

THE MARSEILLES WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT, 1936-1938

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is threefold: firstly, to serve as a contribution to the history of the Marseilles working class; secondly to illustrate the impact of the Popular Front at local level; and thirdly, to act as a case study of working-class mobilisation.

In the first section of the thesis the Marseilles working class is briefly described. It was highly heterogeneous, being made up of various racially, occupationally, and spatially-defined communities. The divisions between these communities were to some extent neutralised by a strong sense of the local community of Marseilles. Marseilles' claim to special status within the nation was, however, increasingly coming under challenge.

Prior to the Popular Front the most successful political organisations on the Left in Marseilles integrated themselves into the rich community life of the town by playing down ideological issues and by practising the politics of locally-based clientelism rather than those of class. The movement for the Popular Front encouraged a new mood of militancy within the Marseilles working class which both contributed to, and was itself encouraged by, the growth of Communist influence within the Popular Front alliance.

At different moments the strikes of the period facilitated or prejudiced the unity of the working class and its integration into the nation. Initially (1934-1937), the strikes which were undertaken advanced the interests of workers against those of employers whilst increasing working-class unity and support for the Popular Front. At the same time the election of a Popular Front Government and its success in resolving strikes to the satisfaction of workers aided the integration of the working class into a new, enlarged, national political consensus. The fragility of this consensus was, however, later revealed (1938-1939), as the Government called for sacrifices in the workplace and the Communists called for the launching of an unpopular war against fascism.

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- by -

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ABSTRACT 2

The coexistence of a tradition of militant working-class action and of extremist but minority working class organisations, is the paradox in recent French history which this thesis sets out to explore. The strikes of June 1936 are among the most well known, and extreme examples of this curiously linked phenomenon. But the literature on the origins of these strikes has been singularly uninformative, with writers dividing between the partisans of working-class spontaneity and those of Communist or ultra-leftist conspiracies. Committed writers have sought confirmation for their prejudices in an unduly generalised and often ahistorical view of June 1936. As a spectacular national event June 1936 has usually been considered purely at the national level and in isolation from the events which either preceded or followed it. These deficiencies in the existing literature seem to justify the approach adopted in this thesis. The aim here is less to identify conspirators or to discover the virtues of 'spontaneous' working-class action, but rather to examine, analyse and explain the complicated process of working-class mobilisation which took place in Marseilles in these years. Marseilles has been chosen for study because of its size as a town, the wealth of its archives, and because of its neglect by historians of this period. In addition Marseilles' own very distinctive history provides a healthy corrective to the national perspective which is usually adopted in the study of the working class during the Popular Front.

The thesis itself is divided into four parts. In the first part the Marseilles working class itself is examined. The second part looks at the organisations making up the Marseilles working-class movement while the third studies the experience of the Marseilles working class in movement, in the strikes of 1936-1938. The fourth part of the thesis explores the links between the turbulent political movements and widespread working-class mobilisation of the period.

Examination of the Marseilles working class shows that it was extremely heterogeneous, being made up of various racially, occupationally, and residentially or spatially-defined communities. Successive waves of immigrants tended to be transplanted en masse, moving from relatively small areas of their country of origin to live in even more narrowly defined quartiers of Marseilles. Once in Marseilles immigrants tended to use networks of family and friends to secure employment and occupational segregation thus compounding the effects of racial and residential segregation. The Marseilles population was, therefore, highly fragmented by these various divisions, but the effects of this fragmentation were to some extent overcome by the unusually strong local identity exerted by the town. Faced with the world outside, with Paris - the centre of power and decisions, most Marseillais had a strong sense of difference. Even when Marseillais were not themselves foreigners they were aware that in terms of temperament and trade their town was more a part of the Mediterranean than the French community. This strong local identity further undermined the weak class identity of the Marseilles working class in the first part of the century.

Economic changes in the late 1920's and early 1930's challenged many of the boundaries and identities of existing political and community structures in Marseilles. The building of canals linking Marseilles to inland ports, the growth, and subsequent location away from Marseilles of new or newly expanded industries such as chemicals, petroleum and engineering, all tended to weaken the old community structures based on the largely immigrant and working-class quartiers around the port. These same quartiers were meanwhile being reduced by wholesale demolition and many of their inhabitants moved away to the suburbs in search of more stable employment and better housing. Whilst the developing new industries weakened the established divisions between communities within Marseilles they also called into question the separation of Marseilles from the national economy. In the past Marseilles had been a centre for the import, processing and re-export of bulk materials. These activities had been labour rather than capital intensive, and the numerous small, locally-financed, flourmilling and vegetable-oil pressing factories had depended on foreign sources for their labour, raw materials, and markets. The new developing industries were far better integrated into the national economy. Tending to be more capital intensive they were financed by national or even international, rather than by local capital, and they were more likely to sell their products in France or Northern Europe rather than in the Mediterranean. These economic changes in the 1920's and early 1930's helped to undermine the established internal structures of Marseilles society and increasingly called into question the basis for the town's sense of distinctiveness and separation from France.

Study of the organisations of the Marseilles working class in the second part of the thesis reveals a surprisingly strong tradition of collective organisation and action. This tradition seems, however, to have been better represented by the various mutual aid societies and associations than it was by political parties, trade unions or the Church. Examination of the formal political and trade union organisations prior to 1934 reveals an influential and moderate Socialist Party which, through the espousal of a rather vague republican and anticlerical theory, and the practice of a locally-based clientelistic system, managed to entrench itself in many aspects of local life. Occasional outbursts of working-class militancy demonstrated that a potential audience did exist for a more extreme form of politics, such as that inspired by notions of class struggle. The embracing of a conflictual view of society did not, however, indicate a readiness to follow blindly the dictates of either Paris or Moscow, and the local Communists were more successful at recruiting, than at retaining, new members. By the end of 1933 the Marseilles working class was largely quiescent and its organisations were in disarray. The Socialists had lost the municipality (and with it their access to the richest spoils) in 1929 and the Communists were committed to a disastrously sectarian political line imposed on them by Moscow.

The events of 6 and 12 February 1934 opened the way for the widespread political and workplace mobilisation of the following four years. The largely narrative account of the strikes of these years which is presented in part three is followed by a more analytical consideration in Chapter 10. The treatment of strikes in this thesis concentrates on the impact they had on, the consciousness and identity of the local

working class, the relations between this class and its organisations (primarily the PCF), and the position of the working class in French Society and its attitude to the State. It is suggested that the connections between these various factors developed in three stages between 1934 and 1939. From February 1934 to the Spring of 1937 there was first a gradual, then a dramatic, growth in working-class mobilisation. The experience of successful strikes increased working-class self confidence and solidarity whilst winning influence and members for organisations such as the PCF and CGT. Meanwhile, the political struggle against the decree laws and fascism, and in favour of the Popular Front, made the Marseilles working class increasingly aware of the implications of national politics for their daily lives. Paradoxically the joint successes of these struggles, first in the electoral arena in May 1936 and then, a month later in the factories, led to a heightened sense of class identity at precisely the time that workers were celebrating the benefits granted by a sympathetic Government, which was itself the product of a class alliance. In this period the working class was increasingly organised and better integrated into national politics precisely through its own high level of mobilisation.

Tensions about the place of working-class action under a Popular Front Government emerged from as early as June 1936 but were usually satisfactorily resolved. From the Summer of 1937, however, these tensions increased as some workers began to have doubts about the goodwill of Government and its allies in the trade unions and parties of the Left. The strikes which took place between the Summer of 1937 and 1938 tended to open up divisions within the working class and between the working

class, its organisations, and the Government.

After the Autumn of 1938 international events, which had themselves been so important in producing the Popular Front alliance, now contributed to its collapse. Government appeasement of fascist powers was welcomed by the population at large as having preserved the European peace, but it cost it the support of the PCF. Meanwhile, workers were faced with the choice of retaining their class identity by joining the PCF in its campaign for an international antifascist crusade or of welcoming the peace the Government had won, and of accepting deteriorating conditions and wages in the factories as its price.

By the Summer of 1939 the Marseilles working class was once more divided and obliged to be quiescent, but the experience of the period since 1934 had produced dramatic changes. Even the disruption of the war would be unable to undo the changes brought about in the previously narrowly local and clientelistic world of Marseilles politics by the high levels of class mobilisation, political organisation, and integration into national politics seen during the Popular Front years.

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in the history of French strikes dates from a local study of the May-June 1968 strikes in Nantes which I wrote whilst an undergraduate at the University of York. Later, as an MA student at the London School of Economics the works of Shorter and Tilly, Perrot and Kriegel, inspired me to attempt a study of the first major strike wave of the century, that of 1919-20. A grant from the LSE Director's Fund took me to Aix-en-Provence in the Summer of 1977 where the poverty of the Bibliothèque Universitaire drove me to discover the abundance of material held in the Archives Départementales at Marseilles. The short MA Dissertation on Marseilles strikes in 1919-1920 which resulted, provides the origins for this thesis.

I had hoped when embarking on this D.Phil thesis that it would be possible to study the changes in personnel, organisation, ideology and practice in the Marseilles labour movement for the entire interwar period. Such a study would have thrown considerable light on the neglected history of the transition from Syndicalism to Communism within the French working class, but unfortunately such a subject would require the time and dimensions of a Thèse d'Etat rather than those of an Oxford D.Phil. This thesis has been motivated by the same interest in the process of change which underlay the original project but its scope is more modest. In view of the absence of any full length published studies of the regional dimension of the Popular Front this study of the impact of the political and industrial upheavals of the period on the Marseilles working class does, however, seem to fill a serious gap in the existing literature. In explaining the process of working-class

mobilisation the alternative theories of working-class spontaneity or of Communist conspiracies applied by other writers to the rather narrow study of June 1936, have not been found to be particularly helpful here.

My supervisors, Vincent Wright and Tony Judt, both urged me to write this thesis and then went far beyond the call of duty in offering advice, encouragement and hospitality during the course of my research. In France I was fortunate to benefit from the advice of Maurice Agulhon, René Bianco, Alain Chenu, Roger Cornu, Patrick Fridenson, Jacques Girault, Antoine Olivesi, Jean-André Vaucoiret, and Bernard Viala. In a country where many academics jealously guard their research findings, the generosity of François Ascher, Alain Chenu and Bernard Viala in showing me their unpublished research was particularly refreshing.

This thesis rests almost entirely on material made available to me by the Archives de France. At the Archives Nationales in Paris I received helpful advice from M.Cezard and Mme.Petillat and generous conditions of access from the Director, M.Jean Favier. The work of Mme. Villard and her staff at the Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône were what made this thesis possible. I received a particularly warm welcome from M.Christian Oppetit. His advice, interest, and encouragement greatly facilitated my research. It must be rare indeed for an archivist to take as much trouble as M.Oppetit did to arrange interviews and access to private archives for a foreign researcher. Through his efforts I was able to interview Marius Eychenne, Adrien Mouton, and Henri Peyrot. I owe an immense debt to these three militants of the Marseilles Communist and Labour Movements for the insight into the period which my conversations with them provided. M.Peyrot was particularly

generous in granting me access to his ample private archives which allowed me to fill many of the gaps in material kept in the public libraries and archives.

Doctoral research is reputed to be a solitary and isolating activity and my case has been no exception to this rule. It is, however, equally true that without the enormous amount of intellectual, material and emotional, support, help, and encouragement which I received from friends, family, supervisors and colleagues on both sides of the Channel, this thesis would never have been completed. I am grateful to Nuffield College for providing me with financial support, an excellent library, and a stimulating environment in which to research and write up this thesis. I am also indebted to the Leverhulme Trust and the French CNRS for providing me with financial support whilst in France. Special thanks for innumerable kinds of help go to my parents, Elisabeth Bonnefoy, Claire Fargeot, Jo Garcia, Bradley Herrmann, Philippe Lamotte, Howard Machin, Christian Oppetit, Martin Rhodes, Anthony Teasdale, Jacqueline and Jean-Pierre Thieck, Philip Williams, and, again, to Vincent Wright.

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List of Abbreviations

AD	<u>Archives Départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône</u>
AF	<u>Action Française</u>
AIL	<u>Amis de l'Instruction Laïque</u>
AN	<u>Archives Nationales</u>
ARAC	<u>Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants</u>
AS	<u>Amicales Socialistes</u>
CCSP	<u>Cartel Confédéré des Services Publics</u>
CC	<u>Commissaire Central</u>
CD	<u>Commissaire Divisionnaire</u>
CDF	<u>Croix de Feu</u>
CESP	<u>Cartel Elargi des Services Publics</u>
CFTC	<u>Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens</u>
CFTU	<u>Confédération Française du Travail Unique</u>
CGT	<u>Confédération Générale du Travail</u>
CGTSR	<u>Confédération Générale du Travail Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire</u>
CGTU	<u>Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire</u>
CIQ	<u>Comité d'Intérêts de Quartier</u>
CS	<u>Commissaire Spécial</u>
FSGT	<u>Fédération Sportive de la CGT</u>
INSEE	<u>Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques</u>
JC	<u>Jeunesses Communistes</u>
JEUNES	<u>Jeunes Equipes Unies pour une Nouvelle Economie Sociale</u>
JP	<u>Jeunesses Patriotes</u>
JS	<u>Jeunesses Socialistes</u>
FAP	<u>Fédération Anarchiste Provençale</u>
LDH	<u>Ligue des Droits de l'Homme</u>
LICP	<u>Ligue Internationale des Combattants pour la Paix</u>
LPP	<u>Le Petit Provençal</u>
PC	<u>Parti Communiste (Marseille)</u>
PCF	<u>Parti Communiste Français</u>
PPF	<u>Parti Populaire Français</u>
PSF	<u>Parti Social Français</u>
PSOP	<u>Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan</u>
PTT	<u>Postes Telegraphes Telephones</u>
RM	<u>Rouge-Midi</u>
SFIC	<u>Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste</u>
SFIO	<u>Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière</u>

SPCN Société Provençale des Chantiers Navals  
SPF Syndicats Professionels Français  
SRI Secours Rouge International  
UD Union Départementale  
UJRF Union des Jeunes Filles de France  
UL Union Locale (Marseilles)

## SECTION ONE: THE MARSEILLES WORKING CLASS, DIVIDED AND CHANGING

This study of the Marseilles working-class movement starts with an investigation of the local working class. Such an approach raises the question of whether there was, in reality, a single working class in interwar Marseilles? To what extent did those people who could be defined, either in terms of occupation, status, or wealth, as working class, identify themselves primarily with such a class? The Marseilles working population was such a heterogeneous grouping that it is worth enquiring whether it constituted a single working class rather than a collection of different working classes?

The heterogeneity of the Marseilles labour force created problems for those groups advocating class-based politics. The argument of this thesis is that, paradoxically, the period of the Popular Front with its political basis of class alliances, saw the shortlived establishment of a working-class identity in Marseilles. For a short while, divisions within the Marseilles labour force were overcome, and a united working class was created. The process by which this was achieved will be examined in a later section. Here, the task is to examine the obstacles to the creation of a unified working-class movement, and to describe the changing nature of the divisions within the Marseilles labour force in the first thirty years of this century.

## CHAPTER ONE: ETHNIC AND RACIAL COMMUNITIES IN MARSEILLES

### 1 Waves of Migration

The population of Marseilles grew dramatically during the nineteenth century and more moderately during the early years of the twentieth century. The population of 110,000 inhabitants in 1821, had grown to almost half a million by 1901.

TABLE 1.1

Marseilles Population Growth 1801-1946  
(thousands)

1801	111.1	1911	550.6
1821	110	1921	586.3
1851	195.3	1926	600*
1876	318.9	1931	610*
1901	491.2	1936	620*
1906	517.5	1946	636.3

Source: Annuaire Statistique de la France. Résumé Rétrospectif 1966  
p 41. Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes  
Economiques (INSEE), Paris, 1966.

1821 figure from M. Roncayolo, Les Grandes Villes Françaises: Marseille, La Documentation Française, Paris 1963, p 38.

Note: \*The figures for 1926, 1931 and 1936 are estimates made by the INSEE. The desire of local politicians to obtain more subsidies and political representation for Marseilles produced severely inflated census returns in these years. Detailed analysis of the local population is almost impossible in years when the INSEE estimate the real population to have been 9, 31 and 47 per cent below the populations of 652.2, 800.9 and 914.2 thousand claimed for the census years of 1926, 1931 and 1936 respectively.

This rapid increase in population was entirely accounted for by migration. From 1851 to 1872 110,000 migrants arrived in Marseilles, followed by a further 100,000 between 1872 and 1891, and then 150,000 between 1891 and 1911.<sup>1</sup> The rate of migration slowed down

<sup>1</sup> Roncayolo, loc.cit.

thereafter but it was still sufficient to compensate for negative natural population growth. Between 1921 and 1936 the population declined by 300 if natural movements alone are observed, while the net total increase in population due to migratory movements was 89,000.<sup>1</sup> The large contribution made by migration to Marseilles' population growth meant that, depending on the period, it was often the case that only about one half of the town's population had actually been born there. In 1866 only 43 per cent of the Marseillais had been born in the town.<sup>2</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century the figure had risen and the proportion of Marseilles-born people was around 60 per cent but 10 per cent of these locally-born inhabitants were of foreign origin, either having become French through naturalisation or retaining their parents' nationality.<sup>3</sup> By 1936, according to the (admittedly fraudulent, census statistics only 714, 961 or 58.66 per cent of the claimed population of 1,281,747 for the Bouches-du-Rhône, had, in fact, been born in the département.<sup>4</sup>

Migration to Marseilles was, therefore, a long established and important factor in the local population.<sup>5</sup> Until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, such migration was divided

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1 Annuaire Statistique de la France, Résumé Retrospectif, 1966, pp93 & 99, op.cit. NB This figure for migration is made on the basis of corrected figures for 1926, 1931 and 1936 as indicated in Table 1.1.

2 A. Olivesi, 'Contrastes Sociaux et luttes politiques sous la IIIe Republique', p386 in E. Baratier (ed.) Histoire de Marseille, Toulouse, 1973.

3 Roncayolo, op.cit. p38.

4 France, Census 1936. Whilst the absolute figures are known to be false there is no reason to assume that, had the real figures been known, the proportion of locally-born people would have been substantially different.

5 W.H. Sewell, 'Social Change and the Rise of Working-Class Politics in Nineteenth Century Marseilles', Past and Present, 65, 1974, pp89-90, shows how 93 per cent of the dramatic increase in population between 1821-1872 was accounted for by migration, and only 7 per cent by natural increase

equally between people of French and of foreign origin.<sup>1</sup> Migration from elsewhere in France, was a long established tradition among those sons of peasants and workers who were obliged to travel in search of work. The two neighbouring départements of the Var and Vaucluse were the most likely to supply migrants to Marseilles, but the attraction of the town also reached out into the Southern Alps, Corsica, the Cévennes, the départements of the Hérault, the Ardèche and the Drôme.<sup>2</sup>

Migrants to Marseilles were not always well received by the native population, and hostility towards the earliest, French, migrants was later directed at the waves of foreign-born immigrants who arrived in search of work.

Social observers of Marseilles during the first half of the nineteenth century commented on the coldness and exclusiveness shown by Marseilles-born workers towards outsiders.<sup>3</sup> This antagonism was in part based simply on a geographical difference, but in the early part of the century differences in the place of origin were compounded by differences in language. Sewell comments on how 'The segregation of natives from immigrants to the city was accentuated by the difference in language; (since) the Marseillais spoke a peculiar dialect of Provençal that was strange to other Provençal-speakers, let

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1 According to Roncayolo, op.cit. p38 in 1900 60 per cent of the Marseilles population was locally born. Of the remaining 40 per cent half came from elsewhere in France and half from abroad.

2 M. R. Loew, Les dockers de Marseille, Ecully, 1944. p38 gives a useful analysis of the origins of dockers. For the origins of Italian immigrants see, A.M. Faidutti-Rudolph, L'Immigration italienne dans le Sud-Est de la France, Gap, 1964.

3 W.H. Sewell, 'La classe ouvrière de Marseille sous la Seconde République: structure sociale et comportement politique', Le Mouvement social, 76, 1971, p47.

alone to French-speakers.<sup>1</sup> Even a commentator from so close a place as Avignon was surprised at the exclusiveness of the social world of Marseilles-born workers and the way in which this contributed to the preservation of their patois.<sup>2</sup> Still other commentators remarked on the superior attitude demonstrated by Marseillais towards the franciots or French speakers, where a Marseilles girl would consider it beneath her dignity to marry a French speaker.<sup>3</sup> Victor Gelu, a Marseillais himself, described how, 'The franciot...is sovereignly antipathetic to the pure-blooded Marseillais. Only Italians inspire a greater aversion in him...If anything the franciot actually appears more ridiculous. And to tell the truth, the franciot... (gives as good as he takes with) this hatred and disdain'.<sup>4</sup>

Hostility to French speakers was less appropriate by the end of the nineteenth century when French had largely replaced Provençal as the language of the Marseilles working class. Successive waves of foreign-born immigrants were, however, met with the resentment and hostility earlier reserved for the franciots. The scale of foreign immigration was considerable,

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1 W.H. Sewell, op.cit. Past and Present, 65, 1974, p95

2 Ibid.

3 W.H. Sewell, Le Mouvement social, 76, 1971, p46.  
Clearly though, many such mixed marriages did take place.

4 Cited by Sewell, op.cit., in Past and Present, 65, 1974, p94

and if naturalised foreigners were included, the already high proportion of foreigners in the Marseilles population would be even greater. What seems clear is that the proportion of

TABLE 1.2

Foreigners in the Marseilles Population

Date	Number	Percentage of total population
1870	40,000	12.54
1906	102,000	19.71
1911	110,000	19.98
1936	202,000	22.11 - 32.6*
1946	53,000	8.3
1954	38,000	5.8

Sources: Figures for 1870 & 1906 from A. Olivesi, 'Contrastes Sociaux et luttes politiques sous la IIIe République', p386 in E. Baratier, (ed.) Histoire de Marseille, Toulouse, 1973. Figures for 1911 from G.S. Cross, 'The Structure of Labor Immigration into France between the Wars', (Wisconsin PhD, 1977) p246. Figures for 1946 and 1954 from M. Roncayolo, op.cit.p39. Percentages have been calculated against the total population as given in Annuaire Statistique de la France. Résumé Rétrospectif 1966 p 41. INSEE, Paris, 1966. The percentage for 1870 has been calculated against the census figure for 1876.

Note: \*The number of foreigners in 1936 is taken from the Etat de Population dated 31.12.1936 contained in AD M6/10816 & M6/9091. This figure is considerably higher than the 125,000 foreigners for the entire département listed in the census of the same year. The proportion of foreigners for this year depends on the total population of the town. The first figure is based on the (false) census return claiming a total population of 914.2 thousand. The second figure assumes that the total population was only 620,000 as estimated by INSEE. Roncayolo (and Olivesi following him) suggests the real proportion to be between 20-25%. Our researches would suggest a higher proportion, nearer the second of the two figures given, although this assumes that the INSEE estimate of population in 1936 is not an underestimate. The report of the total number of foreigners in 1936 as 202,000 is credible, since it accords with the figure of 204,000 foreigners given for 1934 in AD M6/10793 and dated 7.1.1935.

foreigners in the population reached its peak in the 1930's. The largest group of foreign immigrants in 1936, and historically the first group to come en masse to Marseilles, was the Italians. In 1936 the 126,000 Italians in Marseilles accounted for more than 62 per cent of all foreigners in the town. Italians had first arrived in large numbers in Marseilles around the middle of the nineteenth century, and their colony grew thereafter. In 1851 there were already more than 15,000 Italians in Marseilles, by 1886 60,000, by 1901 90,000 and more than 100,000 by 1931. The majority of Italian immigrants came from Piedmont and Liguria, but there were also many from the Mezzogiorno (30 per cent according to a study of the 1926 census).<sup>1</sup> Italian immigration proceeded apace until the First World War when many Italians were mobilised to fight and were hence less mobile in their search for work. After the end of the War however the rise of fascism meant that the old motivation for Italian migration - the search for employment - was complemented by a newer, if not totally unknown motive - the search for political freedom. Mussolini's rise to power in Italy meant that, for those Left-Wing workers able to leave, there was an added incentive to do so.

Marseilles' situation, halfway between the Italian and Spanish frontiers, meant that it was able to attract immigrants from both of these countries. The Spanish community was quite small until 1914, but the mobilisation of the Italians for war increased the possibilities of work for other immigrants. From a relatively small community of 5,000 in 1911 Spaniards increased

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1 Roncayolo op.cit. p39 and Olivesi in Baratier (ed.) op.cit. p387  
Also see Faidutti-Rudolph op.cit. Carte 64.

their numbers to 26,000 by 1918.<sup>1</sup> The growth in the Spanish population in Marseilles does seem to have been restricted to the period of the First World War, since by 1936, lacking in substantial renewal through further immigration the Spanish population had, through naturalisation and natural causes fallen back to 22,000.<sup>2</sup> As with the Italians the early motivation for Spanish immigration, the search for work, was later, after 1936, joined by politically-inspired immigration, as refugees from Franco arrived in Marseilles.

The third and fourth largest groups of immigrants to Marseilles arrived for economic and political reasons respectively. Algerians and other North Africans, although not officially foreigners, were recruited to work in the factories of Marseilles during the years on each side of the First World War. Their recruitment was aimed at replacing Italian labour which was both increasingly scarce and reckoned to be of dubious quality. From an initial population of around 10 North Africans in Marseilles in 1906, their numbers increased to 2,000 in 1914, and then to 9,500 in 1936. Whilst employers sought to attract North Africans to Marseilles to work, Armenians fleeing the Turkish massacres began to arrive in Marseilles. The colony of 16,000 Armenians in 1923 had grown to almost 20,000 by 1936.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Olivesi in Baratier (ed.) op.cit. p387.

2 Olivesi ibid. Also see AD M6/10816. More details on the local Spanish population may be found in E. Temime, 'Evolution et problèmes d'intégration d'une minorité étrangère. Les Espagnols dans le sud-est de la France de 1861 à 1936: étude spécifique du cas marseillais', Ethnologie française, VII, 3. 1977, pp245-254.

3 Olivesi, op.cit. p387, Roncayolo, op.cit. p39. AD M6/10816

These successive waves of immigration, first French, then foreign and later colonial, produced a highly variegated working population in Marseilles. Different waves of immigrants may have fulfilled similar economic and often social functions to those preceding them, but the waves of immigration were staggered over time, and groups of migrants could displace one another upwards through the social and economic hierarchies of the town. Different groups of migrants had their own distinct characteristics however, and it is for this reason that it is necessary to investigate the differences between the immigrant communities as well as noting the dichotomy between natives of, and migrants to, Marseilles.

## 2 The Industrial and Geographical Location of Immigrants

Immigrants to Marseilles usually established themselves within a few specific occupations in the town. The majority came in search of work, and its availability would influence the industries in which they were employed and the areas in which they lived. Most immigrants arrived with limited skills and resources and they were often obliged to find work and employment in those sectors shunned by the better-off native-born Marseillais. The experience of immigration, however, did not merely involve the transition from an agrarian to an urban labour market, but also a confrontation of communities. The largely agricultural origins of immigrants to Marseilles meant that they were assimilated only with difficulty into the local

urban and working-class culture. Indeed, sometimes the very strength of the local working-class culture, especially in the more skilled or better paid trades, was asserted through a refusal to admit immigrants to certain highly regarded trades. Sewell's work on mid-nineteenth century Marseilles has identified a series of trades which were closed to foreigners and immigrants and almost entirely occupied by native-born Marseillais. 'Closed' trades were often maintained through a restrictive corporate structure, where sons of workers had the first right of entry, but even after the erosion of the old corporate structures, employment in most occupations was secured through contact and recommendation rather than by open competition. Sewell's researches reveal a paradoxical situation where the very success of native-born Marseillais in using existing trade and community structures to secure employment for their sons, meant that intergenerational mobility across classes was greater for immigrants to the town than it was for the Marseillais themselves. He argues that the experience of migration freed Italian and French migrants to the town of their 'traditional ascriptive values regarding occupational choices', but that 'a combination of prejudice and lack of qualification kept the Italians from experiencing upward mobility, while the French migrants...attained upward mobility in a relatively high proportion of the cases'.<sup>1</sup>

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1 W.H. Sewell, 'Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century European City: Some Findings and Implications', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, VII, 2 (Autumn 1976), pp227-228. For the other statements in these paragraphs see Sewell's works in Past and Present op.cit. and L' Mouvement Social, no.cit. passim.

Sewell's findings are important in demonstrating the role of community structures and choice as well as that of opportunity in defining occupational location and intergenerational mobility. Early foreign immigrants arriving in Marseilles were excluded from the existing native working-class culture and had few resources to enable them to compete for better jobs which were not sought by the Marseillais. Over time, however, the experience of the immigrant changed greatly. In 1851 an Italian arriving in Marseilles would find himself in an alien community and with few resources: with Italians constituting only 8 per cent of the population it was possible to consign them to the least desirable occupations and neighbourhoods. By 1936 however, after years of Italian immigration and a degree of upward mobility too, people of Italian origin probably made up about one half of the total Marseilles population.<sup>1</sup> The scale and duration of Italian immigration meant that migrants from that country arriving in Marseilles in the twentieth century, would no longer find themselves part of an excluded and marginal grouping but could instead join a community which was sufficiently well established, integrated and defined to offer succour to newcomers whilst being broad enough to open up possibilities of social promotion. The Italian immigrant of 1860 would arrive and be content if somehow he could find himself a job as a day labourer; by the 1930's his successor would hope for something better. He might also feel, given the number of his compatriots involved in local and national politics, that he could afford the luxury of expressing opinions, and maybe of even becoming involved in political actions

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1 See p. 7 for details on the number of Italians in Marseilles in 1936.

himself, activities which he may well have been wary of in the Second Empire.

The passage of time, therefore, or the existence of an extended and supportive community structure, could produce less restricted employment opportunities, either to immigrants from areas with a long tradition of immigration to Marseilles, or to the naturalised children of other immigrant groups. There was, however, a degree of continuity in the industries and localities where foreigners were concentrated. One survey of Italians in 1911 showed that they were concentrated in the building trades and the chemical industry. Amongst certain trades Italians constituted the majority of the workforce, as was the case for cabinet makers, where Italians made up four fifths of the total active working population in Marseilles. Cases such as these, where immigrants were able to establish themselves as skilled independent craftsmen in sectors requiring little capital, were examples of the possibilities available to the more fortunate immigrants. For the most part however, immigrants were required to seek employment in those areas which had the worst working conditions and the lowest wages. In 1911, Italians as the largest immigrant group, were concentrated in the industries that met this description; chemicals, gas and building.<sup>1</sup> Twenty years later the same broad pattern of immigrant employment prevailed. Foreign labour was estimated to account for 32 per cent of the employed industrial labour force, but the proportion of foreigners in each industry varied considerably.

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1 Les Bouches-du-Rhône: Encyclopédie départementale, XIII, Paris-Marseille 1921, p179.

TABLE 1.3Percentage of Foreigners in the Bouches-du-Rhône Labour ForceBy Industry/Occupation (1931)

Labouring & Building	72
Quarrying & Tiles	63
Leather & Hides	54
Textiles	47
Oil & Soap	42
Transport & Carting	42
Ports & Docks	41
Mining	40
Agriculture	38
Chemicals	36
Wood	31
Food	23
Others	23
Engineering	19
Paper	8.5

Source: M. Carencu, 'Les problèmes de l'emploi dans les Bouches-du-Rhône entre 1919 et 1939'. (Mémoire d'Histoire, Université de Provence, 1976) p149

The wide variation in the percentage of foreigners employed in an industry was due to many factors. Amongst these may be included the wages and status associated with an industry, its working conditions, security of employment, and the period at which it had expanded. The date of the development of an industry might have influenced the number of foreigners it employed, because newer industries tended to be situated further from the centre of Marseilles. The ability of recent migrants to settle in close proximity to such new industries was obviously greater than that of those longer established locally-born workers who had family and other ties to encourage them to seek

work in their own localities. Thus, low wage, recent and/or growth industries, would tend to have high proportions of foreign workers and, on occasion, contributed to the establishment of immigrant ghettos in the suburbs of Marseilles.

One example of the intense localisation of immigrant labour was that of Italian workers in the Marseilles suburb of l'Estaque. At a distance of 9½ kilometres from Marseilles this suburb grew more than tenfold between 1872 and 1931 when the population of Marseilles as a whole merely doubled.<sup>1</sup> The dramatic population growth of the area was due almost entirely to the expansion in employment resulting from the dynamism of the local tile and chemical industries. For reasons partly associated with tradition, and also connected with the level of wages in these industries they attracted a mainly Italian labour force. By the mid-1930's a survey of l'Estaque described it as a 'quartier ouvrier, avec de très nombreux Italiens', and where '8 restaurants ouvriers aux noms Italiens' could be found. The extent of the foreign population was indicated by the fact that the electoral register included the names of less than one tenth of the population of the area. L'Estaque was not the only immigrant ghetto. Other areas such as Saint Antoine, Les Ayalades, Saint Henri and Saint André, had equally large foreign populations based on their local industries.<sup>2</sup>

The geographical distribution of foreigners corresponds closely with the industrial map. The cantons with the largest proportions of foreigners in 1931 were also the ones with most industry or high proportions of working-class people.

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1 Les Bouches-du-Rhône...op.cit.XIV, p325. NB reference here to the population of Marseilles is to the figure as corrected by INSEE, the figure for the population of l'Estaque is uncorrected.

2 Les Bouches-du-Rhône...op.cit.XIV, pp325-338 passim.

TABLE 1.4

## Marseilles 1931 Cantons Ranked by Percentage of Foreigners

Ranking	Canton	Percentage of Foreigners
1	1	37
2	5	34.7
3	12	31
4	4	27
5	7	26.5
6	11	25.7
7	10	25
8	3	22.6
9	9	21.3
10	2	20.5
11	8	14
12	6	11.7
All <u>Cantons</u>		25.4

Source: G. Rambert, Marseille, La formation d'une grande cité moderne. Etude de géographie urbaine, Marseille, 1934 p460.

The high proportion of foreigners in the first canton was linked with the attraction which the port and its associated industries had for foreign workers. With casual labour hiring in its industries, and a large supply of cheap, if overcrowded and unhygienic accommodation, the area was well adapted to accommodate those workers who would be employed in the traditional Marseilles industries. The other cantons which had more than the average number of foreigners were those which had particularly great concentrations of local industry. The 5th, 12th, 4th, 7th and 11th cantons were all centres of either well established

or newly developing industry which needed immigrant labour to develop.<sup>1</sup>

The distribution of foreigners in Marseilles was related to the availability of employment and of accommodation, but the different immigrant communities were distributed differently. These differences between the distribution of immigrant groups reflected in part the preferences of immigrants, but also those of employers. Italians, for example, who established themselves in the building and construction trades, as well as in the oil pressing and soap industries from the end of the nineteenth century, found that with the arrival of the twentieth century their horizons, as well as those of their employers, had been broadened. Employers sought other sources of labour and established immigrants attempted to find more stable and remunerative kinds of employment. The case of the arrival of North African workers in Marseilles is an illustration of a form of employer-sponsored immigration which changed the distribution of immigrant labour within Marseilles.

As Italians became established in large numbers in Marseilles, they were less willing to accept the long hours, poor pay, and insecurity which were the features of the sectors to which they were confined. They were also increasingly willing to join forces with French workers in trade union actions designed to improve working conditions. It was one such strike in 1907 in an oil pressing factory which led the management to seek alternative sources

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1 G. Rambert, Marseille, la formation d'une grande cité moderne: Etude de géographie urbaine, Marseille, 1934, p461.

of labour. The foreman in the factory had the idea of requesting friends of his in Algeria to supply Arab workers to break the strike. The request was complied with, the strike broken, and within a short time the employers' federation was organising the transportation of large numbers of Algerian workers to be employed in the industry. The operation was a success and by 1913 the Prefect was able to report that:

'Il est facile de se rendre compte que les Kabyles jouent actuellement un rôle économique fort important à Marseille. Leur mentalité les tient encore éloignés des organisations syndicales et tant qu'elle ne se modifiera pas, certains industriels importants, tels que les fabricants d'huile, les raffineurs de sucre, peuvent compter sur la sécurité du travail dans leurs usines.'<sup>1</sup>

The docility of Arab workers led to changes being made in the Marseilles labour force. A strike in the sugar refining industry in 1910 had as its consequences the substitution of the strikers by 400 Arab workers.<sup>2</sup> The President of the Chamber of Commerce later expressed his fears during the First World War about the return of Arabs to Algeria since they:

'remplaçaient de plus en plus dans nos huileries la main d'oeuvre italienne et dont les services étaient particulièrement appréciés de nos ressortissants.'<sup>3</sup>

Such attempts by employers to use new groups of workers in order to have a more docile labour force, were founded on the assumption that there would be little common feeling between Arab immigrants and previous waves of immigrants, or native-born Marseilles workers. Such assumptions were often valid, even if the Popular Front period itself provided examples of solidarity among workers which managed

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1 B. Viala 'Intégration au monde du travail et mouvements sociaux: L'exemple nord-africain à Marseille. 1900-1940', Unpublished paper communicated by author, mai 1979, p4., quoting report in AD M6/11402 26.2.1913.

2 Viala loc.cit. p4.

3 cited by Viala loc.cit. p8.

to cut across these ethnic divisions. Clearly the behaviour of local employers created an economic conflict between those recent immigrants, such as Algerians, who were prepared to work for relatively low wages, and the longer established French and Italian workers. This economic conflict accentuated and compounded pre-existing social and cultural divisions between immigrant communities.

The occupations and location of immigrant groups depended in part on the period at which they arrived in Marseilles. Generally the last group of immigrants would find itself consigned to the least desirable occupations and housing, obliged to accept bad wages for unpleasant work, and to pay high rents for bad accommodation. The privations of poverty could, however, be made more bearable by the support and comradeship of fellow immigrants in similarly bad conditions, and for some groups family ties with successful immigrants could offer a chance of escape from the miserable conditions in which they lived and worked. The comparison of the experiences of Arab and Armenian immigrants is instructive in this respect.

By 1936, after almost twenty years of North African migration to Marseilles, Arab workers were still consigned to the least desirable employment and accommodation. A police report of 1936 described the experience of Arabs in Marseilles fairly accurately when it explained how they worked:

'Sur les quais, savonneries, raffineries de sucre, en général dans les usines où s'effectuent des travaux malpropres'.<sup>1</sup>

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1 AD M6/10817 Report to Prefect 30.3.1936

There had been almost no upward mobility for this group of immigrants. As with the Italians described by Sewell in the nineteenth century, the experience of migration had led to a dramatic change in values and in occupation, but this had not broken down the wall of prejudice which they faced from the host community. A study of the conditions of North African dockers living in Marseilles in 1942 found them concentrated in the cheaper areas close to the port and its associated industries. The priest who conducted the study described how:

Aux alentours de la place d'Aix, dans les rues qui descendent vers le Cours Belsunce, se masse l'îlot arabe le plus important, habitant en garnis souvent collectifs, dans les hôtels à plusieurs par chambre, véritable dortoirs où les lits se touchent...

Tout autour de la Place d'Aix et dans la rue de Turenne partiellement détruite, des hôtels louent des grandes chambres à des familles venues d'Orient, souvent des arméniens qui s'y sont installés au débarquement et n'ont pas eu le courage d'en déménager. C'est le royaume des meublés sans meubles. Dans ce quartier toutes les conditions de paiement se rencontrent: au trimestre et au mois (le plus rarement), à la semaine, à la journée (cas le plus fréquent même pour des familles installées depuis des années), à l'heure enfin...<sup>1</sup>

For the privilege of living in these conditions the Arab and Armenian dockers were obliged to pay exorbitant prices. Père Loew explained how, for these immigrant dockers:

'habitants à l'embauche incertaine, tout est remis en question chaque jour (car les tenanciers de ces garnies ne sont pas tendres): le pain, le logement et avec lui la sécurité vis-à-vis de la police et la protection contre les intempéries. On comprend également comment la seule assistance que, dans de telles conditions, on puisse espérer est celle qui, provient de ses compatriotes et de ses frères de misère...'<sup>2</sup>

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1 Loew, op.cit. p41

2 Loew, op.cit. pp41-42.

This need for intra group solidarity and support led to an even greater localisation of immigrant groups than that which was rendered necessary by the overcrowding due to their limited finances.

The solidarity within some groups of immigrants such as the Italians and Armenians permitted their members to escape from the poverty of the ghettos to which the Arabs were consigned. Père Loew's description of Arabs' living conditions also mentioned that of Armenians. But for Loew, the Armenians who lived in the area of the Porte d'Aix, did so because they had lacked the courage to move on from where they had first settled after landing. For Armenians there was a possibility of escape from poverty, through the chance of establishing a business to service the Armenian community, or through the aid received from various religious charities. Armenians retained their distinctiveness, and created ghettos of their own, but their solidarity was not rooted in inevitable impoverishment. It also permitted a degree of social ascension which was denied to Arab workers, who, although officially French, had fewer rights than the foreign Armenians. The Armenians tended to move away from the centre of the town towards the suburbs of Saint Antoine, Beaumont, Château Gombert and Saint Julien. According to one report:

'...leur bût général...est de faire du commerce. Très économes; ils amassent un petit pécule sous à sous et lorsqu'ils peuvent disposer d'une certaine somme d'argent ils achètent un commerce, et ne tarde pas à devenir propriétaire'.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Loew, op.cit. p42 refers to the 'enclose situés entre les quais et le Boulevard de Strasbourg, de la rue Blidah, de la rue Desirée, de la rue Kléber, enclos au nom admirable: Château Kléber..., de la traverse Milliard, de la rue Peyssonel, des Grands Salons de la Villette et du domaine Bonnefoy, pour ne citer que les principaux, et qui sont les quartiers des dockers et des chiffoniers'. See map from Loew in appendix.

2 AD M6 11354 Report to Prefect 14.1.1937

Not all Armenians could aspire to such heights but at least for those who did succeed in this way, the concentration and solidarity of the Armenian community meant that they could count upon the custom of their compatriots. Directories of Armenians traders were produced to direct members of the community as to where they might shop, receive medical attention or have their shoes repaired.<sup>1</sup>

The experience of immigration varied considerably between groups. Some, such as the Italians, maintained their distinctiveness, but were, with time, well integrated into the economic and social life of Marseilles. Other groups, such as the Armenians, although recently arrived and of a very different temperament from that of the native-born Marseillais, managed to retain their originality and use their clannishness to establish a distinctive and almost self sufficient economic and social presence within the town. North African immigrants by contrast had their distinctive and impoverished situation imposed upon them, since they either lacked the skills or were denied the possibilities of leading any other kind of life.

Another large and equally distinctive group of migrants was the Corsicans. Already, by 1911, Marseilles contained more Corsicans than either Bastia or Ajaccio and by 1938 there were estimated to be

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1 Roncayolo, op.cit. p39 contrasts the Italians and the Armenians: 'Si les Italiens s'intègrent d'emblée à la vie marseillaise, les Arméniens constituent des îlots encore homogènes, conservant leurs traditions et leurs attitudes, ce qui apparaît dans une structure démographique tout à fait originale'. The directory of Armenian traders in Marseilles may be found in the Bibliothèque nationale Ouh Varjabetian, Guide de Marseille, Marseille, 1938

60,000 Corsicans in Marseilles.<sup>1</sup> Like the North Africans, Corsicans had French nationality and were not, therefore, foreign immigrants. Corsicans, however, were like Italians in that they had a long tradition of migration to Marseilles, tended to originate from, settle, and find employment in well defined areas, and be easily integrated. Yet at the same time they preserved a strong group loyalty for they brought with them the hierarchies, solidarities and loyalties of village life.<sup>2</sup> The experience of migration was one which involved the promotion and advancement of the group as much as that of the individual, and whilst these were also features of much Italian migration, Corsicans were not disadvantaged by obstacles of language and nationality in the way that Italians were. For Corsican migrants the decision to move to the mainland was born of hope as much as of despair. Foremost amongst the hopes of such migrants was the desire to be free from the insecurities and harshness of rural life, and ideally to find employment which was both sedentary and stable. The solidarities born of the adversities of rural life in Corsica often proved helpful in ensuring the social promotion of Corsicans within the urban environment of Marseilles.

A description of Marseilles written in 1934 made the following comments about the Corsican group:

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1 F.Pomponi et.al, Le Mémorial des Corses, Volume 6, Ajaccio, 1981, pp452 and 477.

2 Which were then reinforced by a flourishing collection of Corsican mutual aid groups and associations. See F. Pomponi loc.cit. pp458 - 462.

'Tres cohérent et très uni, il joue à Marseille un rôle de premier plan, non point certes les carrières actives, pour lesquelles, depuis deux siècles, il ne semble plus avoir aucun penchant, mais dans la navigation, dans les professions libérales...et bien plus encore dans certains emplois publics. Les immigrés corses excellent surtout dans les fonctions modestes et multiples de surveillant, d'agent de police, de gendarme, d'employé d'octroi, qui rappellent, sous une forme évoluée, la traditionnelle vie pastorale; ils les peuplent en grand nombre, grâce à leur tenacité, grâce aussi au concours de la politique locale, à laquelle il se mêlent passionnément tant par dispositions naturelles que par intérêt. Ils constituent à cet égard une sorte d'îlot administratif dans la population marseillaise où le goût des carrières actives est la règle, soit chez les autochtones, soit chez les étrangers.'<sup>1</sup>

The abundance of Corsicans in the sectors mentioned was the result, not only of their abilities, but also of their solidarity. For certain jobs were either in the disposal of fellow Corsicans, involved in business, the professions or politics, or could be obtained with the help of a letter of 'recommendation', as to the honesty and integrity of the applicant. Writing of the problems of police corruption, one Prefect commented in November 1937 that there really seemed no way of satisfactorily recruiting a local police force in Marseilles, since:

'la communauté d'origine engendre ici, en effet, des rapports de camaraderie et d'amitié très particuliers. On ne saurait nier que le climat de Marseille n'est celui d'aucune autre ville, et dans ce climat spécial l'esprit de clan, importé de Corse notamment, risque de l'emporter très souvent sur la notion de l'Ordre Général.'<sup>2</sup>

With such strong clan solidarity the provision of employment and advancement for clan members seemed to outweigh the less tangible demands of ideology or efficiency.

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1 Rambert op.cit. p459.

2 AD M6 11355 Prefect to Interior 15.1.1937.

The advancement of Corsicans in Marseilles was in large part due to strong intra-group solidarity. This solidarity, was, however, due in part to the nature of the immigration itself. On occasion almost the entire population of a village would move from Corsica to Marseilles. Once in Marseilles they would settle in a fairly closely defined area, usually in the 4th canton, and there they would recreate the ties that bound them in the village of origin. The topography of Marseilles facilitated this establishment of relatively insular and self-contained communities of migrant groups. Once established in this way, geographical communities tended to develop into occupational ones too. A study by Marie Françoise Maraninchi, of migrants to Marseilles from the small Corsican town of Calenzana reveals the high concentration of immigrants in sedentary and public sector employment in Marseilles:

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TABLE 1.5

The Occupations of Calenzanais living in Marseilles Pre 1931

Occupation	Per cent Employed
White-collar	43.2 (11.5 Sailors)
Civil Service	41.9 (20 Police, 12 Post Office)
Shopkeepers	10.7
Professionals	3.5
Artisans	2.9

Source: Marie-Françoise Maraninchi, 'Un exemple de migration dans l'entre-deux-guerres. L'Exode Calenzanais', (Mémoire de maîtrise, 1977, Université de Provence), p101.

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Maraninchi gives a very persuasive explanation of this process for the Calenzanais when she writes how:

'La plupart de ces Calenzanais trouvent un poste dans l'administration de la municipalité, où s'y efforcent toute leur vie, par l'intermédiaire d'une "personnalité"... souvent influente dans ce domaine...En effet, il est rare que ces personnes n'aient quelques relations dans le milieu politique marseillais, ce qui leur permet de "dépanner" les Calenzanais sans emploi surtout en créant autour d'elles une clientèle dévouée et reconnaissante...A Marseille, la Mairie représente pour les Calenzanais l'objectif principal parce que c'est le symbole de la sécurité pour laquelle ils sont venus...D'autre part, "entrer à la mairie" est une chance enviable car les Calenzanais et les Corses en général sont sûrs de se retrouver ...Il semble que les Corses aient besoin, même dans leur travail, de reconstituer une petite "famille", une sorte de clan à l'intérieur duquel chacun devient lui-même parce qu'il a retrouvé une structure traditionnelle du village.'<sup>1</sup>

### 3 Immigrants and Political Organisations

The operation of clan networks among groups such as the Corsicans meant that political involvement, and occupational and geographical location often combined, and were mutually complementary. In some respects, Corsicans were unusual among migrants since their French nationality gave them easy access to the political system.<sup>2</sup> By the 1930's, however, Italian immigrants and their descendants had also become well-integrated into established local political organisations, and many of the most well-known Marseilles politicians, including the Mayor and Deputy Henri Tasso, could trace their origins back to Italy. As a rule, however, such political integration for foreigners was not always easy and often remained incomplete.

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1 Marie-Francoise Maraninchi, 'Un exemple de migration dans l'entre-deux-guerres. L'Exode Calenzanais', Mémoire de maîtrise, 1977. Université de Provence, UER d'Histoire, p109. See also Faidutti-Rudolph op.cit.p75 for details of the migrants from the Italian village of Sperlanga.

2 Between 1919 and 1939 six Corsicans sat as deputies for Marseilles. (They were Canavelli, Morucci, Sabiani, Ambrosini, Lucchini and Franchi). From June 1935 to March 1936 Corsicans held ten of the twenty-four seats as Conseiller Général and Conseiller d'Arrondissement for Marseilles. A. Olivesi in F. Pomponi et.al.op.cit.p477.

Foreign immigrants to Marseilles tended to import their political concerns with them. These were not always well adapted to the local environment, and Marseillais may not have had much time to spend on understanding the grievances of the Armenians against the Turks, or the tribal conflicts within North African groups or for that matter their struggle for independence from France. Conversely, immigrants themselves needed either to be fairly well integrated or to believe that it could be to their advantage, before they would take much interest in a local and national politics from which they were debarred from participating. Given that most foreign immigrants were in Marseilles primarily as workers and had few rights as citizens, their political involvement could arise most obviously in their role as workers. In this situation it was those parties of the Left and trade unions which were prepared to organise in and around the workplace which could make most impact on immigrants.

The role of immigrants in the workplace and their response to the politics of the workplace was often an important factor in determining their acceptance in society as a whole. And yet the very existence of immigrants in the labour force seemed calculated to increase the power of employers against that of workers and trade unions. Whilst workers were trying to organise to control the supply and price of their labour, the arrival of immigrant labour threatened to undermine such attempts. Most immigrants were prepared to work for lower wages and in worse conditions than would native workers. Faced with union demands for improvements employers could choose simply to replace the French workers with foreign ones. Trade unions and

socialist organisers were often forced to confront this problem and to recognise that immigrants weakened their bargaining power. Relations between a labour movement and the newly arrived immigrants were, therefore, strained. However, the case of Italian workers demonstrates that the tensions between the French and immigrant workers were not insuperable. The Italian immigrants who came to Marseilles at the end of the nineteenth century were often political refugees. As such, they were quite likely to become involved in expatriate socialist politics. Before long, however, Italian socialists realised that in order to sustain their movement, as well as in the name of socialist internationalism, it made sense to orient their propaganda towards conditions in France as well as in Italy. For immigrants in France the key issues tended to be those connected with the workplace, and, with the encouragement of their political leaders, Italian workers at the turn of the century began to become more involved in the attempts of their French colleagues to organise trade unions and strike actions. Italian participation in the dock strike of 1900 in Marseilles marked a crucial turning point both for involving Italians in political and trade union actions, and for winning them acceptance from French workers. Police reports on this strike testified to the resolution of the striking Italian dockers, and commented on how their participation:

'paraît grosse de conséquences, car, jusqu'alors, l'emploi des ouvriers italiens était considéré par les patrons marseillais comme une assurance contre les exigences des travailleurs français. Lorsque ces derniers faisaient la grève, les italiens restant dans les chantiers permettaient aux patrons d'attendre et d'assurer les travaux urgents.'<sup>1</sup>

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1 Pierre Milza, 'L'intégration des Italiens dans le mouvement ouvrier français à la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle: Le cas de la région marseillaise', Relations internationales, no.12. 1977, p363.

