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# The Political Thought of André Gorz

Adrian Little

## THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ANDRE GORZ

Since the late 1950s André Gorz has produced a unique and influential body of work, which has profound implications for politics, economics, sociology and social policy. This is the first book-length analysis of Gorz's thought and its enormous contemporary importance.

Gorz's intellectual foundation was the existential Marxism of post-war France, which he applied to his study of work and class in advanced capitalist societies. Adrian Little recognises the significance of his early writing, but argues that Gorz's seminal work was his *Critique of Economic Reason* which tied together the eclectic themes of his theory.

Adrian Little discusses all of these themes in detail in this book, but pays particular attention to Gorz's use of political ecology, his advocacy of utopian politics and his proposals for a socialist alternative to the existing systems of work and welfare. Little concludes that Gorz's work supplies a coherent theory of 'socialist individualism' that provides a new agenda for the Left in the approach to the twenty-first century.

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THOUGHT OF ANDRE  
GORZ

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**To Sinead**

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is a critical evaluation of the thought of André Gorz which has been largely neglected in political theory in the UK. Most references to Gorz are based upon his most famous book, *Farewell to the Working Class* (1980), which has been open to misrepresentation from those who wish to classify Gorz as a theorist of work and class. It is important to redress the imbalance which has been created by the misinterpretation and categorisation of Gorz's theory by those who fail to understand the complex and original totality of his thought.

Gorz was born in Vienna in 1924, the son of a middle-aged Jewish businessman and a young Catholic typist. From his early years he remembers being the centre of his mother's attention. She attempted to imbue the young Gorz with the bourgeois values of financial success and Aryanism. Subsequently she changed the family name from Horst to Gorz to eliminate the identifying mark of Judaism, cajoled her husband into adopting Catholicism and named Gorz 'André' after an actor. Gorz believes that pressure from his mother hindered him from forming a stable identity which manifested itself when, as a youth, he flirted with Nazism in an attempt to find a mode of social insertion or self-identity.

In his late teens, Gorz discovered political philosophy and became engrossed with Sartre, Hegel and Marx. He was particularly engrossed by Sartrean existentialism and came to value the radical political philosophy that was expressed by the existentialist theorists in France. When he met Sartre and De Beauvoir in Lausanne in 1946 at the age of 22, they were impressed by his thorough understanding of Sartre's work. Subsequently Gorz moved to Paris and became a journalist, working mainly on *Les Temps Modernes* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Slowly he became increasingly prominent in post-war French socialist

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debates in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Moreover he became a close personal friend of Sartre who wrote the preface to *The Traitor*, Gorz's semi-autobiography, published when he was only 34 (Sartre 1989; Marcus 1992).

From this brief biographical account, it is possible to identify the reasons why individual autonomy and self-determination have become the dominant factors in Gorz's political theory. Given his alienation as a child, it is also clear why the existentialist doctrine, with its concentration on individual liberation, was attractive to the young Gorz. From this background he went on to develop a highly original perspective which, although critical of the work of Marx, can be located within the Marxian tradition.

The conventional view of Gorz is primarily based upon his conception of work and class conflict. Commentators such as Meiksins Wood have presented Gorz's theory as anti-Marxist, arguing that Gorz wishes away the need for class conflict and seeks reform rather than revolution (Meiksins Wood 1986: 15–18). Others, such as Hyman, contend that Gorz has supplanted the revolutionary proletariat with a new class, a new revolutionary subject – the neo-proletariat (Hyman 1983). One of the most critical approaches to Gorz has been taken by Sayers who believes that Gorz misconceives human nature by denying the human need to work. Furthermore Sayers argues that Gorz pays lip-service to liberal individualism by creating an ascesis of domestic labour (Sayers 1988, 1991).

Frankel is one of many commentators to analyse Gorz as a utopian theorist. Rather than taking an ideological approach to categorising Gorz's theory, Frankel attempts to assess Gorz within the context of other 'utopian' thinkers who hail from different ideological traditions (Frankel 1987). Others such as Giddens have chastised Gorz's utopianism by asserting the theoretical dangers that arise from utopian political theory. Unlike Frankel, Giddens is critical of the utopian approach to political theory employed by Gorz because it is, to his mind, unrealistic (Giddens 1987: 275–96). More sympathetic discussions of Gorz's utopianism have come from Geoghegan and Keane, who both recognise the important questions that utopian theory can pose to the 'realism' of more orthodox theory (Geoghegan 1987; Keane 1988).

