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.
There are a myriad of political parties in France, which can contribute to the perceived complexity of the electoral system in the eyes of citizens of other countries. Each party has the right to present a candidate for president (more on the various parties in forthcoming issues), which means that for the first round of elections there can be as many as 40 different candidates on the ballot. Following a series of three televised debates, the militants of the Socialist Party voted for their presidential candidate in the first of two scheduled rounds on November 16th (a second round, if necessary, on November 23rd). In spite of polls showing DSK closing ranks on Royal, the results have been characterized as a tidal wave victory for Ségolène Royal.