By the end of 1900, Italian participation in Marseilles strikes alongside French workers had brought about a dramatic change in attitude. Another police report remarked on how this solidarity marked:

'Une chose toute nouvelle pour les Italiens. Car il y a peu de temps, il y avait eu des manifestations contre l'emploi de la main d'oeuvre étrangère...  
...Grace aux grèves, tout était changé; l'Italien qui jusque-là avait été tenu dans un état d'infériorité marquée au point de vue de salaire, était traité sur le même pied que l'ouvrier français. Il n'était plus question de limites, comme on le voulait auparavant, dans l'emploi de la main-d'oeuvre étrangère'....Il en est résulté pour les Italiens une amélioration très sensible de leurs rapports avec la population locale, une plus grande sécurité dans le travail, et une augmentation très substantielle de leurs salaires.'<sup>1</sup>

The strikes of 1900 demonstrated that the interests of immigrant and French workers did not always need to be in conflict. What was possible for Italians was not, however, necessarily so easy for other immigrant groups. Arab workers who came to Marseilles in 1914 intending to seek employment on one of the building sites in the town were greeted by a hostile reception from the crowd which gathered when they went to the site in question. It seemed that the hostility was one which was based on race as much as on any desire to preserve a trade union monopoly over hiring. A police report described how for these Arab workers:

'Aucun n'ayant été embauché quelqu'un leur donna le conseil de se rendre à la Bourse du travail, où ils furent suivis par plusieurs jeunes gens qui leur manifestèrent leur hostilité en sifflant sur tout le parcours. Il leur fut demandé de se syndiquer pour trouver du travail, mais l'un d'entre eux qui le fit n'en retira pas de profit, puisque l'embauche lui fut refusé'.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Milza loc.cit. p366.

2 Viala op.cit. p7.

More than twenty years later, in some parts of the building industry at least, local trade union attitudes had changed little. In May 1938 the Union Locale (UL) and Syndicat de Bâtiment at Marignane, near Marseilles, complained that of the first 24 workers hired to build a new aircraft factory, 7 had been North Africans, saying that the unions 'voudraient que les chômeurs de Marignane aient un droit de préférence'.<sup>1</sup> It was difficult to reconcile such calls with others made at the same time by Marseilles trade unions for solidarity between French and North African workers. It seemed, however, that the basis for such unity was easily undermined in periods of rising unemployment when competition for jobs increased. The organisation of North Africans into trade unions was, meanwhile, conducted on a corporatist as much as a class basis, with the union often acting as intermediary between employer and employee in hiring workers. Trade unions found themselves in competition with fascist groups in this sphere, since some such groups had sufficiently good relations with employers to guarantee employment to their members.<sup>2</sup>

The internationalism of the parties of the Left led them to try and organise immigrant workers. The degree of success which such efforts encountered varied according to each group and the political and economic situation. Italians and Spaniards were among the most easily organised foreign migrants. Both groups had traditionally contained a large number of political refugees, and, by the late 1920's

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1 AD M6 10881 CS Marignane 13.5.1938.

2 See AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 4.5.1937 on the success of the Parti Populaire Française in this respect.

their own political preoccupations often matched quite closely those of the French political organisations. The issues of fascism versus antifascism, of anarchism and syndicalism versus communism with which Italians and Spaniards might be familiar all found a resonance in France. Organising other groups was more difficult. Arabs tended not to be interested in French political issues as such, and often were reluctant to attract the attention of the police through becoming politically active. Armenians tended to adopt a more individualistic approach which left little room for the collective remedies advanced by parties and trade unions of the Left. These two last groups would be inclined to join trade unions in periods of growth, to pay their dues regularly in the hope of being guaranteed regular work, but to be unenthusiastic about the active participation required by attendance at union meetings.<sup>1</sup>

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This brief survey of the various ethnic divisions amongst the Marseilles working population reveals the extent to which immigration produced a heterogeneous working class. This heterogeneity was expressed in terms of the time of arrival and origin of immigrants to the town, the occupations in which they worked, and the areas in which they lived. Varying degrees of interest, job security, command of the French language, and prior political concern and activity affected the willingness of immigrants to participate in the political and trade union life of the town.

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1 Reference to the desire of foreigners to join trade unions in the docks to improve their chances of obtaining work may be found in AD XIVM25/149 CD to Surêté, report 13.5.1939. Concerning Armenians there were problems both in getting them to join trade unions and to pay their subscriptions once they were members. On the reluctance of Armenians to join the dockers' trade union see the report of Gagnaire's meeting for Armenian dockers in AD M6 10888 CD to Surêté 6.5.1939.

## CHAPTER TWO: ALTERNATIVE DEFINITIONS OF THE WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITY

### 1 Spatial Communities

#### a) Physical and Administrative Definitions

The geography of Marseilles goes a long way to explaining both its raison d'être and its specificity. The superb natural harbour offered by the old port explains the decision of the Phoenicians to settle there, and the semi-circle of mountains surrounding Marseilles played a large part in its cultural and economic isolation from the rest of France. Isolation from the hinterland mattered little before the nineteenth century, since Marseilles as an economic entity was geared more to the Mediterranean than to the Continental economy. This distinctive and isolated situation made the town of Marseilles rather exceptional: exceptional because of its geography, its economy, its politics and its culture:

'Les Marseillais comme les non-Marseillais étaient prêts à admettre cette originalité d'un port marginal, plus ouvert sur la mer que sur le continent, au tempérament plus méditerranéen que français, aux problèmes toujours particuliers, échappant à la logique nationale.'<sup>1</sup>

Struck by the exceptional nature of Marseilles outside observers have tended to assume that the region constitutes a homogeneous entity. Isolation does not, however, necessarily involve homogeneity, and the exceptional aspects of the Marseilles region still leave room for considerable diversity. There was little ecological coherence within even the commune of Marseilles itself, and may argued that the administrators who had defined Marseilles as a town with an area three times that of Paris (22,800 hectares), had designed a nonsense.

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1 Roncayolo, op.cit.pl.

7,300 hectares of the 'town' of Marseilles were uninhabited hills and it made little sense to include these with the estimated 3,650 hectares which made up the town core, and contained four fifths of the population in 1931. There were, according to the same estimate, a further 11,850 hectares of suburbs 'in' Marseilles which contained the rest of its population. In 1931 these suburbs contained much new industry, but also a fair amount of agriculture. The administrative entity of Marseilles in 1931 made, therefore, little sense. It contained within it a wide variety of different terrain and economic activities not all of which could be reasonably considered as part of the town itself.<sup>1</sup>

Within the core of Marseilles itself, the very uneven terrain made for a surprising degree of fragmentation into, and isolation between, quartiers. An efficient tram network meant that transport into the town was easier than that between the different quartiers, but even so the integration of the quartiers into the town was far from complete. This lack of integration was even more obvious when the suburbs of Marseilles are examined. Suburbs sprawled across and around the vast area of the town, often owing their location more to the presence of some raw material or an environment conducive to industrial development, than to a simple extension of the town itself. There was no built-up area linking this vast tissue of suburbs, instead they were relatively isolated from one another and from the town of Marseilles.

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1 Rambert op.cit. pp 448-449. Rambert based his estimates of population distribution on the fraudulent census returns for 1931. Whilst the absolute figures are wrong there is no reason to assume that the proportions of population in the town and the suburbs should have been different from Rambert's findings.

## b) Economic and Social Definitions

### i. The Port of Marseilles and its industries

Marseilles and its port were traditionally regarded as synonymous. The location of the town, as a perfect natural harbour situated halfway between the Spanish and Italian frontiers, allowed Marseilles to dominate trade in the Mediterranean. The trade in which Marseilles was engaged was, however, a classic one involving as it did the triangular pattern of the import of raw materials, their processing and re-export. The port and its associated industries lived, not as an intermediary between the hinterland and the sea, but as an integral part of a Mediterranean rather than a French economy. The conquest of colonies in the nineteenth century meant that Marseilles was in an even better position to fulfill its traditional function. The only threat to its existence seemed to come from attempts at abolishing free trade, but pressure from local politicians could often undo at the implementation stage the damage intended by protectionist legislation.

Marseilles' necessary preoccupation with events abroad and in the colonies meant that its links with the region and the hinterland more generally remained weak until well into the twentieth century. This was due in part to the obstacles posed by the mountain ranges which isolated Marseilles, and also to the difficulties of navigation at the mouth of the Rhône. The development of rail transport and the canalisation of the Rhône had improved the position by the First World War, but even by the 1930's one commentator could write that:

'la fonction régionale représente à Marseille un mouvement d'affaires beaucoup moins intense que dans les grands ports de l'Europe, mieux rattachés à l'intérieur'.<sup>1</sup>

The contrast was so great that:

'...aujourd'hui l'on voit Le Havre, Dunkerque, Anvers même, et Rotterdam, desservis par d'excellentes voies d'eau et un réseau ferré modèle venir concurrencer le port provençal jusque très avant dans le sillon rhodanien. Marseille a donc une vive lutte à soutenir pour remplir les fonctions de distributrice à l'arrière-pays des marchandises d'origine exotique et de lieu d'évacuation, vers l'extérieur des produits de ce même arrière-pays.'<sup>2</sup>

It seems that the port's activity made little impact on the hinterland partly because of the physical obstacles to transport, but also because of the strong traditional links with local industry. The port of Marseilles saw a large part of its activity directed towards the supplying of local industry. These industries grew up in Marseilles, in close proximity to the port, and on the basis of its activity. The traditional Marseilles industries of soap and vegetable oil manufacturing relied on the port for their provision of raw materials. These industries depended on small locally-based family firms and were often located near the port. In the period prior to the First World War this traditional integration of the port and industrial activities of Marseilles produced a satisfactory result. The two were mutually interdependent. The port supplied the raw materials for local industry to transform and re-export. Industry and port tended to gather in the same areas of Marseilles and drew their workforce from the same quartiers. The port was the largest single employer and its fortunes affected those of the Marseilles economy

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1 Rambert, loc.cit.p352.

2 Rambert, loc.cit.pp352-3.

as a whole. In social and political terms, too, the port set the tone for much of the town. Local industrialists envied the ease of hiring and firing of port employees, whilst many workers were often inspired by the successes of the dockers to press their own wage demands.

During the interwar period the previously closed world of Marseilles with its own specific economic, political and social practices was upset by certain national and international trends. These trends in turn provoked a change in the nature of Marseilles' business, a relocation of its industries, and an opening up of its old working-class quartiers. This dislocation in the economic, social and political life of Marseilles was, in part, the result of economic success, but it was also the product of a belated adaptation to changes in the international economy.

Rapid growth in port traffic prior to the First World War had made Marseilles very overcrowded. Ships were obliged to anchor outside the port and wait for a considerable time before being admitted. Once ships had been admitted to the port the limited size of the quays and handling areas meant that unloading cargoes was a lengthy business. These delays were inconvenient and expensive to the shipping industry, and it was with the intention of reducing them that the port was enlarged considerably in the interwar period. It was not possible, however, to extend the port forever. There were physical obstacles to such a path, and besides, it was not evident that Marseilles was a suitable site for the unloading of all cargoes.

The explosion in 1909 of an oil tanker which was unloading at Marseilles provided an added incentive for the transfer of similarly dangerous cargoes away from such close proximity to the city of Marseilles to an area which would both be more safe and less overcrowded. It was with this aim in mind that the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce acquired the concession in 1919 for the development of the Port-de-Bouc-Caronte port complexes. By 1932, after considerable building work had been undertaken, cargo boats of 10,000 tons were able to enter the Etang de Berre thus assuring access to the ports of Port de Bouc, Caronté, Fos and Port Saint-Louis-de-Rhône.<sup>1</sup> The opening up of the Etang de Berre upset the traditional equilibrium between port and industry in Marseilles itself, and was described by one contemporary geographer as an unprecedented economic fact:

'En effet, dans cette petite mer intérieure les grandes profondeurs côtoient littéralement le bord meridional; il sera donc aisé d'établir de ce côté une série d'appointements où les vapeurs pourront accoster et en arriere desquels, sur les rives du canal, les usines pourront être élevées à peu de frais.'<sup>2</sup>

The transformation was a dramatic one, since:

'grace à l'aménagement de Caronte et de Berre, grace à la création d'un double accès par le Rove et par Bouc, l'effort marseillais fait naître un chapelat d'établissements industriels le long de rives, de plaines et de côteaux naguère encore déserts où presque'.<sup>3</sup>

Paradoxically, the very success of Marseilles as a port had led it to create, not only a rival port, but also a rival and far more dynamic industrial centre just 45 kilometres from the town.

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1 Alain Chenu, 'Industrialisation, Urbanisation et pratiques de classe. Le cas des ouvriers de la région marseillaise', Thèse pour le doctorat ès-lettres et Sciences humaines (sociologie), Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1981, pp90-92. See also Rambert op.cit. p378.

2 Rambert op.cit. p378.

3 Ibid.

The growth industries of oil refining, chemicals, and with Marignane airport that of air transport too, were all attracted to the cheap industrial sites around the Etang de Berre. Meanwhile the economy of Marseilles itself experienced a decline in prosperity, and the port's activity did not reattain its pre war high. Increases in freight tonnage registered for Marseilles after 1930 were almost entirely due to the activity of the new ports around the Etang de Berre.<sup>1</sup>

Table 2.1 reveals the scale of Marseilles' decline. Having handled 8,938 thousand tons of freight in 1913 in the port of Marseilles alone, by 1928 only 6,471 thousand tons were handled. Growth of the new port annexes led, however, to an increase in the total traffic, but the share accounted for by the traditional port of Marseilles fell from 86 per cent in 1931 to 65 per cent in 1938.

Marseilles' decline reflected, in part, the general problems of world trade in the interwar period, but it was also the reflection of a local industrial decline. Marseilles' traditional industries of transformation were affected by the tendency of producer countries to transform their own raw materials. In addition, there was a strong incentive for international manufacturing companies to locate plants in producer countries where transport costs could be avoided and where labour was cheaper. Industrialisation in countries such as Turkey, Iran, Egypt and India, resulted in a shortage of raw materials needing processing by Marseilles' factories,

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1 Rambert loc.cit.p324 Marseilles' share of total traffic continued falling to 38 per cent in 1946 and then to 22 per cent in 1961.

TABLE 2.1

Marseilles Shipping - Freight Transported  
1913-1938 Thousands (tons)

Date	Total	Marseilles	Annexes
1913	8,938	8,938	-
1920	6,026		
1921	4,719		
1922	5,825		
1923	7,235		
1924	7,171		
1925	7,414		
1926	7,311		
1927	7,602		
1928	8,241		
1929	8,561		
1930	8,722		
1931	8,512	7,355	1,157
1935	8,427		
1936	9,249		
1937	9,776		
1938	9,957	6,471	3,486

Sources: 1913-1931, Gaston Rambert, Marseille, La formation d'une Grande Cité Moderne. Etude de géographie urbaine, Marseille 1934, p.323-4  
1935-1937, La Vie Ouvrière, 10.3.1938, p.5  
1938 Revue d'Economie Politique, Vol 53, Nos 3-4, p1330

whilst such materials as were still available were made more expensive as protectionist trade policies began to bite after 1930. Adverse developments in the international economy obliged the port and local industry alike to depend increasingly on the French colonies. Accounting for 37 per cent of exports and 14 per cent of imports in

1913 the share of Marseilles' trade taken by the colonies had increased by 1938 to the point where it accounted for 64 per cent of exports and 31 per cent of imports.<sup>1</sup> Increased dependence on the colonies as suppliers of raw materials and as market was not itself problem free, since by the 1930's the colonies themselves were beginning to be industrialised. By the Second World War Marseilles industries had to compete with sugar refining and corn milling plants established in Senegal, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of the port of Marseilles the interwar period was an extremely turbulent one with changes in the origin, nature and destination (whether to Marseilles or its annexes) of cargoes having a severe impact on shipping, industry and employment in the town as a whole. The most dramatic change was accomplished in the petroleum industry between 1934 and 1938. Iraq, the main supplier of oil, accounted for only 2.94 per cent of imports to Marseilles (by weight) in 1934. This figure rose dramatically, first to 16.12 per cent in 1935, then to 23 per cent in 1936 and finally (in the prewar period) to 23.8 per cent in 1938.<sup>3</sup> The meteoric rise of the oil industry had implications for the growth of the local chemical industry, but it was also accompanied by a decline in the traditional local manufacturing industries.

For the purposes of this study the significance of these changes was in the impact they had on the conditions of life of the Marseilles working population. Dramatic structural change in the local economy was taking place within an environment which was stagnant in global terms.

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1 See Table 2.3.

2 Roncayolo op.cit. p17. See also L. Pierrin, Industries traditionnelles du port de Marseille. Le cycle des sucres et des oleagineux, 1870-1958, Marseille, 1975, p121 ff for details on the development of overseas factories rivalling Marseilles sugar refineries.

3 Chambre de Commerce de Marseille, Compte rendu de la Situation Commerciale et Industrielle de Marseille en 1938, Marseille, 1939, pp126-127.

TABLE 2.2

Freight passing through Marseilles 1913-1938 - By weight  
(percentages)

Products	Imports		Exports	
	1913	1938	1913	1938
Foodstuffs:	35	27	33	28
of which grain	24	11	14	1
fruit & veg	2	7	1	4
colonial produce	2	4	5	7
Oilseeds	13	12	4	0.3
Chemicals	2	1	10	20
Agricultural primary and manufactured products	7	3	7	10
Coal	35	20	3	0.1
Hydrocarbons	2	30	-	3
Construction materials	-	-	22	6
Minerals, Metals	1	3	8	18
Machines etc.	5	3	13	14

Source: M. Roncayolo, op.cit. p17.

Note: All figures have been rounded to the nearest decimal figure.  
Totals, therefore, may not always amount to 100.

Population growth in the 1930's was slight, and the local economy did not expand greatly. Decline in some sectors was matched by the dramatic growth of others. These changes in the economy of interwar Marseilles may have led to a change in perceptions of workers as well

TABLE 2.3

## Freight passing through Marseilles by Origin 1913-1938

(percentages by weight)

Country	Imports		Exports	
	1913	1938	1913	1938
Colonial Trade				
North Africa	8	15	30	51
Black Africa	2	7	3	4
Madagascar, Reunion	1	2	1	3
Indo-China	1	7	1	4
Total Colonial Trade	14	31	37	64
Foreign Trade				
Northern Europe	40	18	14	18
Mediterranean Europe	19	4	23	7
Middle East, Indian Ocean, Far East	13	7	3	3
Africa	2	2	1	1
North America	4	11	4	2
South, Central America	6	7	6	2

Source: M. Roncayolo, *Ibid.*Note: All figures have been rounded to nearest decimal point.  
Columns do not, therefore, always add up to 100.

as to a change in their activities. The isolation of Marseilles within France no longer rendered it immune to national and international economic trends, and the relative isolation of the traditional Marseilles working-class quartiers, was, in turn challenged by the rise of new industries and new industrial areas. The various economic changes discussed here may have helped to open up the closed world of Marseilles' society and politics. With new areas developing for shipping and industrial activity there was room for new capital to be injected into a traditionally locally-run and financed economy. Similarly, with workers moving into new areas and being employed in new industries, there was an opportunity for political and other groupings with a weak local base to try and establish themselves amongst the Marseilles working class.

#### ii. Suburbs and New Industries

The traditional port industries were in decline in the interwar period. Other industries were, however, in the process of expanding. Some of these expanding industries had been established for some time, but started their more dramatic growth only in the interwar period. The ship repair and engineering sectors provide an example of such industries. Other expanding industries were, in contrast, of relatively recent origin, and are typified by the oil refining and aircraft manufacturing industries. In terms of their location these two groups of industries stand in contrast to each other. Whilst it is true that both types of industry sought to escape from the traditional industrial areas of Marseilles, this aim was achieved with varying degrees of success. For the engineering and ship repairing industries expansion during and after World War One led to their establishing themselves in new industrial suburbs on the fringes of Marseilles.

Marseilles' own urban development meant that these new industrial centres were quickly integrated into the town itself, but the main employers there still managed to maintain a near monopoly of the local labour market. The new industries were located at much greater distances from Marseilles. The first oil refinery was built at Lavera in 1922, and its establishment was quickly followed by other refineries being built in the same area. In 1931 a refinery was built at Berre, and in 1934 another one was built at La Mède. By 1938 the refineries around the Etang de Barre accounted for a quarter of all French oil refining capacity. In the same ten to fifteen year period other new industries established factories in the same area. Saint-Gobain and Kuhlmann built chemical factories at Port-de-Bouc, a dynamite factory was set up at Saint-Martin-de-Crau, and the progress of the aircraft industry was marked by the creation first of a factory at Istres in 1923, then by the opening of Marignane airport in the same year, and finally by the opening of another aircraft factory at Marignane in 1937.<sup>1</sup>

The new and expanding industries posed a challenge to traditional local methods of industrial finance and management. In the traditional oil and soap factories of Marseilles the units of production tended to be small, capital was locally based, and

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1 Roncayolo, loc.cit.p28 & Chenu Thèse p87

management methods inclined to be amateurish.<sup>1</sup> The new dynamic industries for the most part did not fit these features.<sup>2</sup> They tended to be capital intensive, with large units of production, and to be financed by companies based outside Marseilles, and indeed in some cases, outside of France itself. Within these factories managements tended to favour what were perceived as being scientific methods of work organisation, and taylorism or le système Bedeau as it was known in France, was experimented with widely. Workers in the newer more dynamic industries might be better paid, but they would also be under a more strict work regime. In addition the role of national, or international, rather than local, capital meant that trade unions found that there was less room for extracting concessions from management in local-level negotiations. The outcome of negotiations increasingly came to depend upon the decisions of boards of management in Paris rather than in Marseilles, and as such, they were influenced more by national, and international, rather than by local political movements.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Roncayolo, loc.cit.pp29-30 & Pierrein op.cit.p36 describes the traditional Marseilles industries as follows: 'Il s'agit d'une industrie légère, de technique simple, productrice de biens de consommation et même de nécessité. Industries qui peuvent se monter aisément, rapidement: on loue une vieille usine, un entrepôt ancien, et on s'installe; on utilise une main d'oeuvre bon marché, surabondante, venue de toute la Méditerranée, masse flottante de manoeuvres, pour produire des denrées de tous les jours, dont il est dur de se passer'.

2 Although some, such as Coder, were family owned.

3 Once again an exception should be made for Coder. Aciéries du Nord or Société Provençale des Chantiers Navales however are examples from the engineering sector which prove the rule.

The move away from the traditional industrial and working-class centres of Marseilles was induced by the development of new industries and the expansion of old ones. This move was also encouraged by the inadequacy of housing in the older parts of Marseilles, and by the development of the public transport system after the First World War. Sadly, the first attempts at improving the Marseilles housing problem accentuated, rather than curing it. The six hectares of slums around the Bourse, for example, which were demolished between 1912 and 1930 were not redeveloped until after World War Two. By 1933 council officials estimated that 15,000 additional housing units were needed in Marseilles, and it was clear that the efforts of the Offices d'habitations à bon Marché to solve the housing problem made little impact. Private developers stepped in to fill the gap left by municipal inaction. The areas where housing was most needed were in the new industrial suburbs where land was cheap and planning controls almost non-existent. Houses, flats and a variety of shacks were erected by workers themselves and by private developers in the interwar period. This unplanned and uncontrolled development resulted in appalling problems for the inhabitants who, although they had succeeded in finding some form of housing, rapidly discovered that the lack of adequate drainage, sewerage and other provisions made their living conditions miserable in the extreme.<sup>1</sup> This lack of public services in the new industrial suburbs resulted in serious political problems for the municipality. Unable to afford a public works programme on the scale which was needed,

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1 Details of housing conditions from G. Dumont, 'La Question du logement social à Marseille de 1875 à 1939', (Thèse de 3e Cycle, Faculté de Droit Aix-en-Provence, 1973), pp127-128

successive municipalities found themselves confronted with the problem of an increasingly large proportion of the working population which was badly integrated into the local political system (because of the recent development of these suburbs and the often foreign origin of their inhabitants) and increasingly disillusioned with its performance.

The suburbs which grew up around Marseilles, and the industrial developments in the region were noteworthy, therefore, for their relative lack of integration into a traditional economic, social and political definition of Marseilles. The rate of growth of working-class suburbs was formidable. Places such as l'Estaque grew from a population of 1,287 in 1872 to 13,536 in 1931, whilst Saint-André grew from 4,385 in 1911 to 7,931 in 1931. In Les Aygalades the growth was even more dramatic with the population expanding from 1,496 in 1918 to 7,848 in 1931.<sup>1</sup> This rapid growth meant that the inhabitants of these new suburbs tended to have few local loyalties. Ties either with the town of Marseilles or with their new quartier or banlieue were slight. The common problems of bad housing and public services might have encouraged some collective identity to emerge among these new suburban dwellers, but it would tend not to be one which was rooted in the traditionally local elements of Marseilles culture. This new, recently uprooted working class would have found that its problems were more easily identified and resolved at the national rather than the local level. Hence their availability for organising by

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1 Les Bouches-du-Rhône... XIV, pp325, 329, 336.

political groups would depend upon the extent to which nationally based groups could identify the problems and issues which were of most relevance to these workers. Already, by the 1930's, working-class life in Marseilles was no longer dominated by the activities of the port and its industries.

### c) Changes in the Working-Class Community

Marseillais and non-Marseillais alike had often taken refuge in assertions about the uniqueness and exceptional nature of their town, in order to affirm that it had some internal homogeneity. In view of the long tradition of immigration, and the increasingly diverse origins of such migrants, this notion of homogeneity became more difficult to sustain. Between the First and Second World Wars changes in the structure of local industry brought about corresponding changes in the pattern of settlement of industry and workers in and around Marseilles. In spite of constant extension the port of Marseilles itself attracted a decreasing amount of traffic in both absolute and relative terms. Meanwhile, the port annexes dramatically expanded their capacity and traffic and succeeded in attracting a great deal of new industry. Marseilles' dominance within the region was increasingly being challenged in the 1930's, as was its claim to have an economy better integrated into the Mediterranean than into the national market. The new oil industry reproduced one of the traditional functions of the older Marseilles industries - the import and processing of raw materials - but the processed petroleum was not then re-exported but rather sold in the French market. The growth of this industry led

to a relocation of industrial activity in the region, away from Marseilles, and a better integration of Marseilles into the national market. Marseilles also became more integrated into a national market for capital as well as for products. Increasingly the capital for Marseilles' industries came from sources external to Marseilles and even to France.

Industrial changes cast into doubt the claims of Marseilles to be unique within France and to be internally homogenous. The Marseilles working population had to undergo changes, in its occupations, places of residence and the origins of its employers. Such changes called for new definitions of the working-class community. It was no longer evident that workers would have any particular loyalty to an agreed local community. It was even less clear as to how such a community might be defined. In spatial terms the working-class community might be based on a quartier, the banlieue, 'Marseilles', the region or, indeed, the nation as a whole. The very nature of the changes occurring in Marseilles meant that no single spatial definition of community could claim to be predominant, and indeed the unity of 'Marseilles' itself was open to question. Faced with these changes in the traditional local community it is possible that, increasingly, workers defined themselves in terms of their occupation rather than according to their place of residence or origin.<sup>1</sup>

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1 For comments on the prior importance of the quartier in the working-class identity see Chenu, op.cit. pp588-589. See also the list of people evacuated from the Old Port in Marseille-Matin, 28.1.1943 for evidence on the geographical concentration of Corsicans.

## 2 Occupational Communities

### a) The Occupational and Industrial Structure of Marseilles

Collective working-class consciousness may have been generated through the experience of work rather than at the level of the neighbourhood. Consideration of this hypothesis however requires an accurate picture of the local occupational and industrial structure. The construction of such a picture requires use of the 1936 census, which, as has already been pointed out, was deliberately falsified. The problem is not insuperable, since it seems that the occupational census was reasonably accurate in spite of the falsification of the population census.<sup>1</sup>

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1 There was little motive to falsify the occupational census. In addition the following table, which indicates the percentage of total population accounted for by active population in France and locally suggests the figures were accurate.

Date	Bouches-du-Rhône	France
1921	51.62	54.60
1926	49.07	52.58
1931	49.93	51.12
1936	51.28	47.09

Active population for Bouches-du-Rhône from France, Census, 1921-1936. Total population figures from INSEE 1966 op.cit. It should be noted that the active population includes those listed as unemployed.

TABLE 2.4

## BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE - ACTIVE POPULATION

## LISTED BY INDUSTRY 1926-1936

Industry	1926		1931		1936	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
1 Fishing	2084	-	2263	-	2095	-
2 Forestry & Ag.	62877	15	60354	13	56346	12
3 Mining & Quarrying	5349	1	5379	1	4076	1
4 Manufacturing industry	146266	34	156663	34	150400	32
5 Transport & handling	74885	17	75700	17	88752	19
6 Commerce & Banks	76246	18	88236	19	100751	21
7 Liberal Professions	13844	3	15069	3	19090	4
8 Personal Services	20316	5	18508	4	21031	4
9 Public services	28783	7	32518	7	34747	7
TOTAL	430650	100	454690	98	477288	100

Source: Census 1931 & 1936

Note: % Columns do not always add up to 100 due to the effects of rounding of percentages.

Table 2.4 shows that industry was surprisingly underrepresented in the département. Mining, manufacturing, and transport industries together constituted only just over half (58 per cent) of the active population in the département throughout the decade 1926-1936. These main industrial sectors also seem to have not been particularly dynamic, and the share of active population engaged in manufacturing industry declined between 1931-1936 at a time when certain white collar occupations were expanding. As a département containing the second largest

town in France the Bouches-du-Rhône might have been expected to harbour a concentration of blue collar workers, categorised in census terminology as ouvriers. In fact the proportion of ouvriers, in the active population of the département is shown by Table 2.5 to have been below the national average in 1936. The strong element of self-employed and white-collar workers listed in the table reinforce the impression that Marseilles was not predominantly an industrial centre.

TABLE 2.5

BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE - ACTIVE POPULATION BY OCCUPATION  
1920-1936 COMPARED WITH FRANCE

Occupation	Totals Bouches-du-Rhône			Bouches-du-Rhône (BDR) & France (FR) (%)					
	1920	1931	1936	1920		1931		1936	
				BDR	F	BDR	F	BDR	F
Factory managers	70795	68849	72993	16	30	15	29	15	29
White collar workers	82422	93833	101931	19	12	21	14	21	15
Blue collar workers	179192	190551	174647	41	40	42	42	37	38
Unemployed	17922	11849	27263	4	2	3	2	6	4
Self-employed	84291	89608	100464	19	15	20	13	21	14
TOTAL	434622	454690	477298	99	99	101	100	100	100

Source: France, Census, 1920, 1931, 1936.

Rounding of figures means percentages do not always total 100.

Within local industry the decline in the number of blue-collar workers between 1931 and 1936 was, in part, the result of the economic crisis, but there is evidence suggesting that it was also induced by changes within industry. The declining number of blue-collar workers in a period when the number of factory managers increased whilst the total number of workplaces decreased by 32 per cent (see Table 2.6) suggest that considerable industrial rationalisation was underway. New industrial techniques required fewer shop floor workers, more highly skilled white-collar workers and more managers.

TABLE 2.6

BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE - FIRMS RANKED BY NUMBER OF WORKERS 1931 & 1936

Size of Firm (workforce)	Firms					
	1931			1936		
	No.	B. du R. %	France %	No.	B. du R. %	France %
0	41033	59	44	15770	34	45
1-5	23021	33	50	27046	57	51
6-10	2375	3.4	2.8	2084	4.4	2.5
11-20	1292	1.9	1.8	1079	2.3	1.2
21-100	1070	1.5	1.2	836	1.8	1
101-200	133	0.2	0.1	147	0.3	0.1
201-500	91	0.1	0.1	65	0.1	0.1
500+	32	0.04	-	30	0.06	-
Total No. of Firms	69047			47057		

Source: Census, France, 1931 & 1936

Table 2.6 shows the dramatic effects of the economic crisis on Marseilles' industries . A large reduction in the number of firms was largely accounted for by the massacre of firms without employees. Firms with no employees represented 59 per cent of all firms in the département in 1931 (as against 44 per cent in France) but by 1936 their share was down to 33.5 per cent (as against 45 per cent in France). Small firms of this kind were clearly much harder hit by the economic crisis locally than nationally. Large firms were still, however, exceptional in 1936, and the major change in the local industrial structure was the increase in the smallest of firms with employees at the expense of the self-employed. As late as 1936, however, 91 per cent of local firms employed between 0-5 people and only 0.46 per cent employed over 101 people.

TABLE 2.7

EMPLOYED POPULATION IN THE BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE RANKED BY SIZE OF FIRM  
1931 & 1936

Size of Firm (workforce)	Employed Population					
	1931			1936		
	No. B. du R.	%	France %	No. B. du R.	%	France %
1-5	43367	21	33	49650	26	36
6-10	18158	8.7	7.6	15855	8.4	7.6
11-20	19043	9.2	7.5	15888	8.4	7.3
21-100	44540	21.4	17.9	34296	18.2	16.9
101-200	18853	9.1	7.5	20732	11	7.1
201-500	28813	13.8	8.9	21401	11.3	8.7
500+	35284	16.9	17.9	31154	16.5	16.3
Total Employed Population	208058			188976		

Source: Census, France, 1931 & 1936

Table 2.7 focusses on changes in the employed population and shows an 8 per cent decline in its size between 1931 and 1936. The decline was greatest in those firms employing less than one hundred people or more than two hundred. Although in contrast to the rest of France with a majority (57.2 per cent as against 49 per cent) of its employed population working in firms with more than 21 employees, the Bouches-du-Rhône can hardly be said to have been dominated by large firms. In 1936, only 38.8 per cent of the local employed population worked in firms employing more than 101 people, and whereas the average firm had not been exactly large in 1931, the average number of employees per firm had diminished still further by 1936 to reach 6.04. (Table 2.8).

TABLE 2.8

BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE - AVERAGE SIZE OF WORKFORCE PER FIRM 1931 & 1936

Category by size (workers)	1931	1936
1-5	1.88	1.83
6-10	7.64	7.61
11-20	14.74	14.72
21-100	41.63	41.02
101-200	141.75	141.03
201-500	316.63	329.25
500+	1102.63	1038.47
Total No. of Firms with workers	28014	31287
Total No. of workers	208058	188976
Average workforce per firm	7.42	6.04

Source: Calculated from Tables 2.6 & 2.7.

The information examined so far concerning employment structure does not distinguish between different employment sectors. Table 2.9 however, shows that the degree of concentration varied markedly between different sectors. Employment in the main industrial occupations and in certain public services (categories 3, 4, 5 and 9) was remarkably concentrated with more than 65 per cent of their workplaces consistently employing over 21 people in the period 1926-1936. Manufacturing industry (category 4) had the largest number of employees but was far from being the most concentrated sector, and indeed there were great variations within industry itself.

Table 2.10 shows the distribution of industrial employment between 1931-1936 by sex and occupation. Industrial activity as a proportion of total activity was declining in this period, and the hardest hit group was the female blue-collar workers whose number declined by almost 20 per cent between 1931 and 1936. The number of males in the same category declined meanwhile by 11 per cent. The dramatic increase in the number of industrial factory managers once again reinforces the view that production was being rationalised albeit in a period of contraction as workers were subjected to closer supervision. By 1936, blue-collar workers only accounted for one half of the active industrial population. Tables 2.11 and 2.12 permit closer examination of differences between employment patterns in various industries. The major industries in terms of their share of the employed population were transport, engineering, building, chemicals, food manufacturing and clothing. Handling and warehousing should probably be added to this list since

TABLE 2.9

BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE EMPLOYED POPULATION LISTED  
BY INDUSTRIAL CATEGORY & SIZE OF FIRM 1926-1936

Census Code (see Table 2.4)	Date	Size of Workplace (employed population)								Total employed population
		1-10		11-20		21-100		100+		
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
1	1926	511	97	16	3					527
	1931	496	100							496
	1936	486	100							486
2	1926	13856	83	1245	8	1350	8			16451
	1931	12328	79	1342	9	1887	12	142	1	15699
	1936	11356	85	865	6	1083	8	110	1	13414
3	1926	293	6	177	3	509	10	4222	81	5201
	1931	400	8	179	3	386	7	4229	81	5194
	1936	317	8	313	8	223	6	2976	78	3829
4	1926	24324	22	9620	9	28220	25	50506	45	112670
	1931	23866	20	10748	9	28326	24	53774	46	116714
	1936	26615	26	8127	8	21009	21	45227	45	100978
5	1926	2127	11	792	4	2560	13	14307	72	19786
	1931	1923	11	742	4	2710	15	12394	70	17769
	1936	2303	13	1111	6	2159	12	12707	70	18280
6	1926	19190	48	5010	12	8157	20	8026	20	40383
	1931	17920	45	4845	12	8570	22	8427	21	39762
	1936	18628	49	4478	12	6837	18	8318	22	38261
7	1926	2718	39	1050	15	1486	21	1753	25	7070
	1931	2731	37	1087	15	1948	27	1584	22	7350
	1936	3456	40	904	10	2410	28	1950	22	8720
8	1926	1981	91	135	6	70	3			2186
	1931	1840	89	77	4	157	8			2074
	1936	2289	96	79	3	22	1			2390
9	1926	60	2	92	3	451	13	2873	83	3476
	1931	21	1	23	1	556	19	2400	80	3000
	1936	55	2	11	0	553	21	1999	76	2618

Source: France, Census, 1926, 1931 and 1936

TABLE 2.10

## BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE INDUSTRIAL POPULATION

LISTED BY SEX &amp; OCCUPATION 1931-1936

(Census Groups 3,4,5 &amp; 9B)

Occupation	1931				1936			
	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female	Total	%
Factory managers	11638	3180	14818	6	13908	4076	17984	7
White-collar workers	16393	3958	20351	8	15178	4417	19595	8
Blue-collar workers	118510	21342	139852	58	104789	17128	121917	50
Unemployed	7374	1541	8915	4	16646	4004	20650	8
Self-employed	38467	18339	56806	24	49518	16182	65700	27
. Total active Industrial popn.	192382	29048	240742	100	200039	45807	245846	100
. Total active popn.	334468	120222	454690		352990	124298	477298	
as % of B	58	24	53		57	37	52	

Source: Census, France, 1931 and 1936

dockers, although classified for census purposes as self-employed, were really employed, albeit in a different way from other workers. Different kinds of employment raises the question of varying degrees of industrial concentration. Table 2.12 shows that even if the industrial sector of the département had relatively fewer factories with no employees than was the rule for the département as a whole (9 per cent as against 34 per cent - see Table 2.6) small factories still predominated in this sector as in others. Whereas in 1936 95 per cent of all workplaces in the département employed between 0 and 10 people, in industry the equivalent

TABLE 2.11

Bouches-du-Rhône - Industrial Population Listed by Industry & Occupation 1936  
(Census Groups 3,4,5 & 9B)

Industry Code	Total Active Population		Factory Managers		White & Blue-Collar Workers		Unemployed		Self-Employed	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
3A & B	4076	1.66	132	0.73	3829	2.71	114	0.55	1	-
4A	4608	1.87	14	0.08	274	0.19	4320	20.92	-	-
4B	20006	8.14	3866	21.5	14715	10.4	672	3.25	753	1.15
4C	16448	6.69	294	1.63	16020	11.32	112	0.54	22	0.03
4D	1895	0.77	124	0.69	1674	1.18	75	0.36	22	0.03
4E	3967	1.61	308	1.71	3203	2.26	228	1.1	228	0.35
4F	2799	1.14	196	1.09	1957	1.38	139	0.67	507	0.77
4G & H	22988	9.35	3475	19.32	9287	6.56	1339	6.48	8887	13.53
4I	6443	2.62	731	4.06	3216	2.27	369	1.79	2127	3.24
4J	9646	3.92	1449	8.06	5224	3.69	1069	5.18	1904	2.9
4K-M	30728	12.5	3156	17.55	23581	16.66	2239	10.84	1752	2.67
4P & R	5784	2.35	345	1.92	5035	3.56	248	1.2	156	0.24
4Q	25083	10.2	2732	15.19	17060	12.06	2641	12.79	2650	4.03
4 TOTAL	150400	61.18	16691	92.82	101247	71.55	13451	65.14	18991	28.91
5A	56390	22.94	112	0.62	5477	3.87	5590	27.07	45211	68.82
5B	32362	13.16	1049	5.83	28341	20.03	1495	7.24	1477	2.25
9B	2618	1.06	-	-	2618	1.85	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	245841		17983		141511		20650		65697	

Code:

3A	Mining
3B	Quarrying
4A	Unclassified industries
4B	Food manufacturing
4C	Chemical industry
4D	Rubber & Paper manufacturing
4E	Printing & Publishing
4F	Textile manufacture
4G	Clothing industry
4H	Wickerworking, Upholstery
4I	Leather & Hides
4J	Wood & Furniture
4K-M	Engineering
4P & R	Glass, Ceramics, Building materials
4Q	Building & Public Works
4	Manufacturing industry
5A	Handling & Warehousing
5B	Transport
9B	Industrial Public Services

Source: France, Census 1936.

Note: 4N Precious stones with an active population of 5 has been excluded.

TABLE 2.12

## Bouches-du-Rhone - Factories Listed by Size of Workforce in 1936

Industry Code	Number of Blue and White-collar Workers Employed per factory												Total Factories		
	0		1-5		6-10		11-20		21-100		101-500			500+	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		No.	%
3A & B	2	2	71	59	18	15	21	17	5	4	2	2	2	2	121
4A	4	44	5	56	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
4B	390	16	1769	72	143	6	56	2	72	3	19	1	1	-	2450
4C	4	2	63	28	25	11	30	13	58	26	38	17	5	2	223
4D	4	4	43	44	12	12	18	19	17	18	3	3	-	-	97
4E	16	6	168	66	33	13	17	7	12	5	8	3	1	-	255
4F	25	17	89	60	14	9	8	5	7	5	4	3	1	1	148
4G & H	385	13	2223	77	123	4	83	3	63	2	7	-	-	-	2884
4I	77	13	402	70	53	9	23	4	16	3	4	1	-	-	575
4J	65	5	981	79	102	8	60	5	36	3	2	-	-	-	1246
4K-M	132	5	2236	81	185	7	99	4	87	3	25	1	5	-	2769
4P & R	13	4	175	60	36	12	33	11	24	8	8	3	2	1	291
4Q	106	4	1840	75	258	11	117	5	104	4	21	1	2	-	2448
4 TOTAL	1221	9	9995	75	984	7	544	4	496	4	139	1	17	-	13396
5A	6	6	48	47	10	10	11	11	15	15	9	9	3	3	102
5B	35	4	684	74	86	9	61	7	36	4	14	2	4	-	920
9B	-	-	2	7	6	21	1	3	12	41	7	24	1	3	29
TOTAL	2485	9	20794	74	2088	7	1182	4	1060	4	310	1	44	-	27963

Source: France, Census 1936.

Note: Includes census groups 3,4,5 and 9B with the exception of 4N.

Key to codes on Table 2.11

figure was, at 91 per cent, not very different. The typical industrial unit employed between one and five people, and was thus very small. A few sectors were exceptions to this rule of small firms, with chemicals and handling and warehousing having a large proportion of large workplaces, and in the engineering industry too there was a significant number of large factories. (The high proportion of large workplaces in the public service sector is to be expected given the concentration of public ownership.)

This brief study of the occupational and industrial census figures for 1936 reveals that the département can hardly claim to have contained a dominant working-class element. The employed industrial population of white and blue-collar workers represented only 24 per cent of the active, and only 12 per cent of the total, population in the département. The proportions for Marseilles alone would have been correspondingly higher, but it remains the case that Marseilles and its surrounding area were not, in numerical terms at least, a bastion of the industrial working-class in 1936. The local industrial working-class was not only numerically small in 1936, it was also relatively heterogeneous. Large factories tended to be the exception rather than the rule in Marseilles, and the largest industries were not always the most concentrated. Small units of employment and a wide range of different occupations, meant that insofar as it was possible to constitute a unified working-class, such attempts would have had to reach beyond the actual experience of the workplace.

## b) Occupational Differences

The nature of the work performed, as well as the terms and conditions of work, varied greatly between different industrial occupations. The most obvious difference was one which cut across almost all the various occupations; that between the category employés or white-collar workers, and ouvriers or blue-collar workers. The former group had more security than did the latter but they were also more remote from the agricultural origins which they shared with most of the local working class. To be an employé signified a degree of social mobility which might also be accompanied by a political distancing from the concerns of ouvriers and industrial workers. Manual workers, however, whilst still envying employés their better pay and greater security, might actually be proud of the dangers and hardships associated with their employment. Mediterranean culture seemed frequently to require that men define themselves and their masculine identity through manual labour. Thus, the male working-class culture of manual, and often dangerous, labour, was often contrasted with that of the bourgeoisie which was portrayed as one of idleness, and of sexual ambiguity or decadence.<sup>1</sup> This pride in manual labour made for problems in a society where the long term trend was for the non-manual occupations to expand at the expense of the manual ones. It was not always easy to make a specifically working-class appeal which would not also undermine the potential ability to mobilise white-collar workers too. Differences between occupations however were often just as striking as this difference between employés and ouvriers which cut across occupations.

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1 This contempt for the safe life of the intellectual and bourgeois is still alive and emerged during the interviews recently conducted by D. Bleitrach and A. Chenu, and contained in L'Usine et la vie. Luttes Régionales: Marseilles et Fos, Paris, 1979, pp151 and 185.

### i. Male and Female Employment

Women constituted about 15 per cent of the employed industrial labour force in the Bouches-du-Rhône in the 1930's. (Table 2.13). The real situation is, however, concealed by the use of an average figure. Closer examination by industry reveals that women's employment on a large scale was restricted to certain sectors. Women were almost absent from the transport and warehousing sector, together with the building, woodworking, engineering and mining industries. By contrast they were well represented in the food and chemical industries (4B and 4C) but their presence in the latter sector was mainly attributable to the large number of women employed by the local vegetable oil industry. In neither of these sectors, however, did women's participation in the labour force approach 50 per cent. The leather and textile industries stand in contrast to this situation. In the former industry women constituted almost half of the workforce whereas in the latter (4F,G and H) they made up two thirds of the employed workforce in 1936. Even this last figure is an underestimate since the large number of self-employed (isolés) almost equalled that of the factory workers and was made up of 85 per cent women in 1936.

There is only a limited amount of information available concerning women's employment in local industry. It seems, however, that women were employed either in industries which called for skills in which they were likely to have traditionally been trained (e.g sewing and textile manufacture) or in areas where an abundance of cheap labour was required. The Marseilles vegetable oil industry fell into this second category, and it seems that women were used almost

TABLE 2.13

Bouches-du-Rhône - Industrial Workforce by Sex 1931-1936  
(white and blue-collar workers)

Industry Code	1931					1936				
	Males		Females		Total	Males		Females		Total
	No.	%	No.	%		No.	%	No.	%	
3A & B	4984	96	210	4	5194	3697	97	132	3	3829
4A	-		-		-	274		-		274
4B	10167	72	3910	28	14077	11140	76	3575	24	14715
4C	16574	83	3368	17	19942	13076	82	2944	18	16020
4D	1198	63	717	37	1915	984	59	690	41	1674
4E	2261	71	904	29	3165	2372	74	831	26	3203
4F	951	33	1894	67	2845	746	38	1211	62	1957
4G & H	2636	24	8146	76	10782	2212	24	7075	76	9287
4I	2804	69	1264	31	4068	2300	72	916	28	3216
4J	6487	90	734	10	7221	4755	91	469	9	5224
4K - M	25489	96	1177	4	26666	22462	95	1119	5	23581
4P & R	6815	85	1226	15	8041	4249	84	786	16	5035
4Q	17809	99	181	1	17990	16834	99	226	1	17060
4 TOTAL	93193	80	23521	20	116714	81404	80	19843	20	101247
5A	5703	98	105	2	5808	5358	98	119	2	5477
5B	28638	97	849	3	29497	27391	97	950	3	28341
9B	2385	80	615	21	3000	2117	81	501	19	2618
TOTAL	134903	84	25300	16	160213	119967	85	21545	15	141512

Source: France, Census 1931 and 1936.

Note: Industry Codes - See Table 2.11

Industry 4N has not been included in detailed figures but is included in totals.

interchangeably with immigrants, as two alternative sources of cheap, unskilled labour. Even where women were employed in an industry such as engineering, where better wages were generally paid, they found themselves either restricted to the least skilled jobs or were simply paid badly regardless of their work.<sup>1</sup>

### ii. High and Low Wage Industries

Much of Marseilles industry was typically small scale, employing unskilled workers for low wages. Many industries had grown up in the area precisely because the abundance of immigrant labour favoured labour, rather than capital intensive industry, and once such industries had become established they were often slow to modernise. A study of the French shoe industry in 1938 for example, showed not only that the Bouches-du-Rhône industry contained the lowest average number of workers per factory amongst those firms replying, but that it was also one of the least mechanised. The national average of 8.88 machines per factory stood in marked contrast with the 4.25 machines found in the average shoe factory in the Bouches-du-Rhône.<sup>2</sup> Other manufacturing industry was also badly mechanised and paid bad wages: the oil pressing industry was perhaps the most notable example, but many other parts of the food and chemical industries showed similar features. The building industry, too, depending as it did on a largely unskilled immigrant workforce, and organised in very small units, tended to pay low wages. Some industries

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1 AD XIVM22/15 provides details of wages in engineering industry showing that in March 1937 women and girls were paid between 63% to 76% of the wages paid to men carrying out equivalent work.

2 Statistique Générale de France, Statistiques Industrielles Obligatoires, Paris, 1941, p119 ff.

contrasted with this picture of low wage manufacturing. Engineering, insofar as it required skilled workers and tended to be organised in larger and more profitable units than some industries, was willing to pay higher wages.

TABLE 2.14

Some Hourly Wages - Marseilles & Paris

1934 - 1937  
(francs)

Profession	Marseilles (M)				Paris (P)				% increase 1934-1936	
	1934	1935	1936	1937	1934	1935	1936	1938	M	P
Printer	5.30	5.80	5.60	8.45	6.35	6.15	7.25	11.90	6	14
Tailor	5.60	5.00	6.25	11.85	5.50	5.50	6.38	8.49	12	16
Carpenter	4.75	4.75	6.10	8.40	6.10	5.87	6.50	9.85	28	7
Joiner	4.62	4.50	5.60	8.01	6.10	5.87	6.75	9.85	21	11
Plumber	4.50	3.70	5.60	7.78	6.50	6.25	7.25	10.45	24	12
Blacksmith	4.50	3.70	5.70	7.89	6.10	6.10	7.50	11.70	27	23
Locksmith	4.50	3.70	5.45	7.59	6.25	6.00	7.25	9.85	21	16
Lathe Worker	4.50	3.50	5.15	7.57	6.05	6.05	7.20	11.90	14	19
Electrical Fitter	4.50	3.80	5.60	7.80	6.00	6.00	6.80	9.91	24	13
Mason	4.50	4.25	5.60	7.80	6.50	6.37	7.00	10.15	24	8
Building Navvy	3.75	3.60	4.70	6.69	6.25	6.25	6.50	9.55	25	4
Painter	4.25	4.00	5.20	7.32	6.00	6.00	7.00	9.85	22	17
Day Labourer	3.60	3.50	4.55	6.39	No figures available				26	-

Sources: Marseilles figures from Bulletin de la Statistique Générale de la France, Volumes 24, 25, 26.

Paris figures from Annuaire Statistique de la France, Résumé Rétrospectif, 1966.