Gorz is often interpreted as a 'green' thinker, primarily by commentators who have little sympathy with political ecology. Others such as Bookchin, Pepper, Dobson, and Eckersley reject the idea that Gorz is an ecological theorist (Bookchin 1980–1; Pepper 1984; Dobson 1990; Eckersley 1992). Bookchin believes that Gorz is an apologist for

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Marxian orthodoxy and denounces Gorz's attempt to hijack ecology to bolster socialist theory. Eckersley adopts an ecocentric approach and rejects the claims that thinkers such as Gorz, who openly profess anthropocentric socialism, can be ecological theorists. Dobson is broadly more sympathetic to Gorz than Bookchin and Eckersley, but still recognises that Gorzian theory is not green. Most analysts of green politics deploy strict criteria for membership of the green canon. As such, it should not be surprising that few who analyse political ecology rigorously describe Gorz as a Green. Arguably the term 'post-industrial' is more useful in categorising Gorz's work (Kenny and Little 1995).

Despite the work of all the commentators mentioned above, the totality of Gorz's work has generally not been considered. On the contrary, most analysts tend to discuss Gorz within the criteria of their own subject matter or discipline. Consequently, these brief analyses tend to be, at best, partial because they do not recognise the coherence of Gorz's overall agenda. This book will attempt to evaluate Gorz's theory critically through an analysis of his work from the 1950s to the 1990s. In so doing we shall see how Gorz's work has matured and identify recurrent themes in his theory over the course of forty years.

Gorz has had many diverse and varied influences. His theoretical foundation is based on Sartre's existential philosophy. Despite his criticisms of Marx and Hegel, these two theorists have undoubtedly had a deep effect on Gorzian thought. Another important source for Gorz in the 1970s was Illich who has long championed small-scale society, educational reforms and the deprofessionalisation of many social tasks (Illich 1973). A more recent influence on Gorzian theory has been the second and third generation of critical theorists. Gorz has engaged with the complex theory of Habermas and the work of Offe on welfare and employment (Offe 1984). Before this Gorz's only dialogue with the Frankfurt School consisted of his friendship with Marcuse who debated with Gorz on many matters in the 1960s and always provided food for thought.

Viewed as a whole, Gorz's theory can be seen to be vibrant and original. Furthermore, it is also far-reaching in the range of issues it addresses. Gorz's integration of socialist and existentialist doctrines in a political programme has also been a notable achievement. This study will demonstrate how the attempts of commentators to categorise Gorz without reference to his intellectual foundations do his theory an extreme disservice. A critical evaluation of Gorz's radical critique

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shows his theory to be as sophisticated as it is original. The dynamism of Gorzian theory offers much to the development of a new, radical socialism which can challenge the power of capitalism and prioritise individual emancipation.

## GORZ'S POLITICAL HERITAGE

### Existentialism and communism

In the years immediately following the liberation of France at the end of the Second World War, the French Communist Party (PCF) was at its strongest. Indeed in the 1946 legislative elections the PCF won the single largest share of the vote with 28.6 per cent (Hazareesingh 1994: 312). Simultaneously the existentialist movement, with Jean-Paul Sartre as the figurehead, was becoming the strongest leftist intellectual grouping in France. By this time Gorz had moved to France and established contact with Sartre. Having first met Sartre in Lausanne in 1946, Gorz went on to become the political editor of Sartre's existentialist journal *Les Temps Modernes* (LTM) in 1961. Whilst Gorz published a variety of work in the late 1950s, his later work on LTM and *Le Nouvel Observateur* was to bring him greater notoriety.

