus frequently been accused of rampant demagoguery in his fulminations against the evils of austerity. I have no idea of just how justified the Communists' expectations are. Within the optic of institutionalized inferiority, arguments based on technocratic necessities very often appear as just so many attempts to undermine the very modest victories so recently won. Also, one person's recession is another person's depression, if not total tragedy, and, again the Communists' historic role has been that of spokesmen for the most vulnerable within this society. Neither Marchais nor Georges Seguy can afford, in this current juncture of events, to tamely accept the dictates of technocratic wisdom. They will continue to insist up to the penultimate moment on a better deal.

Way back in the sixties Marchais and the PCF also chose to accept a gamble in the name of a vision as generous as that of Francois Mitterand. A union of the left meant a conclusive departure from the outmoded model of a Godot-like revolution that never came. But according to socialism through a broad coalition by electoral means in a measured series of structural changes was not meant to result in a crippling loss of autonomy. The price for entering the mainstream, the cost of ending their status as a pariah party has, like everything else, skyrocketed in the last ten years. Is it any wonder they are leery of handing out blank checks to the Socialists?

And yet the seeming alternative, the muffing of the best chance to end decades of right-center domination, may be too terrible to contemplate. The Communists hold the key to victory and they have been left holding the bag. It's a whole new ballgame, one that their imagination and courage in part summoned into being: one in which, with immense pain and terrible risk, they will try to reconstruct viable political options.



THE HOUSE OF MIRRORS AMERICAN WOMEN AS REFLECTED IN THE MAGAZINES THEY READ

The women's magazine industry is one of the most lucrative in the U.S. today. Six new magazines have entered the field in the last two years; six more are announced for this year; and the established ones are fatter (with advertising) than ever.

The commodity is produced, of course, in order to make a profit for the publishers and advertising agencies and a market for the products of advertisers. It can only succeed in these endeavors if women buy the magazines, and they will only do this if they think they want to read the contents or at least look at the illustrations.

If the women's movement has changed the self-image and the (felt) needs of American women, the change ought to be reflected in the reading matter these women select for themselves. The circulation of the two best-selling women's magazines is presently something over 8 million each. Allowing for some overlap, at least ten—more likely 20—million individual women choose to buy one or more of such periodicals every month.

In the following pages, five different writers examine five segments of the whole field in an effort to define the changes in each. From the answers they come up with, something can be deduced about the direction, the depth and the permanence of changes made in the consciousness of American women over the last 15 years.

THE BIG THREE PLUS THE GIANT TWO

The woman's magazine field is popularly believed to be dominated by the Big Three: *McCall's* (with a circulation of 6,500,000 in 1977, the *Ladies' Home Journal* (6,000,000) and *Good Housekeeping* (5,000,000). Actually for some years now there have been two that outsell them: the supermarket specials, *Woman's Day* and *Family Circle*, which depend entirely on newsstand (check-out counter) sales and have verified circulations of over eight million.

There are differences in emphasis and constituency among the Big Five. The supermarket twins think of themselves as servicing the needs of mothers and homemakers in the realms of cookery, handicrafts, fashion, decorating, health and the "management of money" on the domestic level. They address themselves to the widest possible audience—the most conservative.

The other three have carved particular segments of the population for whom they perform the same services and some new ones. *L.H.J.* is aiming for "the new traditionalist" and attempting to define and enhance her "lifestyle." *Good Housekeeping* is edited for the homemaker between 25 and 40. *McCall's* says it's edited for the "new suburban woman." Most of the editors and all of the publishers are men, and

all have worked with and for each other—which may explain why, despite some interesting differences, there is a deep, basic unity of tone and approach.

Many of the examples used in this discussion are taken from late 1977 issues of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, but equivalents could have been supplied from either *G.H.* or *McCall's* or even from *Redbook* or *Cosmopolitan*, and there is no perceptible difference in more recent issues of any of them.)

What's new?

First of all, there is an apparent change in the reality that women's magazines reflect. Where the stress was formerly on the stability of sex roles, and the premise was always a woman's total commitment to husband, children and domesticity, now there is ambivalence about what women are and ought to be doing and an attempt to patch up and paper over an image of American home life that has been shattered by deep earth movements.

Barbara Ehrenreich, speaking to a recent N.A.M. convention, noted that "the *Ladies' Home* is now printed in small, almost indiscernible type, while *Journal* stands out bold and strong." Inside the covers are articles on "how to handle your first job interview" and reports on "how working wives cope." There is a page of short items called "Working Woman" that is reminiscent of the early days of the women's movement and *MS* magazine. One of these, typically, is called "Our Kids Are Doing Fine" and contends that children of working mothers do as well in school as children whose mothers are waiting to greet them with snacks at 3 p.m.

The material seems to be directed toward the woman who has left—or is about to leave—home after years of marriage and child-raising. She is given the go-ahead with statistics that

prove "employed women experience less stress than either housewives or unemployed women." There are articles on "how women just like you are getting better jobs" and advertising to match, e.g., an Equitable Life Insurance spread, addressed to the executive who is making \$25,000 a year and is shown with an attractive attache case.

There is a recognition that years of isolation in the home and years of unpaid labor have eroded most women's confidence to such a degree that they need to be told "how to handle a job interview" and needs to be reassured that the skills they have cultivated as homemakers are transferable to the world outside the home. There is even an admission that "a woman who leaves homemaking for paid work is like a man who changes his trade and his religion at the same time."

It all adds up to a sustained soft sell to persuade women to return to the labor force and assure them they can make it. But the aspirations projected are not very high. The skill one is most often advised to brush up on is typing. The housewife is offered the chance to clean up and organize someone's messy office as a secretary or a file clerk. Or, if she's really lucky, to "break into real estate."

What's not so new?

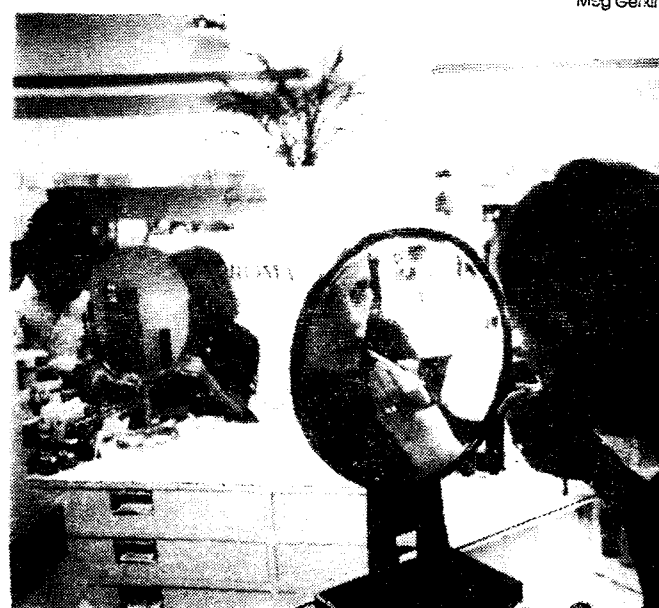
So much for the "new." It still does not—even in *L.H.J.* and *Redbook*—alter the premise that women are preoccupied with responsibilities that have nothing to do with (or are even in conflict with) their jobs. Psychologically and emotionally women are seen as absorbed with home and family. Hence the preponderance of text devoted to "servicing the homemaker" and articles on marital and child-rearing problems.



Meg Gorkin



Jane Molnick



Meg Gorkin