INSEE, Paris 1966.

Note: Figures refer to October of each year.

It is difficult to have an accurate picture of the wages which were paid in Marseilles in the 1930's. The hourly rates of pay listed in Table 2.14 are a useful guideline, but over-represent the skilled working class at the expense of the more locally predominant unskilled workers. In the two sugar refineries operating in Marseilles in April 1934 hourly wages varied from 3 francs 90 to 4 francs 20, and daily wages from 25 francs to 38 francs according to the age of the worker and the harshness of the task.<sup>1</sup> In March of the same year investigation of a vegetable oil refining plant (l'huilerie Reggio) revealed daily wages of 25 to 28 francs.<sup>2</sup> By 1936, after a further period of deflation, wages in this sector had in many cases declined even further. At the oil factory of Rocca-Tassy de Roux women's wages on the eve of June 1936 were a mere 13 francs a day, and the result of the strike was to increase them by 54 per cent to 20 francs a day.<sup>3</sup> This last figure was comparable to the daily wage of 22 francs which unskilled female engineering workers received after June 1936.<sup>4</sup> The most highly skilled male engineering workers meanwhile emerged from the strikes of June 1936 with an agreement which granted them 48 francs for an eight hour day. Even within the same engineering sector, differences were fairly great, and women workers in a small engineering factory producing metal beds were earning only 14 francs for an eight hour day before June 1936.<sup>5</sup> In other sectors such as the docks, high wages were paid to compensate for the irregularity of the work, since it was assumed that a docker would only succeed in finding work for a couple of days a week. In reality,

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1 According to Rouge-Midi, 112, 3.4.1935.

2 Rouge-Midi, 109, 16.3.1935.

3 Rouge-Midi, 181, 13.6.1936

4 AD XIVM 22/15

5 H. Prouteau, Les Occupations d'Usines en Italie et en France (1920 - 1936), Paris, 1938, p103.

however, there is reason to believe that some more fortunate dockers were effectively guaranteed work throughout the week, and were able to ensure that they were hired to unload the most remunerative cargoes.

### iii. Conditions of Hiring

The way in which workers were hired differed greatly between occupations. In a society where jobs were scarce, most firms small, and most labour unskilled and hence highly interchangeable there was always a great deal of competition for employment. It was rare, however, for the labour market to operate in any 'pure' sense. A high degree of mobility of labour within Marseilles was facilitated by an efficient tram network but networks of family, friends and ethnic groups were often more important in matching workers to jobs. In all but the most casual occupations the recommendation of a friend or political or other patron was crucial in obtaining a job. Even in supposedly casual employment the hiring of workers was not always carried out in a purely market-oriented way. In the building industry, for example, Algerian day labourers could be hired at cheaper rates than French or Italian ones, but employers were not always ready to antagonise public opinion, the administration, local politicians and possibly trade unions by behaving in such a strictly economically rational manner. On the fringes of the 'casual' occupations there was room for strictly casual hiring of workers, but there was usually a core of workers who were hired on the basis of custom rather than for their ability to outwork and undercut all possible comers.

The docks provided one such example of a seemingly casual but in fact highly structured labour market. Père Loew in his study of immigrant dockers in 1942 gave a classic picture of the insecurity of their lives. He explained why so many immigrants tended to concentrate in the area immediately around the port pointing out that:

'pour ces habitants à l'embauche incertaine,...on pourra ainsi faire la navette de chez soi au port autant de fois que l'embauche le réclamera; s'il y a des heures supplémentaires ou de travail de nuit, on est sur place. On remédie ainsi à l'instabilité du travail. Etant tous groupés, on remédie aussi à l'insécurité; les nouvelles se propagent vite d'un voisin à l'autre, dès qu'un bateau accoste on le saura et si un contremaître a subitement besoin d'hommes, il ira faire un tour dans ces quartiers on y expédiera un docker pour y "faire des hommes".'<sup>1</sup>

Loew described the situation of the marginal dockers 'à l'embauche incertaine' who were always hoping to pick up some extra work, but who could be distinguished from the 'dockers' sent to hire them. Most dockers were not, however, hired in this wholly individual and irregular manner. Dock work was carried out not by individuals but by teams of dockers, and, insofar as many of these teams had a degree of stability, they were hired as a group on a daily basis. This was in the interests of dockers and employers alike, providing increased security of employment for the first, and the greater production resulting from experience, sought by the second. It was only if a team of dockers was incomplete, or if there was a sudden demand for extra dockers that foremen would seek out other workers in the manner described by Loew. Experienced dockers could usually afford to remain in a bar or café during the hiring period in the knowledge that if there was work to be had a member of their team would secure it for them, and that if not they could wait until the next hiring session later in the day. This category of regular dockers had a degree of control over hiring practices

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<sup>1</sup> Loew, op.cit. p45.

in the port. The constitution of teams of dockers meant that each team had its leader, and that access to membership of the team was often the way in which new workers secured employment in the port. Later attempts at trade union control of hiring in the port often had to overcome the resistance of the individual teams as well as that of the employers.<sup>1</sup>

Networks of friendship, politics and race, were often important in ensuring entry to and in regulating the supposedly casual and unskilled occupation. These networks were also of importance in gaining entry to more skilled occupations. Ship repairing, although more skilled than dockwork, was equally subject to sudden variations in the amount of activity, with the result that workers were employed by the day rather than on a longer term basis. As in the docks, however, ship repairers tended to work in teams, and even as they moved between employers, these teams retained their own homogeneity based on the existence of networks already mentioned, compounded in turn by the addition of specialist skills too.<sup>2</sup> Recommendations from friends

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1 Roger Cornu et al. Analyse contextuelle de la mobilité. I er partie Les industries portuaires à Marseille, CNRS laboratoire d'économie et de sociologie du travail, Aix en Provence, n.d. Chaps: VI, VII & IX.

2 Cornu, et.al.op.cit. describes the situation among ship repairers as follows, p214. 'Comme le genre de travail supposait en règle générale l'intervention d'équipes, il y avait intérêt de la part de l'employeur a avoir affaire à des groupements préconstitués, rodés au travail en commun; inversement, pour les ouvriers, l'efficacité d'un jeu de relations personnelles pour s'assurer des avantages spécifiques, tenait à nouveau au degré de cohésion de l'équipe ou de petit groupe dont il faisait partie. Ainsi, s'explique facilement l'importance des relations de parenté, de voisinage, d'origine géographique (Immigration espagnole, semble-t-il, en particulier) dans la constitution, au sein de la main-d'oeuvre de bord de la réparation navale, de groupes puissants aujourd'hui encore appelés les tribus. L'inégalité dans la répartition du travail n'est qu'une des conséquences de l'action de ces groupements informels, une autre conséquence-complémentaire fut de diverser la main-d'oeuvre potentielle suivant les entreprises: si, en effet, le système d'embauche journalière tendait à créer une conscience d'appartenance à un secteur, les facteurs liés aux relations personnelles qui contrecarraient en fait le fonctionnement de ce système favorisant la création de corps d'ouvriers permanents de telle ou telle entreprise'.

or priests could also be important in gaining access to the more stable sectors of the engineering industry.<sup>1</sup>

Stability and security of employment were highly sought after in interwar Marseilles and most often found in the public sector. In theory, access to municipal employment should have been controlled by competition and limited resources but this was rarely the case in Marseilles. More frequently networks of friendship and of political patronage were what ensured a worker's ability to enter municipal employment. The importance of Corsicans in municipal employment has already been mentioned (pp 21-35), but this merely provides one illustration of the way in which employment in this much sought after sector was allocated. Political connections, too, were of relevance in ensuring access to municipal employment, and it was suggested in the official report into Marseilles in 1939 that the holding of the correct opinions was often a more useful passport to enter the mairie than was the holding of a criminal record an obstacle.<sup>2</sup> For other workers, if political or clan networks were not available then their progress towards a fairly menial type of municipal employment would dominate their early working life.<sup>3</sup>

This brief survey of hiring practices has concentrated only on the extremes in occupations, contrasting the supposedly highly casual dock labour market with that of the purportedly competitive, meritocratic, and secure one of municipal employment.

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1 As in the case of Papazian referred to in Chapter 8.

2 See report in Journal Officiel 21.3.1939.

3 As was the case with Marius Eychenne. Information from interview with Eychenne, Marseilles 29.9.1980.

What emerges is that in neither sector does the traditional image fit the case of Marseilles. Dock labour was less casual than appeared and municipal hiring policies were more influenced by networks of friendship, politics or ethnicity than might have been imagined. These two types of occupation represented extremes in many respects but they are useful to illustrate a general point; that in Marseilles in the 1930's, the difficulties connected with the search for employment were usually resolved by non-market oriented structures. These structures took the form of different types of community linkage - based on friendship, politics or ethnicity or clan - which influenced the operation of the labour market. Increased political activity could be expected to supplement the more traditional types of factors influencing hiring, and to replace or ameliorate the influence of the market on hiring policies with that of connection and/or collective action.

#### iv. Security of Employment

There were few sectors in the 1930's in Marseilles where employment was wholly secure. Whilst dockers and other workers may have been able to influence to some extent their probability of being hired they could not guarantee that they would be retained in work when there was none. Similarly, without very strong trade union and legal protection workers who refused to accept the authority of employers and foremen, or who engaged in unwelcome political activity, were very likely to be sacked.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Interview with Adrien Mouton, Arles, 18.9.1980 provides information about one such individual obliged to constantly change jobs, either because the PCF changed its mind about which sectors he was required to work in or because of sacking for political reasons.

TABLE 2.15

## Unemployment in the Bouches-du-Rhône

Date	Registered Unemployed	Assisted Unemployed
1931	4203	
1932	14218	
1933	18186	9347 (April)
1934	20784	13123 "
1935	24583	17262 "
1936 March	22765	
" June	21239	
" September	19628	
" December	20433	
1937 March	22703	
" June	19828	
" September	17800	
" December	18475	16908
1938 January 7		17232
" " 13		17647
" " 20		18365
" " 28		18515
" February 3		18949
" March	21003	
" June	19094	
" September	16700	
" December 30		17276
1939 January 7		17932
" " 13		18680
" " 20		19527
" " 28		19342
" February 3		19954
" May 1 - 6	23314	20559

Notes: Registered unemployed = registered unemployed in département at the Office départementale de la main d'oeuvre

Assisted unemployed = unemployed helped by various caisses de chômage

Sources: Column 1: 1931-1935 figures are annual averages from M. Carencu, 'Les problèmes de l'emploi dans les Bouches-du-Rhône entre 1919 et 1939'; (Mémoire de maîtrise en histoire, Université de Provence), 1976, p89.

Figures of registered unemployed for 1936, 1937 and 1938 from the Bulletin du Ministère du travail volumes for 1936, 1937 and 1938.

Figure for May 1939 from Journal Officiel Mai 1939, p6081 & pp6033-4.

Figures of assisted unemployed 1933-1935 from Archives Nationales F 60/630 Note of Ministère du travail to Président du Conseil dated 22.6.1935.

Figures of assisted unemployed from December 1937 to February 1939 from Le Midi Syndicaliste 20.2.1939.

TABLE 2.16

Registered Unemployed Among Certain Trades in the Département  
of the Bouches-du-Rhône, March 1936 - September 1938

Industry or Occupation

Date	Building	Day Labourers	Engineering	Textiles	Total
1936 March	4043	6083	1949	118	22765
" June	2684	6648	1946	85	21239
" September	3184	5906	1570	85	19628
" December	3353	5771	1583	71	20433
1937 March	3725	7290	1673	85	22703
" June	3022	6516	1370	156	19828
" September	2653	6162	1255	39	17800
" December	3174	5137	1279	71	18475
1938 March	3774	6253	1506	262	21003
" June	3422	5717	1244	227	19094
" September	2904	4969	1115	113	16700

Source: Bulletin du Ministère du Travail 1936, 1937 and 1938

This vulnerability to economic trends and to the whims of employers was something from which municipal employees were relatively immune. Even they, however, insofar as they had been appointed for political reasons risked dismissal after elections in which their political patrons were

TABLE 2.17

## Index of Assisted Unemployed in Bouches-du-Rhône - January 1936 - December 1939

Date	Index (January 1936 = 100)
1936	
January	100
February	111
March	102
April	102
May	97
June	94
July	102
August	95
September	92
October	97
November	90
December	95
1937	
January	105
February	102
March	103
April	107
May	100
June	99
July	93
August	89
September	90
October	98
November	88
December	89
1938	
January	102
February	97
March	92
April	96
May	93
June	82
July	101
August	77
September	60
October	80
November	80
December	84
1939	
January	94
February	90
March	90
April	90
May	93
June	81
July	77
August	80
September	77
October	72
November	70
December	68

Source: M. Carencó, op.cit. p140.

defeated or exposed as being corrupt.<sup>1</sup> The public sector of employment generally offered greater immunity from economic disaster but political rectitude was still expected from workers and employees. The memory of the railway workers sacked in Marseilles after the failure of the strike in 1920 remained with the strikers of 1936.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, public servants who failed to go to work on 30 November 1938 were liable to dismissal for their strike action.<sup>3</sup> Workers were caught in a dilemma for much of the period: employment was difficult to obtain and insecure once it had been obtained, yet attempts through trade union organisation to improve the security of workers' employment, would, at least before June 1936, render those responsible liable to dismissal. After June 1936 legal provisions were greater and increased union strength could be called upon, but union and political activists could still be made the first victims of many redundancies caused either by a downturn in the market or by less labour intensive work processes.

Industries varied in the extent to which their activity fluctuated. The most volatile industries in this respect were

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- 1 According to Marseille-Libre (admittedly not an impartial source) 9.1.1938, Henri Tasso sacked 1500 journaliers on entering the Mairie in 1935. Sabiani claimed in July 1937 that Tasso had sacked 1,000 journaliers and hired another 1,479 on entering office in 1935. Bulletin Municipal Officiel de Marseille, 23.7.1937. Similarly later on in August 1939, many local authority workers were sacked as a result of the official investigation into the workings of the municipality.
  - 2 Railway strikers in 1936 included among their demands the call for the rehiring of the sacked strikers from 1920.
  - 3 See Chapter 9 concerning the strike of 30 November 1938.

those which were dependent upon good weather. Even in these industries, however, there was a certain predictability to their fluctuations in activity; building and ship repairing for example employed least workers during the winter. (See Table 2.16 for seasonal variations in unemployment among building workers). The security of employment for workers in other industries was more affected by the changes in the prosperity of the particular enterprise or of the industry as a whole. Elasticity of demand, and hence of employment, varied between industries. In less prosperous times, or at moments when public authorities were engaged in fewer public works programmes building employment would decline. Ship repairing could, however, actually increase in such periods, as shipping companies commissioned fewer new ships, preferring to use older ships which in turn needed to be repaired more frequently. There were, therefore, considerable variations in levels of unemployment between industries. Unemployment was certainly underrecorded in France in the 1930's, but such figures as there are suggest a rate of 8 per cent unemployment among the active industrial population of the Bouches-du-Rhône in 1936. (Census figures see Table 2.11). This proportion was an overall one for all industries, building and woodworking industries had the highest unemployment rate - at 11 per cent - whilst the chemical industry with only 1 per cent unemployment had the lowest score.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Calculations from Table 2.11. Sans emploi as a % of total active population. Category 4A (industries mal désignés) is registered as having a 94 per cent rate of unemployment, but it seems fair to assume that this figure means little and that there was simply less precision in determining the occupations of unemployed industrial workers than with employed ones, with the result that many unemployed industrial workers were simply allocated to this category.

## v. The Conditions of Work

Conditions of hiring, remuneration and degrees of job security varied between occupations. The actual conditions of work varied in equally obvious, and even more important, ways. If workers defined themselves and their collective identity at least in part in response to the work they were engaged in then it is clearly important to have some understanding of the differences between the conditions of work in the major local industries. Rather than describing conditions industry by industry consideration is given here to different aspects of the work experience categorised as follows: skilled and unskilled work; dirty and unpleasant versus relatively clean work; dangerous as against safe work; and relatively autonomous as against highly regulated occupations.

### (i) Skilled and Unskilled Work

The hierarchies of pay and of job security often corresponded with those of skill, and ethnicity. Immigrants were consigned to the least skilled, least secure and most unpleasant occupations, but even then, there was only a limited number of skilled occupations available for the remaining Marseilles-born workers. There was an assumption current in Marseilles in the interwar period that the most skilled occupations were to be found in the small-scale artisanal industries, such as small engineering and repair workshops, or in the cutting room of the more prestigious local tailors' shops. Alain Chenu reports how:

'Lors de nos enquêtes auprès des ouvriers marseillais, certains d'entre eux ouvriers hautement qualifiés de souche marseillaise, nous ont déclaré qu'il était de tradition qu'à la sortie de l'école, les meilleurs élèves aient la possibilité de choisir un petit patron, alors que les mauvais partaient dans les grandes entreprises.'<sup>1</sup>

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1 D. Bleitrach & A. Chenu op.cit. p144. Chenu thèse op.cit.p48.

Small artisans and small-scale employers were themselves often skilled workers in origin, having worked for a few years at one of the larger local engineering firms as a lathe-worker or die cutter, before saving up enough money to buy a small workshop attached perhaps to a flat or even a house.

Access to skilled employment was limited by the fact that there was inadequate training provision. Training often depended on obtaining an apprenticeship with a small artisan, but such things were difficult to find, and the number of skilled workers thus produced not always adequate or suited to the needs of the larger local engineering firms. Training schemes could not keep pace with demand, and really took off only in 1939 when it was reported that, faced with a dire shortage of skilled engineering and ship repair workers, the local Chamber of Commerce had established a training school for 1,000 engineering apprentices.<sup>1</sup> On a more general level, this lack of training provision meant that the legislation on the forty hour week was to have little impact on the problem of unemployment since many of the new jobs made available required skills which the unemployed did not possess.<sup>2</sup>

If skills could be taught in some industries and acquired in others, there were yet other industries in Marseilles where only a minimum of skill was required. The day labourers from the building industry were an obvious example, but workers in the local chemical and food industries were not always very different. In some industries brute

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1 AN F 14/15476 Report of 26.1.1939 by M. Gourret, chief engineer, Port of Marseilles.

2 Concerning the vexed question of the effects of the forty hour week legislation see A. Sauvy Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres, II, 1931-1939, Paris, 1967, pp294-307. J-C Asselin 'La semaine de quarante heures, le chômage et l'emploi', Le Mouvement social, 54, 1966, pp183-204.

force, in others the ability to withstand unpleasant, boring or arduous tasks was the only demand made upon the worker.

Rationalisation as it was understood in the 1930's tended to mean an increase in the speed at which these unskilled workers were expected to operate. Le système Bedeau as introduced in Marseilles tended to mean a traditional piecework system combined with a rigorous timing of the actions involved in each task. Discipline in the factory increased dramatically for these unskilled workers in the 1930's. As profits came under threat most local industrialists sought to find their way out of the crisis by this adaptation of half-baked and largely misunderstood notions of rational or taylorist production. Lacking the means or the willingness to undertake the necessary capital investment in new plant, many local industrialists contented themselves simply with employing more supervisors and speeding up the work process in their factories. Such attempts were resented by the workforce and provided grist to the mills of trade union and political activists.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Rouge-Midi for 1934-5 concentrated on the question of industrial rationalisation locally. For one of many articles devoted to the subject see issue 56, 10.3.1934. Local industry was not only faced with a lack of capital it was also unwilling to amalgamate, with the consequent loss of family control which would result. According to Pierrein in Baratier op.cit. p377 there were about 40 oil refining and pressing plants in 1913 and still 30 by 1938, with the result that: 'pas de concentration, pas d'intégration véritable: pas de force globale'. For many locally based industrialists there was a strong attachment to small size firms. L. Pierrein quotes J.B. Rocca as follows: 'c'est l'affaire moyenne, gérée par un patron responsable, qui contient les meilleurs éléments psychologiques et matériels de prospérité, de stabilité et d'équilibre social', op.cit. 1975 p58. Declining demand did however produce some changes. For a consideration of the effects of rationalisation of industry at the national level, and of responses to it see the following works: B. Doray, Le taylorisme, une folie rationnelle? Paris 1981; Y. Lequin, 'La rationalisation du capitalisme français. A-t-elle eu lieu dans les années vingt?' Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez, 31 (1979) pp115-136; O. Hardy-Hémery, 'Rationalisation aux Mines d'Anzin (1927-1938)' Le Mouvement social, 72 pp3-48.

(ii) Dirty and Dangerous Work

Much of the work carried out in Marseilles in the 1930's was not only badly paid and insecure but was also either dirty, dangerous or both. The local oil pressing industry was renowned for the unpleasant nature of the work, with the pungent fumes from the refining process polluting the atmosphere of the whole area around the factories and rendering conditions within the factory dirty and dangerous. Indeed the work was so unpleasant that it was only possible to get workers unable to find alternative employment to work either in the oil, soap or chemical industries. Accidents were common in all these sectors. One such accident at the oil factory of Rocca, Tassy & de Roux in October 1938 resulted in ten deaths and more than forty injured.<sup>1</sup> Another such accident at a local dynamite plant near the Etang de Berre resulted in more than two hundred injured and fifty three deaths.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, few workers could have been happy to work in dirty or dangerous occupations, but there were few alternatives open to them. Most of the local industries required tasks to be performed which, in their nature, were neither pleasant nor particularly safe. Given this situation many workers sought to use the insalubrity of their work, and sometimes its danger too, as a negotiating and organising weapon.

Workers' ability to react to their working conditions depended on many factors; legal provisions, the state of the labour market, demand for the product and the strength of the trade union movement. In many

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1 La Vie Ouvrière, 13.10.1938.

2 Rouge-Midi, 228, 20.11.1936.

industries workers were obliged to accept unpleasant, dirty and unsafe work on the terms at which it was proposed to them by employers. Elsewhere, however, the situation was a rather more fluid one, and the occupations of docker and ship repairer and builder offer the most obvious examples of such cases. These occupations were difficult, unpleasant and often dangerous. Ships' cargoes were often dirty or explosive, giving off dangerous fumes which could overcome careless or unsuspecting dockers. The loads that were carried by dockers were heavy,<sup>1</sup> and cranes were frequently overloaded to the point of collapse. Such injuries as were contracted during work were rarely covered by any insurance policy, and the resultant loss of earnings was the responsibility of the workers alone. Similarly, in the ship manufacturing and repairing industry considerable dangers were associated with the work; workers were expected to climb to great heights - often without the aid of ladders - and to carry out complicated work when they reached the required part of the ship. It was not uncommon in such situations for other workers to be killed or injured by a wrench carelessly dropped or a welding torch accidentally misdirected. It was of such commonplace incidents that the almost daily toll of accidents or deaths were made up. Furthermore, ship repairers, too, faced all the dangers of gassing and explosion associated with ships which had been incompletely unloaded and unballasted.<sup>2</sup>

Faced with the prevalence of these wide ranging dangers to the workforce many commentators have asked why workers put up with such conditions? The answer lies in part in the degree of autonomy and control over the work process that unorthodox and dangerous working procedures made possible.

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1 According to one international report Marseilles dockers carried some of the heaviest loads in Europe.

2 Cornu et al op.cit. pp205-6 give a full description of the dangers associated with the ship repairing industry.

(iii) Autonomy and the Regulation of Work

This brief survey of occupational structure and occupational variations in Marseilles has revealed the coexistence of the formal structures of the market with the informal ones of custom, clan, political influence and organisation. The occupations of docker and ship repairer were the most obvious examples of the second category of work.

As Chenu writes, the port was among the major factors in explaining:

'la formation spécifique de la classe ouvrière à Marseille, (il) est aussi le lieu où se développent cette 'liberté' et cette instabilité du migrant. Le travail sur les docks permet d'être payé à la journée, donc faire face à un entretien quotidien de la force de travail pour celui qui arrive sans le sou.'

In addition:

'Le port...offre "L'aventure", c'est à dire non seulement celle,...du jeune homme qui "rêve des îles", mais celle des gains exceptionnels: les heures supplémentaires pour le docker, les petits trafics pour le navigateur, d'autres trafics encore comme la prostitution, le banditisme.'

It was through exploiting the dangers and irregularity of their work that dockers, seamen and ship repairers were able to assert their relative autonomy in the work process at the same time as they contrived to increase their remuneration. There seems to have been an almost limitless scope for different rates of pay for the one job of docker. If a cargo was deemed to be particularly dusty or dirty dockers received additional payment. Similarly, perishable cargoes might need to be unloaded quickly and working during unsocial hours, at mealtimes, or outside of the normal working day, brought an additional payment. It was through these additional payments that many dockers managed to obtain a sizeable salary for themselves. Similarly, ship repairers were encouraged to carry out work rapidly and at unsocial hours, and in unorthodox ways. All these demands from employers could be negotiated and arranged. If a mast needed repairing and there was no ladder available which was tall enough, a worker would be found to climb the mast and carry out the work if the rate offered

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1 Chenu, thèse, op.cit. pp42-43.

for the job was sufficient. This constant bargaining, either on an individual level or on that of a small group, represented a way in which workers could both assert their relative autonomy against that of employers, and improve their earnings and self-respect, at a time when it would have proved difficult to establish trade unions. When trade unions were established they tended to build on the basis of these old bargaining practices at the same time as they hoped to establish a different kind of collective identity from that already possessed by the dockers and other port workers.

The relative autonomy which dockers obtained for themselves was based precisely upon the informality and lack of regulation existing in the port. The creation of trade unions would, however, call the old system into question, as unions required the creation of more formal structures of industrial relations around which could be created the loyalties of class rather than simply those of friendship and clan. The conflict between these different approaches to work organisation was not always an easy one. Bleitrach and Chenu following on from the work of Roger Cornu and his team of researchers have described these conflicts between individual or small group, and collective solutions to regulating the terms and conditions of work. On the subject of the problem of safety Bleitrach and Chenu write of how they have:

'pris de l'extension dans un processus contradictoire. Un peu comme dans le vieux code de l'honneur méditerranéen selon lequel un homme véritable règle ses affaires sans s'adresser à la police, l'ouvrier négociait avec la maîtrise ses conditions de sécurité ou d'insécurité au coup par coup, monnayant éventuellement les risques encourus et acceptés. La lutte syndicale pour la création d'une véritable police de la sécurité n'a donc pas seulement rencontré une opposition du côté des directions des firmes, elle n'a été possible qu'au travers d'une longue confrontation entre un noyau de militants syndicaux ayant une vue d'ensemble de l'intérêt des salariées

et des ouvriers plus sensibles aux avantages immédiats que pouvait présenter pour eux une certaine liberté dans la détermination où l'application des règles de sécurité.<sup>1</sup>

Writing of the casual nature of employment among ship repairing and dock workers the same authors explain how:

'on observe parfois une évocation nostalgique des formes de marchandage (dans le marchandage, acheteur et vendeur de la force de travail se présentent comme deux individus libres et égaux) et de l'apparente auto-organisation de l'emploi du temps qu'autorisait la pratique du fini-parti et des heures supplémentaires. Les responsables syndicaux interviewés soulignent l'opposition un moment majoritaire dans certaines entreprises qu'a rencontrée la réforme de la mensualisation du salaire ouvrier: "On va être attachés au patron comme ceux des bureaux", protestaient les ouvriers.'<sup>2</sup>

The fact that dockers and other port workers did not feel themselves the slaves of their employers made the task of organising them rather more difficult.<sup>3</sup> In other sectors, however, the relative autonomy enjoyed by dockers was envied even if their lack of security

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1 D. Bleitrach & A. Chenu, op.cit.p150.

2 D. Bleitrach & A. Chenu, loc.cit.p154

3 This subject will be dealt with in more detail in a later section. The following comments by Bleitrach and Chenu loc.cit. p148 are, however, worth bearing in mind at this stage. The two authors write of how: 'Les syndicats ouvriers, centrés sur les négociations par corporation, ont longtemps été parties prenante dans un système de marchandage qui offrait aux ouvriers des possibilités de gains réels et souvent de temps libre en fin de journée. Pendant longtemps, comme le docker et le navigateur, l'ouvrier de la réparation navale vit à côté du port et comme eux il connaît ces alternances de travail intense dans des conditions difficiles et souvent dangereuses et de disponibilité qu'il occupe en allant au café, en jouant aux cartes ou aux boules si le temps le permet. L'autonomie professionnelle mais aussi cette 'liberté' dans l'organisation du temps, le caractère périlleux des travaux, combinés avec une culture latine..., interviennent incontestablement dans la création d'un milieu portuaire (caractérisé par l'attente "à la cour" ou au café, par le travail en équipe, par le rôle de la force et du courage physique comme dimension de la qualification) qui marque de son empreinte toute la classe ouvrière marseillaise.'

was not. In most factories work was perhaps more stable than in the port but it carried less remuneration and was increasingly closely supervised and controlled. The fights against piecework and the speedup in local factories were not only about the pressure to produce more, they also represented a resistance towards increasing regulation, reduced autonomy, and diminished self respect within the work process. The emphasis which would be found in the demands of the June 1936 strikers for greater dignity and humanity in the work process related back to these points.

### 3 Conclusion

This study of the Marseilles working class permits a better answer than would otherwise have been possible to the questions posed in the introduction to the section: Was there one or several working classes in Marseilles in the 1930's? What were the problems which political and union activists were likely to be faced with? It is clear that there were a multitude of working-class communities in Marseilles in the 1930's, and that these communities were based on the ties of locality, ethnicity, skill and occupation. The fact that the industrial working-class population was such a minority must also have posed a problem to political and union activists of the period and the extent of the divisions within this industrial working-class can only have compounded these problems. The experience of these groups of workers varied enormously. Some enjoyed relatively high wages, job security and the privilege of working in occupations which were neither unpleasant or dangerous. Others enjoyed none of these advantages, working in declining and low wage industries where labour discipline was harsh, the work dangerous and dirty. Still other workers were

employed in sectors where a virtue could be made of a necessity and unpleasant working conditions used as the basis for negotiating improved pay and greater flexibility of working arrangements. Workers, therefore, were divided in terms of what they did, the degree of concentration of their industries and in terms of the quartier in which they lived. To define this very variegated and diverse series of working-class groups as constituting a single working class would be an overstatement. Nevertheless, it would be equally fallacious to see the local labouring population as simply an agglomeration of isolated individuals. A more appropriate picture is one of contrasting and changing working-class communities. Divisions of class existed but were often blurred by the alternative attractions of community ties. Some features cut across these different community ties: the desire for a degree of collective autonomy, for instance, as individual advancement and security was achieved through the support of and dependence on the community group. Attempts at political organisation on a class basis conflicted with some aspects of these different community cultures at the same time as they could capitalise on others. Traditions of collective action, however, albeit within a restricted definition of community, could be of relevance to political organisation. As existing community ties were loosened through the economic changes occurring in the local economy the possibility was opened up for political organisations to replace the old community ties by those of class, and those of personality by those of politics. The organisations through which such attempts were made are the subject of the following chapters.

## SECTION 2: THE ORGANISATIONS OF THE MARSEILLES WORKING CLASS

'Nous nous trouvons devant le fait d'une société vivante, d'un organisme très complexe (délégués du personnel, sections syndicales, comités d'entreprise, cellules communistes d'entreprises et de quartiers, syndicats de locataires, comités d'intérêts de quartiers ouvriers, organisations de Femmes de France, U.J.R.F., et, j'ajoute, mouvement populaire des familles). L'évangélisation du milieu ouvrier est l'évangélisation d'une société structurée, qu'il faut voir sous son aspect dynamique, vivant. Ce serait courir à l'échec que traiter une telle société comme un simple amalgame d'individualités.'

Jacques Loew, Journal d'une mission ouvrière, 1941-1959, Paris, 1959, p.88.

'Chaque ville (...) possède sa Bourse du Travail, chaque bourgade sa Maison du Peuple, chaque rue sa coopérative, chaque corps de métier son syndicat. L'esprit de groupement est chez nous une vieille tradition. L'homme isolé n'existe pas. On appartient à une chorale, une harmonie, une société de tireurs à l'arc ou à l'arbalète, de coulonneux, de coqueleux...Ce sens de collectif, élevé à un niveau supérieur, a permis aux ouvriers de créer des syndicats puissants. ...L'association n'est pas seulement une arme pour la défense des salariés. Grâce à elle, on voyage, on visite des villes, des monuments anciens, des cathédrales, des musées...Ainsi, moi, gamin, je m'étais inscrit à la fanfare locale où je soufflais dans un piston. Un beau jour, nous sommes allés jouer dans un port...Pour la première fois, j'ai vu la mer.'

Maurice Thorez, cited by Annie Kriegel in Communismes au miroir française, Paris 1974, p135.

The views of Jacques Loew, the worker priest from the Cabucelle area of Marseilles, and those of Maurice Thorez, the P.C.F. leader, cited above, serve as a useful corrective to the tentative conclusions of Section One of this thesis. Having described the divisions of race, ethnicity, geography and occupation within the Marseilles working-class it is worth changing the perspective to look at the way in which the less immutable divisions of opinion and sociability either cut across, or coincided with, those of circumstance. The Marseilles working-class, in

common with that of other towns, was structured by its own organisations and associations as well as by the impersonal forces already described. In many respects the rich tissue of organisations which will be described in this section proved to be more important and more powerful as political agency than the features of origin and circumstance discussed in Chapters One and Two. The ways in which workers chose to group together in various organisations were crucial in determining their ability to act in a unified manner. In a society with a highly divided and minority working-class, such organisations could provide the basis for class unity, or they could yet further undermine it.

The aim in this section of the thesis is to look both at the ways in which the Marseilles working-class was organised, and at the ways in which various organisations sought to influence it. 'Organisations' covers a wide variety of bodies, and even though the focus of this thesis is political, the view here will not be limited to the activities of the purely political organisations. Many groupings of very diverse kinds were important in both influencing the Marseilles working-class and in defining its identity. The description of working-class organisations to be given in this section will provide the background necessary to an understanding of the strikes and political movements to be dealt with in Section Three.

CHAPTER THREE: THE VARIETY, GROWTH AND REPRESENTATIVENESS OF  
WORKING-CLASS ORGANISATIONS IN MARSEILLES

'Marseille, surtout, est prodigieusement vivante. Lutttes électorales...Développement multiforme de cercles, de sociétés de secours mutuels, de comités de quartiers, d'oeuvres laïques, d'oeuvres pieuses, qui sous-tendent d'un tissu serré de sociabilité coutumière les lutttes politiques, syndicales ou religieuses.'

M. Agulhon, in E. Baratier (ed.)  
Histoire de la Provence, Toulouse,  
1969, p158.

Maurice Agulhon's writings on 'la sociabilité méridionale' provide a useful insight into the Marseilles working-class.<sup>1</sup> In other circumstances it may be possible to view the organisational structures such as parties, trade unions, and various associations, as having been grafted onto the working class from outside. In the case of Marseilles, however, with its highly divided working-class, a case could rather be made for seeing the existence and identity of the class as resting solidly upon its vast network of different organisations. Working-class organisations could not hope to eradicate the divides of ethnicity, occupation or race, but they could capitalise on and transcend these divisions by creating a working-class culture. It was precisely through organisation and activity that this culture was expressed. Not innate, but created, the moulding together of a local working-class culture both depended on the activities of organisations and opened up new possibilities for action.

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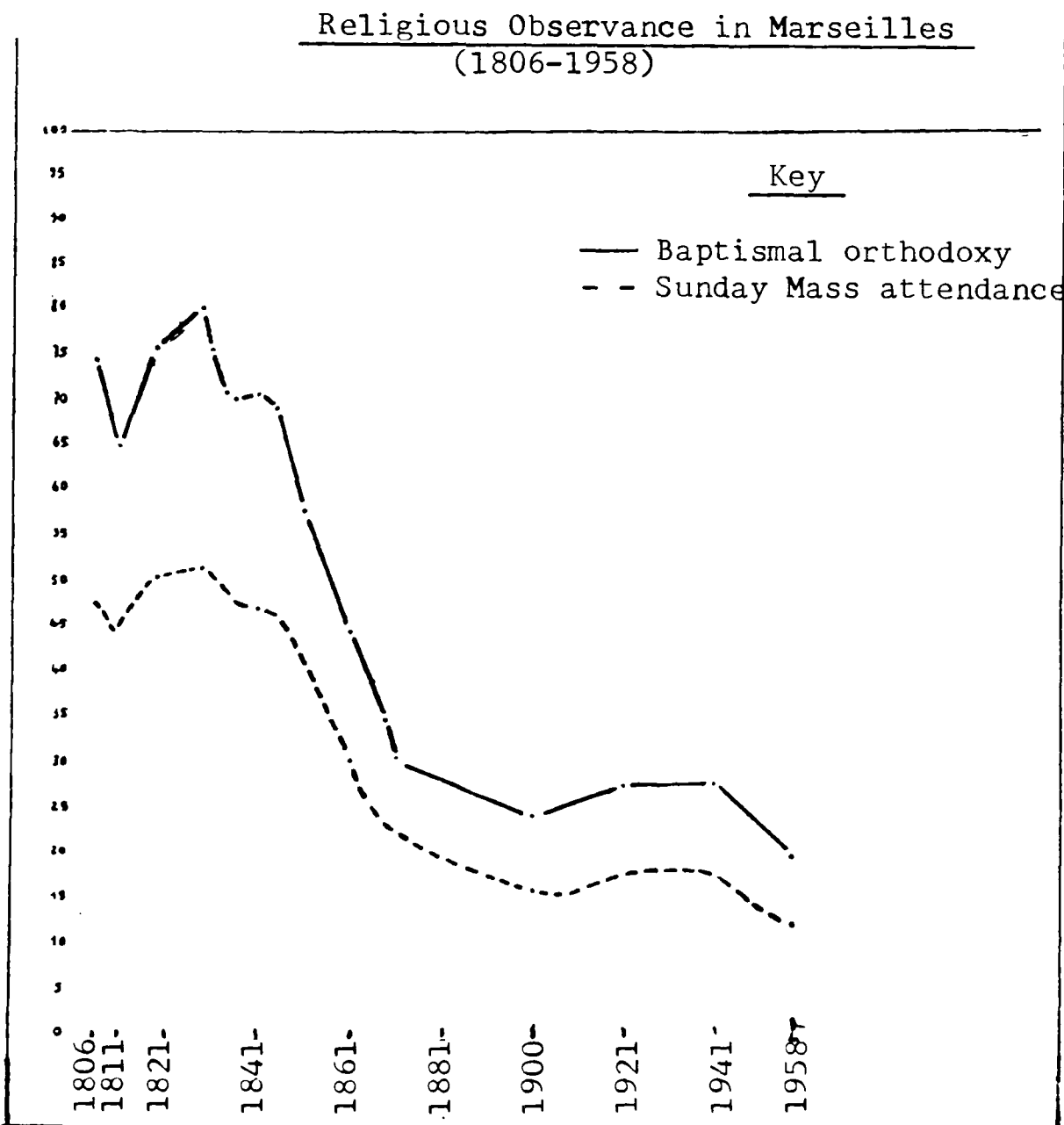
1 Maurice Agulhon's major works in this context are:  
La République au village, Paris 1970.  
La sociabilité méridionale, Aix-en-Provence, 1966.  
La vie sociale en Provence intérieure au lendemain de la Révolution, Paris 1970.  
Le cercle dans la France bourgeoise 1810-1848, Paris 1977.

1 The Church and the Working-Class

The Church did not play the part in working-class life which might have been expected of it. It seems that the widespread immigration from other Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, and from the rural hinterland, undermined rather than reinforced the pattern of religious practice in the town.<sup>1</sup> The decline in religious observance, as measured by the proportion of baptisms taking place within one month of birth, was most dramatic during the second half of the nineteenth century, precisely the moment of greatest immigration into Marseilles.<sup>2</sup>

1 Fernand Charpin, Pratique religieuse et formation d'une grande ville: Le geste du baptême et sa signification en sociologie religieuse (Marseille, 1806-1958), Paris 1964, p308-9.

2 CF the following graph reproduced from Charpin op.cit. p163.



The decline in the proportion of Catholic baptisms of children under one year old in the twentieth century was in part the result of an increase in the importance of other religions and to a lesser degree because of an increasing number of children brought up outside any religion at all. Above all, however, it was due to a continuance in the trend for Catholics to become less observant of the precepts of their faith. The decline in the proportion of Catholic baptisms for children under one year old was paralleled very closely in the twentieth century rise in the proportion of Catholic children baptised between the ages of 1 and 13. Such an increase is significant more of social than religious attachment in a faith which calls upon its adherents to baptise their children before they reach the age of one month, let alone 13 years.<sup>1</sup> As Loew, the first worker priest was to discover, baptisms rarely took place for reasons of religious conviction:

'Une famille vient "commander" un baptême: ni les parents, ni les parrains et marraines ne croient au péché originel, au Sauveur. Quant à l'Eglise et aux curés, mieux vaut n'en point parler. Mais tous veulent que le petit soit baptisé; sans cela, il lui "manquerait quelque chose", "ça risquerait de porter malheur", "et puis, on a toujours fait comme ça dans la famille" .....Ainsi, nos visites avant les baptêmes sont souvent excellentes en tant que contact et pénétration dans une famille; des amitiés précieuses peuvent se nouer, mais rien de chrétien n'arrive à être découvert ou éveillé par nous'.<sup>2</sup>

It was the difference between nominal religious affiliation and active religious belief which explains the divergence of views given by the two most recent and thorough observers of the religious practice of the Marseilles population. Charpin, in his study of baptisms in Marseille since the beginning of the nineteenth century,

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1 See Charpin op.cit. p93.

2 J. Loew, Journal d'une mission ouvrière, 1941-1959, Paris, 1959, pp44 and 47.

concluded that Marseilles in the early 1960's still had a 'Caractère majoritaire du catholicisme' whilst Loew reported on the 'Incroyance quasi-totale des masses marseillaises actuelles' in 1949.<sup>1</sup> These seemingly contradictory pictures of the local population were explained by the fact that although most people chose to baptise their children, few bothered to go to church, and, according to Loew, of those who did go, even fewer actually believed in the Catholic faith.<sup>2</sup> Loew wistfully reported that:

'Pour tant de soi-disant croyants, la religion est, en effet, un "code de morale à l'usage des enfants". Cela convient d'exploiter leur crédulité dans un but louable d'éducation, mais on ne peut pas croire au "Père Noël" toute sa vie.'<sup>3</sup>

Such an instrumental and essentially unbelieving view of Catholicism meant that in reality few people really accepted its notions or were prepared to observe its precepts. Marseilles was noteworthy for its low level of church attendance and the nonchalance of its inhabitants towards baptising their children within the prescribed time limits.<sup>4</sup> One survey of religious practice which appeared in 1965 cited Marseilles at the bottom of the list of towns

1 Charpin op.cit. p311 and Loew op.cit. p135.

2 Loew op.cit. p145 cites one area of Marseilles where he estimated the percentage of believers to be 2.9 and that of practising Catholics to be 2 in 1949.

3 Loew op.cit. p144.

4 Charpin op.cit. p61 provides a table on the moment of baptism over time in Marseilles. Charpin categorises baptisms by respect for the 'normal' delays and he lists a delay of 1-31 days as fidélité, 1-2 months as tiédeur, 3-4 months as indifférence and 5 months to 13 years as froideur. The data read as follows in percentages:

DATE	1806	1819	1841	1861	1881	1901	1921	1941	1958
DELAY									
1-31 days	74.7	75	70.7	44.4	34.9	24	27.3	26.7	20.7
1-2 months	19.2	22	26	43.6	46.9	50.8	41.5	34.7	25.5
3-4 months	3.6	2	2.2	9.3	13	18.9	19.9	18.9	29.7
5 months to 13 years	2.5	1	1.1	2.7	5.2	6.3	11.3	19.7	24.1

classified according to the percentage of adults present at mass on a Sunday.<sup>1</sup> According to the survey of attendance at mass on 8 March 1953 in Marseilles only 12.3 per cent of the population was present. Attendance rates varied greatly however according to age, class and locality in Marseilles. The population under 25 and over 60 years of age was more likely to have been present at mass than were the intermediate, and most economically active, age groups. Variations by occupational class were even greater; 3 per cent of blue-collar workers were at mass compared with 8 per cent of white-collar workers and 23 per cent of professional and managerial workers. Different rates of religious observance by occupational class, however, could be nuanced somewhat by different types of residential area. As Lucien Gros has explained:

'la pratique religieuse varie surtout en fonction du milieu social et, dans le milieu ouvrier, du caractère "residential" ou "industriel" et donc "prolétarisé", du quartier d'habitation.'

Bourgeois areas stood in marked contrast to working class areas in terms of religious practice. The rates of religious practice in five bourgeois quartiers at between 20 and 29 per cent stood in marked contrast to the rates of 5.4 - 7.3 per cent observed in five solidly industrial and working-class quartiers. The evidence supplied by Gros, however, suggests that rates of working-class religious practice tended to rise in the more solidly residential areas and where there had been no recent social disruption caused by the development of new industries and the importation of a new population. Thus working-class areas with a long established residential population such as the Belle-de-Mai

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1 A. Coutrot & F. Dreyfus, Les forces religieuses dans la société française, Paris, 1965, p126.

or Saint Henri quartier tended to have a higher rate of observance than the more recently settled or thoroughly industrialised quartiers L'estaque or Arenc. It seems likely that it was easier for the Church to secure some kind of following in those working-class areas where the culture of the neighbourhood predominated over that of the factory. Catholic patronages were more likely to be located and have a degree of influence in the longer established residential areas than in the newer and more industrialised areas.<sup>1</sup> The general findings about the geographical distribution of religious practice in terms of attendance at mass are confirmed by Charpin's study of baptisms. Charpin's maps on Marseilles baptisms in the interwar period, in addition to confirming general impressions about the level of observance in different areas, also bear out some of Gros' points concerning the impact of rapid industrialisation and population change on religious practice. His data on baptisms in the northern suburbs of Marseilles, for example, precisely the area which was undergoing some of the most rapid economic and social change, show a dramatic drop in the proportion of children baptised within one month of their birth, from 57 per cent in 1921 to 29.5 per cent in 1937.<sup>2</sup>

1 L. Gros, La pratique religieuse dans le diocèse de Marseille, Paris, 1954, pp 42, 32 and chapter 4 passim. See also maps in appendix 1.

2 F. Charpin op.cit. p63 permits comparison of the proportion of baptisms taking place within one month of birth in one upper-class parish of Marseilles, St. Joseph, and in the predominantly working-class northern suburbs.

Percentage of baptisms taking place within one month of birth

Date	Saint Joseph	Northern Suburbs
1841	100	
1851		99.1
1881	94.6	94.5
1901	79.4	64
1921	69.2	57
1936	57.6	
1937		29.5
1946	54.8	
1951		18.2
1956	50.7	

There is a clear trend towards non-observance in both areas, but, having started from a similar point in 1881, the fall-off in observance was more rapid in the Northern suburbs and there was a clear speeding up in this trend during the interwar period. Charpin sees the political events of the Popular Front as having encouraged this trend, but the economic and social impact of rapid industrialisation and in-migration seem more convincing long term explanations.

For a general overview of Marseilles religious practice see the maps in Appendix 1.

This rapid overview of religious observance in Marseilles suggests that the Church had little influence over the lives of the local working-class. Many workers were prepared to go through at least some of the rituals and procedures required by the Church but there were few believers or regular attenders in Church. Such religious observance as there was within the working class seems to have been in decline in the interwar period, and this decline in turn seems to have been aided by the two, often linked, factors of new industrial development and immigration. The Marseilles working-class had rarely been much influenced by religion, but there is some evidence that relatively stable working-class communities provided a more hospitable environment for the Church than did rapidly changing and heavily industrialised sectors.

The map of anticlerical activity seems to have complemented well that of religious practice. Working-class areas with low levels of religious observance tended to have the most solidly rooted anticlerical organisations. Areas such as Menpenti registered both a low ratio for the denier du culte per head (0.09F compared with more bourgeois areas such as St. Giniez at 3.20F per head) and a high level of anticlerical activity. In quartiers such as the Belle-de-Mai anticlerical organisations may well have filled the social as well as the philosophical void left through the weakness of the Church. Anticlerical organisations could act as a form of counter Church in such working-class areas, providing celebrations for those adolescents who were not going to be confirmed and for those newborn children who would not be baptised. The political importance of anticlerical organisations will be reviewed later, but what is already clear is that anticlerical activity both reflected the level of hostility to the Church among the Marseilles working class and could itself take over some of the functions of social organisation which would otherwise have been organised by the Church itself.<sup>1</sup>

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1 B. Bouisson, 'L'anticlérisme à Marseille de 1919 à 1939', (Thèse de 3e cycle, Aix-en-Provence, 1970), pp176, 179 and 183.  
A. Chenu, *op.cit.* pp110-115.

## 2 Mutual Aid Societies

A more influential Church might have provided succour, both spiritual and material, to Marseilles workers in times of adversity. As it was, the local working-class seemed to value co-operation, self help and communal solidarity more than charity. And this desire for working-class co-operation to insure against the insecurities of life, was what gave rise to one of the features of the Marseilles working class; a remarkably well developed network of mutual aid societies.

The number of mutual aid societies and people covered by their insurance schemes had grown rapidly in Marseilles since the mid nineteenth century. The first Maison de la Mutualité Française, in France was opened in Marseilles in 1906.<sup>1</sup> In 1892 there were 330 Sociétés de Secours Mutuels, with the number rising to 428 in 1914 and to close on 1,000 by 1934.<sup>2</sup> These small societies were grouped together in organisations such as the Grand Conseil de la Mutualité, which, by 1937 included 380 societies with about 200,000 members in a département with a total population of 930,802.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Maryse Piat-Audibert, Les sociétés de secours mutuel dans les Bouches-du-Rhône de 1850 à 1914, Marseille, 1971, p45 for figures concerning 1905.

2 M. Piat-Audibert op.cit. p45 for figures concerning 1892 and 1914. A.D. XI 3017 contains information on 18 Unions of Sociétés de Secours Mutuels at the end of 1934. 17 of them contained 943 societies. 13 of them had 174,994 members.

3 Details on the 'Grand Conseil de la Mutualité' in A.D. XI 3029, Le Petit Provençal, 2.12.1937, and La Tribune Provençale, 4, 24.12.1937. For more information on the movement see Marcel Mertens, 'Le mouvement mutualiste dans les Bouches-du-Rhône aux XIXe et XXe siècles', Marseille, 22, 1954, pp17-44.

The establishment of mutual aid societies was often connected with the political situation. During the Second Empire mutual aid societies often served as a way of sustaining surrogate trade unions, and later societies grouped members together on the basis of opinion, origin or occupation.<sup>1</sup> During the Popular Front it seems likely that the increase in mutual aid societies was a reflection of a more general growth in unions, parties and other organisations which characterised the period. Table 3.1 shows how membership grew during the Popular Front before falling off again slightly in 1939. The increasing membership of mutual aid societies was accompanied by persistent attempts to politicise their activities. The expanding trade unions saw the mutual aid societies as a useful instrument with which both to win influence, provide a service for their members, generate some additional income and to wage a political campaign.

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TABLE 3.1

Membership of Mutual Aid Societies - Group 'A' - Bouches-du-Rhône - 1933-1939

Date	1933	1934	1935	1938	1939
Honorary Members	7853	7499	7776	4656	5045
Ordinary Members Total	123720	128919	136261	176658	170252
Men		86720	88082	100998	98915
Women		34814	38607	39415	37174
Children		7385	9572	17807	17184
Over 60		17699	19928	18438	16979
Total Membership	131573	136418	144037	181314	175297

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Source: AD XI 3017

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1 Piat-Audibert op.cit.p41 cites how: 'En 1882, pour être admis à la société "La Solidarité", il fallait: "avoir été inquiétés pour opinions politiques entre 1830 et 1874, ou être descendants ou alliés d'un condamné politique".'