#### MUTUAL ANIMOSITY: THE EXISTENTIALISTS AND THE PCF AFTER 1945

Gorz's personal stance on communism and the PCF in this period was extremely close to that of Sartre in as much as it varied between open hostility and pragmatic acquiescence. Between 1952 and 1956 Sartre could almost be regarded as a 'fellow traveller' (Caute 1973). Nevertheless the communists never quite overcame their suspicion of existentialist theorists and their relationship with Sartre was always a little uneasy. In any case the attempted fusion of Marxism and existentialism has always remained important in Gorzian theory as it did in Sartre's political works. That PCF intellectuals, such as Garaudy, treated existentialism contemptuously is a sign of their own materialist dogma rather than the failure of the existentialists to further the radical critique of capitalism (Garaudy 1970, 1971). The tendency of the PCF was to ostracise socialist thinkers, like Sartre and Gorz, who posed

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critical, ideological questions about Soviet policy. Ironically Garaudy was expelled from the PCF by conservative elements in 1970 (Wilde 1994: 87; Johnson 1981: 155).

In the early 1950s Gorz was part of a group including Sartre, De Beauvoir, Camus and Merleau-Ponty, amongst others, which developed an existential approach to Marxism, thereby confounding PCF proclamations under the then leader Maurice Thorez. Whilst not all of these central figures were to maintain the existentialisation of Marxism through the upheavals of post-war French communism, Gorz continued to see this as his task. It was, for Gorz, the ultimate objective; indeed, following the death of Sartre in 1980, he viewed his work as a continuation of Sartrean ideas (Gorz 1989b: 279). As Davies has observed, *Farewell to the Working Class* provides:

a scintillating application of Sartrean themes – passivity, resentment, scarcity, autonomy, reciprocity, patriarchy and mental pre-logique to the specific socio-political conjuncture of the late seventies and the early eighties.

(Davies 1988: 207)

The feature that has characterised Gorz's work since the 1950s is his constant stress on individual liberation as a prerequisite for socialist change. The prerogative for Gorz has been to restore individuality to its rightful place at the forefront of liberatory struggle – clearly an existentialist objective. Essentially this depends upon reclaiming individuality from the constraints of 'possessive individualism' which permeate liberal democratic regimes. Hence, whilst the neo-liberalism that has developed since the late 1960s and early 1970s has been portrayed as the champion of individual freedom, most of the radical Left has continued to privilege the collective. Furthermore the centre Left has come to engage with the question of individualism within the discourse of the New Right, that is, the freedom of individuals to consume, to be enterprising, to own property. In short, Gorz seeks to rescue the concept of individuality from the possessive individualism of neo-liberal theory.

It is apparent that Gorz's task is as difficult now as it was in the 1950s. Whilst he realises that the individual remains alienated, he has witnessed the colonisation of individuality by the Right. This is partially due to the failure of the radical Left to engage with the question of the individual in the post-war years. Gorz's belief is that the collective freedom which is championed by the radical Left cannot occur without individual liberation – a view he shared with Herbert Marcuse (Marcuse

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1972b). This corresponds with the original aims of the existentialist movement as voiced by Sartre in the first issue of LTM before he had even met Gorz. There he stated that the aim of the journal was to 'participate in bringing forth certain changes in our society. . . . Without being materialist . . . we want to side with those who want to change both the social condition of a man and his conception of himself' (Hirsch 1982: 41). Thus the ultimate goal of socialist revolution for the founders of LTM was reliant upon the freedom of the individual. In effect, the existentialists were identifying individual autonomy as the primary factor for radical social change. This was to become the rallying call for the French students and workers twenty years later.

The late 1940s were a period of immense rivalry between the existentialists and the PCF. The PCF line was that the existentialists were anti-Soviet and thus, given the close personal relationship between Stalin and PCF leader Maurice Thorez, anti-communist (Johnson 1981: 43). This was a misconception on the part of the PCF because the objections of Sartre at this time were to the lack of discussion and self-criticism within the communist movement and not to the cause of communism itself. In short, the existentialists were criticising Stalinist dogma rather than posing rigorous ideological questions.

The communist suspicion of the existentialists probably reached its peak during Moscow's dispute with Tito in 1948 (Wilde 1994: 141). The Yugoslavs had been expelled from the Cominform, the international Communist organisation, on charges of authoritarianism. French intellectuals such as Pierre Herve accused Tito of being a fascist on the grounds that no party conference had taken place in Yugoslavia since the 1930s (Caute 1964: 178). This hypocrisy within the PCF and the communist movement as a whole was seized upon by Sartre who criticised the approach of Moscow. After all, Stalin was not beyond reproach for his bureaucratic centralism and lack of democratic accountability. Furthermore Sartre realised that incidents such as these could do substantial damage to the communist movement because it added fuel to the anti-communist lobby in Western Europe. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the PCF, Sartre was merely continuing to criticise their party/Stalin and was not, therefore, working in the interests of communism. Against this view, Sartre argued that the communist movement had to provide a united front in opposition to American neo-colonialism.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s it became apparent that the intellectual credibility of the PCF was being questioned because of its unconditional acceptance of Stalinist policy. Whilst some states within