In 1936 Lucien Molino established a CGT sponsored mutual aid society in Marseilles, but he was rapidly expelled from the "Grand Conseil de la Mutualité" for being too political or too radical, depending on the point of view.<sup>1</sup>

Politics intervened in the activities of the mutual aid societies at regular if infrequent intervals. Even the names of the societies were influenced by the political climate. Before 1880 147 out of the 277 societies in the département had religious names, after 1880, with the rise in anticlerical activity the number had declined to a mere 26 out of 405.<sup>2</sup> Later, the conflicts of 1936 and of the postwar period raised the question of trade union and Communist influence within the movement. It was hardly surprising that politics intervened in this way: Mutual aid societies reflected not only the solidarity of the local working-class but also its fissures. For many years the mutual aid societies were unwilling to admit some of the most needy elements of the population to their ranks. Functioning as insurance societies for the respectable, male working-class, mutual aid societies were initially only prepared to admit healthy men between the ages of 16 and 45, working in the safer occupations.<sup>3</sup> Objections were raised to the admission of women, it being claimed that they were ill more often than men, and the extent of health insurance was initially restricted in many societies in such

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1 Lucien Molino talked about his role in 1936 to D. Bleitrach and A. Chenu. The interview is reproduced in their book, 'L'Usine et la Vie. Lutttes Régionales: Marseille et Fos, Paris 1979, pp31-32. For more recent controversies within the movement see the reports in Le Monde of 19.12.1980, 28.1.1981, 4.3.1982 & 5.3.1982.

2 Piat-Audibert op.cit. p43.

3 Piat-Audibert op.cit. p83.

a way as to exclude illnesses 'survenues après rixe ou débauche'.<sup>1</sup>

As the mutual aid society movement grew it became less restrictive in its attitudes. It is possible that a growth in the size of the movement made it more open-minded, but it may also have reduced the sociability on which much of the solidarity associated with the movement depended. Nevertheless the average size of each society remained small, and the benefits of membership substantial. In 1834 359 societies dispensed between them over 15 million francs in different kinds of aid to their members. Hospital bills were paid, medicines bought and convalescent homes and childrens' colonies des vacances financed. 130,000 days of sickness were reimbursed by mutual aid societies, funerals paid for and the families of the deceased aided. Some members were even found jobs by the mutual aid societies and some children were sent to training courses on society funds.<sup>2</sup> This wide variety of benefits available through the activities of voluntary working-class associations is a testimony to the extent of working-class organisation. Clearly, whilst mutual aid societies did not always represent a very active kind of affiliation, they did demonstrate the scale of the desire for voluntary organisation in the 1930's. This desire seems to be an almost constant feature of Marseilles life and even today the town is remarkable for the highly developed nature of its mutual aid societies.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Piat-Audibert op.cit. p42.

2 Details contained in the returns on finances and membership contained in AD . XI 3017.

3 Louis Calisti, current President of the Grand Conseil de la Mutualité des Bouches-du-Rhône, claimed in an interview concerning a recent controversy that: "On veut étouffer le mouvement mutualiste en France, et, si la première attaque d'envergure est déclenchée dans les Bouches-du-Rhône, c'est précisément parce qu'il y est particulièrement développé et implanté de longue date". Le Monde, 19.12.1980. See L. Calisti & J-F Rey, Santé et cadre de vie, l'expérience mutualiste de Marseille, Paris 1977, for further details.

### 3 Associations

Mutual aid societies represented only one form of voluntary organisation in Marseilles. The network of local associations (registered under the law of 1901) was even more ubiquitous, and associations were formed for almost every imaginable purpose. Information on the total number of active associations in Marseilles is difficult to come by. Details are, however, available concerning the registration of new associations, and, judging by the rate of their creation there was no falling off in Marseilles' associational activity in the 1930's. On average well over two hundred new associations were registered each year. The only feature linking these associations was the fact that they were not designed with a commercial end in mind. The largest single category of associations was, unsurprisingly perhaps, those which were devoted to sport. Of the sporting

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TABLE 3.2

Registration of Associations in Marseilles  
1930-1939

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Date	1930	1931	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Number of Associations	262	327	244	206	228	238	257	240	172

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Source: AD Régistre des associations  
4M 1032-1035 Récépissés de déclaration des associations

Note: The trend of these figures is more revealing than their absolute number. In some periods registration may have been more diligent than in others. Some associations will only ever have had an ephemeral existence.

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associations, the vast majority were concerned with the playing of boules which provides a good example of the kind of sociability which the associations expressed. The establishment of a boules association marked a degree of seriousness not only to the playing of the game, but a commitment also to the group of enthusiasts with whom it would be played. The daily meeting to play boules provided an opportunity for for some sport, but more importantly, for the exchange of news and gossip, argument, and the consumption of pastis.<sup>1</sup> The importance of these seemingly trivial social groups and rituals should not be underestimated. It was often through the medium of these groups that ideas could be formed, people influenced, and news spread. These processes took place in groups which were not ostensibly political and among people who might never have joined a political group. It was the increasing interest in politics seen during the Popular Front which produced a flowering of more or less political associations. The dynamism of political movements in this period is reflected by the contribution of political associations to the total registrations of associations in Marseilles between 1934 and 1938. Using a generous definition of 'political' association it seems that their numbers peaked in 1936 before declining again: in 1934 5 political

1 For further details on sporting associations see Jean-Pierre Mea, 'Le sport a Marseille de 1919 à 1939 d'après Le Petit Marseillais' Mémoire de Maîtrise, Faculté de Lettres, Aix-en-Provence, Dir. P. Guiral (n.d.). Mea traced 1,380 sporting associations in Marseilles in 1929. 23.7% of them were engaged in all varieties of sport, and the largest group devoted to a single sport were the boules clubs of which there were 173 cases, the 139 football clubs following shortly after in the order. Pierre Guiral, La Provence de 1900 à nos jours, Toulouse, 1978, p333 provides details on the creation of sports associations in the period 1900-1914. See Richard Holt, Sport and Society in Modern France, London, 1981, Chapter 8 passim for details on the theme of 'Sport and Sociability'. Other types of recreational associations in Marseilles have been studied by Jean-Louis Parasis and Michel Peraldi in their unpublished paper 'Eléments d'une géologie de la "mise au vert"'. Les associations de Loisirs de Nature 1870-1914', and the article 'La ligne bleue des alpilles. Le mouvement excursionniste à Marseille (1870-1914)', Recherches, 45, (septembre 1981)p15-55. For a general study of the role and use of leisure time during the Popular Front see, O. Querouil and L. Elhadad, L'apparition des congés payés. L'Etat social et ses Masses, Tentatives et Tentations, Ministère de la Jeunesse des Sports et des Loisirs, Direction du Tourisme, Paris 1979.

associations were registered, in 1935 23, in 1936 28, in 1937 19, and in 1938 12. As well as testifying to the dynamism of political movements within Marseilles these figures also reflect the increasing tendency for political parties and trade unions to seek to extend their influence by providing clubs for almost every kind of recreation and activity.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 3.3

Registration of New Association by Type (%) Marseilles 1934-1936

Types of Associations	1934	1935	1936
Sports	26	23	18
Cultural and Hobbies	9	7	11
Migrants' groups based on place of origin	6	13	7
Charitable and Mutual Aid	5	4	5
Occupational	16	8	15
Religious	1	1	2
Various residents' committees	15	13	12
Anticlerical	1	-	3
Political	2	10	11
Ex-Servicemen	3	3	3
Unclear or unclassifiable names	15	17	13
	99	99	100

Source: Analysis of sources in previous table.

Note: Rounding of percentages means totals do not always add up to 100.

1 On this theme see the article by E. Fannuchi in Le Midi Syndicaliste, No. 201, 6.4.1937 entitled 'Il faut attacher chaque syndiqué à son organisation'. The names of the clubs classified here reveal their diversity. They range from the 'Association sportive ouvrière Belle de Mai' to 'Vouloir, Groupement de revolte légale et de défense des classes laborieuse'. (Respectively Nos. 1007 and 1023 in the Régistre des Associations.)

The names of associations such as Les Amis de la Barbe, Papillon d'or or the Mickey Club did not always reveal their purpose, but politically-inspired groupings tended to be more easily identifiable. The Jeunesses sportives sabianistes was probably an organisation grouping supporters of and guards for Simon Sabiani as much as a sports association. L'Union Intellectuelle et Ouvrière listed its aim as being to 'maintain the rights, interests and liberty of its members' but its statutes made clear that this was more than a simple mutual aid society. Bemoaning the lack of solidarity among the working classes the association aimed to secure jobs for its unemployed members and offer financial support to those who could not be found employment, but these aims were phrased in a way suggesting that they were interpreted in an intensely political way.<sup>1</sup> Other groups declared one aim whilst in fact pursuing another: the Groupe d'Union Sociale des 4e et 5e Cantons had the declared aims of 'politique et aide aux nécessiteux'. The linking of the two aims is suggestive of a certain concept of politics. The qualification for membership of the group was to be an elector (something that not all the needy would qualify as) and its main activity was to organise flyposting during election periods.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to sporting and political associations there were a large number which were based on the place of origin of immigrants. These associations would be organised on the basis either of the country, département, canton or even village of origin, and their declared aims of mutual aid and sociability would often extend to the political sphere as well.

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1 Details in AD 4M/1019.

2 Details in AD 4M/1019 Declaration dated 30.8.1935.

Corsicans were perhaps the group of migrants who were best organised into associations. The twenty or so Corsican amicales which existed in Marseilles in 1925 had grown to around forty by 1939. These amicales and mutual aid groups were usually organised on the basis of the origins of their members, but some were organised according to the place of residence or the economic activity exercised in Marseilles. L'Amicale bonifacienne and Le groupe fraternelle de la vallée du Taravo for example, existed alongside l'Amicale des Petits Fonctionnaires corses, and l'Amicale des Corses d'Endoume, which grouped together Corsicans living in that particular quartier of Marseilles. There were several attempts to federate the various Corsican associations within organisations such as the Fédération des Groupements corses de Marseille and la Maison de la Corse, but political conflicts often frustrated such attempts. Even the smallest grouping of Corsicans could be divided by political conflicts and it was not uncommon for there to be two amicales for migrants from towns such as Bastia or Calenzana, with each grouping representing either those holding or competing for municipal office in the town of origin. Within Marseilles, it was well known that ostensibly professional groupings of Corsicans such as l'Union des Employés et Ouvriers corses des tramways de Marseille, were in fact allied to local politicians - in this case Sabiani. This network of Corsican associations was important in a social sense, as well as for helping members into jobs and giving support to politicians and parties at home and in Marseilles. The increasing importance of antifascism meant that, increasingly, Italian and Spanish based associations too, were likely to become politically involved.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Information from F. Pomponi, op.cit. pp458-462. Also see the case of the Union Populaire Italienne mentioned on page 156 of this chapter.

Residents' groups, too, were important. The movement of Comités d'Intérêts de Quartiers was an important pressure grouping on the local council but also served as a way of mobilising votes in return for services provided by the council. They were certainly perceived as influential organisations, and at one stage it was rumoured that Communists were seeking to take them over and oust their predominantly Socialist leaders.<sup>1</sup> Locally-based anticlerical groupings of the Amis de l'Instruction laïque also functioned in a similar, predominantly pro-Socialist, way.

Ex-servicemens' associations were further examples of ostensibly non-political organisations which, in fact, often functioned in a political way. The number of ex-servicemens' associations being formed in Marseilles in the 1930's was understandably small - most were formed in the immediate aftermath of the First World War - but Marseilles had its share of members of the large, nationally-based ex-servicemens' associations. Many men in the Bouches-du-Rhône held the carte du combattant (79,581 in the 1930's) and many of them were in the national organisations.<sup>2</sup> The largest ex-servicemens' association in the département was the Radical-inclined Union fédérale, with 24,700 members in 1933-5 at a time when the Right-Wing Union nationale des combattants had only 2,200 members. Contemporary police reports suggested that about 15,000 people were either members of or sympathisers with the various Left wing ex-servicemens' associations grouped around the Association républicaine des anciens combattants.<sup>3</sup>

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1 See the report in AD M6/10817 CD to Prefect 23.7.1936.

2 Data from Antoine Prost, Les Anciens Combattants et la Société Française 1914-1939, tome II, Sociologie, Paris 1977, Table 16.

3 Prost loc.cit. Tables 14-15. AD M6/10866 CC to Prefect 12.11.1935. See also Janine Bourdin, 'Les anciens combattants et la célébration du 11 Novembre 1938', in La France et les Français en 1938 et 1939, eds R. Rémond and J. Bourdin, Paris, 1978.

This short survey of the associations created in Marseilles in the 1930's shows the variety of their purposes and the extent of their activities. Their existence of itself was an aid to those who sought to organise the local working class along political lines. In Marseilles there already existed prior to the Popular Front a rich tradition of working-class self-help, mutual aid and association. Cafés and bars were the places not only for the consumption of alcohol, but also of working-class organisation - albeit for very diverse purposes. Whether people had participated in sporting, recreational or locally-based associations mattered little since all helped engender a sense of the group and possibly the collectivity, together with the habit of joint discussion, debate, management, organisation and action. These habits and practices were invaluable when more overt political organisation was undertaken, and it is probable that many of the people who entered political parties and unions in the membership explosion of the years 1936-7 had served their apprenticeships in this patchwork of associational life.

#### 4 Political Parties

##### a Election Results

Election results provide only an imperfect guide to political opinion in Marseilles in the interwar period. Reasons of age, sex or nationality could deprive people of the weapon of the vote who were well able to join political parties and associations and unions, and to participate in strikes. Electoral participation, even of those registered, was also consistently lower in Marseilles than elsewhere in France. Table 3.4 shows that the highest rates of electoral participation in Marseilles were registered in the years of

TABLE 3.4

Valid Votes Cast as a Percentage of Registered Electors France & Bouches-du-Rhône

	1910	1914	1919	1924	1928	1932	1936
France	74	75	70	80	82	82	82
Bouches-du-Rhône	71	67	62	79	76	73	78

Sources: Figures for France calculated from M. Duverger Constitutions et Documents Politiques, Paris 1957, 234-237.

Figures for Bouches-du-Rhône calculated from M-T & A. Lancelot, Atlas des circonscriptions électorales en France depuis 1875, Paris 1970, pp81-2, 87-8.

greatest Left-Right conflict, 1924 and 1936. The high rate of participation which had emerged as a trend nationally by the early 1930's, was only mirrored in Marseilles for exceptional electoral contests.

In spite of the relatively small proportion of the population eligible to vote, and the even smaller number who actually did so, it is still possible to draw some conclusions from the pattern of voting in Marseilles. Marseilles is traditionally associated with the political Left. A centre of Republican opposition and of Internationalist activity at the end of the Second Empire, Marseilles experienced its own, albeit shortlived, Commune in 1871.<sup>1</sup> In the early years of the Third Republic Marseilles became established as a centre of Left voting, dominated first by the Radicals and then, later by Socialists. The Congrès ouvrier socialiste de France held at Marseilles in 1879 saw the triumph of collectivism within the still infant French Socialist movement, and in 1886 local Socialists were elected to the Conseil général and then in the following year to the Conseil municipal.<sup>2</sup> The progress of the local Socialists was sufficiently rapid for them to win control of the Marseilles town hall in 1892 under the leadership of Dr. Flaissières. By 1919 the Socialist Party was receiving 42 per cent of votes cast, but that year also brought with it the threat of some kind of split from the rather moderate local party, as a small syndicalist list stood for election, yet took only 1 per cent of votes cast. With the creation

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1 A. Olivesi, La Commune de 1871 à Marseille et ses origines, Paris, 1950, and L. Gaillard, La Section Marseillaise de l'Internationale 1867-1875, Marseille, 1970 and L. Gaillard, La naissance du Parti socialiste à Marseille, Marseille, 1980.

2 A. Olivesi & M. Roncayolo, Géographie électorale des Bouches-du Rhône sous la IVème République, Paris, 1961, pp11-12 & G.Lefranc, Le mouvement socialiste sous la troisième République, Paris 1963 p39.

of the French Communist Party in 1920 Left dominance in Marseilles seemed assured although its efficacy was reduced by this division of forces. The Socialists seemed to be both moving to the Right and declining in force locally, whilst there were indications that on the far Left, the Communists had the potential to win over much Socialist support. In 1924 Socialists won 47 per cent of votes cast and Communists 6 per cent, in 1928 the figures were 48 per cent and 10 per cent, in 1932 44 per cent and 10 per cent, and in 1936 there was a dramatic change as Socialists scored only 31 per cent on the first round as against 29 per cent for the PCF.<sup>1</sup> In the cantonal elections of October 1937 the situation seemed to have stabilised at a rather less dramatic level, with the socialists at 36 per cent and Communists at 27 per cent of votes cast.<sup>2</sup> From 1924 to 1937 the combined Left vote was well over 50 per cent, and in 1936 it amounted to 60 per cent of votes cast in Marseilles. The Left's hold on Marseilles seemed assured.

The strength of the Left should not, however, be allowed to give the impression that it was unopposed or unchallenged in Marseilles.

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1 Figures from G. Lachapelle, Elections législatives du 11 mai 1924, Paris, 1924.  
 " " Elections législatives, 22-29 avril 1928, Paris n.d.  
 " " Elections législatives, 1er & 8 mai 1933, Paris 1932.  
 " " Elections législatives 26 avril & 3 mai, 1936, Paris 1936.

2 Figures from AD IIM3/ 62 & 69 for cantonal elections. The apparent increase in SF10 support from 1936 to 1937 is misleading. In 1936 Fernand Bouisson stood in the 8th constituency of Marseilles. Although for many years an influential member of the SF10, in 1936 he did not stand as the official SF10 candidate since he had resigned the party's whip in the Chamber and was opposed to the Popular Front strategy. For these reasons Bouisson's votes in the 1936 elections have not been counted with the SF10 results. Had they been so counted the SF10 would have won 46 per cent of votes cast in 1936 rather than the 31 per cent mentioned. In 1937 there was an official SF10 candidate in the constituency and the situation was rather clearer.

There was also a strong Right-wing tradition in the town which was reflected in an upsurge in support on the eve of the First World War, and a degree of support which gave parties of the Right more votes in 1936 than were won by the PCF. In terms of membership as well as in those of votes, the Bouches-du-Rhône was not immune from the influences of parties such as Action française, which, as it happened, had been founded by a local writer, Charles Maurras, born at Martigues.

#### b Membership of Right-Wing Parties

Marseilles and Provence more generally had long been centres of Royalist and Right-wing activity. Until 1914 there was a daily Royalist newspaper, Le Soleil du Midi, and after that date Right-wing groupings found sympathetic publicists on the staffs of newspapers such as Le Petit Marseillais and Marseille-Matin. After the First World War traditional groupings such as Action française still benefitted from the goodwill of much of the local religious hierarchy, (even after the Papal condemnation) but other, newer groupings often gave the impression of being both more dynamic and more to the liking of local industrialists. By 1935 the Croix de Feu seemed a younger, larger and more dynamic grouping in Marseilles than was Action française. Action française gave the impression of being stuck in an ideological rut at a time when there was plenty of scope for making a political appeal based on one of the new revived Right-wing ideologies, or indeed on none at all.

After 1936 the two main Right-wing groupings in Marseilles were the Parti Social Français (ex-Croix de Feu) and the Parti Populaire

TABLE 3.5

Membership of Right-wing Groupings in Bouches-du-Rhône 1922-1939

Notes	Date	Bouches-du-Rhône				Marseilles				
		A.F.	C.D.F.	J.P.	P.S.F.	A.F.	C.D.F.	J.P.	P.P.F.	P.S.F.
1	1922 July				700					
2	1926	c.600								
3	1935 Oct.					11,400				
4	1935 Nov.				2,500		c.1,000			
5	1936 April			20-30,000						
6	1936 August								4,300	
7	1936 Dec.								7,000	
8	1938 Jan.				9,000	15,000			(9,000)	(13,300)
9	1938 March				(12,000)	(19,600)			(12,000)	
10	1939 May								7,200	3,000 paid-up

Sources and Notes: Bracketed figures are the estimates of organisations themselves.

- 1 G. Gaudin, Le royalisme dans les Bouches-du-Rhône 1876 à 1927. De la fidélité à l'idéologie. Contribution à l'étude des blancs du midi. Thèse de Doctorat d'État en Histoire, Université Aix-Marseille I, n.d., p892.
- 2 G. Gaudin, op.cit. p914.
- 3 AD M6 10793 CD to Prefect 28.10.1935.
- 4 AD M6 10866 Prefect to Interior 13.11.1935.
- 5 G. Gaudin, op.cit. p964 & AD XIV M25/77 CD 19.6.1936.
- 6 AD XIVM25/76 CD to Prefect 28.8.1936.
- 7 AD XIVM25/76 CD to Prefect 5.12.1936.
- 8 AD M6 10816 CD to Prefect 19.1.1938. The higher figures refer to the claims of the organisations themselves. The lower figures are maximum estimates made by the police. The report points out that there was considerable overlapping membership between these organisations.
- 9 Simon Sabiani, quoted in Marseille Libre 6.3.1938.
- 10 AD M6 10888 CD to Sûreté 27.5.1939.

Français . The PSF locally seemed both to have better relations with the local business community (the leader of the Croix de Feu had been Jacques Arnault an influential local businessman) and to be more ideologically motivated than was the PPF. The PPF in Marseilles rested almost entirely upon the personal appeal of its leader Simon Sabiani. When Marcel Déat complained to a local PSF meeting that the ability to recruit was adversely affected in Marseilles because 'la politique de clan se place au-dessus des idées', he was thinking of Sabiani.<sup>1</sup> Sabiani's strength rested on the appeals of personality and clientelism. His time as Deputy to the Mayor until 1935 had allowed Sabiani to dispense considerable patronage to his supporters.<sup>2</sup> But his appeal also rested on his charismatic personality and his powers of oratory which meant that even if Sabiani was perceived elsewhere as the epitome of corruption, many in Marseilles saw him as a rare example of a truly honest and disinterested politician. Sabiani's popular appeal was something which all the Right-wing groupings were willing to use to good effect in June 1936 when there was an urgent need for some riposte to be made to the activities of the Left and the trade Unions. The meeting of protest called by Sabiani in June 1936 succeeded in attracting the support of all the important Right-wing figures and indeed the patronage of Doriot himself towards Sabiani. As Doriot explained:

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1 AD M6/ 8289 CC to Prefect 29.1.1936.

2 AD M6/ 10881 CD 3.2.1938 commented on the fact that 150 of the 400 firemen in the town were members of the PPF in the following way: 'Ce nombre total, qui est assez important, est dû à la propagande personnelle du chef régional du Parti, M. SABIANI, qui lorsqu'il était 1er adjoint..., a fait avoir de nombreux avantages aux employés de la ville, parmi lesquels un grand nombre a voulu manifester son attachement à M. SABIANI en adhérant au parti populaire française'. For further detail on Sabiani see: Jean-André Vaucoret, 'Un homme politique contesté: Simon Sabiani (Biographie)' Thèse pour le Doctorat de IIIe Cycle, Université de Provence, Faculté de Lettres, 1977-1978.

'On a beaucoup daubé sur le mouvement socialiste et national de Marseille - On ne peut cependant contester qu'il a été un des seuls capables d'arrêter net les menées moscovites, à un moment où la France s'abandonnait au bolchévisme.

En pleine euphorie du front populaire, en pleine grève révolutionnaire, l'organisation de Simon Sabiani a ramené l'ordre dans le premier port de France.'<sup>1</sup>

Sabiani seemed to be the most effective leader that the Right could hope for in Marseilles during the Popular Front but his popularity obscured his unorthodox politics. Although officially the leader of the local PPF, Sabiani was unwilling to tolerate people in the party who saw their loyalty to it, as coming before their loyalty to him. The problem was rarely posed, but when it did arise, the Sabianists triumphed over the Doriotists.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Sabianists were, in the last analysis, a more dependable base of support than any other. By May 1939 when PPF support had waned and when only 3,000 of the 7,200 PPF members in Marseilles were actually paying their dues, reports suggested that 2,500 of these dues-paying members were pure and simple Sabianists rather than really being committed to the PPF.<sup>3</sup>

Right-wing parties, then, were strong in terms of membership and support during the Popular Front. Their appeal was based on a combination of business support, ideology and the support of Sabiani. This last-mentioned element provided a good base on which the parties of the Right could recruit working-class supporters, but the domination of the movement by such a strong personality could prove to be a liability as much as an asset.

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1 Jacques Doriot in his preface to S.Sabiani, Colère du Peuple, Paris, 1936, pviii.

2 AD M6 10888 CD to Prefect 26.12.1938 explained that the XI section of the PPF in Marseilles had just been dissolved by Sabiani because its leaders were followers of Doriot rather than himself. Writing of the Sabianiste element the report noted that (ils): 'ont aucune foi, aucun Parti, aucune conviction. Ils sont "SABIANISTES". Si M.Sabiani était demain Communiste ou Royaliste tous ses amis épouseraient immédiatement les convictions de leur Chef'.

3 AD M6 10888 CD 27.5.1939.

TABLE 3.6  
SF10 Membership - France and Bouches-du-Rhône 1913-1938

Date	Bouches-du-Rhône		France	
	Cards	Ratio Stamps: Cards	Cards	Ratio Stamps: Cards
1913	1725		68903	
1919	2300	11.26	133277	6.68
1920	2600	12	130000	
1921			50449	
1922			49174	
1923	2620	12	50496	
1924	3800	12	72659	
1925	4610	11.91	111276	8.35
1926	3775	1202	111368	9.14
1927	4720	12	98034	9.53
1928	5996	11.94	109892	8.32
1929	4980	11.9	119519	8.9
1930	5202	12.01	125563	9.03
1931	5040	11.85	130864	9.13
1932	4325	11.51	137684	8.70
1933	4670	11.77	131044	8.85
1934	4210	11.75	110000	8.75
1935	4962	11.44	120083	8.47
1936	5690	11.06	202000	7.94
1937	8151	11.58	286604	8.65
1938	6614	11.74	275373	8.18

Sources: Bouches-du-Rhône 1913 & 1919, Jean Charles et.al. Le Congrès de Tours, Paris, 1980.

Bouches-du-Rhône 1920-1924, Tony Judt, La Reconstruction du Parti Socialiste, 1921-1926, Paris 1976, Annexe VI.

France 1913-1924, G. Lefranc, Le Mouvement Socialiste sous la Troisième République (1875-1940), Paris 1963, Graphie 3.

Bouches-du-Rhône & France 1925-1938, Rapports des Congrès, SF10 1926-1939.

### c SF10 Membership

Although SF10 membership did not always match that of its rivals of both Left and Right in numerical terms there is some evidence that the party was more solidly rooted in the local community. SF10 membership did not fluctuate wildly in the way that the membership of the Action française or the PCF did. The impression is rather one of relative stability within a party of moderate size. The dramatic surges and collapses in membership experienced by the SF10 nationally were reflected in an altogether more gradual manner in Marseilles. The years 1919-1920 and 1934-1937 were ones of very rapid growth in the SF10 nationally and locally, but, rapid though membership growth was in the Bouches-du-Rhône between 1936-7, it did not match that which took place nationally. (Tables 3.6 and 3.7). Relatively slow growth meant that the Bouches-du-Rhône federation was strongest within the SF10 when the party nationally was in a state of decline. In 1920, for example, a good year for the SF10, the Bouches-du-Rhône federation was the 16th in terms of numbers of members.

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TABLE 3.7

SF10 Membership Growth 1929 - 1938

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Year	Bouches-du-Rhône	Seine	Nord	France
1929	100	100	100	100
1930	104	106	102	105
1931	101	112	104	109
1932	87	138	108	115
1933	94	131	104	110
1934	85	112	100	92
1935	100	131	109	100
1936	114	251	125	169
1937	164	301	169	240
1938	133	343	176	230

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Calculations from figures in SF10 Rapports aux Congrès 1929-1939

Note 1929 - 100

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By 1924 its ranking had risen to 4th. A similar if inverse process took place ten years later during the Popular Front period when from being the 3rd largest federation in 1934 and 1935 (after the federations of the Nord and the Seine) the Bouches-du-Rhône federation was relegated to 4th place in 1936, and then to 5th place in 1937 and 1938.<sup>1</sup> The rate of growth of the Bouches-du-Rhône federation relative to that of the Nord and Seine federations during the 1930's is outlined in Table 3.7. The Bouches-du Rhône appears from this evidence to have been among the least dynamic in France with membership increasing by only 64 per cent between 1935 and 1937 compared with an increase of 240 per cent in France as a whole during this period. The federation of the Nord emerges as having been similarly sluggish in its rate of growth during the Popular Front, and, but for the divergent behaviour of the Seine federation, it would be possible to hypothesise that larger (in absolute terms) socialist federations grew more slowly than average during the Popular Front. Table 3.8 shows, however, that there seems to be some connection between the density of SF10 membership and the rate of membership growth. The Bouches-du-Rhône federation contained an unusually large number of members both in absolute terms and relative to population. Density of Socialist membership in the département outstripped both the Seine and the national average, but it was never able to rival that of the Nord, the other main Socialist stronghold. There is some evidence that weaker parties (in relation to total population) were better able to profit from the expansion of the Popular Front period, as was the case with the federation of the Seine, than were the more solidly implanted parties

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1 In 1936 the Bouches-du-Rhône came after the départements of the Nord, Seine & Seine-et-Oise. In 1937 and 1938 it came after the départements of the Nord, Seine, Pas-de-Calais & Seine-et-Oise. Sources, SF10 Rapports aux Congrès, 1936, pp182-3, 1937 p187, 1938, p201., 1939 p151.

TABLE 3.8

SF10 Membership in Relation to Population France, The Nord,  
Seine and Bouches-du-Rhône 1929 - 1938  
(Members per 10,000 inhabitants)

Date	Bouches-du-Rhône	Seine	Nord	France
1929	55	14	66	29
1930	57	14	68	30
1931	55	15	69	31
1932	47	19	72	33
1933	51	18	69	31
1934	45	15	66	26
1935	53	18	73	29
1936	61	34	84	48
1937	88	41	113	68
1938	71	46	118	66

Note: Membership figures from SF10 Rapports aux Congrès, 1929-1939. Calculations against Census figures for 1931 (1929-1933) & 1936 (1934-1938). Population figures (corrected for Bouches-du-Rhône) are as follows:

	Bouches-du-Rhône	Seine	Nord	France
1931	910,672	4,933,855	2,029,449	41,834,923
1936	930,802	4,962,984	2,022,167	41,907,056

like those of the Nord and the Bouches-du-Rhône. Whilst it is possible to discover general trends which influenced the pattern of SF10 membership in the Bouches-du-Rhône there is considerable evidence indicating the importance of local factors too. A close examination of membership turnover between 1927 and 1934 (Table 3.9) indicates how

closely membership movements were linked to trends in local as well as in national politics. The high rate of new members entering the party in 1927, 1928 and 1929 is likely to have been linked to the municipal elections of 1929. It is probable that members, and especially municipal employees, were recruited to the party in this period. Similarly the high rate of defections from the party in 1929 reflected the SF10's loss of control of the municipality and its rewards in that year. Sabiani's control over the mairie between 1929 and 1935 (as Deputy Mayor first to Flaissières (1929-1931) and then to Ribot (1931-1935)) took its toll on the clientele of the SF10. Bouisson's defection from the party may also have led to a high rate of non-renewals of membership in 1932, whilst the high rate of membership loss in 1934 may indicate a certain disenchantment with the party's moves towards the PCF. Potential members who were enthusiastic about the Popular Front idea may well have been readier

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TABLE 3.9

Membership Change in SF10 - Bouches-du-Rhône 1927-1934

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Year	Total Members		New Members		Lapsed Members	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1927	4720	100	1150	30	205	5
1928	5966	100	2150	46	904	19
1929	4980	100	1170	20	2156	36
1930	5202	100	570	11	348	7
1931	5040	100	666	13	828	16
1932	4325	100	366	7	1081	21
1933	4670	100	900	21	555	13
1934	4210	100	664	14	1124	24

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Source: SF10 Rapports aux Congrès 1928-1936 provide details of total membership and new recruits. Percentages and losses have been calculated from this source.

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to join the PCF, as the more enthusiastic and dynamic partner in the alliance, than the SF10. In 1938 too membership change in the Bouches-du-Rhône seems to have been more affected by local rather than national developments. The national decline in the party may have been attributable to the expulsion of the Gauche Révolutionnaire in 1938 but the Pivertistes were not strong enough locally for their expulsion alone to make much impact.<sup>1</sup> The far more dramatic membership decline in the Bouches-du-Rhône is more likely the result of the problems affecting the municipality after the Nouvelles Galeries fire of October 1938. In addition, the party's ability to win support on the basis of its ability to intercede for its supporters was increasingly cast into question in 1938, as Blum was ejected from Government for the second time, and as municipal debts meant that no more workers could be hired by the marie.

The impression of the distinctiveness of the SF10 in the Bouches-du-Rhône is born out by an examination of the number of stamps purchased by party members. (Table 3.10). Local Socialists paid their dues with remarkable assiduity, and this special local feature seems to be the result of something more than simply the rewards of municipal socialism, since, in the Nord, there was a rather different

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1 Jean-Paul Joubert, Révolutionnaires de la SF10., Paris, 1977, writes p38 how: 'La Gauche révolutionnaire est forte là où le parti socialiste progresse le plus vite aux élections comme dans le recrutement, mais ce sont également les secteurs où les fédérations sont relativement faibles au regard de la population et les résultats électoraux n'y ont jamais été brillants. La Gauche révolutionnaire ne parviendra pas à mordre sur les puissantes fédérations du Nord, Pas-de-Calais et des Bouches-du-Rhône, pas plus que dans tous les secteurs où la SF10 bénéficie d'une implantation parlementaire ancienne. Dans ces fédérations-là, elle ne parviendra pas à ébranler l'emprise de l'appareil et du groupe parlementaire'.

TABLE 3.10  
Average Number of Party Stamps Purchased  
SF10 Federations 1924 - 1938

Date	Bouches-du-Rhône	Seine	Nord	France
1924	12	8.2	9.5	
1925	11.9	8.05	8.9	8.35
1926	12	9.9	9.3	9.1
1927	12	9.6	9.2	9.5
1928	11.9	8.2	8.3	8.3
1929	11.9	9.6	13.7	8.9
1930	12	10.1	10.1	9.0
1931	11.9	10	9.3	9.1
1932	11.5	9.5	8.6	8.7
1933	11.8	8.8	8.9	8.9
1934	11.8	8.9	9.3	8.8
1935	11.4	8.5	8.5	8.5
1936	11.1	7.6	10.1	7.9
1937	11.6	9.4	10.1	8.7
1938	11.8	4.7	9.7	8.2

Source: Calculations from data in SF10 Rapports aux Congrès, 1924-1939.

picture. One explanation for the high ratio of stamps to cards could lie in the mass purchasing of stamps by the federation leadership in order to have more votes at party congresses. Such an explanation would correspond with an occasional surge in stamp buying rather than such regularly high figures. (The very high figure for 1929) in the Nord federation for example). It seems more likely that members

themselves were persuaded to buy the requisite number of stamps for their party cards. This may have been achieved by an efficient party treasurer but it seems unlikely that success on this scale would have been achieved if members did not want to buy the correct number of stamps. Their motives must have been strong ones, connected with their desire to demonstrate commitment to the party either for ideological or more practical reasons; e.g. the desire for municipal employment. The regularity of dues paying in the Bouches-du-Rhône was only very minimally affected by the rapid growth of the Popular Front period. Elsewhere, in the Seine and the Nord, political factors and growth in membership seem to have affected the ratio of stamps to cards in a way not seen in the Bouches-du-Rhône.<sup>1</sup>

Focussing attention exclusively on membership figures for the entire SF10 federation conceals the importance of the range of organisations which depended on the Socialist Party. Among these were the womens' and youth groups of the party. The Femmes socialistes were not very active, but, with 150 members in the département in late 1935 they were not entirely without significance. More important was the Jeunesses Socialistes. Organized in parallel with the parent party the youth organisation was, if anything, even more dynamic than its parent organisation during the Popular Front. The 800 members of the Jeunesses Socialistes of late 1935 had grown to 1877 by March 1937

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1 The low ratio of stamps to members in The Seine in 1938 may well have been due to the departure of the Gauche Révolutionnaire, with its strong base in the federation, from the party in 1938. The rise in the ratio in the Nord in 1936 and 1937 may not be of great significance. It could, however, be the reflection of an attempt by the federation to retain its dominant position in the party, in the face of rapid membership growth among other federations, through the wholesale purchasing of membership stamps. It may equally have been the result of increased enthusiasm for the party amongst the members.

and then on to about 4,000 members by January 1938.<sup>1</sup> The Jeunesses Socialistes (JS) performed a valuable role in renewing some of the older membership of the party and in serving a force of stewards and guards to be used in defending SF10 meetings and speakers against attacks either from the Left or the Right.

The growth in the membership of these parallel SF10 groupings was matched by a growth in the party's own organisation. The SF10 was organised by section in this period, and in Marseilles at least there was one section per canton making a total of 12 sections. Elsewhere in the département there was more scope for organisational growth, and the Popular Front period saw the party grow from 64 sections in 1935 to 104 in 1936, 73 in 1937 and then 78 in 1938.<sup>2</sup> In the constitution of the SF10 the section was the smallest level of organisation which received official recognition but sections were often keen to spread their influence by encouraging the establishment of sous-sections. These sous-sections seem to have expanded in Marseilles during the Popular Front period, and, corresponding, as they often did, with the quartier, they provided a good basis on which to

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1 These figures refer to the number of JS in the département. The figure for the number of Femmes socialistes and JS in 1935 is from AD M6 10866, that for the JS in March 1937 is from Le Provence Socialiste 26.3.1937, and that of 1938 is taken from an article by Francois Billoux in Rouge Midi, 7.1.1938. Comparable figures for the nation membership growth of the JS movement are as follows:

July 1935	12,500 JS members
December 1935	16,320 "
May 1936	20,000 "
November 1936	40,000 "
January 1937	50,000 "

(Figures from Dossiers de l'Action Populaire, 10.4.1937, pp859-860).

2 Source: SF10 Rapports aux Congrès, 1935 figure in 1936 volume p180. 1936 figure in 1937 volume p184, 1937 figure in 1938 volume p198, 1938 figure in 1939 volume p148.

recruit new members and organise the activities of existing ones.<sup>1</sup>

This rapid survey of the SFIO influence in the département suggests that Socialism was one of the most solidly entrenched local political forces. The basis of this position rested upon SFIO control of the municipality of Marseilles and strong local traditions. The local party seems to have been relatively well rooted in the local community but not to have been a particularly dynamic force. The rate of local recruitment was outstripped by that of the national party during the Popular Front but seemed better able than the party nationally to withstand the challenge of difficult times. As a large party, both within the SFIO as a whole and in relation to other local parties, the SFIO in the Bouches-du-Rhône was perhaps less susceptible to the very dramatic increases in membership strength which other parties locally, and other federations within the SFIO, experienced during the Popular Front. The slow growth of the Bouches-du-Rhône federation was not, however, entirely due to its prior strength. Other strong SFIO federations had, after all, been better able to profit from the Popular Front. In the Bouches-du-Rhône enthusiasm for the Popular Front was reflected in increased party membership, but the party to reap this benefit was the PCF rather than the SFIO.

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1 Sissel Frogg "'Marseille-Socialiste' 1936. Une étude d'un parti et de son journal', Mémoire de maîtrise en histoire, Université d'Oslo, Automne 1981, pp18-19 deals with the question of these sous-sections. Another way of extending the party's influence was, of course, through its local newspapers. Marseille-Socialiste was reputed to print 7-8,000 copies when it began in 1936. (AD VI T 5/2 report of 10.2.1936). In 1937 its successor Le Provence Socialiste made the rather unrealistic claim that it had 300,000 readers. (Le Provence Socialiste, No.100, 31.12.1937) 30,000 would have seemed more credible.

#### d PCF Membership

Within a relatively short time of the Congress of Tours the young SFIC federation seemed no longer to pose a threat to the SFIO. Although the vast majority of local SFIO members had favoured the Cachin-Frossard motion at Tours voting membership of the Third International, it was the SFIO rather than the SFIC which found itself early in 1921, with the bulk of the local party's funds and elected officials.<sup>1</sup> The SFIO Deputies in the Bouches-du-Rhône divided equally after Tours, with two each remaining with the SFIO and going to join the SFIC. Among the Conseillers Généraux there was a different story with only one out of ten joining the SFIC, whilst among Conseillers d'Arrondissements and Conseillers Municipaux the figures were two out of ten and two out of twenty one respectively.<sup>2</sup> The PCF's weakness in terms of local political personnel was compounded over the following years, as purges and defections from the party reduced its influence. The purge of 'freemasons and Rightists' in 1923 gave rise to the creation of a potentially powerful local Fédération Communiste Autonome under the leadership of Veyren and Sabiani which would rival the PC's own strength in the remainder of the 1920's.<sup>3</sup> Internal divisions and an excessively sectarian national and international political line meant that the PCF suffered in terms of membership during much of the 1920's and early 1930's. The Bouches-du-Rhône federation proved no exception to this general trend, and its relatively large number of industrial workers seemed to provide no guarantee of success for the ideologists and apologists of the Third International.

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1 Jean Charles et al, Le Congrès de Tours. Edition critique, Paris 1980. p706 indicate that 73.1 per cent of the Bouches-du-Rhône delegation voted for the Cachin-Frossard motion at the Tours Congress of December 1920.

2 J-A Vaucoiret, op.cit.p41.

3 For details on this matter see J-A Vaucoiret, op.cit. p85ff.

The contrast between PCF and SFIO membership was not only a numerical one. Communist Party membership, in contrast with that of the SFIO, seemed to make many demands upon the individual and offer few rewards. 'Sleeping' members were unwelcome in a party where the emphasis was upon activism, and the activities which the party did undertake could often prove risky for the individuals within it, threatening their jobs and sometimes their liberty. Members were susceptible to arrest or sacking if they followed loyally the instructions of their party. The party could offer little in return for such demonstrations of their loyalty. Permanent paid officials received what little money they were allocated late as often as not, and meanwhile they were obliged to do their best to find alternative sources of funding to ensure the regular appearance of party and cell newspapers and leaflets.<sup>1</sup>

The unpopular politics of the young PCF, combined with the excessive demands, and risks, and limited rewards, of membership, combined to mean that few people were willing to join the party, either nationally or in the Bouches-du-Rhône during the period prior to the Popular Front. The euphoria which affected the working class in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution soon changed to despair as it was realised that, whatever the merits of the Soviet experience, there was going to be no such transfer of power within France. In terms of numbers, therefore, the PCF suffered badly in the first thirteen years of its existence. The 2,600 members of the SFIO of the Bouches-du-Rhône represented at Tours in 1920 had been reduced to 1,400 SFIO

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1 See D. Bleitrach & A. Chenu L'Usine et la Vie. Luttes Régionales: Marseilles et Fos, Paris, 1979, p35.

TABLE 3.11

PCF Membership in Relation to Population France &amp; Bouches-du-Rhône

1920-1945

(Membership per 10,000 Inhabitants)

Date	Bouches-du-Rhone	France
1920	31	45
1921	October 17	28
1922	July 13	20
1923	March 12	
	August 10	
	Sept. 8	14
1924	10	15
1925	8	15
1932	(Marseilles) 5	6
1933	(Marseilles) 6	7
1936	106	69
1937	107	81
1938	97	76
1945	201	135

Source: See note 1 on following page and Appendix 8.

Note: All figures refer to membership in December of each year unless otherwise indicated.

members by October 1921. Numbers continued falling; by the following July there were 1,100 members, in March 1923 1,020, and by December 1925 a mere 690 members in the département. The picture in the Popular Front years was, however, dramatically changed, with 9,880 members in the Bouches-du-Rhône in December 1936, 9,031 in September 1938, and then a massive increase after the war to 19,501 members in

1945.<sup>1</sup> Table 3.11 provides a clearer impression of the distribution of PCF members in the département and the nation during this period.

The preceding table makes clear that the PCF, both nationally and locally, did not manage to regain the position held by the SFIO in 1920 until the Popular Front was installed in government in 1936. What is equally clear, however, is that if the years before the Popular Front saw the SFIO as easily the largest party on the Left, the Popular Front itself established the PCF in this position, in terms of membership if not of votes, at the level of the nation and of the département. The years 1936-1938 saw the PCF achieve such a dramatic increase in membership that it overtook the SFIO in the Bouches-du-Rhône

<sup>1</sup> All national data come from, A. Kriegel, 'Le Parti Communiste sous la 3e République (1920-1939): Mouvement des effectifs et structures d'organisation', in Le pain et les roses, Paris, 1973, pp.307-315

Local figures are from the following sources:

- 1920-1921 Parti Communiste Français, Un an d'action communiste, Courbevoie, 1921, pp55-58.
- 1922 Parti Communiste Français, L'Action communiste et la crise du parti, Courbevoie, 1922, p101
- 1923 March J-A Vaucoret, op.cit. p84
- 1923 Aug & Sep. D. Moulinard, 'Le Parti Communiste à Marseille: Naissance et debuts, 1919-1925', Mémoire de maîtrise, Aix en Provence, 1971, p135
- 1925 J-A Vaucoret op.cit. p.126
- 1932 & 1933 AD M6 11379
- 1936 Dec Parti Communiste Français, Deux ans d'activité au service du peuple, (Arles 25-29 decembre 1937), pp182-186. Calculation based on figures given for number of timbres de contrôle livrées. The figure for the region is given, i.e. Bouches-du-Rhône, Vaucluse and Corsica. Figures are also given separately for the last two départements, and their total membership has been deducted from that of the Region to produce the total for the Bouches-du-Rhône.
- 1937 Dec Rouge Midi, No.346
- 1938 Sept Parti Communiste Français, 1937-1938. Du Congrès d'Arles à la Conférence de Gennevilliers. Une année de lutte pour le pain la paix et la liberté, Gennevilliers, 1938.
- 1945 Parti Communiste Français, Sept ans de luttes ardentes au service du peuple, Paris, 1945.

and in France as a whole. The strength of the PC's membership in the region was greater than that of the SFIO, but it is worth noting that the PCF in the Bouches-du-Rhône still did not manage to achieve for itself the kind of presence which the SFIO had in its stronghold of the Nord in the Popular Front years. (See page 117). The PCF achievement in the Bouches-du-Rhône, however, remained substantial. The gains of the immediate prewar period were confirmed and amplified at the Liberation when the PCF expanded enormously throughout the country, but even more dramatically in the département.

The achievement of the PC in increasing its membership in the département during the Popular Front was all the more remarkable given its previous weakness. A police report of January 1934 described a situation where there were few members, where the party's organisations lacked funds and where many of its officials had appropriated what few funds or resources the party did possess. Such members as there were did not pay their subscriptions regularly, and of a membership of 350 in Marseilles it was estimated that only 100 were up to date with their dues. The report concluded that:

'Dans la période de nervosité que nous traversons actuellement au point de vue politique, il convient de n'attacher à l'action du parti communiste à Marseille qu'un seul mobile, que ses possibilités limitent d'ailleurs considérablement: participer au désordre, s'il y en a et faire le plus de bruit possible pour donner au Comité Central, à Paris, l'impression d'une activité qui est, en réalité, sans consistance.'<sup>1</sup>

This inability to act was described in the same report as a:

'situation qui peut se résumer ainsi: pas de militants capables, pas d'argent faute de subventions, très peu de cotisations payées, indifférence totale de presque tous les membres du parti et désintéressement à peu près complet des dirigeants.'<sup>2</sup>

The weakness in terms of membership and finance described in this report was reflected as well in the party's inadequate organisation. The police reported that the 34 cells which the party claimed to have in Marseilles were:

1 Report in AN F7 13132 & AD M6/11379 CD to Prefect 31.1.1934.

2 Ibid.

'inexistantes en fait. Certaines comprenant, en effet, un membre unique qui cumule toutes les fonctions et qui figure à lui seul un groupement...on ne peut appliquer à aucun groupement communiste de Marseille la qualification "d'organisation" au sens propre de ce mot. Rayons et cellules se caractérisent, au contraire, par leur défaut d'organisation...'<sup>1</sup>

The following years saw a transformation in the party's organisation which must have exceeded the wildest dreams of Francois Billoux, sent to Marseilles at the end of 1933 to prove himself to the Party hierarchy by rebuilding the Marseilles party.

The PCF was organised in cells, both factory and neighbourhood ones, which during the Popular Front period at least, were responsible to sections, which were, in turn, responsible to Regional Committees of Direction. In periods of party weakness the creation of a cell, and particularly that of a factory cell, marked as often as not as much a declaration of intent to the Central Committee as it did any political reality. Cells would be created in factories where it was thought appropriate for the party to be active, but recruitment was, as already noted, not always on a sufficiently large scale for the cell to have any lasting presence. Thus, the growth in number of cells from 17 in Marseilles in 1932 to 34 in December 1933 did not mark a dramatic increase in PC activity.<sup>2</sup> By way of contrast the growth in the number of cells in the region, from 173 in October 1934 to 332 in June 1935, and then 365 in October did mark a dramatic upturn in PC fortunes. Similarly, the fact that by the Autumn of 1937 there was a total of 328 local and 319 factory cells organised into 39 sections in the Bouches-du-Rhône was a reflection of the enormous expansion in influence

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1 Ibid.

2 Figure for 1932 and 1933 in AD M6 /11379.

which the PC had experienced in the Popular Front period. This kind of expansion in organisation and membership brought benefits beyond the obvious ones of increased votes and subscriptions to the party. Such an extensive and dense organisational network allowed the party to entrench itself in the Marseilles community in a way which neither it, nor its rival the SFIO, had ever been able to do previously. The Communist cell seemed so ubiquitous in the Popular Front period that it could hope to extend its influence beyond that of merely being a political organisation. Members could be spared to involve themselves in things other than purely political activities. Sports groups could be founded and run by PC members in the hope that they would attract other people to become involved in a PC-sponsored activity. Newspapers could be sold either in the street or door-to-door to members' friends and neighbours in a way not before possible. Thus the extension of PC influence in Marseilles in this period was not merely linked to membership, it actually seemed to spread exponentially as increased membership produced in turn improved and extended organisation, which in its turn was translated into increased newspapers sales, fringe organisation activity and influence generally. Rouge-Midi, the local Communist newspaper was estimated to be only printing 300 copies when it first started in 1930,<sup>1</sup> and its influence was estimated to be nulle. The situation had changed by the end of 1934 when the paper claimed to have won an extra 3,000 readers since July of that year. By mid-February of 1935 the paper was printing 8,000 copies and by late March almost 9,000 copies.<sup>2</sup> During the strikes of June 1936 the newspaper

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1 AD VI T 5/2 Report of 3.11.1930.

2 Rouge-Midi, 90, 3.11.1934.  
Rouge-Midi, 105, 16.2.1935.  
Rouge-Midi, 110, 23.3.1935.

became a twice-weekly one, printing between fifty and sixty five thousand copies a week.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter, sales settled down a little but the paper remained the most successful party newspaper in the region, producing four separate editions of its Tuesday and Friday issues which were respectively printed in almost 19,000 and 24,000 copies.<sup>2</sup> At the same time as sales of Rouge-Midi increased so, too, did the number of newspapers produced and either given away or sold by the individual PC factory and neighbourhood cells. Sales of literature showed a similar jump in this period as the 17,000 francs worth of party literature sold in the département in 1934 was transformed into a sale of material worth 400,000 francs in 1937.<sup>3</sup> These increases in newspaper sales, organisation and membership also allowed for a parallel increase in the recruitment of the PC fringe organisations and youth movements. The Marseilles region of 1930 which had included only 200 members of the Jeunesses Communistes had grown enormously by September 1936 to a point where there were 2,500 members of the Jeunesses Communistes in Marseilles alone.<sup>4</sup> By December of the following year there were 4,000 members of the Jeunesses Communistes in the département and over 800 members of the now separate Jeunes Filles de

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1 Rouge-Midi, 184, 19.6.1936.

Rouge-Midi, 185, 24.6.1936.