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the Soviet bloc were prepared to question the Stalinist hierarchy, Thorez and the PCF remained fiercely loyal. Simultaneously Sartre was regarded as an enemy by the party because of his revisionism and his immense appeal to the disillusioned youth who felt alienated by traditional communist politics.

#### 1952–6: FELLOW TRAVELLERS

Nevertheless, the situation during the Cold War was beginning to bring Sartre closer to the French communists. The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, in 1951, Thorez, having suffered a stroke, went to the Soviet Union for treatment at the behest of Stalin. He was to remain in the USSR until Stalin's death in 1953 (Johnson 1981: 46). During the intervening period Jacques Duclos took hold of the reins of the party. His immediate goal was the amalgamation of all pro-peace and anti-imperialist groups that were developing. Hence the movement was opening its doors to more disparate support and when Sartre returned from the Vienna peace conference in 1952, he was willing to adopt a less critical approach to the party. The second reason for this new mood of rapprochement was the success of the PCF in articulating the now widespread anti-American fervour that was sweeping France. Whilst the PCF had, since the war, consistently warned about the danger of political subsidy from the Americans, the Right had welcomed the Marshall Plan. By the early 1950s though, the end of Marshall aid had produced a bitter reaction from de Gaulle. Thus the communists were handed the moral high ground on the issue of sweeping American influence (Johnson 1981: 42–3). The wave of 'Americophobia' also corresponded to Sartre's post-war warnings and so pushed the PCF and the existentialists closer together.

The Korean War set the seal on their uneasy alliance. The American aggression in Korea, albeit reacting to the North Koreans' initial strike, inflamed communist and existentialist passions to the extent that by 1952 the relationship between Sartre and the PCF was relatively harmonious. Nevertheless it was notable that the PCF intellectuals never really adopted the anti-imperialist discourse which was to characterise the rise of the New Left. This created a political problem for the PCF because most of the enemies of French imperialism in the post-war years in Africa and Asia had similar Marxist-Leninist leanings to the PCF. The silence of the intellectuals in the PCF in the face of French colonial exploits in Madagascar, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Syria, Lebanon and Indo-China was abhorrent to independent intellectuals

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such as Sartre. It appeared though that by 1952 he was prepared to overlook this tacit justification of French colonialism in order to support the communist movement as a whole from the onslaught of criticism it was receiving from the Right. This criticism was to be silenced in 1952 by the growing anti-American feeling that allowed the communists to present themselves as morally correct.

There was universal unease on the Left at the brutal police suppression of the anti-American 'Ridgeway' riots in Paris on 28 May 1952 (Johnson 1981: 48). The conservative Pinay government (1952-3) had started to purge the communists in their own French version of McCarthyism. General Ridgeway, an American who was prominent in the Korean War, had been appointed as the new NATO commander in Paris and upon his arrival he was greeted by demonstrations orchestrated by the PCF against the American usage of biological warfare in Korea. The demonstrators were attacked by the police and several leading communists, including Jacques Duclos, were arrested on false charges. This led to a political backlash against the government's tactics that pulled the Left closer together. Indeed it is clear that the existentialists, including Gorz and Sartre, saw this repressive action by the government as the point at which the Left in general had to close ranks to preserve their mutual cause.

This was the period when the theorists of the PCF and the existentialists converged to the greatest degree. Nevertheless Sartre was more sympathetic to this alliance than other members of the existentialist movement such as Camus and Merleau-Ponty who believed that, in effect, this closing of ranks was an endorsement of Stalinism. This may have been an overestimation but Sartre was certainly beginning to understate some of the more idealistic elements of his existentialism. It also outlines the degree of expediency that Sartre was willing to exercise in his desire to unify the Left. Chiodi gives another explanation for Sartre's attempt to fuse existentialism and Marxism:

What Sartre accepts from communism is its demands that limited 'bourgeois' humanism be replaced by a universal humanism, and that the only way of achieving this is by removing the means of production from the hands of a single class and placing them at the disposal of the entire collectivity. But he continues to hold that the political action this demands can only take place with, as its driving force, an ideology which recognises the existentialist anthropology as its proper foundation. If the demand for this is

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couched in terms inimical to Marxism, Sartre considers that its effects will be sterile, but if existentialism declares its support for Marxism at the politico-cultural level it will thereby gain a position within Marxism whence it can instigate a transformation of its ideological basis.

(Chiodi 1976: 7)

Sartre clearly perceived Marxism as a potentially useful theory for the transmission of existentialist doctrines but he was aware that this required a rigorous restructuring of the Marxian method to remove economism and incorporate existential phenomenology. Thus, in maintaining that individual freedom was reliant upon the freedom of that individual's class, he was not really erring from the existentialist track. The two, as Gorz has long maintained, are interdependent. As Marcuse put it: 'no revolution without individual liberation, but also no individual liberation without the liberation of society' (Marcuse 1972b: 48).

A notable feature of this period was that it signified the end of a unified French existentialist movement, to the extent that it was ever really 'unified'. Sartre had been its figurehead and his disagreement with the other leaders, Camus in particular, was to lead the way for a wider unification of New Left interests in France after Sartre's split with the PCF in 1956. The period up to 1956 marked the emergence of a more reformist tendency in the communist movement as a whole. The Korean armistice minimised one source of contention and the accession of Malenkov and Khrushchev to power in the Soviet Union following Stalin's death, and the slightly more revisionist discourse which they adopted, increased hopes within the PCF that a new unity could develop with the moderate Left. In so doing they hoped that the PCF could end the Algerian crisis which had escalated in 1953.

However Guy Mollet, the leader of the socialist *Section Française d'Internationale Ouvrière*, rejected the offers of the PCF to create a new alliance. Despite this the communists were to support Mollet in the next election and he duly came to power (1956–7). His first step was to seek special powers from the assembly to suppress the unrest in Algeria. Reluctantly the PCF ensured the passage of these special powers by abstaining in the vote – a move that was to seriously undermine their credibility. Hence a new regime of terror was created in Algeria with the large-scale execution of many nationalist guerrillas (Hazareesingh 1994: 238). As a civil rights exercise it was abhorrent; as a socialist exercise it was disastrous. The Left was torn apart and in

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1957 the government was overthrown. It was only at this time that the intellectuals within the PCF were able to voice support for Algerian independence fully. Nevertheless, by this time their credibility amongst independent intellectuals was minimal and the Left was decimated.

#### REOPENING OLD WOUNDS

Whilst the apparently inconsistent behaviour of Sartre had disrupted the unity of the existentialists, Gorz remained faithful to his mentor. Indeed, before his own publishing career began, Gorz appears as something of a Sartrean acolyte rather than a political theorist in his own right. Having been a 'fellow traveller' between 1952 and 1956, Sartre strongly criticised the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Revolution in October 1956. This in effect marked a complete return to his mutual hostility with the PCF of the late 1940s. Sartre severed his ties with the PCF and the animosity that preceded the Korean War was reinstated. That Gorz and Sartre followed the same intellectual path in these years was no coincidence. Nor is it merely an indicator of Gorz's admiration for Sartre, rather it signifies the close political proximity of the two. Even during his sojourn with the communists, Sartre never renounced his idealism or his individualism. Because of this it is clear why Gorz believes that his 'utopian' and individualist writing in the 1980s is a logical extension of Sartre's critique.

Prior to 1956 Sartre had understated his criticism of the Soviet system in order to maintain solidarity with the anti-American and peace movements that were growing in France. The Soviet invasion of Hungary, though, was considered a blatant abuse of the Soviet Union's military power and it led to Sartre's famous comment that the USSR had opened fire on an entire nation (Caute 1973: 350–7). This is perhaps the point at which a shift in the political agenda that created the French New Left occurred most clearly. Nevertheless the denunciation of the repression of the Hungarian Revolution by the existentialists need not have proved so controversial if the PCF had not seen fit to overlook the candid abuses of civil and individual liberty that were taking place in Hungary. In their attempt to maintain a good relationship with the Soviet leadership the PCF supported the invasion of Hungary – a stance that was irreconcilable with the beliefs of the existentialists. LTM perceived the Soviet intervention in Hungary as a return to Stalinism. Thus, following the revolution, a group of intellectuals, including Sartre and De Beauvoir, signed a letter protesting against the Soviet action. Whilst they proclaimed their belief in socialism, they disagreed with the