2 Parti Communiste Français, Deux ans d'activité au service du peuple, op.cit. p223.

3 Rouge-Midi, 346, 28.12.1937.

4 The change was even more dramatic than this might suggest since the 1930 figure concerned the Marseilles region, which included four départements, whereas the 1936 figure included Marseilles alone. The 1930 figure is from AN F7 13189, contained in a letter from the JC Committee in Paris to the Marseilles region. Figure for September 1936 is from Rouge-Midi, No.212.

France.<sup>1</sup>

The period of the Popular Front saw a transformation of both a quantitative and qualitative kind in the Marseilles Communist Party. The weak, badly-disciplined and organised party of the late 1920's and early 1930's was transformed after 1934 into a highly efficient, well-organised, large and influential party. In terms of its membership, organisation, and the sale of its press and literature it outstripped the local SFIO, even if the latter still won more votes and had the support of the established daily press in the town. The PC had changed from being a marginal political grouping to become a highly influential, and well-rooted social force in the life of Marseilles. Its meetings, film shows and fêtes champêtres all succeeded in drawing large attendances, testifying to the extent of the transformation in the party.

#### e The Extreme Left

The extreme Left was never a very serious threat to the main Left-Wing parties during the Popular Front period but it could act as an irritant at the more difficult moments. The parties of the extreme Left could capitalise on dissatisfaction with the Popular Front in a similar way to those of the extreme Right. The parties and groups of the extreme Left may be divided as follows; into Anarchists, Dissident Communists and Dissident Socialists.

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1 Figures from Parti Communiste Français. Deux ans au service du peuple, op.cit. p258 and 265. NB figures in this sentence refer not to the département but to the region. According to AD M6/10792 Report of CD 3.7.1939 the JC movement had 5,500 members in the Bouches-du-Rhône at that moment. It is interesting to note that the meeting of the JC movement which was the subject of this report attracted an attendance of 3,500 people which was quite sizeable for the time.

## i Anarchists

Marseilles had been an important centre of anarchist activity before 1914 and the strikes of 1919-1920 were led by Anarchists and Anarcho-syndicalists.<sup>1</sup> During the early 1920's Communists succeeded in gaining control of the local unitaire unions and the Anarchists and non-Communist revolutionary syndicalists were forced to choose between continuing in independent unions, joining the Confédération Générale du Travail Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire (CGTSR), or joining the local CGT. Anarchist building workers in Marseilles maintained an independent trade union and devoted much of their energy to denouncing the PCF and publicising traditional Anarchist notions of hostility to the Church, the State, the Army and the Nation.<sup>2</sup> The growth of a powerful Communist trade union movement meant that such independent anarchist trade unions tended to be pushed closer to the CGT and the ex-confédérés during the Popular Front, and join the local Socialists in their vehement denunciation of PCF domination of the trade unions. Spanish and Italian immigration helped the local Anarchist movement since many of these immigrants were more sympathetic to Anarchist than to Communist politics, but throughout the interwar period the PCF was clearly a larger and more dynamic party than any of its rivals on the Left.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 See R. Bianco, 'Le mouvement anarchiste à Marseille et dans les Bouches-du-Rhône de 1880 à 1914', (Thèse de 3e cycle, Aix-en-Provence, 1977), and D.A.L. Levy, 'French Trade Unions and Strikes from 1919 to 1920: A Study with special reference to Marseilles and the Bouches-du-Rhône', (University of London, MA Dissertation 1977, Centre of International and Area Studies).
  - 2 AN F7 13059 CS report of 18.3.1927. Reports on the CGTSR may be found in AD M6 8294 CC to Prefect 24 & 25.2.1935 and AD M6 10874 CC to Prefect 8.2.1937.
  - 3 AN F 14 15745 'Rapport au sujet du conflit des dockers de Marseille', 31.8.1938, mentions the Anarcho-syndicalist views of Italian dockers. AD M6 10809bis CS to Prefect 5.11.1937 mentions the Anarchist views of Spanish immigrants. AD M6 10899 CD to Prefect 29.5.1937 mentions the attempts of Spanish Anarchists to raise money for Spain. AD M6 10812 CD 14.12.1936 reports a meeting of Anarchist engineering workers where one of those present claimed that there was little point in trying to organise an Anarchist collection for Spain within the industry 'car dans cette corporation que la propagande communiste en recueille tous les fruits'.

Anarchist speakers such as Sebastien Faure could attract large audiences but organised anarchism was less successful in winning support.<sup>1</sup> The Fédération Anarchiste Provençale (FAP) launched an unenthusiastic and ineffective antiparliamentary campaign on the eve of the 1936 legislative elections and anarchist interventions in the June 1936 strikes urging the creation of a revolutionary council were reported by police to have received little support.<sup>2</sup> The FAP was thought to have about one hundred members in Marseilles by December 1936 but its leaders never failed to be surprised by the lack of enthusiasm in Marseilles for their movement.<sup>3</sup>

## ii Dissident Communists

In addition to recruiting amongst immigrants and those people who had traditionally supported anarchist politics, Anarchists and other groups on the extreme Left could benefit from disillusionment with the PCF. Bolshevisation of the PCF had provided some recruits for Anarchist, Socialist and Sabianiste parties in the 1920's. By the early 1930's a Trotskyist presence began to grow in Marseilles. Two issues of the Trotskyist newspaper Le Bolchevik-Leniniste produced in 1933 denounced the expulsion of Trotskyists from the local PC.<sup>4</sup> Trotskyists never succeeded in recruiting many members in Marseilles, and at the end of 1936 the local Prefect estimated that there was only a maximum of eighteen Trotskyists in the town.<sup>5</sup> Like the Anarchists,

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1 AD XIVM 25/76 CD to Prefect 7.12.1936 mentions an attendance of 1,500 at a meeting addressed by Faure.

2 Bulletin Intérieur de la Fédération Anarchiste Provençale 7 avril, 1936. AD XIVM 25/78 CD to Prefect 16.6.1936 commented on Anarchist interventions in the June strikes: 'Cette propagande ne paraît pas devoir détourner les grévistes de leur point de vue actuel, c'est-à-dire les revendications reconnues par le Gouvernement'.

3 ADM6 10812 Prefect to Minister of Interior 1.12.1936 AD M6 10880 CC 12.12.1938.

4 Le Bolchevik-Leniniste January and February 1933.

5 AD M6 10809bis Prefect to Minister of the Interior 25.11.1936. Also see AD XIVM 24/62 CD to Prefect 9.10.1937.

however, Trotskyists could act as an irritant to the PC, and sometimes threatened to undermine the party's control over strike movements. Anarchist and Trotskyist leaflets distributed during the Summer 1938 Dock overtime ban won some support for their criticism of PC moderation in the strike and their criticism of the policy of continued support for the Popular Front.<sup>1</sup> Dissent within the local PC seems to have increased from the Summer of 1937 as many party members saw PCF policy as being too opportunist in terms of its support for the Government, moderation over Spain and in strikes and its overtures towards the Church.<sup>2</sup> Police reports indicated a rise in the number of expulsions from the PC in the Autumn of 1937 and suggested that the cancellation of a planned visit by Thorez in September 1937 was the result of local concern about internal party dissent.<sup>3</sup> It seems that Trotskyists benefitted more than did the Anarchists from the Left-wing dissent within the party, but there is some evidence that many ex-Communists were also willing to join the parties of the far-Right such as the PPF and the PSF.<sup>4</sup>

### iii Dissident Socialists

Dissident Socialists in Marseilles tended to group around individuals rather than national organisations. The most serious fractures in the local SFIO were caused by the defections of prominent individual Socialists, such as Flaisières in 1929 (when he campaigned for Mayor on a ticket with Sabiani as Deputy Mayor) and Bouisson in

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1 AD XIVM25/139 leaflets of 26 and 27.8.1938.

2 AD M6 11379 CD to Prefect 30.11.1937.

3 AD M6 11379 Report dated 26.11.1937 and AD M6 10809bis Report of 30.8.1937.

4 AD M6 10809bis CD 25.10.1937 and M6 10877 CD 19.6.1937.

1934. The national splits, of the Néos (under Renaudel from the neighbouring département of the Var) in 1933 and of the Pivertistes in 1938 made little impact in Marseilles. The Gauche Révolutionnaire of Marceau Pivert was vigorously opposed within the Bouches-du-Rhône SFIO and was estimated to have only ten members in Marseilles in January 1936.<sup>1</sup> By the Autumn of 1938 the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan had become established as an independent grouping with fifty members in the département.<sup>2</sup> The crisis in the local SFIO federation with its traditionally moderate politics was reflected in the, albeit moderate, growth of the PSOP in the département in the following year, since by May 1939, the Pivertistes could count three hundred and fifty members and ten sections in Marseilles alone.<sup>3</sup> There is some evidence that the small grouping of Pivertistes in Marseilles undertook joint actions with the local Trotskyists. The small size of the extreme-Left in Marseilles meant that individual groups needed to ally if they were to perform even the rather modest role of irritant to the larger well established parties of the Popular Front.

## 5 Trade Unions

### a) The nature of trade union membership

Parties such as the PCF may have tried to spread their appeal very broadly during the years of the Popular Front, but, whatever their successes in this field, they were never as large and extensive as the major trade unions. In part, this difference derives from a difference in the very nature of party and trade union, but it is also a function

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1 AD M6 10793 Prefect to Minister of the Interior 2.1.1936.

2 AD M6 10789 CD to Prefect 8.9.1938.

3 AD M6 10888 CD 23.5.1939. The PSOP considered recruitment to have been slower than expected.

of circumstance. Superficially, trade unions appear to differ from parties; to be organisations devoted to organising the whole workforce regardless of political opinion and thus to have greater potential scope than organisations such as political parties which accepted people on the basis of their opinions, and were most likely to appeal to those people who were eligible (and interested enough) to vote. This superficial contrast between party and union obscures however, as much as it reveals. In the periods of enormous trade union growth after the First World War and during the Popular Front, membership of a trade union did not require enormous political commitment, but the act of taking out a membership card was, nevertheless, linked to a change in the political situation. At other moments, membership of a trade union could, if anything, demonstrate more of a political commitment than actually joining a political party. To join the CGTU, for example, in some factories in the 1920's, offered few rewards and many dangers, and members were more akin to political than to union activists. Conversely, membership of a party such as the PCF could indicate more than simply an electoral commitment, since the party took an active interest in events outside of the still-narrowly defined electoral arena. In short, if it is relatively easy to assess the significance of party membership, it is a great deal more difficult to interpret correctly the meaning of trade union membership in interwar Marseilles. Membership of unions was, certainly, more common than was that of political parties, but it could also be motivated by a greater variety of factors. In different circumstances joining a trade union might signify the desire for employment, a willingness to flout the authority of an employer,

demonstrate class or political solidarity, or simply to have a quiet life. All these various motivations could act on individuals at different times and it is, therefore, very difficult to consider union membership trends in a simple linear or chronological way. The act of joining a union cannot be divorced from the political situation in which it took place.

#### b) Rival trade union confederations

The very politicisation of trade unions was reflected in the multiplication of confederations. There had been a coexistence of employer-sponsored (jaune) trade unions together with Socialist and Anarchist ones organised in the CGT prior to the First World War. With the end of the War and the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution the situation became more complicated. Simple employer-sponsored unions continued much as before, but there was also another important development in the field of Conservative trade unionism with the establishment of the CFTC in 1919. Catholic trade unions were important after that date, and in Marseilles their strength derived from the predominantly female needle trades and the white-collar banking and clerical sectors. Nationally, the CFTC grew from 85,000 members in 1919 to 102,000 in 1934 and then, affected as other unions were by the membership growth of the Popular Front period, its membership rose dramatically to a claimed total of almost 488,000 in July 1938.<sup>1</sup> Locally, the CFTC arose in response to the revolutionary

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1 P. Ardouin, Le syndicalisme ouvrier en Provence 1834-1935, Marseille, 1936 pp9 and 10 for national figures for 1919 and 1934. Le Musée Social, August 1939, p214 for July 1938 figure.

strikes of 1920, as railway workers in Arles 'tous empreints de l'esprit "anticégétiste et anti-révolutionnaire"' created their own local branch of the catholic union.<sup>1</sup> Before the Popular Front CFTC activity in Marseilles was associated mainly with the Church, but thereafter it seemed to attract those workers who were religious, hostile to the CGT, and desirous of a variety of trade union activity which sought reforms but within the constraints of legality. A high moral and pro-natalist tone permeated much CFTC literature, and although members were usually opposed to strikes it seems that their position was the result of beliefs rather than pressure applied from employers.<sup>2</sup> By April 1939, after a period of considerable growth, the CFTC in Marseilles claimed over 25,000 members.<sup>3</sup>

Other non-revolutionary or socialist unions also developed during the interwar period. Most, however, were employer-dominated organisations. During the Popular Front employers and Right-Wing parties alike went to great lengths to combat the influence of the CGT by establishing rival trade union confederations. The most dynamic of these were the Syndicats Professionels Français (SPF) established in the wake of the strikes of June 1936. Often funded by employers and receiving support from the Parti Social Français (PSF), these unions grew dramatically during the Popular Front period, to a point where they constituted the second largest union movement in Marseilles after the CGT. Another confederation similar to the SPF, the Confédération

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1 Ardouin, op.cit. p45.

2 For general information on the local CFTC see the federation's newspaper La Paix Sociale. Also see the report by the CD in AD M6/10888 22.4.1939.

3 AD M6/10888 CD 22.4.1939.

Française du Travail Unique, developed in Marseilles in the first months of 1939. Attempting to profit from disillusionment with the CGT the CFTU recruited members quite rapidly in an atmosphere when many people saw CGT membership once more as a danger to their chances of continued employment. The CFTU attempted to appear independent but was, in fact, sponsored by the PPF.<sup>1</sup> The CFTU and SPF in many ways appear to have been simply revived and revived versions of the long established tradition of employer-sponsored unions. Their fascist leanings enabled such unions to combine the role of helping employers through combatting the CGT at the same time as they offered their own programme of social reform.

The largest trade union confederations were those of the CGTU and the CGT. Although committed by its Charter of 1906 to the avoidance of an attachment to any political party the CGT had always acted as a political, if not a party-political, force. The linkages between the CGT and the French Left were demonstrated in the period after the Bolshevik Revolution when the splits which resulted from that event in the SFIO were mirrored in the trade union movement. The CGT divided into two parts in 1921, and over time the new CGTU developed ever closer links with the PCF whilst the CGT developed a reformist strategy which placed it alongside, if not within, the SFIO. The battle between the CGT and CGTU was an extremely bitter one throughout the 1920's and the early 1930's. Nationally and locally both organisations were relatively small, but the CGT was always the larger of the two. In 1928 the CGT nationally is estimated to have

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1 AD XIVM24/62 CD 19.6.1939 & AD XIVM 24/52 Note dated 15.2.1939.

had 554,796 members and the CGTU 370,260, whilst the CGT had 31,714 members and the CGTU 9,783 members in the Bouches-du-Rhône in the same year.<sup>1</sup> In 1934 both the CGTU and CGT had lost members with the former having 264,085 and the latter 490,984 members. In the town of Marseilles alone, the picture by the Spring of 1936 had improved dramatically for the CGTU at least. The CGTU claimed 16,545 members in Marseilles at the local reunification Congress of 1936, whilst the CGT, although still the larger of the two organisations, had seen its lead reduced, as it had 28,641 members.<sup>2</sup> In the years of separation the CGTU had always adopted a more revolutionary position than had the CGT, but this seems to have led to a loss of membership. The CGT, with its reformist politics did little better, but it did seem better able to attract those workers who were most able, because of their work situation, to join a trade union without fearing too much for their jobs. Separately neither organisation could make much headway. In Marseilles, as elsewhere, they discovered that reunification, on the wave of enthusiasm for united action which accompanied the Popular Front, seemed to offer the chance to more easily recruit the many workers who had remained unorganised until then. The Popular Front then, aided recruitment and encouraged the reunification of the CGT. The same movement, however, also reinforced the extent to which the largest trade union movement was both dependent on and an actor upon the political scene, and, as such, its ability to act and recruit members was influenced by national political developments.

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1 National trade union membership figures from A.Prost, La CGT à l'époque du Front Populaire 1934-1939, Paris 1964. Tableaux XVIII & XIX. Local figures are from Bulletin d'Information de Union Régionale Unitaire, septembre 1928, No.3 Marseilles, 1928, p13. (Archives Peyrot). NB The CGT figure refers to 1927 whilst that for the CGTU refers only to the first eight months of 1928.

2 National figures from Prost *ibid.* Local figures from AD XIVM 24/53.

### c) Evaluating the influence of trade unions

Trade union membership provides one measure of trade union influence but it is by no means an easy one to grasp. Authors as distinguished as Kriegel, Prost and, more recently, Robert, have grappled with the problem of measuring trade union membership in 1919-1920 and 1934-1939.<sup>1</sup> These three authors agree that trade union membership should best be judged by dividing the annual number of trade union stamps sold by ten. This is the strategy adopted in the following tables when possible. The relevant figures are not, however, always available and sometime estimates of membership are used from police sources, assertions made by the unions themselves, and the, often inaccurate, electoral lists for the elections to the Conseil Supérieur du Travail. These measures are not wholly satisfactory, either in terms of what they purport to show, the numbers of members, or in terms of an evaluation of the influence and importance of trade unions.

Other indices of trade union influence, apart from that of membership, are available. Few are any more satisfactory in themselves, but they should be considered together with the membership figures. The elections to the posts of délégués d'atelier could potentially provide the best indication of trade union influence at the level of each factory or workplace. Unfortunately few reliable comprehensive records exist concerning the outcome of these elections, and when reported they tended to be done in such a selective way as to provide very little overall picture of union influence.

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1 See Antoine Prost *loc.cit.*

Annie Kriegel, La Croissance de la C.G.T. 1918-1921, Paris 1966.

Jean Louis Robert, La Scission Syndicale de 1921. Essai de reconnaissance des formes, Paris 1980.

The figures contained in the tables presented here provide an indication both of total union membership at certain periods and also of union growth during the Popular Front period; primarily that of the CGT. Some figures are presented concerning Marseilles but a more complete series of membership figures applies to the level of the département. Table 3.11 deals with the département and has the advantage of comparability with the tables already given concerning SFIO and PCF membership. The table makes clear that throughout the interwar period union membership as measured against total population in the département outstripped by far that of any political party - and usually did so by more than a factor of ten. Clearly in terms of membership at least, the trade unions penetrated deeper into the community, even at moments of weakness, than did any political party. The real influence of trade unions, however, may more properly be measured against the 'unionisable'

## Trade Union Membership in Relation to Population, Bouches-du-Rhone 1913-1939

(CGT &amp; CGTU)

Date	Members	Organisation	Population		Union Members per 10,000	
			Total	Unionisable	Total popn.	Unionisable popn.
1911			805755			
1913	8111	CGT			101	335
1914	5820	CGT			72	240
1918	15000	CGT			178	619
1919	37850	CGT			450	1561
1920	49667	CGT			590	2048
1921	25082	CGT	841996	242476	298	1034
1922	11600	CGT alone			138	478
1923	16778	CGT alone			199	692
1924	16475	CGT alone			188	653
1925	18569	CGT alone			212	736
1926	20205	CGT alone	876951	252182	230	801
1927	22458	CGT alone			256	891
1928	23628	CGT alone			269	937
1929	27000	CGT alone			296	1003
1930	6987	CGTU			77	260
1931	21996	CGT alone	910672	269064	242	818
1934	4000	CGTU alone			44	143
1935	32700	CGT&CGTU			351	1172
1936 Jan	28000	CGT&CGTU	930802	278829	301	1004
May	40000	CGT			430	1435
June	51596	CGT			554	1850
July	100000	CGT			1074	3586
Nov.	145000	CGT			1558	5200
1937-7*	135242	CGT			1453	4850
1937-8*	148813	CGT			1599	5337
1938-9*	104169	CGT			1119	3736
1939 July	95000	CGT			1021	3407

1. 1913 & 1914 membership rates have been calculated against the population figure for 1911, but against an active population figure calculated from the 1921 census. 1918-1923 figures have been calculated against 1921 population census, 1924-1928 figures against 1926 census, 1929-1931 figures against 1931 census, and the remaining figures against the 1936 census.
2. The unionisable population includes all the non agricultural categories of ouvriers, employes, and sans-emploi, with the exception of the army. Employers and self-employed workers have been excluded as not being liable to unionisation. The exclusion of agricultural workers might be objected to given the strength of agricultural trade unionism in the Arles area during the Popular Front.
3. The election lists of the Conseil Superieur du Travail in AD M22/40 are another source of information on trade union membership. The lists provide figures on membership for all non-public sector trade unions. Thus postmen, civil servants and teachers are excluded from this source, but, in contrast to the figures given above, non CGT or CGTU unions are included: an important factor in 1937. According to this source total trade union membership was 59530 in 1933 and 196072 in 1937. The figures are probably too high since unions had an incentive to inflate their memberships and unions' own submissions were not checked in the Prefecture.

Sources

- 1 Population and active population figures from Censuses of 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1936.
- 2 1913 Trade Union membership figure from M. Labi, La grande division des travailleurs, Paris, 1964, p.250. (Labi's figures have been multiplied here by 1.2, since Labi gives membership on the basis that each member would have purchased twelve stamps per year. It seems more realistic to assume ten stamps per year on average and to adjust Labi's calculations accordingly).
- 3 1914, 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921 membership figures from Jean-Louis Robert, La scission syndicale de 1921: Essai de reconnaissance des formes, Paris, 1980, p.206.
- 4 1922-1929 figures from Le Peuple, 17.10.1929. 1930 figure from AD M6 8288 CS 22.12.1930. 1934 figure from, Union Régionale Unitaire, Rapport d'activité au Congrès de Marseille, 4.3.1934.
- 5 1935 membership figures from AD M6 11379 21,000 CGT members and 11,700 CGTU members.
- 6 1936 January membership figure mentioned in Confédération Générale du Travail Compte rendu sténographique des débats, 31e Congrès, Nantes, 14-17 novembre, 1938.
- 7 1936 May membership figure cited in Le Peuple, 24.11.1936.
- 8 AD XIVM 24/53.
- 9 July 1936 membership figure from Rouge-Midi 10.7.1936 and Le Midi Syndicaliste 14.7.1936.
- 10 November 1936 membership figure is a halfway point between the claims of 140,000 members and 150,000 members mentioned respectively in Le Peuple 24.11.1936 and Le Midi Syndicaliste 15.11.1936.
- 11 The figures for 1936-7, 1937-8, and 1938-9 marked with the asterisk are from the printed reports for the Conferences of the Union Départementale, in 1937, 1938 and 1939 respectively. They are based on dividing the total number of union stamps sold by ten. This gives a lower figure than some other estimates, since such a procedure, carried out at the end of the financial year, tends to even out sudden bursts (or for that matter declines) in membership.
- 12 The July 1939 membership figure is mentioned in a police report in AD M6 10792.

TABLE 3.12

## Trade Union Membership in Relation to Population Marseilles 1927 - 1939

Date	Members	Population	Trade Union Members Per 10,000 Popn.
1926		600,000	803
1927	48,169	"	803
1931		610,000	
1936 May	37,000	620,000	597
July	45,186	"	729
Nov	100,000	"	1613
1938	100,000	"	1613
1939 Mar	116,000	"	1871

Notes and Sources:

- 1 Population figures as used in Chapter One.
- 2 1927 figure is for members of all unions (i.e. includes non-CGT or CGTU unions) attached to the Marseilles Bourse du Travail AD XIV M 22/40.
- 3 Figure for May 1936 mentioned by Armand, General Secretary of Union Locale in meeting in February 1937, reported in AD M6 10874.
- 4 July 1936 figure probably dates from the period before the strikes and refers to the situation of unions at the reunification congress of that month, AD XIVM 24/53.
- 5 1938 figure from La Provence Socialiste 25.2.1938.
- 6 1939 figure in fact refers to the membership at the end of the year April 1938-March 1939 and is cited in Rouge-Midi 7.3.1939.

population (defined here as the total civilian non agricultural population of employés, ouvriers, and unemployed). As a percentage of the 'unionisable' population in the Bouches-du-Rhone CGT membership rose from 10 per cent in January 1936 to over 53 per cent in 1937-8.

Adopting the same procedure in analysing the membership of the CGT and CGTU in France as a whole during this period produces a unionisation rate of 7.52 per cent in 1934 and of 41.96 per cent in 1937.<sup>1</sup> Since there is no occupational census for Marseilles alone unionisation rates can only be calculated against total population in the town. On this basis Table 3.12 shows that the unionisation rate in Marseilles in 1927 at 8.03 per cent was several times greater than that of France as a whole which was 2.35 per cent if the CGT and CGTU are considered. Similarly, the disparity between Marseilles unionisation rates and that of France as a whole are equally evident for the Popular Front period. If we assume a maximum CGT membership of 100,000 in Marseilles in 1937 the unionisation rate for the town is 16.13 per cent in 1937 as against that of 9.45 per cent nationally. The difference between Marseilles and the rest of France had been narrowed but it still remained sizeable.<sup>2</sup>

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1. This unionisation rate for France differs from that given by Prost. We have used Prost's figures op.cit. Tableau XVII for total (CGT & CGTU) union membership in 1934 and 1937 of 755,069 and 3,958,825 respectively. These figures have then been converted into percentages against the total French civilian non agricultural active population (i.e. the unionisable population) of employés, ouvriers and sans-emploi of 10,038,974 in 1931 (applied to the 1934 figure) and of 9,434,833 in 1936 (applied to the 1937 figure).
  2. These percentages are for union membership calculated against total population. Union membership for France (CGT and CGTU) of 956,200 in 1926 Prost *ibid.* and as in note 1 for 1934 and 1937. Relevant census data gives total French population figures of 40,743,897, 41,834,923, and 41,907,000 in 1926, 1931 and 1936 respectively. Thus union membership as a percentage of the total French population was 2.35%, 1.8% and 9.45% in 1926, 1934 and 1937 respectively.

It seems reasonable to assume that, on the basis of these crude calculations, if union members constituted 16.13 per cent of the total population of Marseilles in 1937, they would have amounted to well over half of the active population.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear, from this brief study of trade unions and their membership, that they constituted the most extensive organisations in the Marseilles community. Their influence was greater both than that of other political organisations in Marseilles or that of most unions in the rest of France.

## 6 Para-Political Organisations

Political parties were not slow to realise that whilst being unable to rival the large memberships of the various associations and trade unions in the town, they could at least attempt to extend their influence through such organisations. The widespread reluctance to join political parties meant that there was great scope for para-political organisations which could play the dual roles of buffer and transmission belt between the party and the community. Frequently, the effectiveness and influence of political organisations would depend upon their ability to create around them a range of potentially attractive and useful para-political organisations. Any party which could succeed in meshing together and securing dominance over a network of mutual aid societies, recreational and ethnically or locally-based associations, and various single-issue campaigning organisations might have a good chance of establishing its hegemony

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1 According to the table on union membership rates for the Bouches-du-Rhône a rate of 15.58 per cent of the total population converts to one of 52 per cent of the unionisable population. Following this example it seems likely that (even allowing for the fact that Marseilles had a smaller share of the excluded agricultural population than did the département as a whole) 16.13 per cent of the total Marseilles population would convert to more than 50 per cent of the active population if the latter were known.

within at least a substantial part of the community.

The strongly entrenched network of anticlerical organisations in Marseilles offers one of the best examples of the kind of 'para-political' activity referred to. The movement of Les Amis de l'Instruction Laïque (AIL) managed to combine nicely the roles of propagating a point of view (secularism), mobilising support for the SFIO, and, above all, of providing an organisation through which people could engage in various recreations. The combination of the ideological and the recreational was well summed up in the subtitle to the AIL newspaper for the Blancarde district of Marseilles. The paper itself was named Marseille-Blancarde and the subtitle announced that it was the 'Organe de l'Association "Les amis de l'Instruction Laïque de la Blancarde" Philanthropique, Excursionniste, Sportive et Musicale'.<sup>1</sup> In keeping with its title much of the content of this newspaper was devoted to reporting the excursions and entertainments planned for the membership. This AIL was only one of many, and their collective membership was extremely large. In 1930 one estimate put the AIL membership in the Bouches-du-Rhône at 12,000.<sup>2</sup> An account in the local newspaper of the same year gives a very vivid picture of the range and extent of AIL activities. Le Petit Provençal reported that in June 1930:

'La Fédération des Bouches-du-Rhône compte alors 66 sociétés affiliées (dont 42 pour Marseille). Elle dirige 56 garderies et patronages laïques, 16 cours de travaux manuels, couture, broderie et enseignement ménager, 25 groupes musicaux, 35 cours de solfège, 25 cours d'instruments, 8 sections d'art théâtral, 6 groupes de gymnastes, 42 équipes de football, 14 équipes de basket, 12 groupes d'athlétisme, 45 d'éducation physique, 6 de boulomanes, 1 de scouts laïques (...), 18 cinémas, 3 appareils de T.S.F., 46 bibliothèques, 12 garderies de vacances, 2 cantines scolaires gratuites, 1 colonie à la mer, des milliers de livrets de caisse d'épargne délivrés chaque année.'<sup>3</sup>

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1 Marseille-Blancarde founded November 1884.

2 AD M6/8288 Inspecteur de l'Académie to Prefect 4.8.1930.

3 Le Petit Provençal, 20.6.1930 quoted by Bernard Bouisson, L'Anticléricalisme à Marseille de 1919 à 1939, Thèse 3e cycle histoire, Aix-en-Provence, 1970, p112.

This was an impressive array of activities by any account. The membership of the AIL movement seems to have declined in the 1920's, from 20,000 to 13,000 between 1925 and 1930, but by 1934 the number of groups at any rate had increased to the number of 84 in Marseilles alone.<sup>1</sup> Although ostensibly based upon an ideological belief, the AIL movement seems to have owed its success in large part to its willingness to turn its attention towards organising social and educational activities of a general nature. The fact remains however that the AILs were dominated by the local SFIO, and with a Socialist councillor or activist on the management committee of almost every AIL in Marseilles, the party had succeeded in establishing for itself, a place in, and a political base on, one of the most vibrant manifestations of local working-class life.

Often organised alongside the AILs, and also frequently with similar memberships, were the various Pacifist and human rights organisations which existed in Marseilles in this period. The most prestigious organisation was the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, (LDH) a secular and largely socialist humanist or human rights organisation. In 1936, before the elections of that year, all five of the SFIO Deputies for the Bouches-du-Rhône (if Bouisson is included in such a category) were members of the LDH. As with the AILs, many of the most influential activists at local level were teachers or other civil servants. The LDH had almost 4,000 members in the Bouches-du-Rhône in 1934 (out of a total national membership of 158,490) and a year later

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1 1925 figure Bouisson loc.cit.

1930 figure AD M6 8288 op.cit.

Details on sections; 1930, Le Petit Provençal, 20.6.1930.

1934, Marseille Blancarde, No. 398, Jan-March 1934.

the Marseilles section counted 2,500 members.<sup>1</sup> The interest taken by the LDH in questions of civil liberties overseas as well as at home was sufficient to ensure that it was possible to sustain an Italian section of the organisation, with 150 members in Marseilles in 1935.<sup>2</sup> The LDH activists were often involved in one or other wings of the pacifist movement, and Marseilles was no exception to this rule: In 1937 the Treasurer of the Marseilles LDH, G. Pauthe, was also Secretary of the militantly pacifist Ligue Internationale des Combattants de la Paix, (LICP). Pacifism, or at least its more moderate versions, was a fairly respectable ideology in Marseilles in the early 1930's and the various pacifist organisations which stressed the role of collective security through the League of Nations received the support of many local school and university teachers, socialist Deputies, and even of the Prefect.<sup>3</sup> Regular conferences organised by the Nouvelle Ecole de la Paix, held at monthly intervals in Marseilles between 1931 and 1935, succeeded in attracting audiences of 4-800 people. Pacifism was, therefore, both respectable and regarded as being an issue of interest in Marseilles in the early 1930's, but it was not a movement which could mobilise vast numbers of working-class people. The movement was influential amongst the largely socialist intellectual and middle-class milieu, and it seemed unable to spread beyond these confines to include the working classes.<sup>4</sup>

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1 T. Ferlé, La ligue des droits de l'homme, Paris, 1936 pp51 & 53 for 1934 figures and for other information on this group. 1935 membership figures and other local details are contained in Bernard Bouisson, Le mouvement pacifiste à Marseille entre 1932 et 1939, Mémoire de maîtrise d'histoire, Faculté des lettres, Aix-en-Provence, 1968, p55.

2 AD M6/10866 Prefect to Minister Interior 13.11.1935. The group was however reported to be 'peu actif'.

3 The reference here is to the Nouvelle Ecole de la Paix created in 1931 by the Groupe Universitaire pour la Société des Nations. According to B. Bouisson 'Le mouvement pacifiste...' op.cit.p55. the Comité d'honneur of the Nouvelle Ecole... included Causeret, Prefect of the Bouches-du-Rhône, Bouisson, Deputy, Ribot, Mayor of Marseilles and Léon Bon President of the Conseil Général.

4 B. Bouisson 'Le mouvement pacifiste...' op.cit.pp72-74.

One movement which seemed to be able to link together the pacifist sentiment of many Left-Wing intellectuals with the more specific concerns of the working-class, and then to reconcile these groups to the diverse aims of the differing Left parties, was the antifascist movement. Antifascism seems not to have been a very important issue before 1932-3. Thereafter, however, the rise of Hitler in Germany made fascism seem more of a live issue. Its pertinence to the working-classes lay in the fact that fascism was perceived as primarily an extreme and ferociously anti-working-class, form of capitalism. Campaigns launched for the release of Left Wing activists in Germany succeeded in touching a popular chord in Marseilles when they were presented in tandem with campaigns against the traditionally unpopular militant Right-Wing and clerical French-based groupings such as Action Française and the Croix de Feu. Local Committees against war became committees against both war and fascism before in turn becoming part of the Amsterdam-Pleyel Committees. The Amsterdam-Pleyel movement in the département served as a meeting point for the two main parties which were to be involved in the Popular Front, but its function extended beyond this, since it also provided a way in which people outside the main political parties could become politically involved.<sup>1</sup> Between the beginning of 1935 and that of 1936 the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement in the département grew from 3000 to 8000 members. At the Congress of the movement held in January 1936 the leader Jean Cristofol was able to report that the movement had 84 groups in Marseilles alone and that in the département as a whole there were 15 factory-based groups.

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1 B. Bouisson op.cit. p.103 uses the term 'lieu de rencontre'

Even more significant was the fact, reported by Cristofol, that of the 8000 members, more than four fifths had not previously been members of a political party.<sup>1</sup> This ability to attract the unorganised was undoubtedly due to the popularity of the issues dealt with by the group, but also to the unsectarian way in which the group behaved and the fact that the provision of entertainments and other diversions for the members were not overlooked by the group's leadership.<sup>2</sup>

The PCF was the great gainer from the antifascist movement, since many of the unorganised people attracted to become involved in it, would, in time, either become sympathetic to, or even members of, the PCF. In many respects the Popular Front itself represented the triumph of the para-political approach; recruiting people into various fringe and front organisations rather than seeking nothing less than their membership of the political party itself. The para-political approach was one which the PCF had profited from before the Popular Front, but after 1934, its non-sectarian public face, created a more propitious climate for such an approach. The PC-sponsored groups such as the ARAC and the Amis de l'URSS seem to have grown during the Popular Front period. The latter group was successful in attracting large numbers of people to its meetings and film shows. Two such meetings held in celebration of the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in November of 1935 succeeded in attracting 1,000 and 500 people. The group was reported to be dominated by intellectuals, but the membership of 2,900 in the département and 1,000 in Marseilles at the beginning of 1936 probably included many working-class people

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1 AD M6/10809bis Reports 213 & 225 of 11 & 12.1.1936 respectively. Rouge-Midi, 11.1.1936.

2 AD M6/10809bis CC 13.1.1936 reports that 'une grande manifestation artistique' accompanying a meeting attracted an audience of 2,000. Similarly the attendance at events organised by the Amis de L'URSS was noticeably higher when films were shown after the talk.

sympathetic to the USSR.<sup>1</sup> Groups such as these, organised by the PCF, stood in a long tradition of such organisations. The Secours Rouge International (SRI) for example was one long-established PCF front organisation which seemed able to retain some members at times when the PCF generally was doing very badly. In 1930, for example, it was reported that the SRI had sold 5,000 membership stamps in 1928 and 7,000 in 1929 at a time when the party itself in the département had only about an equivalent number of members.<sup>2</sup> By the beginning of 1936 the SRI had a well established network of local and workplace groups which provided the basis for an expansion during the Popular Front to a point where the group had 4,000 members in Marseilles in 1939 and had, significantly, been re-named to become the Secours Populaire de France.<sup>3</sup>

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1 AD M6/8294 Prefect to Interior 8.11.1935.

AD M6/10809bis Prefect to Interior 25.2.1936.

2 AD M6/8288 Report of SRI Departmental Congress. It is assumed here that the stamps sold were monthly ones and that one should divide the annual number by ten to reach an idea of membership.

3 AD M6/10866 Prefect to Interior 13.11.1935 indicates a membership of 500 in Marseilles. AD M6/10809bis Prefect to Interior 7.1.1936 gives a full list of branches and their membership for Marseilles. It is interesting to note the extent of overlapping organisational structures: The SRI had the following factory branches at the beginning of 1935:

Railwaymen - Gare St Charles

Gare d'Arenc

Gare du Prado

Tramways - Arenc depot

Raffinerie du sucre - St Charles

Caserne du Douanes-Boulevard de Strasbourg

A listing of Amsterdam-Pleyel workplace groups made at the end of 1935 included the following:-

Tramways - Chartreux & St Pierre depots

Raffinerie - St Charles

Railwaymen - Gare St Charles

Gare de la Capalette

from AD M6/8294 CD to Prefect 22.11.1935. The report of 7.1.1936 is also interesting because it mentions the intention of the SRI of operating in a completely non-sectarian and non-party political manner. It was suggested that the SRI should help all victims of injustice, even fascists or religious people. This statement of 1936 is all the more relevant when considered alongside later developments. The change in name to Secours Populaire de France was significant. The new activities were also significant. A report of 1939 on the SPF Congress (AD M6/10792 CD to Prefect 27.3.1939) lists the main activities of the organisation as having been the raising of money for Spain, and for the victims of the Nouvelles Galeries fire and the explosion at the St Chamas gunpowder factory. Clearly, by 1939, few of these activities would be regarded as being in the least controversial.

These para-political organisations with a general appeal were complemented by those with a more specific membership. The Maison de la Culture, for example, which was opened in February 1936, was aimed at all those who were interested in literature, cinema and the theatre. Its management committee was composed, however, exclusively of PCF members, even if the events staged at the centre were open to all those who would be interested. The organisation's newspaper made clear that its activities, although aimed primarily at the working-class, would, (perhaps for that reason) be of interest to intellectuals desiring to experiment with new forms of theatre and literature.<sup>1</sup> A different kind of entertainment was provided by the many local groups of the Fédération Sportive de la CGT (FSGT) which were organised on a local and workplace basis. There were also small social reform groupings which met regularly to discuss economic and political matters.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, there were also groupings for specific social or ethnic categories. The Comité Central des Chomeurs et Chomeuses de Marseilles with its own newspaper, (La Voix des Sans-Travail) restaurant, and 2,500 members in 1937, represented the most successful attempt at organising the unemployed which had ever been seen in Marseilles. Success was due not only to the swollen numbers of the unemployed but also to the more general

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1 AD M6/10816 CD to Prefect 13.5.1938. For more details on the Maison de la Culture see its newspaper Peuple et Culture copies of which are held at the Bibliothèque National.

2 E.g. J.E.U.N.E.S. (Jeunes Equipes Unies pour une nouvelle Economie Sociale) described as a PCF front organisation which concentrated on propaganda towards students. According to one report its membership of 20 in Marseilles in April 1936 had grown to 120 in March 1937. The same report mentioned the growth of a similar (but not a PC group) group, Droit au Travail, which had grown from 30 in April 1936 to 100 in March 1937. AD M6/11354 Prefect to Interior 25.3.1937.

tendency towards organisation in this period, which allowed such a committee to be established and prosper.<sup>1</sup> A similar tendency towards organisation helped to increase the membership of various politically based Franco-foreign friendship committees. One such organisation, the Comité d'Amitié Franco-Italienne, had between 5-6,000 members in the Bouches-du-Rhône. Most of its activities were carried out by a PC-dominated core of 3,500 organised in the Union Populaire Italienne, which was notable for the way in which its organisation overlapped with that of the PC itself and with those of other PC-dominated organisations.<sup>2</sup>

The various organisations discussed here which have been dubbed as para-political were significant precisely for their ability to overlap the existing organisational structures of established political parties at the same time as they succeeded in extending the appeal of those same parties. A network of organisations which simply attracted the same members as those of the political parties may have served to better attach the membership to the party but would contribute little to the task of extending party influence in the population at large. Para-political organisations were particularly useful at times when political parties sought to extend their influence beyond that of the membership. Elections and other forms of mass political mobilisation would see these para-political organisations playing an extremely important role.

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- 1 AD M6/10874 CC to Prefect 23.5.1937 & Le Petit Provençal 2.1.1936. La Voix des Sans Travail, No.7, 1939 provides details of the activities of the Foyer des sans travail. The activities and facilities included a cheap restaurant serving scores of meals every day, a grocery store and a hairdresser. The group also distributed food and fuel to the unemployed.
  - 2 AD M6/10816 Report of 3.5.1939. An example would be the location of a group at the Bar de Métallurgie, the home of the Comité du Front Populaire de St Marcel and organising centre for the strike at Coder at the end of May 1936.

CHAPTER FOUR: CLIENTELISM, CORRUPTION & MODERATION: A PORTRAIT  
OF THE SFIO AND CGT TO 1936

1 Introduction

The view of political organisation presented so far has been a rather static one. The aim here is to look rather at the dynamics of political and trade union activity in Marseilles, to convey the flavour of Marseilles politics, highlight the traditions of the town, and to describe the differences between the groups which sought to influence the working class. Chapters 4 & 5 are devoted to the pre 1936 period. Chapter 10 will examine the impact of the Popular Front on the existing political system.

2a Clientelism in the Third Republic

The literature on clientelism is vast and the term has been applied to describe very diverse political systems.<sup>1</sup> The aim here is

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1 The term 'clientelism' will be used frequently in this thesis. This is not the place to conduct a debate about the nature of clientelism nor to provide a bibliographical essay on the considerable literature on the subject. Suffice it to say that references to clientelism made here and later in the thesis are based on a critical reading of the following works: P. Allum, Politics and Society in Post-War Naples, Cambridge, 1973, C. Clapham (ed.) Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State, London, 1982, Luigi Graziano, 'Patron Client Relationships in Southern Italy', European Journal of Political Research, I (1973) pp3-34, Graziano, 'A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Clientelistic Behaviour', European Journal of Political Research, IV (1976) pp149-174, Graziano, 'Central-Periphery Relations and the Italian Crisis: The Problem of Clientelism', pp290-326 in S. Tarrow (ed.) et al, Territorial Politics in Industrial Nations, New York, 1978, J-F Médard, 'Political Clientelism in France: The Center-Periphery Nexus reexamined', pp125-171 in S.N. Eisenstadt & R. Lemarchand (eds.) Political Clientelism. Patronage and Development, London 1981, S.W. Schmidt et al (eds.) Friends, Followers and Factions, Berkeley, 1976, J.C. Scott, 'Corruption, Machine Politics and Political Change', pp1142-1158, American Political Science Review, Vol 63, (1969), E. Gellner & J. Waterbury, Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies, London 1977, A. Weingrod, 'Patrons, Patronage, and Political Parties' Comparative Studies in Society and History, X (40) (1968) pp377-400, S. Tarrow, Peasant Communism in Southern Italy, New Haven, 1967.

less to engage in a detailed analysis of the term 'clientelism' but rather to briefly highlight some of its causes and consequences in Marseilles in the 1930's. The application of this term to the politics of the Marseilles SFIO is not intended to suggest that the party was a purely clientelist organisation but simply that this aspect distinguished it to a large extent from its Communist rivals.

The combination of a weak Executive, a strong Parliament, and weak political parties under the Third Republic produced the personalisation and ideological fluidity commonly observed in clientelistic political systems. Power and its correlate, patronage, were seen to be held by deputies more than by the parties or the Executive. Ideologies were not unimportant but were often defined in an imprecise and rather fluid way which produced a relatively small (and usually excluded) extreme Left and Right and a large amount of centre ground. It was on this centre ground that deputies could frequently manoeuvre against parties and that parties could compete with one another. Whilst parties were often important in mobilising votes the actions of individual deputies could often determine whether or not such votes were retained. Deputies rather than parties were seen as the fount of patronage and favours and many deputies used their personal prestige in order to reduce their dependence on, or even to leave, the party whose nomination had first helped them to office. Within local politics parties were often, at least nominally, stronger since the list system of voting in Municipal elections increased the chances of one party gaining a secure hold on the reigns of power. The considerable amount of municipal patronage in a town the size of Marseilles meant, however, that popular politicians of diverse political attachments and

origins were often tempted to ally in an attempt to form a winning list. Opposed to them might be a list sponsored by a party but with a programme which would play down party politics and might even contradict official party doctrine. Councillors and deputies alike would often choose to compete for votes primarily on the basis of their ability to defend local interests rather than to promote an ideology or the interests of a class.

The clientelism of the 1930's was an ambiguous force in terms of its impact on relations between the Centre and Periphery acting both as an integrative and separating force. Local and specific interests received more attention in the clientelistic political system than did the general demands of class, ideology, or nation. Politicians tended to encourage their constituents to view politics as a competition between territorially defined areas for the favours and immunities dispensed from the Centre. The collective local ego was flattered and politicians claimed that their essential qualification lay in their profound understanding of the very special nature and needs of their own constituency. It was paradoxical that the encouragement of such localist sentiment was undertaken within a clientelistic system where the rewards and immunities which were sought were brought to the Periphery from the Centre. The localism of the clientelistic system therefore asserted the separation of the Periphery at the same time as it sought the assistance of the Centre.

#### b Marseilles & the Clientelist Environment

The aspects of Marseilles discussed in Chapters One & Two; the large number and succeeding waves of immigrants, the segmentation

of the community within the town, and the relative separation of Marseilles from the national economic and political life, all created an environment propitious to the extension of a clientelistic political system. The immigrants who arrived were often vulnerable, both economically and in terms of their relations with the State and the administration. Their insecurity could be attenuated through the operation of group loyalties or the actions of political patrons, or more often, through both.

The informal structures surrounding casual employment in the docks and construction industry, facilitated the integration of immigrants. Initially at least, given some luck or a useful contact, an immigrant could succeed in obtaining at least some of the less sought after work in these sectors. Later, the immigrant worker might achieve a greater degree of job security and be able to facilitate the entry of one of his compatriots into the profession. It was in this way that small scale reciprocal links developed, which could be integrated into a larger patron-client network. The political patron stood at the summit of the local clientelistic system. Having access to the rewards controlled by the local or the national State such political patrons were indeed powerful figures. Minor patrons could trade off their perceived power. Even something as basic as literacy for example, could be a powerful asset in a community of immigrants where such a skill was in short supply and yet was needed in dealings with the administration. The keynote in the lives of these vulnerable immigrant populations was

the search for intermediaries: Intermediaries to intervene on their behalf with employers and with the local and national administrations. Such intermediaries could procur employment, naturalisation, municipal charity (through the bureau de bienfaisance) licences to operate market stalls or to sell on the street, and could sometimes, even more importantly, intervene with sympathetic policemen to secure the dropping of criminal charges.

Loyalties within immigrant communities were often fostered by continuities in terms of place of origin, residence and employment sector, but the operation of such loyalties could often ensure the separation of the immigrant from the host community.<sup>1</sup> The very separation of Marseilles itself from the national community could however increase the sense of unity across the highly divided local communities. Thus, at different levels, group loyalties tended to reinforce isolation and produce an increased need for intermediaries to act in relations between the different communities within Marseilles and between Marseilles and the State.

The role of intermediaries and brokers in Marseilles reveals something about patterns of loyalty within the local communities and illuminates the nature of relations with the State. Patron-client relations are usually said to be a feature of societies with largely vertical patterns of political loyalty and deference.<sup>2</sup>

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1 See Chapters 1 & 2. Also see A-M Faidutti-Rudolph, L'immigration Italienne dans le Sud-Est de la France, Gap, 1964, pp96-111 and cartes 52 & 53 for examples concerning the Marseilles Italian community.

2 J.C. Scott op.cit. p1146

Yet in Marseilles it seems that the high degree of homogeneity in terms of occupation and class within each immigrant community might have been more propitious to the creation of horizontal patterns of political loyalty. The need for political intermediaries produced, however, an inherently unstable and overlapping pattern of group loyalty with strong horizontal ties attenuated by the dependence placed upon the vertical link of deference towards a political patron and intermediary.<sup>1</sup> On arriving in Marseilles an immigrant would call upon the horizontal loyalties involved in, say, seeking accommodation with friends or family from his native village, and at the same time demonstrate his willingness to enter into a deferential relation by approaching the patron or godfather of the community and asking him to help in the search for employment or identity cards.

Political patrons reflected a confused pattern of loyalties within the Marseilles immigrant communities. They also reflected on a broader level an ambivalence towards the French State. For recent migrants, and indeed for most of the citizens of Marseilles, the strength of the State seemed to reinforce the vulnerability of the citizen. The State seemed to have enormous powers as potential oppressor and benefactor. For the individual citizen and often for the community as a whole the role of the intermediary was to neutralise the former and activate the latter role of the State. Thus, the patron would defend whole communities against the State at the same time as he would attempt to extract favours from it.<sup>2</sup>

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1 J. C. Scott *ibid*, stage B in Scott's classification.

2 See the comment made by some women at the funeral of Jean Médecin, Mayor and boss of Nice from 1928-1965, "and now who is going to protect us?", cited in Médard *op.cit.* p147.

In a paradoxical way this dependence of the citizen on the State produced a combination of deference, awe and contempt towards central authority. Support rather than legitimation was engendered and dependence on bureaucratic values produced no respect for them. The law of the State was perceived as the rule of the strong and citizens were correspondingly content to allow their patrons to flout the conventions of law and order in order to satisfy the requirements of their clients. In a town where for most people law breaking was both necessary and frequent, the rather greater transgressions of the various political patrons were dismissed as the clients' sins writ large or regarded as a form of social banditry.<sup>1</sup> The banality of theft in port life especially added legitimacy to the attempts by political patrons to defraud either the municipality or the State.<sup>2</sup>

Interwar Marseilles presented, therefore, the combination of old loyalties and new rewards and powers which was propitious to the creation of a clientelistic political system. Democracy and a strong state transformed traditional networks of clan into the urban

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1 For comment on clientelism and political legitimacy see Graziano in S. Tarrow (ed.) et al. p294 op.cit. J. LaLumia has an interesting discussion of notions of official and unofficial justice in pp 180-182 of his article 'Mafia as a Political Mentality', Social Theory and Practice, Vol 7,2 (Summer 1981), pp179-192. J.C. Scott op.cit. p.1144 refers to the way in which municipal corruption may be perceived as 'social banditry'. For more information on this discussion see, E. Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, Manchester 1959 & Bandits, New York, 1969.

2 For two discussions of the role of crime in docklife see, Daniel Bell, 'The Racket-Ridden Longshoremen: The Web of Economics and Politics', pp159-190, in Bell, The End of Ideology, Illinois, 1960, and M. Gruttner, 'Working-Class Crime and the Labour Movement: 'Pilfering in the Hamburg Docks, 1888-1923', pp54-79 in R.J.Evans(ed) The German Working Class, London, 1982.

environment of political clientelism and political machines. At a national level the early 1930's saw the decomposition of the political hegemony of the Radical Party, whilst locally, the rapid succession of elections (which occurred annually between 1928 and 1932) produced an environment in which political mobilisation was important and yet where the ideological bases for such mobilisation were few. In the case of one group, the Corsicans, some analysis has been attempted of how this transformation from the loyalties of clan to those of political spoils was accomplished. F. Pomponi describes this transformation as:

'l'ultime étape contemporaine où l'on peut suivre l'esprit clanique dans sa remarquable faculté d'adaptation aux nouvelles exigences du milieu environnant. L'avènement des constitutions républicaines, la promulgation du suffrage universel et le poids des consultations électorales dans l'accès au pouvoir ont eu progressivement pour conséquence la politisation de la structure du clan à tous les niveaux. Pour les nouveaux capipopoli, l'affirmation de l'autorité et de l'influence et la concrétisation des rivalités potentielles passèrent dès lors par la voie des urnes: le clan s'habilla du manteau de la politique'.

This politicisation of the clans, did not, however, remove their basic mode of operation. Crime, corruption, and political violence were integral parts of Marseilles clientelistic system. Alain Chenu has identified this system as resting on a dual basis:

'd'abord celle qu'assure la voie politique, à travers de laquelle l'élu local ou le parlementaire distribue emplois, logements, obtient droits et passedroits, rend de menus services administratifs, répartit adjudications et marchés; ensuite, celle qu'autorise un grand port et qui s'appuie sur la prostitution, les trafics de drogue, d'armes, de cigarettes, les trafics les plus divers. Dans l'entre-deux-guerres, et

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1 F. Pomponi 'A la recherche d'un "invariant" historique: la structure clanique dans la société corse', in Pieve et paesi, Paris, 1978, p.21, cited by A. Chenu, 'Industrialisation, Urbanisation et Pratiques de Classe: le cas des ouvriers de la région marseillaise', Thèse pour le doctorat ès lettres et sciences humains (sociologie) Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1981 pp 122-3

particulièrement à l'apogée du sabianisme au début des années trente, ces deux assises tendent sinon à se confondre du moins à se superposer largement et en certains secteurs des points de passage se maintiennent encore de nos jours. Ces points sensibles sont le syndicalisme portuaire, l'organisation des campagnes électorales, certaines professions, en étroite relation avec l'appareil judiciaire ou avec le port'.<sup>1</sup>

So far, much of this description of the mores of Marseilles politics suggests the existence of a system akin to that in many American cities which were dominated by party machines in this period. Marseilles met the three conditions outlined by James C. Scott in his classic statement of the bases of political machines, namely; elections, mass suffrage, and a high degree of electoral competition.<sup>2</sup> Marseilles also clearly provided, in common with many American cities, what Scott describes as the 'ideal soil for the emergence of party machines'; 'the rapid influx of new populations for whom family and ethnicity were the central identifications,... coupled with the award of important monopoly privileges (traction, electric power and so forth) and the public payroll...'<sup>3</sup> In Marseilles, too, 'political power was fragmented', 'ethnic cleavage and/or social disorganisation were widespread' and 'most of the population was poor'.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst Marseilles politics certainly included the particularistic, material rewards which characterized the operation of the machine, the

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1 A. Chenu, op.cit.p 125

2 J.C. Scott, op.cit. p1143

3 J.C. Scott, op.cit. 1145

4 J.C. Scott, op.cit. p1149. For more comparative information on American City Machines see, Charles E. Merriam, Chicago, A More Intimate View of Urban Politics, New York, 1929, and E.C. Banfield & J.Q. Wilson, City Politics, Massachusetts, 1963, Chapter 9.

balance between these individual rewards and collective material rewards was a distinctive one. The classic machine 'is not the disciplined, ideological party held together by class ties and common programs', 'Neither is it typically a charismatic party, depending on a belief in the almost superhuman qualities to insure internal cohesion'. Scott emphasises that, instead, 'The machine is rather a non-ideological organisation interested less in political principle than in securing and holding office for its leaders and distributing income to those who run it and work for it. It relies on what it accomplished in a concrete way for its supporters, not on what it stands for.'<sup>1</sup> In Marseilles, however, the crude material exchange which Scott sees as the basic cement holding the machine together was only one part of the story. Charisma was important, too, and numerous police reports reiterated the fact that in the case of Sabiani, his supporters would follow him wherever his political whims took them - even to the extent of continuing to follow him whilst out of office and denied patronage.<sup>2</sup> Class and ideology were also important in Marseilles. Ethnic solidarities may have confused class loyalties but they rarely conflicted with them. Lastly, ideology, albeit in its very personalised guise, did matter. Battles within the Marseilles SFIO, and between the SFIO and PCF, were, on occasion, genuine ideological battles. Admittedly, ideology was often the cloak in which to cover conflicts between rival personal fiefs, or indeed rival machines, but in the last analysis, the role of class and populist oratory, the importance of collective as opposed to individual

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1 Scott, op.cit. pp.1143-4.

2 AD M6/10888 CD report of 27.5.1939.

rewards, and the role of political charisma (engendered often as much through bravado and alleged heroism as through the exchange of favours) made politics in Marseilles more than pure machine politics. Insofar, however, as local clientelist parties came under challenge from class-based organisations they succumbed to the inflationary pressures inherent within the machine system. The populist rhetoric of Sabianistes and Socialists alike, with their appeals to 'ceux qui souffrent', and the 'workers of Marseilles', left open the way for more directly class-based appeals from organisations such as the PCF. Competition stretched the resources of the clientelist system and succeeded in destabilising it.<sup>1</sup>

### 3 Socialism in Marseilles

It is paradoxical that, having played the major part in establishing the most dogmatic branch of French socialism, Marseilles was later to be better known for the ideological flexibility of its socialist municipalities.<sup>2</sup> The supposedly doctrinaire beliefs of the 1879 Guesdists had been transformed during the interwar period into a rather more pragmatic approach to politics. After the creation of the PCF, the local SFIO became noted for its corruption, its moderation, its clientelism, its ideological orthodoxy, and its willingness to use its strength to back the party leadership. The party still

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1 Scott, op.cit. refers to these inflationary and unstable aspects of machine politics, p.1155.

2 According to L. Gaillard, La Naissance du Parti Socialiste à Marseille, Marseille, 1980, pp191-192, 66 of the 130 delegates at the founding Congress of the Guesdist Parti des Travailleurs Socialistes, held at Marseilles in 1879, came from the département of the Bouches-du-Rhône.

directed its appeal to the Marseilles working class, but by the 1920's many workers were beginning to ask when the militant language of local Socialist leaders would be reflected by changes in the conditions of life for the Marseillais. Victor Barthélemy describes how he moved towards communism in the 1920's when he saw the misery of the working-class areas of Marseilles:

'Les socialistes avaient été étaient encore, les élus de ces quartiers, conseillers municipaux, conseillers généraux ou d'arrondissement, députés. Tous, depuis vingt ans et plus, avaient promis à ces déshérités de meilleures conditions de vie, de meilleurs salaires et de meilleures horaires de travail, des maisons plus accueillantes, des quartiers plus propres matériellement et moralement. Ils n'avaient rien fait ...La peine de ces hommes demeurait aussi profonde et aussi dure'.

#### a. Corruption

Many observers of the Marseilles political scene attributed the Socialists' failure to improve the lot of the Marseilles working-class to the degree of corruption which pervaded the local party. Corruption varied in its seriousness. Sometimes there was bribery of councillors either for the benefit of individuals or corporations, at other times electoral frauds were engaged in, and on still other occasions electors were intimidated or misled by Socialists and their allies.

The Marseilles Socialists seem to have considered almost any tactics to have been reasonable in the scramble for votes. One anecdote from the early career of Bouisson, the spiritual father of Marseilles Socialists if not actually from Marseilles himself,

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1 V. Barthélemy, Du Communisme au Fascisme, Paris, 1978, p.21.

illustrates the kind of electoral ruses resorted to by local Socialists. During an election campaign Bouisson promised a railway line to link his constituency of Aubagne with the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée line. Local residents were greatly impressed when, shortly before polling day, railway sleepers appeared along the route of the planned line. After Bouisson's dynamism had made itself felt in this way and the votes had been counted, the railway sleepers were duly collected and no more was heard of the proposed line.<sup>1</sup>

Such dubious ways of winning votes were customarily complemented by the coercive powers of the Marseilles underworld. Such links were used by all the main local parties and Sabiani, who was commonly thought of as the arch-practitioner of electoral corruption and intimidation, realistically claimed to have learnt his skills from his period in the SFIO.<sup>2</sup> Later, in 1929, Sabiani's campaign against SFIO corruption led him to join a municipal election list headed by the veteran socialist Flaissières (now disowned by his party) and including many prominent Right-wing politicians.<sup>3</sup> Sabiani alleged that corrupt adjoints from the outgoing SFIO council had swollen the ranks of council employees with SFIO members, and had contracted agreements with suppliers of public utilities which were highly disadvantageous to the municipality.<sup>4</sup>

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1 L. Jeansoulin, 'Fernand Bouisson', Marseille, 121, 1980, p86.

2 Exchange in Chamber of Deputies with Vincent Auriol, reported by J-A Vaucoret, op.cit. p277. D. Brogan, The Development of Modern France, 1870-1939, London, 1967, p712 points out that the PPF was not alone in having 'shady supporters from Marseilles'.

3 J-A Vaucoret, op.cit. pp174-175.

4 J-A Vaucoret, op.cit. p157 & Journal Officiel, Lois et Décrets, 21.3.1939, p3671.

Sabiani's condemnation of the SFIO won him the support of the PC in the legislative elections of 1928 but his later move to the Right was sufficient to frighten away even the most violently antisocialist Communist. The common features of the SFIO and the Sabianistes may well have lain at the basis of their antagonism. Whereas Sabiani had started his career as a Socialist, the most prominent underworld supporters of the SFIO, the Guerinis, had themselves served their apprenticeship with Sabiani's criminal henchmen, Carbone and Spirito. After a row with Sabiani in 1930, the Guerinis were encouraged to change camp by J-F Leca, a fellow Calenzanais and powerful SFIO figure. Henceforth the Calenzanais could, through these political and criminal patrons, be well integrated into the SFIO party machine in the 3rd and 4th cantons where the bulk of them lived.<sup>1</sup> By 1935 when Tasso and the SFIO were fighting Sabiani in the municipal elections, the Guerinis were available to act as SFIO strongarm men in their fights with the Sabianistes under the leadership of Carbone and Spirito. Gunfights took place around the Gare St Charles in Marseilles, and this combination of political and near military force ensured the election of an SFIO municipality. Soon, the Guerinis were entrenched within the local SFIO and their Corsican compatriots were increasingly assured of undemanding and secure employment in the mairie.<sup>2</sup>

Changing political alliances and the consequent moves in the political allegiances of the Marseilles milieu could swing election

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1 J-A Vaucoret, op.cit. p205

2 J. Sarazin, Dossier M...comme milieu, Paris, 1977, pp264-266.

results, but they could also be embarrassing. The strongarm men of the Marseilles political parties had killed too many people for old political enmities to be laid aside easily. In 1931, Renucci, commonly assumed to be acting for Socialist councillors Leca and Rouvier, had shot the Communist activist Carini, at a Socialist meeting when Jacques Duclos attempted to seize control of the platform. Memories of this kind did not aid Socialist-Communist unity during the Popular Front.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Ferri-Pisani, ex-Sabianist turned Socialist, having chosen to stand down after the first round of the legislative elections in 1936, then went on to interpret the agreement to support Billoux, the Communist standing against Sabiani, for Deputy, rather too literally. According to Communist sources, Ferri-Pisani offered the services of his more skilful and 'persuasive' friends to the Communists, suggesting ways in which ballot boxes might be stuffed with papers for Billoux.<sup>2</sup> Allegations of electoral frauds persisted during the Popular Front, and, with the SFIO in control of the municipality, and hence of patronage and the electoral lists, they had the most scope for corruption and fraud. There were few techniques which were left untried although the stuffing of ballot boxes, the forced early closing of polling stations, and voting in the name of dead people or sailors out of port were among the more favoured practices which accompanied the customary intimidation of opponents.

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1 AN F 7/13081. J. Duclos, Mémoires tome i, Le chemin que j'ai choisi de Verdun au Parti Communiste, Paris, 1968, pp338-340. AD M6 8289 report of CC to Prefect 26.3.1934 quotes Mouton speaking at the St Pierre cemetery in a ceremony to commemorate the martyrs Cremieux and Carini, of Carini's 'assassinat par les bandes socialistes'. Three hundred people were present at this ceremony.

2 The hostility between Ferri-Pisani and Sabiani was so great that they had to be separated during a fight between them in the Council Chamber in 1936. LPP 8.2.1936. There were constant conflicts between these two politicians in 1935-1937. See procès verbaux Bulletin Officiel Municipal de Marseille (BMO) 1935-1937 passim.

The Guerinis, in their capacity as employees of the bureau de bienfaisance and active members of the Jeunesses Socialistes were alleged to have exerted pressure on council employees prior to the cantonal elections of October 1937, to ensure that they registered to vote in the 11th canton where Henri Tasso was standing.<sup>1</sup> The SFIO suffered yet another blow to its rather damaged reputation for honesty, when, in early 1939, an SFIO councillor, Dr Franchi was jailed for allegedly having issued false medical certificates to men seeking to escape military service.<sup>2</sup>

#### b. Moderation

Corruption alone would not have provided sufficient reason for the SFIO to suffer criticism from its potential working-class constituency. What angered the working-class critics of the SFIO was that the corruption of the party was directed towards individual rather than collective goals. Voters, it was claimed, were mobilised by appeals and promises to advance the interests of the working-class, only to see their representatives using public office to line their own pockets through alliances with moderate and even Right-wing parties. As Sabiani explained, politicians might serve business interests when the Right was in control:

'Mais quand une ville...délègue à la Mairie des hommes sortis du peuple, affirmant des opinions socialistes, se réclamant des plus grands noms de la démocratie, se proclamant internationalistes, s'abritant dans les meetings et les manifestations publiques à l'ombre de Jaurès, on peut espérer que les intérêts de la masse ouvrière seront protégés contre la puissance du capital....on est en droit d'espérer que des soi-disant socialistes se souviennent de leurs origines et reconnaissants vis à vis de leurs électeurs, auront à coeur de ne point faillir aux promesses solennellement faites, et ne déchiront pas comme un chiffon de papier le pacte qui les lie à la masse d'où est venue toute leur force'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Information from poster in AD M6 10875.

2 Antoine Olivesi, 'Henri Tasso 1882-1944; Marseille, 100, 1975 pp51-52. The fact that Franchi was found not guilty of the charge could not undo the damage caused by the allegation.

3 J-A Vaucoret, p157.

The moderation of the Marseilles SFIO had a long history, and in many respects early local Socialists took over the mantle of the Radical Party rather than introducing a particularly new element into Marseilles politics. In 1892 the 'bon docteur Flaissières' became the first Socialist mayor of a major French town, but he showed little understanding for Socialist doctrines. His fellow Guesdist councillors established what was soon to become a tradition in Marseilles politics, seeking to ensure re-election by broadening the base of their support, and thereby diluting the distinctiveness of their new party. The national party was meanwhile sufficiently enthusiastic about the rewards of office to overlook the ideological heterodoxy of Marseilles office holders.<sup>1</sup>

Party and personality tended to become locked into a tense and mutually dependent relationship in Marseilles. Few of the major local politicians were happy to remain within the confines of the party in which they started their careers. Sabiani and Flaissières were examples of this trend but Bouisson, too, provides an illustration of it. As Deputy for Aubagne and La Ciotat between 1909 and 1942 Bouisson managed to use a national political career better to secure his hold on his local base and to distance himself from the SFIO. Bouisson became President of the Chamber of Deputies in 1927 and from this elevated position he felt able to resign from the SFIO in 1934. Alexander Werth commented that: 'his resignation surprises no one; for during many years his membership of the Socialist Party had only been nominal, and (he)...

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1 Socialist sources themselves recognised from as early as 1899 that socialist groups in Marseilles were 'beaucoup plus imprégnés de l'esprit radical que de la pure doctrine socialiste'. Quoted by C. Willard, Le mouvement socialiste en France (1893-1905). Les Guesdistes. Paris, 1965, p300. See also pp105-6, and 296-300.

had come to consider himself as an above-party personality...'.<sup>1</sup>  
 Bouisson's reputation for political flexibility was demonstrated by his choice of ministers in his shortlived government of June 1935 where he sat alongside Herriot, Marin, Mandel, Caillaux, Laval and Pétain. Neither Bouisson's fall from government nor his failure to be re-elected as President of the Chamber did anything to mitigate his own sense of self-importance or people's confidence in his ability to defend the interests of the region.

Major SFIO personalities such as Bouisson, Flaissières and Tasso emphasised their ability to defend and represent the locality in their appeals to the electorate. The electorate responded well to this approach and in the early 5th Republic it was still remarkable how in Marseilles:

'l'électeur tend à valoriser les facteurs locaux au détriment des facteurs nationaux et politiques. Cette tendance marque son comportement dans une election nationale aussi bien que dans une élection locale'.<sup>2</sup>

Socialist preoccupation with local interests reflected a one dimensional view of conflict where centre-periphery tensions were emphasised at the expense of class conflicts. The interest of Marseilles were perceived primarily in terms of those of the shipping and business communities. Tasso like Defferre later, was Minister for the Merchant Navy whilst Mayor of Marseilles. Meanwhile, Tasso and Bouisson's own roles as small businessmen added to the willingness of local business circles to entrust them with defending Marseilles shipping interests in the Chamber.

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1 A. Werth, The Destiny of France, London, 1937, pp145-6.

2 P. Weil, p271 in A. Mabileau (ed.), Les facteurs locaux dans la vie politique nationale, Paris, 1972.

Referring to Tasso the local business newspaper, Le Sémaphore paid tribute to 'L'actif président de la commission de la Marine marchande', with his 'promptitude d'assimilation et de compréhension de questions extrêmement complexes et ardues', and his 'mariage indissoluble avec ses électeurs'. The newspaper added that for Tasso, as for Bouisson, 'L'homme dépasse ici la doctrine et pourrait sans danger se payer le luxe de changer de parti'.<sup>1</sup> It seems likely that Tasso sought election to the Senate in October 1938 as a way of ensuring that he would no longer be so tied to the SFIO at a time when internal conflicts within the party were increasing. In the end conflicts between central government and the municipality and the declaration of war in 1939 removed the relevance of any plans Tasso may have had for distancing himself from the SFIO.

The violent anticommunism of the Marseilles SFIO was one expression of its ideological moderation. Ideological conflict was also a reflection of the contrasting styles of the two parties. The SFIO favoured the politics of representative democracy with representatives interceding on behalf of their constituents, while the PC favoured a more highly mobilised form of politics, with the working class being encouraged to apply direct pressure on its rulers. Tasso and Bouisson constantly emphasised their powers to intercede in Paris for their individual constituents and for the broader interests of Marseilles. Their reluctance to ally with the PCF reflected these contrasting styles of operation as well as a lack of trust. Tasso's own lack of enthusiasm

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1 Le Sémaphore quoted by A. Olivesi, 'Henri Tasso 1882-1944; Marseille, 100, 1975, p48.

for the Popular Front alliance was made clear by his support for Bouisson when, in 1936, the latter stood as an independent candidate in the 8th canton of Marseilles against Cristos, the Communist Popular Front candidate. Bouisson won re-election as an independent but Popular Front voters forced him to a second ballot for the first time since 1910. Between the first and second ballots Bouisson fought a defensive campaign, reminding electors of what he had achieved for the town. Rejecting allegations of being a traitor to the working-class Bouisson pointed out how, from the very beginning of his parliamentary career in 1909 he had intervened to get orders, first for the shipyards at La Ciotat, then for the engineering works of Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée at Menpenti. He announced proudly that, 'Depuis il n'y a plus eu de chômage....Aussi, la classe ouvrière m'y est reconnaissante et me reste fidèle...'. As Henri Tasso arrived at the meeting Bouisson pointed out how as recently as 1932 together they had fought off another threat to local industries:

'Henri Tasso, avec qui nous marchons en accord complet,...dans l'intérêt de la Ville de Marseille, et de la classe ouvrière. Ces intérêts, nous pouvons d'autant mieux les servir que nos fonctions, lui, comme président de la Commission de la Marine marchande; moi, comme président de la Chambre, nous donne plus d'autorité'.<sup>1</sup>

Bouisson pointed to the presence of Tasso, member of a working-class party as evidence that he could not be a traitor to the working-class cause. Conceding that he may have voted the decree laws<sup>2</sup> Bouisson pointed out that he had intervened to ensure that they did not damage Marseilles shipping. Tasso himself testified to the help he had

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1 LPP, 1.5.1936.

2 See Chapter 6, section 3.

received from Bouisson in getting legislation through the Chamber permitting him to engage Marseilles workers on public works projects, and guaranteed that in the future Bouisson would support Socialist measures in the Chamber, Bouisson declared that:

'Avec Henri Tasso, nous n'avons qu'un idéal; Servir ceux qui peinent et travaillent; adoucir les maux de ceux qui souffrent; combattre la misère et soulager ses victimes. (He then appealed to his audience) Continuez, en nous faisant confiance, à faire confiance à des hommes qui vous aiment et vous défendent'.<sup>1</sup>

At another meeting Bouisson produced a telegram of support from Ehlers of the Seamen's Union to add force to his arguments. According to one report:

'La foule, applaudit à tout rompre. Il ne s'agit pas de paroles en l'air, mais d'un document qui consacre d'éloquente façon les éminents services rendus par un véritable défenseur de la classe ouvrière'.<sup>2</sup>

### c. Clientelism & the Working Class

Corruption and moderation often aided the SFIO in its search for, and consolidation of its hold on political office. Such office could prove a valuable source of patronage and rewards for supporters, but it could also be a political liability; all the more so during the Popular Front when the working class tended to interpret progress as the result of successful mobilisation, and defeats and setbacks as the consequences of Government action.<sup>3</sup>

The spoils of public office had traditionally oiled the wheels

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1 LPP, 1.5.1936.

2 Ibid. For a general account of the Bouisson case, albeit from a very hostile point of view see the intervention made by Pivert in S.F.I.O. Congrès 1936 Compte Rendu Sténographique des Débats, Paris 1936, pp30-36.

3 Marseille-Socialiste, 6.6.1936, explained the SFIO deputy Ambrosini's defeat by the PC candidate Cristofol in 1936 as being due to the problems of an incumbent fighting to retain a seat at a time of high expectations. For another example of the liabilities of office see the long series of articles in Marseille-Socialiste of 1936 explaining the need for increases in tram fares. One example among many is contained in the issue of 8.8.1936.

of the Marseilles political machine regardless of which party was in control. The Flaissières-Sabiani municipality elected in 1929 saw its first task as being the purge of SFIO 'employees' from the key patronage agencies of the Bureau de Bienfaisance and the Commission des Hospices, and their replacement by Sabianistes.<sup>1</sup> In 1935, when the SFIO retook control of the Mairie, all the journaliers that Sabiani had promoted shortly before the election, were sacked. There was a great change round as Tasso sacked 870 journaliers replacing them with 1,500 of his own supporters.<sup>2</sup> Not all public services could be purged and renewed with equal effectiveness. In 1938 two thirds of Marseilles firemen were Sabianistes, a legacy of the years when Sabiani had filled the service with his supporters, registering the new recruits in his electoral fief of the fourth canton.<sup>3</sup> Few people could have remained ignorant of the fact that appointments to municipal employment were dictated by political allegiance rather than by merit.

In the eight years from 1930 when council employment expanded by 2,000 only 123 posts were advertised for open competition. The overall increase of 36 per cent in council employees between 1931 and 1936, concealed the worst excesses. In the same period the number of cemetery employees increased by 84 per cent, while the street cleaning and repair sector saw its total employees increase by 75 per cent, with the road repairing section alone increasing its workers in

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1 J-A Vaucoret, pp192-3.

2 The figures are from Marseille-Libre, 9.1.1936, 16.7.1935. The issue of Marseille-Libre for 9.1.1938 claimed that Tasso had sacked 1,500 journaliers on taking office.

3 J-A Vaucoret op.cit. p193 and AD M6 10888 CD report 3.2.1938.

leaps and bounds from 15 in 1925, to 75 in June 1935, and then, under a Socialist municipality, to 240 workers in December 1938.<sup>1</sup> Even had it been possible to explain increases on this scale in terms of the need for improved services, it would have been difficult to justify the inclusion of 77 individuals with criminal records among the privileged and permanently established sector of the workforce. The inherently inflationary dynamic contained within the distribution of spoils on this scale, produced an unacceptable level of municipal indebtedness. For the tramway company alone, municipal subsidies rose from 3.2 million francs in the early 1930's to 28 million in 1936 and then to 47 million in 1937.<sup>2</sup> Municipal debts mounted so rapidly that the council was obliged to put a block on any new hirings after 1937 and a series of adjoints aux finances came and went with great rapidity, as the local SFIO found itself unwilling to choose between the course of political or financial disaster. As the official report on Marseilles described the situation:

'Quel que soit le conseil en fonction, on trouve les mêmes causes de mauvaise gestion: l'autorité faible et divisée, l'ingérence constante des conseillers municipaux dans l'administration, la prédominance des considérations électorales sur l'intérêt général'.<sup>3</sup>

The bureaucratic distinction between the general interest and electoral considerations would have been recognised by few SFIO

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1 Journal Officiel Lois et Décrets, 21.3.1939, p3674.

2 Journal Officiel, op.cit. p3675.

3 Journal Officiel, op.cit. p3671. A. Olivesi, 'Henri Tasso 1882-1944', Marseille, 100, 1975, p50.

councillors. For many in the SFIO, the general interest was simply seen as the sum of particular interests which needed to be attended to in order to secure re-election. Similarly, a class-conscious PCF would be obliged to respond to the particular interests of its client, the working-class. Even a superficial reading of council debates reveals the extent to which individual councillors and Deputies too, went out of their way to advance the interests of their chosen interest group. Thus, Cristofol and Albertin, as Communist and Socialist customs officers and Deputies spent their time in the Chamber advocating the interests of their profession. Cristofol as a Communist carried his concern into the council chamber where he could be found advocating such things as free travel on trams for customs officers. Pasquini meanwhile, along with Ferri-Pisani, one of the leaders of the sailors union who was also a councillor, used the Marseilles council chamber as a place to put forward proposals such as the one aimed at asphaltting the old port, and re-routing trams to pass through the port.<sup>1</sup> Council debates suggest that among Socialist councillors at any rate, there was less a preoccupation with the 'general interest' than there was one with generally satisfying all the particular interests of their clients.

The interlinking of the SFIO with trade unions and other associations was one effective way in which the preoccupations of the various interest groups in Marseilles could be funnelled towards the centres of local power. Groups of Amis d'Instruction Laique and Comités des Intérêts de Quartiers (AILS and CIQs) maintained privileged links

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<sup>1</sup> LPP 7.7.1936.

with socialist councillors. Socialist councillors headed the committees of each ALL group, and the CIQs were carefully nurtured by their local councillors.<sup>1</sup> Links with trade unions could, however, often be more important in moments of crisis. The economic role of sailors and their residential concentration in the port area made working-class parties keen to win control of their union. Sabiani succeeded in this aim when he installed Ferri-Pisani as leader of the sailors' union, but Ferri-Pisani later moved to the SFIO, where his activities as councillor, union leader and local founder of the anti-Communist Amis des Syndicats movement, all proved valuable assets.<sup>2</sup> Other notable socialists in the union movement included Auguste Joblin, founder and honorary life President of the tramway workers' union and an adjoint responsible for tramways on the Tasso council. The leader of the municipal employees trade union at this time was Noël Carréga, who maintained privileged links with the more influential local socialist councillors, and was usually understanding when political considerations made it difficult to meet the demands of his members. Links such as these could be valuable insofar as the local council became involved in Marseilles industrial relations, both as one of the largest employers in the area as well as arbitrator and local peacekeeper. Influential union

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1 As Billoux complained during the 1935 municipal election campaign, insofar as renovation of the city was concerned: 'On réalise actuellement quelque chose qu'autant qu'un adjoint ou un conseiller municipal délégué se fait accrocher par un Comité d'intérêt de quartier' Rouge-Midi, 117, 20.4.1935.

2 J-A Vaucoret, op.cit. pp147-150 provides details on Ferri-Pisani's takeover of the sailors' union.

leaders such as Joblin or Carrega could explain to their members why all their demands could not be met at once, at the same time as they could promise to reach a satisfactory deal in the end.<sup>1</sup>

As with politicians, Socialist union leaders tended to personalise power within 'their' unions. Union members were encouraged to delegate authority to their leaders, whose political contacts could often ensure success which often in turn increased the charismatic qualities of leadership. The personalisation of union leadership in the local CGT meant, however, that turn-over was limited and the average age of union leaders was relatively high.<sup>2</sup> Joblin was leader of the tramway workers union from 1901 until 1935 and in the dockers' union the rule of Manot was similarly long lived. If age or political influence did not of themselves create the cult of personality surrounding many CGT leaders prior to the Popular Front, then a slightly superior social station or the reputation for personal bravery would often be contributing factors.<sup>3</sup> Leaders of the Marseilles working-class could play upon the deference as well as the solidarity of their followers.<sup>4</sup> Their influence was, of course, linked to their success but the strategy adopted by the socialist-led unions reinforced the view of the leader as intermediary and, consequently, as being somewhat distant on occasions from his membership. Ferri-Pisani, in his exposition of trade union principles in his book, Le Syndicalisme Maritime, published in 1933, made clear his view that if trade unionism was about

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1 Joblin wrote several persuasive articles in Le Tramway Socialiste during 1936-7 on tram fare increases. For details of the negotiations between Carrega and the municipality see LPP 19.3.1938, 3.6.1938, 11.11.1938, 29.12.1938. Also see AN F60 256 Frossard to Tasso 24.2.1938 for details of the controversy over council workers' pay.

2 The average age of leading CGT personnel listed by police was 45 years as against 34 years for those CGTU leaders listed in 1935. AD M6 11379.

3 Eg. Gagnaire's reputation for enormous physical strength.

4 None of the most famous SFIO Deputies were themselves working-class. Tasso, Bouisson, Vidal and Flaissières all had occupations which placed them solidly in the middle-class.

improving the position of workers, not all workers were equally well suited to advancing its ends.<sup>1</sup> Ferri-Pisani saw individual workers as often being selfish, ignorant, illogical and unrealistic in their demands. In contrast to this mass of workers, stood the union leader and his officers as 'le traducteur de la volonté générale'.<sup>2</sup> Ferri-Pisani saw a clear distinction between the roles of the leaders and the membership of the union. As he explained:

'...une organisation ne peut vivre sans cadres. Et les cadres sont constitués par quelques centaines de syndicalistes, armature du syndicat, qu'animent non seulement le désir d'améliorations successives mais aussi et surtout la volonté de s'instruire, de connaître et de comprendre. Ces cadres seuls comptent pour assurer la vie morale du syndicat et pour accomplir la besogne de recrutement parmi l'élément moins avancé qui fournit, avec son nombre, les ressources matérielles de l'organisation, et avec sa discipline, la puissance syndicale'.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, this view of trade unions, which contrasted the education, knowledge and understanding of the leadership with the brute force of the membership raised uncomfortable questions about the majority of workers who remained outside trade unions. Were they to be seen as opposed to the CGT, or as failing to understand their own self-interest? Ferri-Pisani saw few problems in this area. He wrote that:

'Les non-syndiqués sont éloignés de toute organisation quelle qu'elle soit, et c'est prétentieuse folie que de vouloir interpréter leurs sentiments. Ils ne sont pas, comme on veut parfois le dire, contre la tendance de l'organisation confédérée, mais bien privés de toute tendance, démunies de toute conscience corporative, incompréhensifs devant le syndicalisme'.<sup>4</sup>

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1 P. Ferri-Pisani, Sur le Syndicalisme Maritime I: Les organes et les militants, Marseille, 1933, avant-propos and p9.

2 Ferri-Pisani, op.cit. p66, p173.

3 Ferri-Pisani, op.cit. pp64-5.

4 Ferri-Pisani, op.cit. p64.

Minority trade unionism thus gave rise on the reformist side to the belief in a working-class elite and to a strategy where union leaders acted as the intermediaries for this elite rather than as a force attempting to achieve the mobilisation of the mass of workers. This approach differed from that adopted by the CGTU and the PCF. The Union Départementale of the CGT implicitly raised this contrast in its report to the 1931 Congress held at Tarascon.

Reporting on May Day 1931 the UD commented:

'Nous avons suivi les directives de la C.G.T. qui étaient d'inciter au chômage et non pas d'obliger au chômage...la forme de l'action des masses ouvrières syndiqués est en perpétuelle évolution. Sont révolus les temps où cette action se manifestait par des cortèges bruyants: ceux qui y sont encore attachés arrivent rarement à n'être pas ridicules'.<sup>1</sup>

The rather complacent condemnation of unitaire tactics which followed suggested that the confédérés were not too unhappy about the state of minority trade unionism. Indeed, in many respects the exchange of favours inherent in the local clientelist system of which confédéré unionism formed a part, depended on its exclusive nature.

One eminent writer on the French trade union movement has dubbed the interwar period as one of revolutionaries without revolution and of reformists without reforms.<sup>2</sup> In Marseilles the reformists achieved few reforms before 1936 but political leverage, could obtain favours and benefits for union members. Such leverage could not only be applied successfully in sectors under such obvious political control as municipal employment. Many industries in the private sector depended on State regulation and/or State orders. The industries connected

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1 C.G.T. -Union Départementale des Bouches-du-Rhône, Rapport aux Syndicats, Tarascon Juin 1931, p6.

2 G. Lefranc, Le mouvement syndical sous la Troisième République, Paris 1967, Troisième Partie, Chapitre IV.

with the port of Marseilles depended greatly on decisions taken in Paris; decisions concerning the granting of shipping licences, the placing of orders, and the levying of trade tariffs. It was this particular, if indirect, dependence of Marseilles industry on decisions taken in Paris, which reinforced the need for intermediaries within the local clientelistic political system. The more notable figures could also present themselves as intermediaries between Marseilles and Paris. Bouisson was the most successful intermediary for the local working class, and even Communist-led unions would choose to oppose his influence at their peril.

Bouisson's incestuous relations with the shipyard workers' union of La Ciotat had begun in 1909 when he 'lent' sufficient money to the union to enable it to purchase shares in the shipping company Messageries Maritimes.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of this generosity Bouisson was able to persuade the union leaders to stand for re-election as local councillors in 1910 on a list sponsored by him. Thereafter Bouisson used his contacts in Paris to cement his relationship with the union. As one chairman of the shipyard remarked:

'A chaque élection, il (Bouisson) promettait à ses électeurs, s'il était réélu, que l'Etat, sous le contrôle duquel se trouvaient les Messageries Maritimes, passerait des commandes. Et il en fut ainsi pendant de très nombreuses années...'.<sup>2</sup>

It seemed, for a short while, as if the strikes of the Popular Front period might change this clientelistic pattern of politics in La Ciotat. The strikes of June and the union reunification accompanying them swept

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1 L. Jeansoulin, op.cit. p87.

2 J-M Terrin, Président-Directeur-Général, of Chantiers Navales de la Ciotat, 1941-1963, cited by Jeansoulin, op.cit. p90.

the old union leaders out and the Communist Jean Mailloulas replaced Bouisson's allies as leader of the shipyard workers' union. When shipyard workers decided to strike in September 1936 in protest at falling orders, Bouisson's pique was evident:

'...ce syndicat, dirigé pas des communistes, a décrété la grève sans prendre mon avis, ce qui était son droit, ordonné l'occupation des Chantiers et discuté seul avec la S.P.C.N...mais les dirigeants du Syndicat se sont rendus à Paris à mon insu, poussés d'une façon évidente par un sentiment d'hostilité contre ma personne et accompagnés auprès du ministre par qui?...par un député communiste de la Seine!'<sup>1</sup>

Bouisson clearly felt that his role as intermediary was being undermined by this new and unfamiliar 'political' approach. When short time working was introduced in October and lay offs seemed imminent Bouisson commented how:

'Depuis trente ans, grâce à l'union et à la volonté de tous d'exclure du cadre corporatif des manoeuvres politiques nous avons pu éviter cette calamité...'<sup>2</sup>

This tried and tested way did prevail in the end. Before long the Communist union leaders found that none of their actions had produced results, so, spurred on by their members they swallowed their pride and asked Bouisson to intervene for them. Chiding his errant children Bouisson responded by expressing the hope that:

'...l'union qui se manifeste aujourd'hui par l'appel unanime que vous m'adressez sera de longue durée et se poursuivra loyalement, sans arrière pensées, pour le plus grand profit de notre cité et de son admirable population'<sup>3</sup>

Bouisson's hopes were rewarded, but only after he had pulled off his last coup and won the orders which were so needed. By mid November Bouisson was able to tell a trade union meeting at La Ciotat that:

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1 Jeansoulin op.cit. p91. The PCF Deputy mentioned was Ambroise Croizat, General Secretary of the Fédération des Métaux.

2 Jeansoulin loc. cit. p91.

3 Ibid.

'Je suis heureux de vous annoncer que, grâce à l'intervention de mon ami M. Tasso, je puis vous assurer que le travail va reprendre de manière normale et que, d'ici à huit ou dix jours, le chômage va cesser. La construction d'un pétrolier, ...qui devait nous échapper, va être entreprise sur nos chantiers. Vous aurez encore la construction d'un paquebot de 170 mètres que j'ai pu obtenir, encore grâce à M. Tasso..'<sup>1</sup>

Confronted by the threat of Communism, 'President' Bouisson, together with Tasso, had managed to overthrow the logic of capitalism and bring work to the most expensive shipyard in France.<sup>2</sup> When the first orders arrived in February 1937 Bouisson, Tasso and the director of the shipyard company were all feted during three days of celebrations in La Ciotat: It seemed that the arrival of a Socialist Government in Paris had facilitated a near perfect linking of the local and national clientelistic systems of the local SFIO.

The Communist challenge to SFIO influence over the trade unions was met by the creation of Amicales Socialistes (AS) or Socialist factory cells which were designed to create 'un lien nouveau et robuste entre le peuple et son gouvernement'.<sup>3</sup> In theory this link between workers and government was meant to be operated in both directions with the AS movement serving to help government better understand the desires of workers and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> In Marseilles however, it seems that the AS movement simply represented the extension of traditional clientelist politics in the town, to take account of the new possibilities offered by the existence of a Socialist Government. Instead of the AS movement reflecting genuine enthusiasm for Socialist politics it seems rather to have formed a part of the traditional political exchange. The AS movement was expected to supply industrial peace and trade union office for Socialists. Many local AS members were prepared to co-operate in this plan if they could be guaranteed

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1 Ibid.

2 Jeansoulin loc.cit.p92.

3 Marseille-Socialiste, 14.11.1936.

help from the Government and municipality in return. Thus the growth of the AS movement in Marseilles represented less an upsurge in interest for Socialist ideology than a new form of intermediary between patron and client and centre and periphery.

There were about fifty AS groups in Marseilles between 1936 and 1939 and at their peak, in July 1937, they claimed a membership of 24,000.<sup>1</sup> Their pattern of growth is suggestive of their role in the traditional clientelist system. It was claimed that the first AS in France had been that of Marseilles council workers, created, significantly, in September 1935, just a few months after the Socialists had gained control of the municipality. Office-holding affected the success of the local AS movement, with the Marseilles groups being hit harder by Blum's exclusion from office than was the case elsewhere. Whereas the Marseilles AS movement grew from 12,000 members in February 1937 to 24,000 by July it then declined to 12,000 members by May 1938.<sup>2</sup> In the Seine by contrast the decline was far less dramatic, with membership falling from 80,000 in July 1937 to 60,000 in October of the same year and then recovering to 80,000 by May 1938.<sup>3</sup> Such AS groups as did exist in Marseilles were concentrated in the sectors most susceptible to government influence, with State and municipal employees and public service workers' groups making up the bulk of the local movement. Successes in private industry were greatest in those sectors, such as shipbuilding and merchant shipping, where government policies could most influence industrial prosperity. Canavelli, Marseilles sponsor of the AS movement, reminded a meeting of shipbuilders, that AS links with government could often be more practical help than any

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1 La Provence Socialiste, 16.7.1937.

2 La Provence Socialiste, 12.2.1937, 16.7.1937 & 20.5.1938.

3 J-P Rioux, 'Les socialistes dans l'entreprise au temps du Front populaire: quelques remarques sur les Amicales socialistes (1936-1939)', le mouvement social, 106, 1979, p9.

number of Communist-launched strikes and demonstrations. He

pointed out how:

'grâce au Parti socialiste, à la municipalité socialiste, au Maire qui était ministre de la Marine marchande, devant l'impuissance de camarades s'affichant toujours plus à gauche que les autres, les travailleurs de la S.P.C.N. obtinrent les satisfactions auxquelles ils avaient droit'<sup>1</sup>

Services provided by the SFIO carried, however, with them an obligation for AS members to aid the Government and the municipality in their policies. After an embarrassing strike of street cleaners in December 1936, Henri Tasso employed additional men to take on the work of the strikers. It was no accident that an AS of street cleaners was soon formed, with Tasso, its employer as honorary president, and that one member should explain at an early meeting of the group how:

'Les socialistes doivent donner à tous l'exemple du travail et de la discipline au sein de notre service...'<sup>2</sup>

Groups such as the AS reinforced the notions, already prevalent in Marseilles, that workers could best improve their position through the activities of a patron acting for them rather than by using their own potential for collective action. Power was thus delegated to other individuals, parties and movements to act on behalf of workers. Not all areas of employment were equally susceptible to control at the centre in this way, and the effectiveness of this clientelistic system depended on the rewards of office. The Popular Front period offered the chance of the greatest rewards, since the SFIO was in government, but the mood of the times increased expectations and made the necessary rewards increasingly costly to deliver. Locally,

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1 La Provence Socialiste, 26.12.1936.

2 La Provence Socialiste, 22.1.1937

the Socialists had to face up to the three main weaknesses of their clientelistic system; increasing expectations, ideological decay, and municipal indebtedness.

#### d. Ideology and Class

Low working-class representation and moderation were longstanding features of Marseilles Socialism and it is not necessary to believe in a mechanistic relation between class and ideology to posit a link between these features. The Marseilles SFIO defined its ideology on the basis of three principles, anticlericalism, anticommunism and antimilitarism, which, although important in their own right, impinged little upon the lives of the local working-class. For most of the interwar period the main lines of local SFIO ideology lacked political salience. The Communist Party was small in terms of membership and unimportant electorally in Marseilles until the Popular Front. Similarly antimilitarism and anticlericalism were more important in generating rhetoric to unite the party than in terms of the issues themselves. For much of the period SFIO rhetoric seemed irrelevant, and when, during the Popular Front period, class-based issues increased in importance, it could even appear diversionary.

The issues which excited the SFIO faithful were rarely capable of mobilising the working-class. The vague sentiments of anticlericalism and antimilitarism in the population at large paled into insignificance against the more important material questions and the newer ideological conflict over fascism. The SFIO could win working-class votes and followers through its clientelistic

practices and through being the largest party on the Left but it could not attract many working-class party activists. SFIO influence in the CGT and AS groups tended to be predominantly concentrated in the service and State-owned sectors.<sup>1</sup> Within the party itself a study of activists revealed that ouvriers accounted for only 19 per cent of activists identified in 1935. The most common occupation for party activists was that of employé and a lower middle-class group of artisans and small traders as well as skilled workers accounted for almost half of the 582 activists studied. Further up the party hierarchy the already small working-class representation diminished still further.<sup>2</sup>

The ideological orthodoxy and limited working-class recruitment of the Marseilles SFIO seem to have been mutually reinforcing. Outdated ideologies had the advantage that they could be applied and interpreted

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- 1 According to one estimate the UD CGT in 1927 depended for 63 per cent of its members on railwaymen, civil servants and other ouvriers à statut. Union Régionale Unitaire, Bulletin No.3, septembre 1928. In terms of numbers of groups and of members the AS movement was best established in the tertiary and publicly run sector. The study of 19 AS which printed their membership figure in Marseilles Socialiste or La Provence Socialiste between 1936-9 reveals that although they counted 6,191 members at their peak only 26 per cent of these members worked in industry. The rest all worked as public employees or in public services where they had a high level of job security.
- 2 M. D'Agostino, 'L'implantation socialiste à Marseilles sous le Front populaire', Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Provence UER d'Histoire, 1972, pp66-70. C. Willard found the same paucity of ouvriers in Marseilles socialism during an earlier period, op.cit. p302.

pragmatically at the local level with indulgence in rhetoric offering few hostages to fortune. Generally, the local party seemed happy to throw its weight behind the national leadership at Party Congresses in return for an understanding that there would be no interference from above in local affairs. Dissident brands of socialism whether of the Left or the Right made little headway in Marseilles. Factions had little appeal in a town where winning votes could excuse most ideological crimes. Ideological dissension only seemed possible when, after Blum's exclusion from power in 1938, and the suspension of the Town Council in 1939, the local clientelist system was deprived of the spoils which had oiled its wheels. Simultaneously the costs of following the party line increased as the rewards for such loyalty diminished. The national congress of the SFIO in 1938 saw the first split vote from the Bouches-du-Rhône delegation in a very long time. The alliance between Blum and Faure at previous party congresses had suited the Bouches-du-Rhône federation very well but after Munich the natural deference of the party to Blum was diluted by their preference for the anticommunist and antimilitarist line offered by the Party Secretary Faure.

#### e. Conclusion

The divisions caused within the Marseilles SFIO by the issues of war and communism in 1939 revealed the inadequacies of a political strategy which had concentrated purely on satisfying the material needs of its clients in the search for votes. The Popular Front was a period when ideological conflicts could severely undermine the exchange politics of the SFIO. Initially, however, it seemed that the events of the Popular Front offered some hope of simply reinvigorating the old clientelist system. Between 1935 and 1936 with Socialists in control

of the local council, influential within the Marseilles trade union movement, and soon to be in control in Paris as well, it seemed that the party's traditional arsenal of patronage and spoils would be greater than ever. Similarly, the demand for patronage and for political intermediaries seemed to be increasing. Socialists could present themselves as intermediaries between locally-based ethnic and occupational groups and the centres of municipal and national power. The working-class and the ethnic minorities were underrepresented in the higher echelons and among the more active elements of the party, but they were more than happy to join the party or its allied organisations whilst deferring to the leadership over questions of policy. Local socialist patrons depended on more than spoils for their influence. Many of them also had a certain charisma, bravado, machismo, and the benefits of a respected social position with which to accompany their populist rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> In that sense the clientelism of the local SFIO was one which was in transition, where old values and the power of deference were accompanied by an increased awareness of the material and ideological issues of the 1930's. Different aspects of the local clientelist system could appear in diverse ways. On occasions the local political system seemed to resemble an American political machine, at other times a rural patron-client relation, and at still other moments, an example of class-based and ideological politics. This diversity reflected both the strengths of local socialist politics and also its potential weaknesses.

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1 In the case of Bouisson for example his grave appearance won him respect from some quarters whilst his past as a champion rugby player won him a different kind of respect. He was the kind of candidate about which local people would exclaim 'C'est un homme!' See Jeansoulin, op.cit. p56.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE LONELINESS OF CLASS STRUGGLE, THE PCF & CGTU  
PRIOR TO THE POPULAR FRONT

1 Introduction

Communist-dominated organisations in Marseilles engaged in a different kind of activity from that practised by the SFIO and CGT prior to the Popular Front. The PCF was neither able nor willing to provide its local organisations with the kind of clientelistic links that the SFIO could offer. Determined to root itself in the French working class but unwilling to become compromised in 'la politique politicienne' the PCF sought to win support by demonstrating its powers as general staff for the mobilisable working-class. The PC in Marseilles hoped that the local working-class would recognise that the rewards of mass action were superior to those offered by local political patrons. Unfortunately this hope was in vain. The period from 1921-1934 was one where the balance of power in factories favoured employers rather than workers and the determination of the PC to mobilise the workers in spite of this adverse situation simply produced martyrs rather than any significant material advance. In Marseilles during this time, the local political patrons, with the resources of local government behind them, were able to offer the chance of individual and a few collective benefits in exchange for votes. Scorning the electoral process the PC placed its emphasis instead on building up its factory organisations and enlarging its working-class base. The small organisational resources which were built up in this manner were then squandered with tedious regularity

in unwinnable political strikes called mainly for the purpose of demonstrating the local leadership's enthusiasm for the latest Comintern initiative. Faced with a hostile environment the Marseilles PC was obliged to choose between political orthodoxy or organisational success. Local leaders soon realised that the former option was a safer one in the PCF, although the lack of progress which it resulted in would usually lead to their replacement after a few years by a new leadership appointed by the national party. Loyal apparatchniks and the policies of the Comintern and Profintern were thus imposed upon the ever shrinking Marseilles Communist Party in this period. Rejecting the local and national political system and embracing an unhelpful strategy for working-class action the Marseilles Communists were obliged by the early 1930's to seek consolation for their isolation in the knowledge of their purity.

## 2 Communists in Search of the Working-Class

The creation of a French Communist Party at the 1920 Tours Congress of the SFIO represented a self conscious attempt to break with the past practice of working-class parties. The primacy accorded to the role of the working class was itself the most dramatic demonstration of this rupture. But the party was not content simply to change its name, and clarify its constituency, it also wanted to be a new type of party. The PCF marked this new departure through its links with the new-born Soviet Republic, its rigid political position, (even if this rigidity was often exercised in the implementation of very contradictory policies) its adoption of democratic centralism, and its preoccupation with organising the working-class at the point of production.

The 1920's were devoted to forcing the young PCF into the Bolshevik mould. The period of Bolshevisation was followed by the policy of class against class; devoted both to opposing the SFIO and to helping distinguish the PCF from its parent. As one PCF spokesman explained, in 1928 after the new policy had brought electoral disaster:

'...la tactique classe contre classe avait pour but d'opérer une rupture démonstrative avec les partis de gauche de la bourgeoisie, avec les préjugés démocratiques, avec la vieille classification politique désormais vide de tout contenu social "les rouges contre les blancs", avec toutes les déviations opportunistes et électoralistes. Elle avait pour but de montrer à la large masse que les communistes considèrent le Parti communiste comme l'unique parti prolétarien. Elle avait enfin pour but de mettre le Parti sur de nouveaux rails, c'est-à-dire rompre définitivement et sans retour possible avec les vestiges de la politique des accords circonstanciels et des compromissions de toutes sortes avec la bourgeoisie.'<sup>1</sup>

Ferrat's explanation might have been aimed specifically at the Marseillais to inform them of the difference between their own Communist and Socialist parties. The thorough imposition of this policy of differentiating the PC from the SFIO was, however, costly in terms of membership and personnel. Membership of the Marseilles PC declined almost without halt in every year from 1921 to 1933.<sup>2</sup> This decline in membership was accompanied by an alarming discontinuity of personnel. The only way that the party could be kept along the correct ideological lines was if the leadership was constantly purged. The results of this policy were reflected in the fact that none of the leaders of the Marseilles PC in the years immediately after Tours held positions of any influence by 1934. Most had either left the party or been expelled long before then. Similarly, not one of the sixteen members of the Marseilles Regional Bureau and Committee in

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<sup>1</sup> André Ferrat, quoted in L. Bodin & N. Racine, Le Parti Communiste Français pendant l'entre-deux-guerres, Paris, 1972, pp169-170.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3, Table 3.11.

1926, the year of Bolshevisation, was to represent the party at the Villeurbanne PCF Congress ten years later.<sup>1</sup> This impression of discontinuity in PC personnel is reinforced when it is noted that a major element in the PC campaign during the Popular Front period, was of opposition to Simon Sabiani, himself one of the founders of the local Communist Party. Centrally directed purges of the party were followed by local defections and declining membership for most of the 1920's. The old membership, infected with anarchist and reformist ideas, was excluded and replaced by a more malleable, but also more transitory, group of largely foreign-born members of the working-class.<sup>2</sup>

The PC's preoccupation with appealing to the working-class caused it to devote considerable efforts to controlling the activities of the local CGTU and to the creation of factory cells. The move to create more factory cells in the 1920's was designed both to extend the influence of the PC among the working class, but also to ensure that middle-class members of the party would be submerged among the working classes and thus cured of their inherent reformism and electoralist ambitions. This theory was, however, rarely vindicated in practice. In Marseilles, the move to reorganise the party in factory cells often seems to have amounted to little more than a bureaucratic reclassification, with existing members simply being attached to renamed 'factory' cells. The seriousness of the problem was illustrated by a letter sent by a member of the largest factory cell, the railwaymen, to Duisabou, the local party leader in 1925. The cellule des cheminots officially had

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1 Data for 1926 in AN F7 13097 Report of 19.8.1926. For 1936 see AD M6 10809bis Report of 21.2.1936.