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violent suppression of Hungarian independence, insisting that socialism could not be achieved at bayonet point (Caute 1964: 227). The Kadar regime in Hungary, maintained by the Red Army, was infringing, the signatories argued, the liberty of socialist writers who were being imprisoned or sentenced to death. Kadar continued to persecute anti-Soviet socialists such as Heller, Feher and Markus until his removal from power in 1988 (Wilde 1994: 145–6).

The PCF support for the USSR over the Hungarian Revolution seriously damaged the party in France. It was apparent that the Left had torn itself apart. In the following years France was to witness the rise of the Right with the re-election of Charles De Gaulle as president in 1958. This period of right-wing presidential leadership was to continue until 1981. The division between the existentialist movement and the PCF was to expand long before the electoral decline of the French communists. The primary reason for this split was the reaction of the communists to the colonial exploits of the French government in Algeria. Whilst Sartre voiced extreme caution about the course of the war, the PCF had difficulty criticising it, given that they had agreed to the special powers granted to the Mollet administration that had led to the escalation in repressive violence. Not only had the PCF pandered to Soviet aggression in Hungary, but also they were failing to criticise French colonialism in North Africa. It appeared, to their existentialist critics, that the communists were bowing to public opinion rather than their own principles because the intellectuals of the party were still moving with the prevalent anti-Muslim sentiment in France. This discredited the party intellectuals leaving the new breed of socialists and Leftist independents, such as Gorz, in a stronger position to articulate the ideas of the young socialists.

Opposition to the Algerian War was widespread amongst leftist intellectuals, including Frantz Fanon, Claude Bourdet, and Albert Memmi who all joined Sartre in criticising French policy in Algeria. Influential thinkers such as Cornelius Castoriadis and the Trotskyite 'Socialism or barbarism' group were also critical. Whilst 'Socialism or barbarism' were far from intellectual partners of the LTM theorists, they were also to play an important part in the new dynamism of the French Left which was to precede the 1968 uprising. Indeed their idea of 'autogestion' (the concept of greater workers' control in the workplace and the development of this ethos in society as a whole) was to become an accepted part of French New Left theory, the primary doctrine of trade unions including the influential Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT: French Democratic Confederation

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of Labour), and an influential principle in Gorz's *Strategy for Labour* (Gorz 1967).

The main activists in the movement which led to the 1968 Paris uprising were to find their intellectual basis in a disparate group of New Left thinkers who had found the deterministic dogma of the PCF too much of a political burden. Sartre had attempted to bring a new culture of self-criticism into the PCF and failed. Nevertheless he still viewed it as an important organ for liberatory change. It had, however, left the way open for a new generation of theorists to articulate concerns on the Left over problems in the Third World which were intrinsically linked to the colonialism issue. The PCF treatment of French colonialism left them in a weak position as far as this debate was concerned. Hence Sartre and Gorz became important political theorists for the socialists who had to find a new direction after the failure of the PCF and the moderate Left to challenge De Gaulle's hegemony. Along with activists such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit and radicals like Régis Debray, they were to become the central intellectual figures in the revolt of students and workers in 1968. It is evident that after 1960 Gorz's influence in the political arena increased substantially.

#### A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE FRENCH LEFT

Whilst Gorz and Sartre always maintained the necessity of the revolutionary mass body (though not necessarily a political party), it had become apparent that the PCF was fragmenting rather than unifying the interests of the Left. Gorz realised that the actual achievement of socialist change would rely upon a body encapsulating widespread socialist support. In the mould created by Marx and Lenin, Gorz, like many theorists of the Left, advocated the decentralisation of the revolutionary body after the achievement of the socialist goal. By 1960, however, it had become obvious to Gorz that the growth of unrest in French society was not being articulated by the PCF – a body that was now bereft of both credibility and groundswell support. For this reason Gorz called for a transformation of the traditional forms of socialist organisation. He was to write in 1969 that, at the beginning of the 1960s, his task was one of

showing that capitalist development, though it attempted to shape the conscious needs of the working class, gave birth to new needs and new exigencies which are potentially revolutionary. And that these new exigencies are slow in producing a new