2 AN F7 13097 Report of 19.8.1926 refers to the preoccupation of the local PC with the foreign-born population, there was an Italian section of the party locally and newspapers were produced in Greek and Armenian.

between 60 and 80 members in 1925, but Barbaroux, a chemist and ex-Marseilles town councillor, complained that he was one of only three or four members who actually ever appeared at cell meetings. The working-class members apparently had no time to attend cell meetings, and Barbaroux saw this as illustrating the need for a return to work on a local rather than factory basis.<sup>1</sup> The lack of attendance and activity by the working-class members of factory cells meant that central funds had to be called on in order to carry out the most mundane tasks. By 1930 it was reported that most of the cell newspapers and bulletins were usually produced by a single individual in each case and funded by money received from the Regional and Central Committee rather than by collections among the workers.<sup>2</sup> Factory cells seemed almost impossible to establish in the Marseilles Region, and their absence was the cause for constant complaints from the Central Committee to local party leaders. The first attempt to set up a network of factory cells in Marseilles had taken place in 1924, and then of the fifteen cells only two actually had more than a paper existence.<sup>3</sup> By 1929 Maurice Thorez could complain that there were only eight functioning factory cells in the large factories contained in the whole of the Marseilles Region.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the theories of the party its membership was falling in the late 1920's, and, at the moment when greatest stress was placed on

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1 AN F7 13175 contains a copy of the letter from Barbaroux to Duisabou dated 10.8.1925.

2 AN F7 13120 copy of letter from the Commission d'agit Prop à toutes les cellules, dated Marseille 25.6.1930. See also F7 13134 where the CS report of 21.9.1936 mentions a meeting held on the previous day where a party leader had said that the campaign for recruitment in Marseilles had had to be held up until the Central Committee sent 3,000 francs.

3 AN F7 13096 Reports dated 1.9.1924, 15.10.1924, 28.10.1924, 24.1.1925.

4 Figures from report of Thorez to PCF Congress at St Denis 30.1.1929. cited by D. Tartakowsky, '1927-1931: pour la conquête des masses', Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez, 5, 1973, p23.

organising the working-class, it must have been disconcerting for the party to recognise that the most dramatic falls in membership were occurring precisely in the most heavily industrialised areas. Between 1926 and 1930 the East of France lost 75 per cent of its membership, Paris 45 per cent and Marseilles 42 per cent.<sup>1</sup> In Marseilles, by the time of the Regional Congress of 1932, members were still being exhorted to create more factory cells and informed that 'La structure actuelle de notre Parti nous montre que nous n'avons qu'un infime réseau de cellules d'entreprises'.<sup>2</sup> The local leadership reported that far from progressing in the creation of factory cells there was a tendency for them to decline and disappear, and they reminded the membership that:

'La cellule d'entreprise doit être la base fondamentale de notre Parti, parce qu'elle lui donne l'indispensable prépondérance des éléments prolétariens.  
...La cellule d'usine sera le pillier indispensable pour le maintien de la dictature du prolétariat et le moteur entraînant pour l'instauration du socialisme.'<sup>3</sup>

In spite of its lack of success the PC's concentration on organising by factory rather than by locality served to demarcate it from the other, more electorally-oriented, parties in the town. Its organisational domination of the local CGTU also marked it off from other local parties. The SFIO also maintained close links with individual trade unions in the CGT but such links were based on ties of convenience and patronage rather than anything more permanent.

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1 Tartakowsky loc.cit.p32.

2 AN F7 13028 PC internal report for Marseilles Region presented to Regional Congress 27-28.2.1932.

3 Ibid.

Between the PC and CGTU by contrast there was a very strong organisational link. After some initial problems with local anarcho-syndicalists the Marseilles CGTU could be described by 1926 as being 'absolument subordonnée à la direction du Bureau régional du Parti' and all members of the Union Locale Unitaire Conseil d'Administration were themselves also members of the PC.<sup>1</sup> The CGTU was, in Marseilles as elsewhere, designed to become the standard 'courroie de transmission' between the PC and the working-class. To succeed in this aim, however, the union needed to recruit the working-class, and it seems that it was not very much more successful in this aim than was the party itself. Throughout the period of trade union division (1921-1936 (reunification did not take place in Marseilles until 1936)) the CGTU was a smaller organisation than was the CGT. Whilst the CGTU aimed itself more specifically at the proletarian factory workers it was even less successful in recruiting them than was the CGT. In 1928 CGTU sources reported that factory workers accounted for 37 per cent of CGT membership in the Bouches-du-Rhone, and only 30 per cent of the smaller total of CGTU members.<sup>2</sup> Even among those factory workers who were in the CGTU the majority were, in fact, skilled workers at a time when the few strikes taking place locally were conducted by unskilled industrial workers.<sup>3</sup> The local CGTU was obliged to recognise that the Marseilles trade union movement was very unrepresentative of precisely the most militant sections of the working class. The leadership resolved to try and do better in creating a base in the working class, but they never really succeeded in this aim until the

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1 AN F7 13096 Report of 28.10.1924. AN F7 13097 report of 19.8.1926.

2 CGTU Union Régionale Unitaire, Bulletin, No.3, septembre 1928 p13.

3 Bulletin, No.3, loc.cit. p14.

Popular Front period when there were new policies and possibilities for action.

### 3 The Marginalisation of Revolutionaries

The party's declared desire to win a solidly working-class following was often frustrated by the tasks it allocated to those workers who did actually join. In reality, the party and the CGTU operated as sects, the membership of which marginalised their members in society and made them liable to victimisation at work. In spite of repeated declarations concerning the party's desire to recruit the working-class, the party's activities were often so demanding of time and energy, and so little related to the realities of working-class life, that they required immense dedication which was most likely to come from the unattached or financially secure working and middle classes. The result was that, as the Comintern complained in a letter to the PCF in 1927:

'Dans son état actuel, le Parti Français n'est nullement un Parti de masse - ni par ses effectifs, ni par l'influence qu'il exerce - et, de plus en plus, il s'éloigne de cet objectif. Ses effectifs sont faibles...le fait est aujourd'hui reconnu que le Parti est un "lieu de passage", qu'il retient mal ceux que la situation objective y fait entrer. La majorité des membres du Parti a seulement quelques mois de présence dans nos rangs; étrangère à l'histoire de notre Parti, elle est dans sa grande majorité totalement ignorante des principes les plus élémentaires du Communisme.'<sup>1</sup>

With the lapse of time the situation in Marseilles at least, became even worse. In August 1932 the Commissaire Spécial at Marseilles wrote a draft reply for the Prefect to send to the Minister of Interior in response to a questionnaire dating from July and concerning the position of the Communist Party. The Commissaire's reply revealed the state of the local party. He described how:

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Communist International to PCF of 2.9.1927. Photographic copy in AN F7 13100.

'Il m'en est assez difficile...de répondre aux questionnaires transmis par M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur et qui présupposent l'existence d'une organisation parfaite des groupements communistes de la région.

En effet, si ce parti politique donne, pour les besoins de sa propagande, certaines indications susceptibles de faire supposer que les Marseillais...sont enrégimentés de façon régulière dans des cadres chargés de les conduire sur le chemin de la Gloire Soviétique, le Rayon, les Sous-rayons et les cellules, à fortiori, ne peuvent être cités que sous la réserve expresse de leur fictivité de fait.'

Having listed the five sous-rayons in Marseilles the report went on to note:

'Tous ces Secrétaires de Sous-rayons sont seuls administrateurs de leur groupement, c'est-à-dire qu'ils cumulent toutes les fonctions prévues dans l'organisation communiste. Il leur serait d'ailleurs assez difficile d'organiser un conseil d'administration puisque, dans la plupart des cas, leurs adhérents sont inexistantes. Aussi ont-ils eu recours, pour figurer les cellules, à des camarades qui, réduits à leur unique personne, représentent celles-ci.'

The continuation of 'mass' actions when the party was so obviously isolated required tremendous dedication and energy from party and CGTU members. The high costs of membership meant in turn that there was a tendency for people to content themselves with simply being paper members or to leave the party fairly rapidly. The party seemed locked into a vicious circle destined at best to be what Robrieux has called 'une secte de masse' and recruiting:

'Des militants jeunes, dévoués, dynamiques, engagés totalement, souvent des célibataires, des jeunes ouvriers batailleurs, entrés au Parti comme on va à un refuge dans une société invivable.'

Once recruited, the party and the CGTU expected members to become energetically involved in campaigns decided on in Paris and in Moscow, and which only rarely had much to do with the day-to-day experience of the working-class. One ex-Communist from Marseilles has written of the tremendous efforts required from members in order to carry through

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1 AN F7 13130 CS to Prefect 25.8.1932.

2 P. Robrieux, Histoire intérieure du parti communiste (1920-1945), Paris, 1980, p405.

the party's policy of opposition to the Moroccan War. In addition to some sabotage on the quaysides, members in Marseilles were expected to participate in:

'du travail en profondeur, ce qui demandait un effort de chaque jour, de chaque nuit. Affichages, distribution de tracts, prises de parole dans les bars et sur les lieux de travail.'<sup>1</sup>

Work such as this would have been debilitating at the best of times, but when, as with most other campaigns launched by the PCF during this period, the results were negligible, only the most dedicated activists would be able to remain within the party. Lack of success, however, mattered little to PC members by the mid 1920's, since by then, according to one of their number:

'une foi ardente nous animait. Les tièdes avaient été éliminés. Nous étions devenus des inconditionnels de la révolution.'<sup>2</sup>

The revolutionaries though, through their commitment to a project designed and directed by forces outside of Marseilles and ill-suited to local conditions, found themselves marginalised among precisely the group they sought to influence; the Marseilles working-class.

Prior to 1934 the PCF seemed almost congenitally incapable of devising campaigns which would strike a chord among the Marseilles working class. Anti-militarism, antifascism, anti-colonialism, and various campaigns in favour of the Soviet Union and against the local CGT and SFIO rarely succeeded in rallying much support before 1933.<sup>3</sup>

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1 V. Barthélemy, Du Communisme au fascisme. L'histoire d'un engagement politique, Paris, 1978, p26.

2 Barthélemy, loc.cit. p27.

3 AN F7 13115 contains a PC regional circular dated 4.4.1929 on antimilitarist propaganda. AN F7 13120 Report of CC 9.2.1930 refers to PC plans to disrupt a football match with Italy played at Marseilles. According to Adrien Mouton, (18.9.1980 Arles interview) the planned disruption met with little enthusiasm from the Marseilles working class. Barthélemy loc.cit. suggests that anticolonial campaigns around the Moroccan war met with no more success, pp26-27.

Occasionally an issue would arise, such as the Social Security Law of 1930, where the political line of the PCF and CGTU (of opposition to workers' contributions to the fund), coincided with the feelings of the local workers. But the very way in which the PCF and CGTU attempted to exploit this opportunity demonstrated just how rare it was for the party to be able to point out to workers the link between 'leur situation particulière et la situation générale' (i.e. the PCF analysis).<sup>1</sup> As members became accustomed to being voices crying in the wilderness they tended to react by intensifying the militancy of their positions and becoming increasingly preoccupied with remaining true to the latest party line. Having little support in the community, party members were increasingly likely to look to the leadership for guidance. The more that local parties sought direction from outside their community, the more their marginalisation within that community was increased.

The broad based tradition of Left politics in Marseilles was precisely representative of the kind of activity with which the PCF wanted to break. The vague ideologies of anticlericalism and the clan and locality-based loyalties of the SFIO and its associated organisations (Comités des intérêts de Quartier, ALLs, and Sections de Libre Pensée) were antithetical to the vision of a thoroughly bolshevised French Communist Party. The early leaders of the Marseilles PC were more part of this general Left tradition than they were the precursors of a genuinely bolshevised party. Veyren, as a defrocked priest and the first Marseillais to become Secretary of the local PC,

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<sup>1</sup> AN F7 13120 PC circular of 25.6.1930.

was himself the type of activist who might well have led the party into a traditional style of anticlerical politics had he not been rapidly ousted from his post by the Paris-based leadership.<sup>1</sup> Until 1933 the PC rejected organised anticlericalism as a reformist doctrine diverting workers from the revolution and local party leaders were frequently rejected by the Centre on the grounds of freemasonry or simply their refusal to bend to party discipline.<sup>2</sup> The small size and fragmented nature of the Marseilles industrial working-class made it difficult even at the best of times for a political party to base its appeal exclusively on appeals to this sector of the population. When, as in the period 1921-1934, the party conducting this strategy failed to understand the adverse balance of power in the factories, and continued relentlessly to use the local working-classes as cannon fodder in the political battles ordered by Moscow, then this narrow political appeal could only lead to the disillusionment of the many who might momentarily have been attracted by it, and the marginalisation of the few who remained attached to it.

Together, the rigorous doctrinal demands of the central leadership of the party and the absolute control exercised over the appointment of local leaders meant that the Marseilles PC became increasingly inclined in the 1920's to judge itself according to the yardstick of ideological rectitude rather than of popular support. Lack of progress among the working class was, time and again, interpreted as the result of a failure to impose the party line sufficiently energetically, rather than as casting doubt on the

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1 B. Bouisson, 'L'anticlérisme à Marseille...' op.cit. p201.

2 eg. Henri Torrès and Simon Sabiani. B. Bouisson, 'L'anticlérisme à Marseille...' op.cit. pp201 & 243.

appropriateness of the party's strategy. Party leaders at the local level owed their positions, and any wages they received, to the Paris-based centre, and it was thus to the centre that they looked for guidance. Lack of success in recruitment was perhaps depressing on a daily basis but its consequences for the individual local party leader were less serious than was the adoption of an independent approach. In time, of course, the Marseilles party's lack of success would be condemned as being the result of the wrong line being imposed and changes in the local leadership would follow. It was in this way that the failure of the Marseilles party to do better in the late 1920's and early 1930's was later attributed to the ultra-Leftist influence of the Barbé-Célor group.<sup>1</sup> From as early as 1930, François Billoux, himself a member of the Barbé-Célor group, in his capacity as leader of the Jeunesses Communistes was beginning to detect which way the ideological wind was blowing and to respond by purging the Marseilles Jeunesses Communistes of 'ultra-leftist elements'.<sup>2</sup> By 1932 the way was open for Thorez to remove the existing leadership of the Marseilles Party under Duisabou, the local representative of the 'group', and to replace them with his own protégés, Mouton and Nédelec from outside, together with Genovesi and Enjalbert who were local unionists.<sup>3</sup> Two years later the party sent Billoux to Marseilles to purge himself of his sins. After Billoux's association

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1 M. Thorez wrote in March 1932 how: 'Dans toute la situation...le groupe Barbé-Célor porte une responsabilité lourde. Le groupe a exprimé particulièrement cette...pratique sectaire qui couvraient et permettaient le développement de l'opportunisme de droite le plus caractérisé sous la phrase de gauche...Camarades de Marseille, n'avez-vous pas eu une politique de groupe pendant une période dans votre région?' Cited in Oeuvres de Maurice Thorez, Paris, 1950-1960, Livre deuxième, tome trois pp157 & 160.

2 AN F7 13189 Photographic copy of letter from Billoux to Comité Central des Jeunesses Communistes de Marseille 31.3.1930.

3 According to D. Tartakowsky, Les premiers communistes français: formation des cadres et bolchevisation, Paris 1980, p198 Genovesi had attended a party school in Marseilles in 1930. Another attender was Rimbert who had been excluded from the party as a member of the Barbé-Célor group.

with the 'group' and his subsequent atonement and disgrace it seems clear that he would have been determined to demonstrate his loyalty to the Central Committee through the orthodoxy and success of his leadership in Marseilles. The increasing willingness of the PCF to become involved in broad front activities from 1933 onwards, combined with a more propitious environment for party activity meant that Billoux found himself in the unusually fortunate position for a leader of the Marseilles party, of being able to extend the party's influence at the same time as he kept within the, newly extended, bounds of doctrinal orthodoxy.

#### 4 'Implantation' ou 'Contre-Société'?

Recent writings by communist historians have tried to correct the vision of the PCF as counter society projected by Annie Kriegel. They have chosen instead to focus on the way in which the PCF was rooted in the French Working-Class community. The most extensive analyses conducted so far according to this new revisionist perspective of implantation have dealt with the interwar period.<sup>1</sup> Focussing attention more on election results than purely on membership figures these analyses have indicated that, although a small party for most of the interwar period, the PCF nevertheless attracted a not inconsiderable amount of electoral support. The same phenomenon was observable in Marseilles where a miniscule PC could still obtain up to 10 per cent of the votes cast at legislative elections before 1936.<sup>2</sup>

A view of the Marseilles PC in the period 1921-1934 which saw it either in terms of implantation or as contre-société would be difficult to substantiate. The party was never really rooted in the locality; its votes were largely an ill-defined affirmation of protest

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<sup>1</sup> J. Girault et al, Sur l'implantation du Parti Communiste Francais dans l'entre-deux-guerres, Paris, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3 p 109

against reformist socialism, and its limited influence in trade unions was more the result of alliances made with corrupt leaders in areas of key strategic importance than a reflection of the ideological commitment of the local working-class. Similarly, it seems inappropriate to define the local party in terms of being a counter-society. Its narrowly political preoccupations and very rapid turnover of membership and leadership restricted its ability to play such a role, forcing it rather into a position of marginality. The sense of isolation and antipathy felt by Communist activists, both within and towards society, was made perhaps greater because of their small number, but this same limited extent of the local Communist movement prevented it from establishing a large enough base from which to fulfill the role of counter society.

The small size and ideological orthodoxy of the Marseilles PC could not spare it from the dilemmas posed by its contradictory political aims. A reading of internal regional CGTU bulletins gives the impression of a party and its union pursuing three, often mutually antagonistic, aims: first to build up support in areas regarded by the party as being of key strategic importance; secondly, to assure the presence of the party and trade union in those sectors of the working-class actually engaged in militant action or regarded as being most likely to do so because of their thoroughly proletarian nature; thirdly, to enlist recruits and supporters acquired during the pursuance of the previous aims into the campaigns organised by the party in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a view based on a reading of local PC and CGTU material in this period. In particular the Bulletins of the Union Régionale Unitaire have proved useful. The issues for August 1928, September 1928 and March 1929 have been located and consulted.

The activities of the PCF and CGTU in the port of Marseilles reflected their preoccupation with gaining a foothold in what was regarded as being an area of strategic importance. The ability to control port traffic was regarded by the Communists as being of such great importance that it took precedence over considerations of ideology. In the Marseilles docks and port, therefore, local Communists were prepared to make an alliance with whoever was regarded as the potentially strongest union leader. In the docks physical strength and contacts with powerful political patrons often counted for more than ideological considerations in winning support for a union leader. The PCF was prepared to moderate its dictatorial policy towards trade unions in this case. Two men of dubious character and without any particular political convictions, Ciavaldini and Nazzi, were accepted into the CGTU as the only people likely to be able to give the PCF an influence in the port. They established a unitaire dockers' union whilst retaining only the most tenuous and strained links with the local PC. The PC was unhappy about the situation; it would have preferred more orthodox and malleable men as union leaders, but confronted by the choice of accepting undesirable but influential leaders for the dockers' union, or of having no influence at all, they chose the former option.<sup>1</sup> This rather pragmatic Communist attitude towards gaining control over a trade union was not dissimilar from the approach sometimes adopted by the SFIO towards trade unions. In this instance the PC's determination to be able to control the workforce was such that they were prepared to back up the clientelist and corrupt

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<sup>1</sup> And settled for the disreputable and influential leaders, Ciavaldini & Nazzi.

activities of two dockers' leaders in the belief that this would enable them to force dockers to go on strike at will. In this area at least, communist preoccupation with controlling port traffic caused them to avert their attention from issues specifically related to questions of class or ideology, preferring instead the tried and tested local methods of bossism and corruption.<sup>1</sup>

The second and third aims of the PC which have been identified were conducted in rather a different way. The party's preoccupation with organising the most militant and most proletarian elements of the local population has already been discussed in some detail, as has the relative failure of party directed campaigns. Generally the obsession with, and relative failure of, the party's attempts to organise the working-class meant that it was rarely successful in initiating strikes and was reduced instead to clumsy attempts at capitalising on the few strikes which actually took place. Constantly in search of the militant working-class, in which it so passionately believed, the party was very ready to offer assistance when the desired object actually manifested itself. Not content with merely offering help, however, the party felt obliged also to offer practical and ideological guidance, membership cards and exhortations to participate in the latest party-initiated political campaigns. These aims could often be counter productive and the political preoccupations of the PC often seemed to undermine their class appeal.

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1 The replacement of Ciavaldini and Nazzi by Gagnaire, another man with a criminal record seemed to reinforce the impressions of the inevitability of crime in the Marseilles docks. Attempts by the PCF to set up a Club des Marins to counter the corrupting influence of the dissident unitaire leaders were to little avail. Simoni, one of the organisers of the Club des Marins was expelled from the PCF for having stolen the club radio. Similarly, when the Théâtre Ouvrier used the Club premises they took all the furniture with them after completing their performance. Details from AN F7 13132 CD to Prefect 31.1.1934.

This brief examination of the Marseilles PC and CGTU in 1921-1934 reveals two interlinked organisations, characterised above all, by their dogmatic dedication to the realisation of often contradictory aims. The party's aims which were most obviously in conflict were the threefold desires to, acquire a stage army to participate in Paris-ordered demonstrations and campaigns, gain control over unions powerful in areas of strategic importance, and to win a powerful foothold among the most oppressed and militant sections of the industrial working class. Clearly the very vulnerability of the workers the party sought to recruit would make them reluctant to participate in political campaigns offering few rewards and multiple risks - to their liberty and their jobs. Similarly, the party's determination to win control of powerful unions in key strategic areas would mean that the leaders of such unions could afford to follow an unorthodox or purely opportunistic political philosophy and practice.

The very instrumentalism of the party makes it difficult to define its whole approach as being either clientelistic or class-based and ideologically inspired. The party's determination to follow the instructions given by Paris, which were so ill-suited to local conditions, led it to follow different approaches at different times. Thus a policy of implantation might be pursued in a certain area where the importance of key economic activities made party influence and control more important by far than considerations of political purity. At other times the determination to establish a purely working-class party might lead the party to be more selective in its recruiting policy, but such selection would be directed to questions of class origin rather than to ones of political conviction.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Adrien Mouton (Interview Arles 18.9.1980) mentions the suspicion with which applications for membership from foremen were received. At one stage the local party refused to accept them as members.

For most of the time, however, the party's preoccupation with organising unpopular, dangerous, and often irrelevant political campaigns led it to become marginalised within society and to lose the support of those working-class people it had recruited with so much difficulty. The marginalisation of the party was so great, and its size so small, and its base so narrow, that it is difficult to describe its dismal showing in terms of Kriegel's counter-society. The party was never strong enough in this period to counterpose itself to Society as a whole. Indeed, in view of the violent historical debate between Communist historians and the school of writing inspired by Annie Kriegel, it is perhaps paradoxical that the very ability of a PC to fulfill the role of counter community must depend on its previous successes at following a policy of implantation. Implantation itself, however, could only occur when the working-class did not occupy such a vulnerable position in society, and when either party ideology was better adapted to local conditions or when Marseilles party activists were prepared to ignore the directives of the national party. Few of these preconditions existed prior to 1934, but the success of the Popular Front rested by contrast upon their creation.

### SECTION THREE: THE MARSEILLES WORKING CLASS IN MOVEMENT

In this section of the thesis the focus of attention will move away from the organisations of the working-class and return to the working-class itself. The purpose, however, of the following chapters is not to return to the description of the working-class seen in Section One but rather to examine the motives for and manner of working-class mobilisation in Marseilles during the Popular Front. The Popular Front was notable for the high level of working-class mobilisation which was manifested in the streets, at factory level, and at the polls. The following chapters (6, 7, 8 and 9) focus primarily on the links between political and trade union organisation and factory level mobilisation in strikes. This brief introduction attempts to situate the strikes of the period in their broader political context.

The period from 1934 to 1938 saw an unusually high level of working-class militancy and mobilisation. These phenomena were reflected in organisational and electoral developments as well as at street and factory level. The riots of 6 February 1934 awakened a response from the Marseilles working-class which surprised its organisations. Whilst the newly reorganised PC could only gather together 83 members at a meeting held on 11 February the demonstration of the following day attracted between 25-100,000 Marseillais.<sup>1</sup> United action against fascism and the decree laws seemed capable of mobilising the Marseilles working-class in a

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<sup>1</sup> Parti communiste français, Compte rendu du VIII<sup>e</sup> Congrès National du PCF Villeurbanne, 22-25 Janvier 1936, Report by Billoux, pp328-334.

way not seen since 1919-1920. The positive unity behind a Popular Front movement for bread, liberty and peace, revealed the Marseilles working-class as more optimistic and less quiescent than previously, willing to go on strike, happy to give up time and pay to demonstrate, ready to vote for Popular Front candidates and to join the parties and trade unions of the Left.

The Popular Front period was not, however, one of unmitigated triumph for the parties of the Left. The need for unity against domestic fascism was removed once a Popular Front Government was in secure control of the State. At the same time the increasing need to oppose foreign fascism raised the contradiction between the Popular Front demands for Peace and Liberty as it became clear that the latter could only be preserved at the expense of the former. Meanwhile, the vastly increased working-class expectations which had been so important in creating the Popular Front movement threatened to undermine a Popular Front Government which was felt to be moving too slowly. The political unity which had proved so necessary to the campaign in favour of the Popular Front was rapidly transformed, first into rivalry, and then into overt antagonism between the parties of the Popular Front. The increase in mobilisation on all fronts which had been seen in the period from 1934-6 was transformed into a sharp decline by 1938-9.

The initial upsurge in street-level mobilisation of February 12

1934 was only matched again in 1937 when, with almost official status, and with the support of the much enlarged Popular Front parties and trade unions, the ritualistic demonstrations of 12 February and Mayday reached their peak. Table 6A shows how much attendance at these demonstrations declined by 1939.

TABLE 6A

Attendance at Mayday and 12 February Demonstrations in Marseilles  
1934-1939

(Police estimates)

Year	Mayday Attendance	12 February Attendance
1934	2,000	25,000
1935	12,000	2,000
1936	15,000	4,000
1937	35-60,000	25,000
1938	25,000	12,000
1939	5,000	500

Source: AD M6 10820 & M6 10792.

The surge and decline in street-level mobilisation was reflected too in the membership of Left parties. Tables 3.6 and 3.11 (See Chapter 3) show that although the SFIO, and more particularly the PCF, experienced rapid membership growth from 1934-1937, both parties suffered a decline in membership in 1938 which probably continued into 1939. Table 3.12 show a similar pattern in trade union membership,

where a rapid growth from 1936-7 had been transformed into a decline by 1938-9. Election returns also revealed the gradual decline in the popularity of the Popular Front. In the first constituency of Marseilles - an SFIO stronghold represented by Henri Tasso the Mayor of Marseilles - the combined Socialist and Communist share of votes cast which had reached 93 per cent in 1936 was reduced, first to 76 per cent in 1937, and then to 55 per cent in 1939.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in Marseilles the same decline was observable by 1939, albeit of a less extreme kind. The surge and decline in mobilisation and support for the Popular Front which was seen in the political sphere was also evident in the strike movements which will be described in the following chapters. Chapter 10 will then attempt to interpret the links between the political and the strike movements of the period.

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1 AD 11 M 3/62

CHAPTER SIX: THE GROWTH IN WORKING-CLASS POLITICAL MOBILISATION  
AND ORGANISATION: FEBRUARY 1934 - FEBRUARY 1936

The strike and demonstration of 12 February 1934 in Marseilles were the largest in any provincial town.<sup>1</sup> For the first time since 1920 and in spite of a tiny and divided trade union movement Marseilles experienced a near-total strike. Shops, cafés, bars and restaurants all remained closed. Public transport came to a halt and workers in sectors as diverse as the docks, post office, shipping and industry ceased work.<sup>2</sup> The success of the movement must have been staggering to those who participated in it. After years during which the working-class had both felt excluded from the political process and too weak to act, action suddenly seemed possible and could be geared to national political issues.

Participation in the February strike extended far beyond the membership of the established working-class organisations. The PCF welcomed the movement as a successful example of the long sought after workplace mobilisation, but was less enthusiastic about the use of this weapon in defence of the much derided Republic. In the weeks after the strike Rouge-Midi was full of declarations such as: 'Que nous importe à nous, communistes, La République bourgeoise et ses institutions?', and 'Après le 12 Février. Non, les ouvriers confédérés ne défendront ni la République bourgeoise ni les intérêts

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<sup>1</sup> AD M6 10794. Antoine Prost 'Les manifestations du 12 février 1934 en province', Le Mouvement Social, 54, 1966, pp7-27

<sup>2</sup> Rapport fait au nom de la commission d'enquête chargée de rechercher les causes et les origines des événements du 6 février 1934 et jours suivants... Les manifestations du 12 février - la grève générale, par M Pétrus Faure, député Documents parlementaires, Chambre de Députés, 1934, No.3393, p24-26.

de leur maîtres'.<sup>1</sup> In this manner the PCF declared its loyalty to the tactic of class against class, its hostility to the SFIO and its lack of sensitivity to working-class instincts.

The success of the 12 February strike demonstrated the immense potential for working-class mobilisation in Marseilles. The low participation in the May Day strike of 1934 demonstrated, however, the contrasting inability of working-class organisations to channel such mobilisation. May Day, the moment par excellence of organised labour was as unsuccessful in 1934 as it had been in 1933, attracting only 2,000 participants.<sup>2</sup> In the following years the Popular Front movement created a climate favourable to increased working-class mobilisation and greatly strengthened organisations. The successful creation of the Popular Front in Marseilles depended on the extent to which the organisations of the local labour movement were able to unite the differing ideological, political and workplace struggles and preoccupations involved in the resistance of civil servants to the decree laws, the fight against French and foreign fascism and the daily conflict of the workplace. This chapter will examine the motives for, and consequences of, working-class mobilisation in the period from 1934 to February 1936.

### 1 Economic Depression and Heightened Militancy

Strikes in industry during 1934-5 took place against a background of increasing unemployment and falling wages. Even the inadequate figures on the number of assisted unemployed suggest that

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1 Rouge-Midi, (RM) 53, 55, 17.2.1934, 3.3.1934.

2 AD M6 10820 May Day 1934 & 1933.

unemployment rose by 84 per cent in the Bouches-du-Rhône in the two years after April 1933, whilst daily wages fell by 8.4 per cent between October 1934 and October 1935.<sup>1</sup> Reductions in average wages were in part the result of the spread of short time working but they were also due to falls in basic wages which were tied to the declining local cost of living index.<sup>2</sup> Between 1932 and 1936 the Marseilles cost of living index moved as follows:

TABLE 6.1

Date	Cost of Living Index
1932 November	616.073
1933 "	616.602
1934 "	593.215
1935 "	562.709
1936 February	601.280

(Base level of 100 in 1914)

Source: Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille, T47.

1 For more information on unemployment in this period see Chapter 2, Part 2b iv and G. Letellier et al, Enquête sur le chômage en France de 1930 à 1936, Paris 1938. Pages 121-2 of this work indicate that the number of workers registered at the Marseilles fonds de chômage rose from 291 in 1930 to a peak of 22,868 in February 1936. Average daily wages changed as follows between October 1934 and October 1935:

	<u>Marseilles</u>	<u>Seine</u>	<u>France</u>
1934	37	50.72	32.65
1935	33.9	49.75	31.7

Note: Figures for Marseilles & France based on daily wages in francs for 43 male occupations. Those for the Seine based on 20 male occupations. Source: Bulletin du Ministère du travail, 1936, p41.

2 Increases in short time working in France are indicated by A.Sauvy, Histoire Economique de la France entre les Deux Guerres Vol.2, Paris 1967 pp549-550.

It was in 1935 that those occupations with indexed wages suffered most, but even before that date the strike and demonstration of 12 February had produced a new mood in the factories and an increased willingness to challenge employer authority. Increased working-class militancy was accompanied by increased class solidarity, often reflected in rising trade union membership during, and after, (successful) strikes. Although strong trade union organisations could help to ensure a strike victory, such organisations took time to establish and in 1934 they were themselves usually the products as much as the initiators of strikes.

The strike at the oil and soap factory of Rocca, Tassy de Roux which lasted from 5-12 March 1934 illustrated many of the themes which were present in strikes during this period. The conflict over rationalisation in the workplace and the solidarity of other workers and residents with the strikers presaged later developments. The strike started when management changed the system of payment for packaging workers from one based on a daily rate to one based on a piecework rate. The change affected only 110 workers, but by 6 March 1139 workers from two different factories had joined in a sympathy strike. The scale of this sympathy strike illustrated the widespread hostility to piecework and production speedups. The Communist Party had been campaigning for some time against the kind of rationalisation introduced at Rocca, Tassy de Roux and they were at the forefront in organising the strike at the firm. Its support in the form of propaganda, pickets and collection of money was aimed both at aiding the strikers and at facilitating the growth of the CGTU union branch.

The PC claimed that the proposed rationalisation would lead to a deterioration in working conditions (C'est l'ouvrier transformé en automate' Rouge-Midi, 56, 10.3.1934), redundancy for the workers and increased profit for the employer.

The conflict contributed to the politicisation of the workforce and workers turned to the local population and political organisations for assistance. In doing so they traded on the kinds of issues which the local working-class would sympathise with. Rocca's use of nuns to run a crèche and canteen was easily understood by the largely anticlerical working-class as being cause for just resentment. Similarly, the arrest of strike pickets led to people becoming involved in confrontations with the police. The political lessons of the strike were brought home even more strongly after its defeat, when management went on to extend the Système Bedeau across the factory and to sack 600 workers.<sup>1</sup>

1935 saw the continued decline of the local cost of living index with its consequent repercussions on the level of wages. After a year of political and organisational effort since February 1934, however, local workers were to be in a more militant mood and more prepared to resist attempts to reduce wages. The first such attempt occurred at the rubber factory Le Caoutchouc Industriel on 7 January 1935. Ninety-seven workers struck in protest at the attempt

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<sup>1</sup> For full details see AD XIVM 25/74, R.M. 56, 10.3.1934 & 72, 1.7.1934 and France, Direction du Travail, Statistique des Grèves, 1934.

to reduce their daily wages from 30 francs a day for women and 40 for men to 29 and 39 francs per day respectively. The proposed reduction was small, but in collaboration with the militant Syndicat Unitaire des Produits Chimiques the workers in the factory succeeded in obtaining a total strike, with demands for not only an end to any wage cut, but for a 14.5 per cent increase in wages and improvements in safety, hygiene and working conditions. Solidarity meetings were organised in the locality, and with the aid of the trade union and local support, the strikers were able to stay out until 1 March 1935. The wage cuts were then imposed as planned, but in two stages and in such a way that the worst paid workers were given a small increase in pay. None of this could conceal the fact that the strike had ended in a defeat and in the sacking of some workers. The conduct of the strike had, however, convinced many of the need for efficient trade union organisation.<sup>1</sup> The uses of such organisation were illustrated when 150 unionised workers at an engineering factory employing 1,400 succeeded, after a 2 hour strike, in securing the re-hiring of four workers who had been sacked for rudeness to a chef de service. It seemed that solidarity actions backed by trade unions had a greater chance of success, even when undertaken by only a minority of the workforce.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Strikes in the Port

The port posed a rather different kind of problem for working-class mobilisation from that prevailing in industry.

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1 AD XIVM 25/74 and Statistique des Grèves, op.cit. 1935, No.43.

2 AD XIVM 25/74 and see details of strike at Caisseries Réunies for comparison. See also details of the strike at a local cremeries, which ended in failure. Statistique des Grèves 1935, No.346 & 214.

Local industry, the Prefect, Government, trade unions and political parties all were concerned with events in the port which seemed both to symbolise the health of the local economy and the balance of political forces in Marseilles.

The economic crisis affected dockers just as much as workers in industry. Between 1933 and 1935 there was a shrinking market for dockers' labour and those who did find employment were obliged to work in deteriorating conditions. The seven major port employers reduced the number of dockers they employed daily from an average of 4,000 in 1929 to 2,500 in 1935.<sup>1</sup> By 1935 it was estimated for the 10,000 registered dockers that they would obtain work only on two days out of every seven.<sup>2</sup>

If the declining demand for dockers' labour did not facilitate attempts to improve their position, the corruption, moderation and division of their unions did not help either. The CGT counted 500 dockers in November 1934, and their ageing moderate leader Manot did not see fit to complain as deflation produced three successive reductions in dockers' indexed wages between 1933 and 1935. The 300 members of the CGTU meanwhile had a more colourful and corrupt but no less moderate leadership in the form of Ciavaldini and Nazzi. The two CGTU leaders were more energetic in using their offices for various illicit traffics than they were

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1 Carengo, op.cit. p106.

2 Le Midi Syndicaliste, 124, 19.1.1934.

at organising the dockers. Although nominally in charge of a CGTU Union their relations with the PCF were extremely bad, and anti-communism would later become the keynote of their politics.<sup>1</sup>

Before dockers could be mobilised for any serious resistance to their worsening condition a long period of propaganda was required together with some reorganisation of dockers' trade unions. The Communists undertook these tasks as part of the eighteen-month long battle for the 'conquête du port' which was launched by Tillon on the instructions of Clément (Fried). The task was not easy and the methods used were often unorthodox. The man chosen by Tillon, Victor Gagnaire, is alleged to have succeeded in capturing control of the port with a combination of 'coups de poing' and 'coups de barre de fer'. The ousting of Ciavaldini and Nazzi took place during a riotous meeting in the Bourse du travail. One of the participants has recounted how:

Quand nous avons essayé de huer les deux secrétaires qui étaient des gangsters, ils ont sorti des revolvers. Alors, c'était à moi de jouer avec mon service d'ordre. Nous avons entouré la tribune et tout. Le pauvre Gagnaire, qui avait une force herculéenne, a empoigné le secrétaire et de peu il le lâche par la fenêtre de la bourse du travail! C'est moi qui le lui ai enlevé des mains. Il m'a dit: "Je le lâche? - Ne le lâche pas!" Nous avons pris le truc comme ça.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to violent confrontations of this kind the PC also conducted a powerful propaganda campaign. Throughout 1934 Rouge-Midi devoted

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1 AN F7 13711 Prefect's note 18.10.1934 for trade union strength. For information on Nazzi and Ciavaldini see: C. Tillon, On Chantait Rouge, Paris, 1977, pp183-4, and AN F7 13710 CD to Prefect, 24.10.1933 and F7 13711 Note from Parisian Préfecture de Police, 6.2.1934. Also see L'Humanité, 12-14, 9.1929 and 19.4.1931 for conflicts between PC and CGTU leaders.

2 Lucien Molino in D. Bleitrach & A. Chenu, L'Usine et la Vie, op. cit. pp33-4.

considerable attention to the grievances of dockers over working conditions and pay and relations with foremen.<sup>1</sup>

The fruits of the Communists' work were not really reaped until the end of 1935 when, following their participation in a meeting which further reduced the local cost of living index, confédéré leaders signed an agreement to reduce dockers wages by 2 francs per day. On the same day, 9 December, Ciavaldini and Nazzi joined forces with the confédérés. On the following day the dockers went to work only to be informed of their wage cut, and with only the PC union leadership ready to act, the result was that:

'entraînés par les éléments unitaires, (les dockers)...ont abandonné le travail. La cessation s'est repercutée de chantier en chantier et le mouvement est devenu général.'<sup>2</sup>

The conduct of the December dock strike marked a turning point in the history of local working-class political mobilisation for several reasons. It was backed by almost all the dockers.<sup>3</sup> It was based on an issue of direct relevance to large numbers of other workers in the town (an estimated 60,000 would have been affected by the reduction in the index) and was likely, therefore, to lead to some kind of united working-class response. It was distinctive for the active role played in it not only by a unitaire union but by one which was invited to negotiate with the public authorities. The outcome of the strike itself was remarkable: firstly it marked the victory of local workers against an unwelcome part of the local

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1 For a description of this period by a participant see F. Billoux 'Naissance et Essor du Front Populaire à Marseille et sa Région', Cahiers du Communisme, 1966, 9, p144.

2 AD XIVM 25/74 Prefect, 10.12.1934.

3 AD XIVM 25/74 Daily reports on strike.

industrial relation system, the indexing of wages to a controversially established cost of living index: Secondly, it resulted in a massive growth in unionisation in the docks. This growth was to the exclusive benefit of the newly constituted unitaire union, which would later be renamed as a single united dockers union - although still firmly under unitaire control. The significance of the dock strike was greatly increased when a one day strike of tramworkers managed to secure the withdrawal of the decree law which would have reduced their pay by 10 per cent. The tramworkers' victory provided another illustration that united and militant working-class action could overturn seemingly irreversible administrative decisions. The joint impact of these two movements was considerable in increasing the self confidence and desire for political involvement of local workers.

The Communist leaders of the dock strike contrasted its conduct - with the daily meetings of strikers and the active involvement of the local workers and their families - with the kind of passivity which the old and discredited union leaders expected from their members, while agreements were negotiated with employers. It seemed that the highly united and popular action of the dockers in striking against the wage cut produced results where negotiations alone had produced none. After a week-long strike, during which increasing numbers of local workers announced their willingness to go on strike in support of the dockers, the Prefecture was forced to announce on 16 December that it would withdraw the cost of living

index and employers in turn announced that they would withdraw the wage reductions. The victory seemed impressive. It was hailed by union leaders as a tribute to the organisation of the dockers, and perhaps even more so to the adoption of the unitaire strategy of the previous eighteen months. Writing in Rouge-Midi on 21 December 1935 Adrien Mouton declared:

'C'est en suivant la tactique de la CGTU que les dockers préparèrent et réalisèrent les conditions de leur lutte'.

Referring to the success of the CGTU Mouton explained that whereas in April 1935 the unitaire dockers union had only 100 members, by the eve of the strike and after the ousting of Ciavaldini and Nazi almost 900 dockers had joined. After the strike the reconstituted unitaire union claimed 3,000 members.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, if effective union organisation could be of help in ensuring success, success itself could increase membership and hence the effectiveness of such organisations. The local and national Communist press wasted no time in pressing home the lessons of the strikes; unity of action, local support based on Popular Front Committees, and a willingness from Communists to concern themselves with the concrete and day-to-day issues of the working-class, all these were new factors which it was thought had increased the chances of victory in the strikes.

The success of the strike and the strengthened trade unions made dockers more self confident, and more prepared to engage in offensive as well as defensive strikes. Gagnaire explained in January 1936 how:

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<sup>1</sup> Gagnaire in La Vie Ouvrière, 31.1.1936

'Il ne passe point de jours où nous n'arrachons pas quelque revendication justifiée. Jusqu'à présent, certains chefs de chantier menaient les dockers comme des esclaves, les battant même. Or c'en est fini de ces méthodes, car les ouvriers ont repris confiance grâce à leur unité et à leur nouvelle direction.'<sup>1</sup>

It was precisely the issue of authority at work which sparked off the next dock strike. On 28 January 1936 dockers in warehouse 10 went on strike in order to secure the firing of a foreman who had insulted one of their colleagues. Other dockers joined in the action and by 30 January 450 dockers were on strike. The union saw this new strike as demonstrating that:

'Par leur union les dockers veulent de meilleures conditions de travail, et de sécurité, et être traités en hommes et non comme des esclaves.'<sup>2</sup>

but employers felt that to give way to this kind of union demand would undermine their authority. The strike increased in intensity on 1 February as dockers working on several ships struck, demanding that eight rather than six men be allocated to each team unloading dirty cargoes. Other dockers started intermittent strikes and go-slows.<sup>3</sup> The employers tried to undermine union influence by refusing to employ shop stewards but this simply produced a total strike involving 4,000 dockers which started on 3 February. Attendance at strike meetings was good, and with the local council, the union, and a considerable part of public opinion behind them the dockers increased their demands to complain about the 'équipes incomplètes, refus d'embauchage des délégués, brimades' and to demand discussions

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1 La Vie Ouvrière, 31.1.1936. Also see La Vie Ouvrière, 3.1.1936. Rouge-Midi, 155, 21.12.1935, L'Humanité, 1 & 2.1.1936.

2 Rouge-Midi, 161, 1.2.1936.

3 L'Humanité, 3.2.1936.

on a new labour contract.<sup>1</sup> This escalation in dockers' demands led the President of the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce to complain in a meeting with the Président du Conseil that:

'Ce n'est,...ni une grève de salaire, ni un conflit de travail sur un ou plusieurs points, c'est une grève politique tout simplement avec toutes ses conséquences. 'Si nous arrangions la question du contremaître et des cales... dix autres questions rejailliraient le lendemain devant le succès remporté par les extrémistes qui veulent prendre la tête dans la direction des syndicats ouvriers à Marseilles.'<sup>2</sup>

The employer's analysis was probably correct. The strike had much greater significance than its ostensible causes alone would indicate. In addition to the material demands of the strikers the dispute involved a political attack on two fronts; by workers against employers' authority, and a bid by unitaire unions for the support of the dockers. The dispute put both of the objects of this attack in an impossible position. Further resistance from the employers would probably only have increased dockers' militancy, but concessions would indicate that extremism paid off. For the local SFIO and the confédéré unions, failure to support the strike would further reduce their standing among Marseilles workers, yet to offer support would be to encourage a Communist-led movement which threatened, by its dynamism, to undermine their base. Communist dynamism and militancy was proved when they proposed a general strike for February 24 in support of the dockers. Socialists and confédérés, fearing that such a general strike would further favour the PC, were obliged to use their influence to persuade the Prefecture to climb down yet

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1 L'Humanité, 4 & 7.2.1936.

2 Chambre de Commerce de Marseille, Registre, 1936, pp112-113, Séance of 18.2.1936.

again and abandon a cost of living index which confédéré union leaders had helped to set.<sup>1</sup>

The significance of the February dock strike is difficult to overestimate. It marked the triumph of Communist union tactics over those of their Socialist rivals (or partners?), and a decisive point in the longer term Communist strategy of winning control of, and vastly expanding, local working-class organisation. The achievement in the docks was the first in a series of victories which would spread into the private sector after June 1936. Militant action by Communist activists, based around paying close attention to workers' demands had resulted in the reconstruction of trade unionism in the docks. This reconstruction provided the base for further action in strikes, which themselves led to vastly increased union membership. In this process the confédérés were reduced to following Communist initiatives, and, for want of any alternative, reinforcing them.

Communists had changed the terms of reference of local working-class politics, and they had also seized the initiative from the previously dominant reformist Socialists. Socialists were now placed on the defensive in the least militant sectors of the local working-class. Their time-honoured ways of conducting working-class organisation, through political representation, seemed discredited by Communist activism, at the same time as they were obliged to continue using such representation, but now in order to

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1 AD M6 10817, CD to Prefect 18.2.1936, reported that among the public: 'On n'ignore pas que c'est un mouvement nettement communiste pour des fins électorales et on s'étonne de l'appui donné par les élus socialistes et dirigeants des syndicats confédérés.' The same report indicated that confédéré-led unions, together with Tasso, were doing their best to oppose any extension of the strike movement.

help Communist-sponsored movements. The call for a general strike reinforced the Communists' image as the most dynamic and successful working-class organisation. Socialist opposition to the general strike played into Communist hands in three respects: first, it increased the impression of Communist dynamism; second, it meant that a strike was unlikely and that the 'bluff' of a recently constructed and minority union movement would not, therefore, be called; thirdly, it meant that the Socialists were obliged to back up their opposition to the strike by interventions with the Prefect and other public authorities. When such interventions were successful, the credit for them meanwhile accrued to the Communists.

### 3 Public Sector Mobilisation Against the Decree Laws

The public sector was the area in which workers were best organised prior to 1936. It was also the sector in which attacks on wages launched by the Etat-patron would be most likely to evince a political response from the workforce. This response linked the struggle against Laval's decree laws with that in favour of the Popular Front. It is paradoxical that the Popular Front, whose success would benefit the PC at the expense of the SFIO in Marseilles, should have been initiated locally through the mobilisation of the one group of workers, the civil servants, over whom the SFIO had a significant influence.

The public sector suffered from being the instrument of the deflationary policy adopted by governments between 1933-5. In sum, the wage reductions imposed on civil servants in this period ranged

from 13.6 per cent for junior employees to 17.6 per cent for senior civil servants.<sup>1</sup> Alfred Sauvy has rightly pointed out that in terms of real wages civil servants suffered less than some other workers: private sector workers were hit by the economic crisis from as early as 1933, suffering intensified production, short time working, wage reductions and unemployment, and during this time, by mid 1935 civil servants were enjoying their highest living standards since 1930. The earliest attacks on civil service pay had been made up for by falling prices, and it was only with Laval's decree laws of July 1935 that real incomes actually fell by 13 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Falling money wages, however, attracted more attention than static or rising real wages.

The political movement which grew out of the campaign against the decree laws was out of all proportion to the impact of the laws themselves. It is possible that the civil service tradition of trade union membership and a high degree of job security facilitated this response. Militant action against the decree laws was usually initiated by Communists, often with repression as its result. Such actions, however, forced the non-aligned and Socialist union leaders both to engage in more militant action themselves, in other words to emulate Communist activity, and then to join solidarity movements in favour of those - usually Communists - who had been the victims of repression. As in private industry and the port, Communists, through their trade union activity, succeeded in radicalising a movement which, though led by reformists, would thereafter contain a receptive audience for Communist ideas and political initiatives.

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1 G. Dupeux, Le Front Populaire et les élections de 1936, Paris, 1959, p34.

2 A. Sauvy, Histoire Economique de la France entre les Deux Guerres, Vol.2 Paris, 1967, pp 409-411.

The tone for the action against the decree laws was already set in 1933. In December 1933 the Communist-led Cartel Elargi des Services Publics (CESP) held a meeting against the proposed decree laws attended by 3,000 civil servants, railwaymen, war veterans and shopkeepers. The meeting was designed to challenge and upstage the confédéré-led movement against the decree laws. Communist speakers chided the confédéré civil service leaders for their absence and the meeting ended in a violent clash with the police.<sup>1</sup> The strategy was successful, and by 23 January 1934 1,800 people at a meeting of the Cartel Confédéré des Services Publics (CCSP) heard Babau, Secretary of the Fédération Départementale des Fonctionnaires, propose united action with the CESP. The militant mood of his audience may have been the explanation for this surprising proposal from a confédéré leader of a sector where the Communists were extremely weak. As it was this militancy was expressed in clashes with the police at the end of the meeting when 22 people were arrested.<sup>2</sup> Unwilling to be upstaged in militancy, the CESP organised a meeting and a march on the Prefecture the following day, where 1,800 people protested about civil servants' pay and the Stavisky scandal and heard calls for united action from Matton, leader of the CGTU. The police intervened, arresting 60 people and sustaining 21 injured. Among those charged were two leading PCF figures, Cristofol of the customs union, and Fanucchi of the unitaire-dominated taxi drivers' union.<sup>3</sup> Their arrest gave additional impetus to the Communist-led campaign against the decree laws. The next meeting of the CESP on 29 January

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1 AD XIVM 25/74 Report on meeting of 19.12.1933.