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radicalism because they do not recognise themselves in traditional methods and objectives of the trade union and political struggle.  
(cited in Howard and Klare 1971: 390)

Gorz was beginning to look for new motors of revolutionary change and new organisations for articulating socialist aspirations. It was obvious that the PCF in its present guise could not be the party of change. Furthermore the trade union movement also appeared to be regressive. Writing in 1965, Gorz articulated the changing face of work in French society in a form that was heralded as post-Fordism in the 1980s, although Gorz is by no means a post-Fordist thinker (Gorz 1975: 127). Gorz believed in 1965, as much as in the 1990s, that trade unions had failed to change as the nature of work changed. Thus they had not realised that the technical division of labour would ensure that full employment was impossible. Instead of creating a new discourse concerning the quality of work, trade unions continued to prioritise full employment – essentially a quantitative goal. This being the case it was all the more unlikely that the unions could represent the new militancy of the working class. Whilst Gorz perceived that French workers were becoming uneasy with the possibility of unemployment and the changing face of work and the policies of the De Gaulle administration, he could not see how this uneasiness could be articulated by the unions which were entrenched within the confines of traditional trade union politics (Gorz 1967). Thus it appeared that the conventional mediators of socialist unrest were redundant in the situation that confronted France in the mid-1960s. This new situation necessitated a new strategy. If the traditional organisations of socialist politics were not prepared to employ a new strategy, a new body was required to articulate radical socialist concerns.

Meanwhile, for Gorz, a new means of transmitting liberatory impetus was becoming apparent – the student movement. Gorz believed, though, that the students had to cooperate with workers if a united socialist front was to come about. Given the differing social base for these separate movements, this alliance was going to be difficult to forge and even more difficult to maintain. Whilst this proved to be the case in 1968, it was nonetheless apparent to Gorz, at the time, that the intellectual Left should assist the formation of such a union. Gorz demonstrated that, in seeking to embrace a wider revolutionary base than the labour movement, he was moving away from traditional Marxist-Leninist discourse:

the struggle of the student unions for emancipation and valorisation of the student labour power is equivalent, in the

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educational and cultural fields, of the workers' struggle in the field of industry. But all the evidence suggests that this struggle can become and remain truly socialist, and avoid the pitfalls of reformism, only if it is extended and sustained by a strong working-class revolutionary movement. Left to itself student trade unionism, however socialist its thinking and objectives, cannot transcend the limits of corporatism, but must inevitably relapse into it if its aims are not taken up by the working-class organisation and inserted from the outset into an overall social struggle, safeguarding the student world against its own idiosyncrasies and myths.

(Gorz 1975: 119–20)

Nevertheless it appears that the alliance of New Left interests that did come about was more accidental than strategic. This may also be a partial explanation for its failure. The forces that were to become known as the New Left were created out of a perceived necessity rather than a conscious strategy on the Left despite the efforts of Gorz and Sartre to promote such a strategy. The fact that these groups were so disparate is perhaps an indicator that the uprising of May 1968 was doomed to failure. Despite Gorz's recognition that a new strategy was required, it is apparent that a new strategic force never emerged. The New Left fervour of the 1960s was as much distinguished by its disunity as its unity. The socialist intelligentsia recognised the necessity for a new third way between orthodox communism and social democracy but never succeeded in creating a force capable of bringing together the disparate interests involved.

Whilst Gorz was continuing to advocate the need for a revolutionary party, it was apparent that no such party was emerging. Whilst the independent Left recognised this necessity, they came no closer to actually achieving unity. Nevertheless it is apparent that, amongst the socialist intelligentsia, Sartre and Gorz had a substantial influence on the activists of 1968. Cornelius Castoriadis, whose advocacy of workers' control in the workplace was a focus of New Left interest in France, denied the influence of Sartre on the students. This view has been scorned by Gorz:

You, Castoriadis, do not find in Sartre 'one single sentence' (you emphasise these words) that 'in any measure' prefigures the American 'movement' and student movements in Europe – in short May '68. You must therefore not have been in the United States or you would have experienced the decisive influence of