2 AD XIVM 25/74 Report on meeting of 23.1.1934.

3 AD XIVM 25/74 Report on meeting of 24.1.34

attracted 3,000 people to protest against the arrests and listen to calls for a general strike and trade union unity.<sup>1</sup>

The militancy of the CESP was insufficient in itself to generate a general strike but it did place the PC in a good position from which to exploit the changed mood in the working-class after 12 February 1934. The demonstration of that day served to illustrate the efficacy and possibility of militant working-class action, thus vindicating the tactics previously adopted by Communists in the battle against the decree laws. Jean Cristofol, who as leader of the CESP had already been active in fighting the decree laws, emerged on the 12 February in his other guise, as leader of the local antifascist organisation, the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement. Cristofol led a parade of uniformed customs officers in the 12 February demonstration and was subsequently sacked for this act. The later battle against Cristofol's dismissal attracted a great deal of support, especially in the area of the Belle-de-Mai where he lived and worked. Cristofol's victimisation provided one more sign of the militancy of the CESP and the PCF. In a town where 'fascism' was perceived in a rather vague way as representing antirepublicanism and the arbitrary rule of employers, support for Cristofol was easily translated into increased support for the antifascist movement which he led. The support was also directed at the individual as well, and the establishment of Cristofol as a popular working-class figure in Marseilles seemed symptomatic of a new period in which the PCF would be

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1 AD XIVM 25/74 Prefect to Minister of the Interior, 30.1.1934.

better able to root itself in the working-class community. Once again the SFIO had been outflanked by its Communist rivals. The SFIO deputy Albertin, himself editor of the national newspaper of the Customs Officers' Union, was obliged to use all his resources to secure the reinstatement of Cristofol. In this way Socialists found themselves with no choice but to support Cristofol and thus to help in the creation of his role as a local political personality.

Cristofol put his newfound reputation to good use when he chose to stand as a Conseiller d'arrondissement for his home fifth canton of Marseilles in October 1934, and secured election at the second round in this SFIO stronghold. It was the first time since 1922 that a PCF candidate had been elected in Marseilles, and although not perceived as such at the time, the election victory marked a triumph for the Marseilles PC, and the beginning of the Popular Front at electoral level. Cristofol's election illustrated what was to become a familiar pattern of the triumph of Communist over Socialist strategy during the Popular Front. Cristofol's reputation had been founded on the victimisation which resulted from the militant action he had pursued in his desire to upstage his SFIO and confédéré opponents. His opponents had then been obliged to participate in the campaign for his reinstatement, without ever securing any credit when he actually was rehired. Instead, Cristofol ousted the elderly SFIO incumbent and won the seat of Conseiller d'Arrondissement with the benefit of Socialist votes. Less than two years later Cristofol would deliver another shock to the SFIO when

he ousted their incumbent Deputy, Ambrosini, at the legislative elections of 1936.<sup>1</sup> The SFIO had helped launch a Popular Front movement which threatened to undermine them.

#### 4 Conclusion

The two years prior to February 1936 were crucial ones in the history of the Marseilles working-class movement. It was during this period that the practices of mobilisation and organisation, and the political aspirations associated with the Popular Front, were developed. A new mood coincided with a changing balance of forces in industry and politics. Aspects of the industrial relations system which had been perceived as immutable now seemed to be subject to change through working-class action. The fatality and moderation typical of what little trade union activity there had previously been in Marseilles were seen to be inappropriate. Workers could now strike, organise and succeed. The successes of the dockers created a mood of optimism and self-confidence among some workers which made them ready to strike repeatedly for ever escalating demands. The strike had become a more intensely political weapon, used not only to back up demands on employers, but also to strengthen trade union organisation and to increase working-class solidarity. Unions were increasingly seen by the workers as being useful to workplace struggle, capable of formulating and articulating demands, and even on occasion of forcing management to negotiate. These changes took place at the same time as a battle raged for control of existing trade unions and

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1 A. Olivesi, 'Jean Cristofol (1901-1957)', Marseille, 99, 1974, pp 58-60.

increased influence over the Marseilles working-class. The Communists repeatedly outflanked the larger and more established SFIO and confédérés in this battle. The combination of their old militancy with a new willingness to immerse themselves in the daily preoccupations of the working-class enabled the Communists to make greater headway than in the past. The PCF was also helped by the changed political possibilities, and, with less to lose than the SFIO and confédérés, and yet without the sectarianism of the past, the Communists could afford to engage in the militancy which could now be so productive. In terms both of working-class mobilisation and of organisational struggle within the Marseilles working-class movement, June 1936 was to be less a totally new phenomenon, than the application of lessons learnt in this earlier period.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WORKING-CLASS MOBILISATION AND POLITICAL INTEGRATION

FEBRUARY 1936 TO SPRING 1937

1 Introduction

The first few months of 1936 were dominated by the campaign for the election of a Popular Front Government. Reunification of the UD and Marseilles UL in the first two months of the year both reflected and itself aided the growth of working-class unity. The invasion of the Rhineland in March 1936 caused some concern in Marseilles (withdrawals from the Caisse d'Epargne were five times higher than average between 9-14 March) and reinforced the relevance of an electoral alliance based on antifascism.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the role played by the Marseilles Town Council in the dock strikes of December 1935 and February 1936 had demonstrated the usefulness of well-placed politicians who were sympathetic to the working-class.

Trade unions and workers alike showed great interest in the impending legislative elections.<sup>2</sup> For once the parties offered political programmes which presented voters with a choice between alternative visions of society rather than simply the old formula of hastily constructed (and even more hastily disintegrating) parliamentary

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<sup>1</sup> AD M6 10789 Rapport mensuel March 1936.

<sup>2</sup> At the election itself turnout was high. Police reports indicate that a meeting of trade union delegates on 29 April 1936 called to discuss preparations for Mayday was more preoccupied by organising for the Second Round of the elections than for Mayday. AD M6 10820 CD to Prefect 29.4.1936.

alliances. The increased interest aroused by ideological conflict was compounded by the high level of often violent personal conflict raised by the election campaign. The battle in the Third Constituency between Sabiani, his old protégé Ferri-Pisani (now in the SFIO), and François Billoux for the PCF commanded particular attention. Campaigning in this constituency in 1936 was frequently violent and the contest took on a duel-like quality. Billoux emerged triumphant after showing that he was as capable as Sabiani of defending himself against verbal and physical attacks, and that the appeals of class unity and of the Popular Front alliance could sometimes outweigh those of clientelism and clan solidarity. More generally in Marseilles the Communist electoral success appeared striking. Communists won 39,953 votes in the eight Marseilles constituencies on the first round of the 1936 elections compared with only 10,756 in 1932.<sup>1</sup>

The response of both the Marseilles SFIO and PC to the election results was one of wary optimism. For the SFIO, the prospect of national office gave cause for rejoicing, but the knowledge that locally their traditional support had been undermined by the PC gave cause for concern. At the SFIO Federal Congress on 24 May members were put on their guard against co-operating with the PC and warned of the dangers posed to the SFIO by PC 'demagogy'.<sup>2</sup> Communists meanwhile welcomed a government which it was assumed would be more sympathetic to the demands of labour but were sceptical about the chances of any dramatic government action without the application of pressure from

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<sup>1</sup> Rouge-Midi, 174, 1.5.1936.

<sup>2</sup> Le Petit Provençal, 25.5.1936.

below. Commenting on the election result Nédelec wrote in

Le Midi Syndicaliste on 15 May how:

'La CGT doit rester une force indépendante du Gouvernement qu'elle aidera au dehors en luttant contre le grand capitalisme, mais sur lequel elle doit aussi être en mesure de faire pression. Après les élections, une grande expérience peut être réalisée. Ce sera une grandiose bataille de classe ou se jouera le sort de la classe ouvrière.'

Elements on the far Right later interpreted such comments as proof that the PCF had planned the June strike movement in advance as a direct challenge to Blum. Whilst it is true that the PC did play an active part in promoting strikes this activity should be interpreted as forming part of the general Communist aim of increasing its influence on the working-class, and of improving its position within, rather than as constituting a challenge to, the Popular Front.<sup>2</sup> Despite the dramatic changes in the scale, extent, and forms of workplace mobilisation in the period from February 1936 to the Spring of 1937, the period may be viewed as a single one, with its continuity being contained in the intensely political nature of all the actions which were undertaken. The political fact which influenced working-class mobilisation throughout the period was the Popular Front. No movements of any significance were undertaken during this period without consideration being given to their likely impact on the Popular Front movement or on its Government, after May 1936.

June 1936 brought a new kind of strike - the factory occupation - and extended the use of the strike to new sectors of the workforce. The

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<sup>1</sup> Le Midi Syndicaliste, 15.5.1936.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Branciard, Syndicats et partis. Autonomie ou dépendence. I: 1879-1947, Paris, 1982, p135.

issues raised in June 1936 had all emerged however, in the preceding period when strikes had been undertaken with the aim of challenging the authority of Right-wing employers, overturning unfavourable administrative decisions, mobilising support for a trade union branch, and undermining the credibility of political opponents within the labour movement. In addition to these political aims there would continue to be strikes about material issues such as wages, working conditions, and hours. But the dichotomy between political and material issues in strikes was shown to be a false one during this period. Support for the Popular Front movement affected workers' perceptions of what was possible and desirable in terms of workplace mobilisation, and led them to advance workplace and political grievances in tandem. This element of political calculation was what gave unity to the working-class mobilisation which will be described here.

Most accounts of the Popular Front concentrate on the intensely political and spontaneous nature of the June strikes. This study suggests, however, that the strikes of June were neither more nor less political than those which preceded or followed them. Throughout the period 1934-1938 strikes took place in an intensely politicised environment, too, but before June 1936 the political calculation involved in them usually centered on their possibilities of success. Sometime during June, when it had become clear that the changed political climate meant that the desires of yesterday could swiftly be translated into the reality of today, the political calculation of the chances of success was replaced by one which focussed instead on the desirability of mobilisation. It is difficult to see how

the term spontaneity can be applied to the strikes of the period. However rapid the decision to strike, or vague the demands of strikers might have been, workers, throughout the period under consideration, went on strike after consideration of the possibility of succeeding in their movement and of the desirability of undertaking it. The strikes were organised, if not always planned, and usually the unions and parties of the Left played an active part in their conduct. Workers who were not already unionised when they went on strike assumed that the most natural thing to do after undertaking their action was to contact the union, to join en masse, and to seek the advice of the experts in negotiation and the organisation of strikes.

#### 1 Strikes, February - May 1936

Many of the features commonly associated with the life of the Popular Front Government were already observable in this period. Strike activity continued to increase, often bringing increased union membership in its wake.<sup>1</sup> Demands arose for union recognition, and such demands sometimes spilled over into ones for union control of hiring policy. After the dockers had demonstrated the possibility of successful strike action other groups were keen to emulate their example. A strike by drivers in one highly unionised transport firm in January won increased wages for the strikers and increased

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#### Strikes in the Bouches-du-Rhône - 1931 - 1936

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1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
5	6	1	6	9
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <u>1935</u>            J F M A M J J A S O N D            1 3 0 1 1 1 0 0 1 0 0 1         </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <u>1936</u>            J F M A M J            4 3 0 0 5 111         </div> </div>				

continued overleaf

membership for the union.<sup>1</sup> The strike and demonstration on Mayday 1936 were more imposing than in previous years but were still far from universally followed.<sup>2</sup> Support for the strike was very uneven. Municipal workers, dockyard repair workers, most dockers, seamen, and some workers in the local sugar and soap industries struck. In the building industry there was a near total strike in the largest firms but almost normal work in smaller ones. The engineering industry made an uneven showing, with all the workers at the SPCN striking, whilst very few Coder workers joined the strike.

Despite the uneven response to the Mayday strike five strikes during the rest of May showed that the Marseilles working-class was far from quiescent. Two offensive strikes were undertaken against employers in the building and chemical industries who were noted for their Right-wing affiliation. These strikes were successful, and even though the number of workers involved was small, their wider significance lay in the solidarity they attracted from other workers and local residents. Questions of union rights were at issue in both strikes and, in the case of the chemical strike, it was noteworthy that a Croix de Feu employer had been forced to negotiate at the Prefecture with a trade

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continued from previous page

1 Source: Annual figures 1931-5 Statistique des Grèves  
 Monthly figures 1935-1936 Bulletin du Ministère du Travail  
 1935-6.

Note: It is unlikely that any nationally gathered strike statistics are reliable in this period. The figure of 111 for June 1936 for example is certainly an underestimate. These figures however do provide an idea of changes over time in strike activity.

Rouge-Midi, 165, 29.2.1936 carries an article by Lazar, of the chemical workers' union making an explicit link between strike action and union recruitment.

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1 J. Bally, 'Le Mouvement Ouvrier à Marseille de 1936 à 1939', (Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures, D'Histoire du Droit, Aix-en-Provence, 1970-71), pp11, 14, 15. Rouge-Midi, 161, 1.2.1936.

2 Police reports suggested that 15,000 participated in the Mayday demonstration in Marseilles. AD M6 10820.

union.<sup>1</sup> The Prefecture was to become the focal point for the resolution of strikes in the months to come. Already, by the end of May, even small disputes were seen as having political significance and as being susceptible to resolution through Prefectoral pressure on employers.

## 2 The First Factory Occupation, Coder, May 1936.

The first factory occupation occurred in the Coder engineering factory in Marseilles. As one of the largest local factories Coder had been the target for intensive trade union and Communist recruitment campaigns almost since the creation of the PCF. In the two years prior to May 1936 there was hardly a week without a story in Rouge-Midi about accelerated work schedules, rationalisation, victimisations, or wage cuts at 'le bain Coder'. Before May 1936 this campaign had not been very productive, and the tough reputation of M. Coder himself had discouraged the largely foreign workforce from joining the union.<sup>2</sup> Nine union members who struck on Mayday 1936 were promptly sacked. The aggressive attitude of management increased the militancy of workers and contributed to the growth of the union branch.<sup>3</sup> The factory occupation which eventually resulted at the end of May succeeded in unionising the factory. It also convinced workers, that with a favourable Government in Paris, factory occupations could be used to extract very significant concessions from employers.

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1 See Le Petit Provençal (LPP) 19, 20, 21, 24, 31.5.1936. AD XIVM 25/78 Reports dated 18, 20, 21.5.1936. Bally, pp18-19, 22-23, Le Midi Syndicaliste, 186, 1.6.1936, Rouge-Midi, 179, 5.6.1936.

2 Le Midi Syndicaliste, 186, 1.6.1936.

3 *ibid.*

The strike of 29-30 May at Coder was carefully prepared by the Communist -dominated union branch in liason with the local PC and Popular Front Committee. A police report of 29 May explained that:

'Cette grève aurait été déclenchée par les unitaires à la suite du renvoi chaque jour, depuis une quinzaine, d'un ou deux ouvriers de tendance communiste qui faisaient la propagande sur les chantiers.'<sup>1</sup>

But the initial meetings held in defence of these sacked Communist workers in late May never succeeded in attracting more than 300 of the 1,000 workers employed by Coder. It seemed that a broader platform rather than simply the defence of the members of a minority trade union would be needed before a strike would succeed. After a series of meetings and guarantees of support from the Syndicat des Métaux the workers added demands for an extension of the lunch hour (it was only half an hour in a town where most workers were accustomed to returning home for lunch) and the abolition of the truck system to their protests about victimisation.<sup>2</sup> Having prepared their action the workers intended to present M. Coder with their demands on 29 May. But a police report, written on the morning of 29 May indicated that:

'M. CODER aurait l'intention de ne pas recevoir la délégation syndicale, et serait décidé à régler immédiatement tous les ouvriers meneurs qui se présenteraient devant lui, "pour étouffer tout mouvement qui tendrait à suivre l'exemple des usines de Paris".'<sup>3</sup>

Coder's intransigence backfired. By the evening, newspapers reported that workers at Coder:

'Comme leurs camarades parisiens... "occupent" l'usine, attendant que satisfaction leur soit donnée.'<sup>4</sup>

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1 AD XIVM 25/78 CD to Prefect 29.5.1936.

2 AD XIVM 25/83 CD to Prefect 29.5.1936, CC to Prefect, 25.5.1936, Syndicat des Métaux to Prefect 27.5.1936.

3 AD XIVM 25/83 CC to Prefect 29.5.1936.

4 Le Radical de Marseille 29.5.1936.

This first factory occupation and strike had been prepared well in advance. A police report of 30 May recorded accurately that:

'à la suite de la réunion donnée avant-hier, un mot d'ordre circulait parmi les ouvriers au sujet de la cessation du travail, à un signal convenu.  
Et hier, à 10h., précises, la sirène d'alarme, qui peut être actionnée de divers points de l'usine, retentissait: aussitôt les ouvriers se réunissaient dans l'artère central, les militants entraînant les hésitants.'<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the signal was given the factory gates were closed and workers prevented from leaving the plant. Two hundred out of the thousand did in fact succeed in leaving by climbing over the wall, while the rest settled down to the occupation. A Communist-dominated strike committee was elected. The leader was distinguished by his name, Travail, while the chef de la propagande, Nobili, had the dual advantages for the job of both being a chef d'équipe (and therefore presumably someone with some authority in sections of the factory) and of being the brother of the owner of the Bar de la Métallurgie across the road from the factory where all the planning meetings for the strike had been held.<sup>2</sup>

By midday on 29 May the factory resembled a fortress with the strike committee within the plant refusing to allow anyone to leave, and foremen acting for management posted outside the gates in order to prevent anyone from entering.<sup>3</sup> M. Coder declared his willingness to talk on condition that the strike was terminated, but the strikers were reluctant to relinquish the initiative.<sup>4</sup> The occupation had succeeded in uniting the workers behind the union in

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1 AD XIVM 25/83 CC to Prefect 30.5.1936.

2 AD XIVM 25/83 CD to Prefect 29.5.1936.

3 Le Radical de Marseille, 29.5.1936. Rouge-Midi, 179, 5.6.1936.

4 After gaining the support of other local unions. LPP 30.5.1936.

a way never before achieved. The strike committee chose to press its advantage home by drawing up a new list of demands to be presented to management. They also chose to extend the strike outside the factory through the Comité de Front Populaire de Saint Marcel which called a meeting of support for that evening addressed by Billoux, Gagnaire, representatives of PCF women's organisations and an SFIO local councillor. After the meeting Billoux went to the factory to be present during the distribution of the evening meal to the strikers.<sup>1</sup>

The leaflet distributed by the Comité de Front Populaire de Saint Marcel is worth quoting at some length, since it illustrates well the political bases on which support was mobilised behind this first factory occupation. Addressed to 'la population de Saint-Marcel et des environs' the leaflet appealed 'A L'AIDE DES OUVRIERS DE CODER!' and went on:

'Excédés des mauvais traitements qu'ils subissent depuis déjà trop longtemps, les ouvriers de chez CODER viennent de passer à l'action.

Nul n'ignore dans quels conditions honteuses ils étaient soumis jusqu'à ces derniers temps, à telle fin que l'Usine pris le surnom de "Bagne Coder".

...

Ils viennent de passer à l'action! Depuis ce matin 10 Heurs, ils ont cessé tout travail et occuperont l'usine jusqu'à ce que triomphent leurs revendications PLUS QUE LEGITIMES:

1 Réintégration des ouvriers licenciés dernièrement pour l'activité syndicale.

2 Reconnaissance du Droit Syndical (Loi de 1884).

3 Temps normal pour le repas de midi.

4 Paiement des acomptes hebdomadaires "EN ARGENT" et non en jetons. (Cette revendication intéresse aussi les petits commerçants du quartier qui sont concurrencés par la "Co-operative" (CODER)

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<sup>1</sup> Rouge-Midi, 179. 5.6.1936

5 Augmentation de 2fr par jour du salaire actuellement insuffisant (revendication de tous les Métallos marseillais).

6 Plus d'hygiène et d'égard envers ceux qui travaillent.

Pour obtenir ces revendications les OUVRIERS de chez CODER sont DECIDES à VAINCRE, malgré toutes les embûches qui seront mises sous leur pas.

Leur lutte et leur victoire doit être la lutte et la victoire de tous les honnêtes gens du quartier, de toute la CLASSE OUVRIERE qui est lassé d'être victime d'une poignée d'exploiteurs.

Comme pour le mouvement victorieux des Dockers, SAINT MARCEL se soliderisera avec les "Bagnards de Coder".

Ouvriers, Petit Commerçants concurrencés par la "Co-operative" CODER, toutes organisations politique, philosophique, culturelles de quartier aideront leurs frères de classe en lutte pour de meilleurs conditions de vie.

Le FRONT POPULAIRE ne faillira pas à son devoir, la lutte pour le PAIN est inscrite en tête de son programme, il invite toute la population du quartier à assister en masse au

#### GRAND MEETING

.....

pour le soutien moral et financier des grévistes de CODER qui ne reprendront le travail qu'après complète satisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

The leaflet was interesting for reasons which go beyond the question of the success of the meeting to which it was devoted. Previous leaflets relating to the strike had been badly duplicated, cheaply produced hand outs. This leaflet from the Comité de Front Populaire de Saint Marcel was well printed and distributed throughout the area, suggesting either that it had been planned prior to the strike or that it was produced with the resources of something more substantial than the Comité de Front Populaire de Saint Marcel. In view of the fact that the main speaker at the meeting to which the leaflet called was Billoux, the PC seems an obvious candidate for the printing, the financing, or the wording of the leaflet, or for all three.

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1 AD XIVM 25/83 Leaflet of 29.5.1936. For a report of the meeting see CC to Prefect 30.5.1936.

The wording of the leaflet illustrates how the Popular Front was perceived in Marseilles and how its coming to power affected workplace mobilisation. The tone of the leaflet reflects the ambiguities of the Popular Front itself. An appeal is made both on the grounds of class interest and class solidarity (note the capitals and emphasis placed on the words OUVRIERS and CLASSE OUVRIERE) and on those of morality. Conditions at the factory are described as 'honteuses', much play is made on the nickname 'Bagne' for the factory, and the demands are described as 'PLUS QUE LEGITIMES'. This ambiguity between the appeals of justice, morality, fairness and of class interest, is used to explain the need for the alliance of all classes behind the Coder workers. Such an alliance is explained once again both in terms of morality and of self interest. The moral appeal is to be found in the statement: 'Leur lutte et leur victoire doit etre la lutte et la victoire de tous les honnêtes\* gens du quartier, de toute la CLASSE OUVRIERE qui est lassé d'être victime d'une poignée d'exploiteurs.' (sic)

A more pragmatic, if less convincing, appeal to economic and political interest is found in the following paragraph where shopkeepers, undercut by the Coder co-operative, and all political, philosophical and cultural groups in the area are asked to join the workers struggle for 'de meilleures conditions de vie'.

The bases around which the local Popular Front Committee chose to mobilise support for the Coder workers were clearly confused, but so were those of the Popular Front itself. Locally, however, it was clear that the Committee had gone to some lengths to demonstrate how the Coder workers' demands were linked with the

\* emphasis added

campaign for the Popular Front. It is noteworthy that in the list of demands presented in the leaflet, those which tended to generalise the movement, (i.e. bracketed comments on demands four and five, and point six in its entirety) had been added by the Committee to those actually drawn up by the strikers.<sup>1</sup> The local Popular Front Committee was keen to support Coder workers but it was also keen to stress the peaceful and 'responsible' nature of the strike in order to convince middle-class supporters that such strikes were neither frightening nor incompatible with the programme of the Popular Front. Indeed it was emphasised that the struggle for 'bread' was a part of the Popular Front programme. The demand for complete victory on such vague claims as those for more hygiene and greater respect for workers could, meanwhile, appeal both to working and middle-class support and be used to justify a continuation in the strike.

The long battle prepared for by the Popular Front Committee proved, however, to be unnecessary. M. Coder attended a meeting with trade union leaders at the Prefecture and agreed to reinstate the dismissed workers, to give the workers the opportunity of receiving cash wages on Saturdays between paydays (rather than tokens redeemable at the company shop as before), and to extend the lunch hour before he considered the pay demand. Rouge-Midi's report of the evacuation of the factory suggested that the winning of union rights was the main achievement of the strikers:

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<sup>1</sup> The strikers' own demands were listed in LPP 30.5.1936, Le Midi Syndicaliste, 186, 1.6.1936, and Le Radical de Marseille, 29.5.1936.

'L'enthousiasme au moment où les ouvriers quittèrent l'usine après avoir pris l'engagement de se syndiquer ne peut être rapporté'<sup>1</sup>

Coder was the first factory occupation in Marseilles, and it demonstrated the usefulness of this tactic in helping to establish powerful union organisations. Through skilful organisation workers had been drawn into a campaign to defend a union to which most of them did not belong. Early meetings that had been called in the plant to defend victimised unionists had not been very well attended. On Mayday few workers from Coder had struck. By contrast, the occupation of 29 May, having been well prepared, was followed by all but two hundred workers. The strikers stayed on the premises, perhaps after being reassured by the organisers that they now had little to fear from the police after Blum's victory.<sup>2</sup> Reports suggested that the mood in the factory was good and no doubt knowledge of the campaign being organised in the neighbourhood would have sustained the strikers' morale. Workers' wives came to the factory at lunchtime with food for the strikers so word must have spread rapidly in the neighbourhood about the strike. As in previous battles, negotiations had been conducted at the Prefecture and between union leaders and management. Increasingly the lesson from local strikes was that disputes which could not be won by an isolated union branch in the factory itself, might well be satisfactorily resolved at the Prefecture. The local labour press did not wait to emphasise the relevance of the Coder strike for other workers. Le Midi Syndicaliste

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1 Rouge-Midi, 179, 5.6.1936.

2 The Communist press had printed details of the earlier factory occupations, but the first details of the national strike only appeared in LPP, 28.5.1936.

carried a full report of the Coder strike, adding:

'Il est souhaitable que les ouvriers métallurgistes de la région Marseillaise sachent tirer profit de l'exemple d'organisation, de courage et de fraternité que leur ont donné leurs camarades de chez Coder; que celui-ci leur serve de stimulant et qu'à brève échéance il y ait dans chaque usine une section syndicale capable de faire face victorieusement à toutes les attaques patronales.'<sup>1</sup>

### 3 June 1936

The first factory occupation in Marseilles had, like those elsewhere in France, taken place in an engineering factory. Engineering was more highly unionised than most of Marseilles industry at this time. According to one estimate, 3,000 of the 14,000 engineers were union members and 1,000 were also PCF members in Marseilles in May 1936. The strike at Coder would be followed by similar strikes in other engineering plants, and, as at Coder, Communists would play a very active part in deciding on the timing of these other strikes.<sup>2</sup>

The day that workers at Coder were returning to work, Saturday 30 May, police reports suggest that a strike committee had already been constituted at the Aciéries du Nord plant, with a view to the organisation of a strike projected for the following Tuesday.<sup>3</sup> The strike started as planned on June as Genovesi and Enjalbert of 2 June, of the ex unitaire local unions met with management. Only 250 of the 700 workers joined in the strike and they returned to work shortly before 2pm. The demands advanced were very varied including claims for:

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1 Le Midi Syndicaliste, 186, 1.6.1936.

2 The sources referred to below suggest that this was certainly the case for the strikes at Aciéries du Nord, and Forges et Chantiers...

3 AD XIVM 25/83 CD to Prefect 30.5.1936.

'un juste rétablissement des salaires, la suppression des amendes du paiement des outils cassés, des mises à pied, la suppression des heures supplémentaires, suppression de la peinture au pistolet et du sablage pendant les heures de travail... Pour les jeunes une échelle de salaires basée sur le principe, à travail égal, salaire égal'.<sup>1</sup>

Management conceded all the demands except those on wages, for which they requested time to consult Paris. Another factory occupation during the afternoon of 5 June was sufficient to force the hand of the Paris head office, and by that evening the desired wage rise and collective contract had been won.<sup>2</sup> As at Coder, an early and partial strike had succeeded in mobilising the rest of the workforce so that a total strike could be undertaken a few days later to impose a complete victory on management.

The strike movement extended in a rapid and premeditated way through the Marseilles engineering industry. As the first Aciéries du Nord strike was ending on 2 June reports were already predicting a strike at the factory of Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée on the Chemin de Toulon.<sup>3</sup> The organisation of the strike at Forges et Chantiers was similar to that of the other engineering strikes, but the workers were actually obliged to spend the night in the factory, as management did not give way as

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1 Article by Genovesi in Rouge-Midi, 179. 5.6.1936.

2 AD XIVM 25/75 CC Report of 6.6.1936. LPP, 6.6.1936, quotes this typical detail of the strike, writing: 'Des pourparlers aussitôt s'engagèrent entre patrons et délégués, tandis que dans le cour de l'usines les ouvriers pour passer le temps jouaient aux boules.'

3 AD XIVM 25/84 CC to Prefect 3.6.1936.

easily as had happened at other factories.<sup>1</sup> Extensive solidarity was organised in the locality by the Comité de Front Populaire and the Comité d'intérêt de quartier and contributions in cash and kind were collected from local workers. Union leaders Armand, Genovesi, and Enjalbert conducted negotiations with Tasso (Mayor and by now Minister of Shipping - Forges et Chantiers was a shipbuilding firm) at the Town Hall. Meetings were organised by the Syndicat des Métaux in support of the strike and important local Communists such as Cristos toured the factory offering encouragement to the strikers.<sup>2</sup> Management's refusal to negotiate while the factory was occupied led the trade union to call a congress of factory delegates to agree on a draft collective contract for the whole Marseilles

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1 AD XIVM 25/78 CD to Prefect 3.6.1936. LPP, 4.6.1936, listed 9 demands as follows: (The similarity with the demands of Coder workers in May 1936 is instructive).

- a) That overtime should be paid at the rates agreed by the existing contract.
  - b) A wage rise.
  - c) Time sheets to be kept in duplicate with one copy available to workers so that they could know what their wages should be.
  - d) That 8 hours continuous work should lead to a bonus of 5fr. a day.
  - e) That pay should be weekly, with the possibility of advances before the end of the week.
  - f) That there should be 8 days p.a. paid holiday for workers with more than one year in the firm, and 15 days p.a. for those with more than 3 years experience.
  - g) Increased pensions for retired workers.
  - h) That the findings of time and motion studies should all be checked by a workers' representative. That all findings concerning the optimum time for a task should be increased by 20%.
  - i) That trade union delegates should be recognised in the factory. That such delegates be present in all discussions and disputes.
- Other details of these demands were also contained in Rouge-Midi, 5.6.1936.

2 LPP, 6.6.1936 reported Chauffard (ex-confédéré), and Nédelec, Pozzi di Borgo, and Enjalbert (all ex-unitaires) as having toured the factory. The report in Rouge-Midi, 5.6.1936, emphasised Cristos' presence in the factory, and used the strike as an excuse to attack the dissident socialist Bouisson. Paul

engineering industry.<sup>1</sup>

By 4th June there were clear signs that the strike movement was spreading to other sectors of local industry. Building workers employed by an asphalt company went on strike and, faced with the employers' refusal to negotiate, union delegates went to the Town Hall to try and negotiate, since asphaltting was carried out under contract from the council.<sup>2</sup> Within a day, Dominici, leader of the builders' union, had negotiated an agreement which granted workers an increase of 3 francs per day together with increased transport and overtime allowances.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the large and unionised soap factory of Fournier-Ferrier also struck on 4 June and the 850 workers occupied the plant. As with the engineering strikes this one, too, had been organised beforehand, with union demands being drawn up at prior meetings, then after management's refusal to accept them, the factory siren being sounded at 10.20am on 4 June and work coming to a stop. Police sources suggested that after the first day or two of this occupation, 'on a remarqué un certain enervement parmi le personnel dont une grande partie serait hostile à ce mouvement qu'ils subissent par discipline syndicale,' but the fact that the strike continued until 15 June suggests either that the pressure exerted by the union was extremely powerful, or that workers' hesitancy was

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continued from previous page

2 Quilici (an SFIO member and later activist in the 'Syndicats' Movement), later cited this strike as an example of PC control of strike organisation. He claimed that he had gone to the factory as the accredited correspondent of Le Peuple and had been refused access by the communists controlling the gates. Syndicats, 31, 13.5.1937. This emphasis on the role played by communists in the strike is confirmed by the success of fundraising for the strike at the La Capalette tram depot, a notorious centre of PC influence, see Rouge-Midi, 13.6.1936

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1 LPP, 4 & 5.6.1936

2 Rouge-Midi, 5.6.1936. LPP. 5.6.1936.

3 LPP. 6.6.1936.

assuaged when they realised that their strike was not as isolated as it may at first have seemed.<sup>1</sup> In common with those in the engineering industry, this strike had been organised by the trade union, and it, too, was negotiated centrally as Nédelec, and Armand, and Lazar of the Syndicat des Produits Chimiques met with employers at the Town Hall. Meanwhile, in and around the factory, solidarity activities were organised in support of the strikers.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern of the first few strikes was repeated in those which broke out between 6 and 9 June. By 8 June the largest factories and those in the most important sectors of the local economy had all struck and most were occupied by the workers. The main oil and soap factories struck on 6 June followed by the two sugar refineries, the main chemical and petrol plants, and transport firms on 8 June.

In all these strikes the same elements of union involvement, local solidarity, and political assistance from Popular Front parties were to be found. The mood was such that some workers, such as those at the sugar refineries, struck before they had actually presented any demands.<sup>3</sup> Everywhere workers were striking and acting in unity, more often because of a sense of changed political environment than because of the emergence of any particularly original grievances. Many of the issues which would be put forward by the workers were standardised ones - indeed on occasion workers would contact unions

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1 LPP. 5.6.1936. Rouge-Midi, 5.6.1936. AD XIVM 25/75 CD to Prefect, 6.6.1936.

2 Rouge-Midi, 180, 12.6.1936.

3 AD XIVM 25/75 Gendarmerie report 8.6.1936.

to ask just what kind of demands they should be making on employers - and employers often replied with an equally standardised refusal to negotiate before the factories were evacuated.<sup>1</sup> If the strikes were uniting workers they were also having the same effect on employers.

The extent of the strike movement after the first week of June makes it difficult to consider individual strikes in much detail. Strike statistics do, however, indicate that the average size of strikes was falling throughout the month and this was very likely the result of smaller, ununionised plants feeling able to join in the strike movement only after others had demonstrated the possibility of winning. It also reflects the greater reluctance of smaller employers to accord the demands of trade unions, sometimes because they had more principled objections to discussing with unions, but perhaps more often because they were actually less able than large firms to grant improvements in pay and conditions. Several small local firms would close down after June 1936, protesting that increased labour costs had rendered them uncompetitive.<sup>2</sup>

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1 See the file of almost identical letters of protest sent to the Prefect from employers in AD XIVM 25/75. For two examples among many see those sent by the managements of the Raffineries du Sucre (7.6.1936) and the Huilerie Nouvelle (6.6.1936).

2 AD XIVM 25/84 gives the case of the Usine Lefort at La Capalette. The factory employed 70 workers. The strike began on 19.6.1936. On 15.7.1936 the workers tried to return to work only to be told the factory had closed. Their response was to reoccupy the plant, and on 19 August, having made no headway, they wrote a very humble letter to the Prefect asking him to intervene with the company to ask it to reconsider its decision to close.

TABLE 7.1

## Daily Strike Information Marseilles June 1936

Date	Totals			New	
	Strikers	Strikes	Av Size	Strikers	Strikes
9	11710	22	532	700	1
10	14862	45	330	1422	10
11	19067	59	323	5075	19
12	18992	72	263	2940	18
13	20034	77	260	1641	11
15	11822	72	164	881	15
16	13825	75	192	2003	3
17	15205	83	183	1855	16
18	15459	88	176	1421	12
19	13971	82	170	1118	5
20	13291	80	166	820	7
22	11261	68	165		
23	10111	100	101	4540	62
25	11446	106	108	1676	12
26	11322	110	103	132	10
27	4172	36	116		
29	4112	35	117		
30	5490	32	172	1615	2

Note: Figures for 11-19 June do not include striking bars, cafés, and restaurants, and those for 15-19 June do not include striking hotels.

Source: Daily Telegrams Prefect to Minister of Interior AD XIVM 25/75

On 4 June Léon Blum took office and a new Prefect, Paul Souchier, arrived in Marseilles. Among Blum's first acts was the issuing of instructions to Prefects to intervene and to bring a speedy end to the strikes.<sup>1</sup> Blum appealed to the country for calm on 5 June, in a radio broadcast which was designed both to reassure workers and to put pressure on employers.<sup>2</sup> But in Marseilles at any rate the strike wave had hardly got underway by the time Blum came to power. The engineering industry

1 Georges Lefranc, Juin 36, Paris, 1966, p143.

2 Lefranc, Juin 36, loc.cit.p129.

had just about come to a halt but there was the rest of local industry waiting in the wings for its chance too, to undertake strikes aimed at securing improved wages and conditions and at establishing union rights in the factories. Communists were pressing hard for the undertaking of strikes in the major industries of the town. Their main desire was for the winning of collective contracts that would establish union branches in each factory and facilitate their task of organising at the grass roots. The problem with this strategy was that if the factory occupations increased the membership of unions and their standing among the workforce, such strikes also led to radicalisation of a more general nature. The party nationally had, however, already made clear in a sharp reply to Marceau Pivert at the end of May that 'Tout n'est pas possible.'<sup>1</sup> Locally, where the strike wave started later than nationally, the task of the PC was, therefore, to encourage workers to strike - to have done otherwise would have been to risk missing a superb opportunity massively to extend its factory level and union influence - but to do its best to ensure that the strikes had limited and achievable ends which would facilitate their fairly speedy resolution. This was the task of local unions, too, and it was by no means an easy one to carry out.

Nationally, the Matignon agreement was signed on 7 June and its local equivalent was signed in Marseilles on 10 June. The unions won substantial advantages in return for a pledge to terminate local strikes. The unions' inability to enforce this agreement was demonstrated by the fact that the number of strikes peaked only on 18 June, more than 11 days after the Matignon accords. (The high strike

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<sup>1</sup> L'Humanité, 29.5.1936.

figures in Table 7.1 between 23 and 26 June are misleading since they cover the period of the seamen's strike and count each of the 68 ships as constituting a separate strike). The trade unions' desire to honour their word and encourage a return to work was difficult to reconcile with their interest in recruiting new members. More often than not unions were prepared tacitly, and sometimes actively, to support strikes breaking out for the first time in unionised or badly unionised plants after 10 June as long as the industries affected were not of vital importance, control of the strike did not risk escaping the union, and strikers' demands could be presented in a suitably moderate manner.

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TABLE 7.2

Number of Strikers by Industry. Marseilles 1-25 June 1936

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Industry	Number of Strikers	As % of Total
Docks & Shipping	6560	16.14
Building	3964	9.75
Oil & Soap manufacture	3550	8.73
Shipbuilding & Repairing	3250	7.99
Sugar Refining	2950	7.26
Chemicals	2940	7.23
Food Industries (excluding hotels, cafés, restaurants & bars)	2500	6.15
Engineering	2457	6.04
Clothing	2050	5.04
Wood Manufacture	1856	4.57
Spinning	1820	4.48
Tile Manufacture	1690	4.16
Footwear	1645	4.05
Transport & Coaches	980	2.41
Sack, Canvas & other Fabrics	485	1.19
Printing & Paper	470	1.16
Other	1487	3.66
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40654</b>	<b>100.01</b>

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Source: Manuscript in AD XIVM 25/75.

Note: Breakdown is for total of 240 strikes and 40,654 strikers.

In mid-June the aims of working-class organisations changed. In the early strikes Communists and other union activists had urged the engineering workers into action in the belief that the election result meant that strikes could be both politically possible and desirable. Later, when it became clear that, with employers on the defensive and the Government behind the workers, any strike was politically possible, calculations centred on the desirability of strikes. Increasingly unions and political parties alike began to evaluate strikes according to their impact on public opinion. From this viewpoint strikes in public services or in the provision of essential supplies were to be avoided at all costs, for fear that they might frighten moderate opinion away from the Popular Front. It was in this context that Arriviello, the ex-confédéré gas union leader, campaigned vigorously against any threat of a gas strike during June 1936. At a meeting on 12 June of 3000 people he guaranteed to those present that gas supplies would not be hit. Speaking more specifically to those gas workers present he announced:

'L'intérêt général doit passer avant l'intérêt particulier .  
Il ne faut pas donner crédit aux bruits de suppression du gaz...' <sup>1</sup>

But this attempt at calming the mood in the industry did not prevent a strike on the following day.<sup>2</sup> All involved desired a speedy end to a strike in such a sensitive area, and when Arriviello and Nédelec led a delegation to the Mayor, Tasso was ready to accede to all the strikers' demands. Rather as Blum's hand had been forced by the strikes nationally, so local strikes such as this one, precisely because they threatened to discredit the Popular Front, could extract concessions very rapidly from public authorities. After less than a day's strike

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1 AD XIVM 25/77 CD to Prefect 13.6.1936.

2 AD XIVM 25/75.

the gas workers won promises of 5-15 per cent wage increases, regrading, paid holidays, titularisation, and pensions.<sup>1</sup>

In other sectors strikes were necessary to persuade private employers to grant concessions to the workforce, but their consequences threatened to be so severe on public opinion that all the parties and unions of the Left alike would oppose them. This is what happened when butchers in Marseilles threatened to strike during June 1936. A PC Conférence d'information at the beginning of July was reminded by Cristos that the party was opposed to such strikes. Cristos went on, however, to give evidence of the way in which this order should be applied by speaking of:

'un incident au cours duquel le camarade ROZIER aussi que DESBIOLLES se sont fait siffler par bouchers à la Bourse du travail, parce que ces deux camarades voulaient empêcher la grève. ROZIER et DESBIOLLES sont jeunes et inexperimentés. Quand on ne peut empêcher une grève il faut savoir la déclencher au bon moment et la finir le plus tôt possible. Il ne faut pas prendre au pied de la lettre les mots d'ordre du parti. Il faut être psychologue et savoir manoeuvrer mais ne pas se rendre impopulaire.'<sup>2</sup>

It would be difficult to find a better example to illustrate Communist strategy in Marseilles during June 1936.

Communist tactics were not always as machiavellian as the theory might suggest. Particularly in a period of rapid recruitment, Communists were defined as much by their militancy as by their discipline. Communist railwaymen were, for example, prepared vainly to urge a strike on their fellow, mainly Socialist, workers. The minority grouping of Communist railwaymen would have been accustomed to taking a

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1 LPP, 14.6.1936.

2 AD XIVM 25/77 CD to Prefect 1.7.1936.

line to the Left of that favoured by the SFIO, and, party policy notwithstanding, that is what they did in June 1936.<sup>1</sup> In other sectors PC calls for action were heard even after the Matignon agreement had been signed. The Bank and Commercial Workers' Union ended a leaflet with the following appeal to its members:

'Pour aujourd'hui faisons appel à tous...pour rejoindre le syndicat. Le nouveau gouvernement a affirmé sa volonté de collaboration avec la CGT, mais nous n'obtiendrons rien sans effort.

A l'action. Le moment est venu.

Le Conseil Syndical.'<sup>2</sup>

A Communist dockers' news-sheet from June 1936 advanced a similar view. Having emphasised the need for workers to join their trade unions and the Popular Front Committees in their neighbourhoods the leaflet went on:

'La perspective de la montée au pouvoir d'un Gouvernement de gauche ouvre devant la classe ouvrière française une ère de possibilités immenses pour l'amélioration de vie et d'existence. Mais nous ne pourrons en bénéficier que dans la mesure où notre volonté se manifesterà dans l'action de masse obligeant les élus et le Gouvernement de Gauche à réaliser leurs promesses: le programme de la CGT pour nous les dockers et l'additif au contrat de travail du syndicat contre toute tentative de dévaluation du franc et aussi la mise de la police au service de la volonté populaire que s'est exprimée clairement les 26 avril et le 3 mai contre les bandes fascistes.'<sup>3</sup>

The notion that action was needed to put pressure on the Government was indeed credible. Under the pressure of the June strikes Blum behaved for a short while as though he had 'conquered' power rather than simply 'exercising' it.<sup>4</sup>

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1 AD XIVM 25/77 Commissaire Speciale to CD 30.6.1936.

2 AD XIVM 25/77 CD to Prefect 9.6.1936.

3 AD XIVM 25/77 CD to Prefect 10.6.1936 encloses copy of L'Exploité de la 1<sup>o</sup> des Docks, Organe des Travailleurs de la 1<sup>o</sup> section. Édité par le groupe communiste, Juin 1936.

4 Cf. Blum's comment of 1926 that: 'The danger of the exercise of power, is precisely that it may be confused with the conquest of power, so that the proletariat is encouraged to expect from the former the totality of results which can result only from the latter,' cited by James Joll, 'The Front Populaire - After Thirty Years', Journal of Contemporary History, 1, 2.1966, p35.

While many workers believed that power had been 'conquered' unions and political parties were to emphasise the need for discipline if middle-class support was not to be frightened away. One poster from the seamen's union summed up the keywords of June 1936 from the union point of view as 'force et discipline'.<sup>1</sup> What was desired by unions was that workers would demonstrate their strength, unity, discipline and restraint within their trade unions. Workers, meanwhile, could not help but be overwhelmed with enthusiasm for the changes which now seemed possible. Unions and parties alike were thus obliged to perform a careful balancing act between assuring workers that the Blum Government represented the opening of a new era and hastily pointing out that demands for 'too much too soon' could emanate only from fascists and agents provocateurs seeking to undermine the Popular Front.<sup>2</sup>

If unions were influenced by changing political events the same was also true of employers. In early June 1936 strikes broke out in big factories which were most responsive to political trends in Paris. Later, as strikes dragged on in smaller factories, and as the Government stressed its desire to see a return to order, some more militant employers may have felt that the imperatives which had made their colleagues accede to workers' demands so easily in early strikes, were no longer operative. By mid-June it was clear that revolution was not on the agenda and that failure to accede to workers' demands did not carry the threat of dreadful reprisals. Strikes became increasingly bitter, precisely at the time that unions, Government, and the political parties of the Popular Front were most emphasising the need for order and calm in the country.

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1 AD M6 11382 Poster of June 1936.

2 Ibid. - seamen's union poster.

As conflict hardened in the workplace, however, so, too, did the threat to union authority. Whereas the impetus to unionisation had at first been created through strikes, later these same strikes, inasmuch as they threatened to get out of hand, were viewed with concern by the unions. In areas where strikes had already been won, union leaders urged their members to concentrate on strengthening the trade unions rather than launching further strikes. Where strikes were continuing trade unions did their utmost to retain control. In the building industry union leaders decided to limit strikes to the larger, and more easily controlled, firms. Workers were warned about provocateurs and urged to place their confidence in the trade unions.<sup>1</sup>

Sailors in particular were warned against employers who:

'...effrayés par la victoire populaire, savent qu'ils ne peuvent se sauver qu'en vous divisant.  
 Ils n'osent pas vous combattre ouvertement  
 Ils usent d'une tactique nouvelle en soudoyant des agents provocateurs qui viennent surenchérir sur vos revendications et tentent de vous dresser les uns contre les autres.  
 Chassez ceux qui prêchent la défiance et la désunion  
 Chassez ceux qui nous entraînent dans des action partielles contre l'ensemble de vos camarades  
 Chassez ceux qui veulent vous désolidariser de l'action générale avec des offres démagogiques.  
 Groupez-vous, plus étroitement que jamais, contre les éléments troubles, à la solde du fascisme et des armateurs...'<sup>2</sup>

The notion that calls for more militant action emanated from the paid agents of employers and fascists was a claim made frequently during (and often since) June 1936. The SFIO, PCF, and CGT were all keen to present the working class as a strong but disciplined force with the implication that such organisations were capable of disciplining the strength they had mobilised. Given the recent growth in unionisation this claim was often less than true, but its lack of veracity explains

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1 AD XIVM 25/77 CC to Prefect 14 & 19.6.1936.

2 AD M6 11382 Post of June 1936.

the increased force with which it was advanced. Somehow if people - for the most part employers and administrators - would only believe that unions did hold the key to the monster which had been unleashed, then they would be prepared both to negotiate with such unions and grant them the sole representative status which would allow them further to reinforce their position. Representative organisations were desperately needed during this turbulent period, and Government and administration alike were, therefore, prepared to accord unions the status they sought, to urge employers to reach agreements with their workers, and to do all in their power to prevent such conflicts as were continuing from deteriorating.

In spite of union claims there were elements within the strike movement which sought to go beyond the limited aims proposed. Even if the aims were not frequently called into question, the methods of action were. Some railwaymen and seamen called for more militant action, as did some building workers. Other groups, too, may have experienced this pressure for militant action, so often described by unions as 'provocation'. Even when 'disciplined' strikes took place they were not always perceived as such. The moderate seamen's strike was seen by the public as anything but the calm, disciplined, movement which the union might have recognised. Police reports describe it as:

'la grève qui a certainement le plus frappé les esprits...(les) ...inscrits maritimes...en actionnant les sirènes et en arborant le drapeau rouge sur les bâtiments ont fortement ému l'opinion publique dans tous les milieux qui ont vu là le vrai geste révolutionnaire.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> AD XIVM 25/83 CS to CD 26.6.1936 & AD XIVM 25/77 CD to Prefect 25.6.1936. Also see the outraged account in Paul Lombard, Quatorze Mois de Démence, L'Expérience Léon Blum, Paris, 1937, p71.

The early strikes in Marseilles were carefully prepared and well organised launching pads for factory level trade-union organisation. Later ones, however, were often characterised as much by anarchy - the absence of authority - as they were by the 'calm' and 'discipline' so much favoured in the reports of the pro-government press and trade unions. In view of the vastly increased expectations of workers it would have been surprising if there had not been moments when strikes ceased to bear any relation to the calm and disciplined movements for which June 1936 is remembered. Police intervened in strikes frequently during June to re-establish order.<sup>1</sup> In a strike movement which, according to one source involved 71,945 workers in 111 separate strikes in the Bouches-du-Rhône during June, it is not surprising that police were much in demand to maintain order.<sup>2</sup> Police sources suggested that:

Des actes répréhensibles ont été commis dans les occupations d'usine. Ils sont le fait, en grande partie, d'associations syndicales appartenant le plus souvent au parti communiste.<sup>3</sup>

But there were only 14 arrests in June which were connected with the strikes and more general political disturbances of that month. Despite the fact that many police reports had emphasised the prominent part played by foreigners in the disturbances, no expulsion orders were issued.<sup>4</sup> In

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1. AD XIVM 25/77 CC to Prefect 6.7.1937

2. These figures from the Bulletin du Ministère du Travail for 1936 should not be viewed as definitive. The Prefect estimated on 25 June that there had been 240 strikes involving 40,654 workers since the beginning of the strikes in Marseilles alone. But the figures from the Bulletin... themselves represent a strike rate of 27% for the département if the active population liable to strike is taken as 266,604. (In contrast to the definition of unionisable population on p.144 this figure includes agricultural workers and excludes the unemployed. Local agricultural workers were active in the June strikes although barely unionised while the unemployed could clearly not strike even though they could join unions. The figure of 266,604 is the total civilian active population less the census categories chefs, sans emploi and isolés). Strikers in the département in June 1936 accounted for 15% of the total active population compared with 9% in France. The equivalent figures for 1935 were 1% and ½% respectively.

3 AD XIVM 25/77 CC to Prefect 6.7.1936.

4 In marked comparison to what happened in earlier strikes.

the past a single strike or demonstration had often led to more arrests than took place in the whole of June 1936. It seems that in June the police services were acting according to what they perceived as the new political situation, in not arresting strikers. Strikes were now seen as an integral part of the new political situation rather than as something opposed to it.

The friendly neutrality of the State in June greatly aided the strikers. The impact of this change was all the greater because of its novelty.<sup>1</sup> Workers no longer felt that the pursuit of their interests would necessarily lead to conflict with the State. Strikes could be undertaken with impunity. Government was now perceived as willing to act in the interests of the workers, with militant action only being necessary either to increase pressure on employers or to remind the Government of the needs of a group which it had overlooked. The Prefecture was seen as a place where union representatives engaged in tripartite discussions to produce agreements favourable to the workers. The system of collective contracts constituted a renewed legality in which workers were rewarded rather than punished for joining unions, and where the law was used to coerce employers rather than workers. The Prefect, that symbol of repressive authority in the past, was transformed into a new kind of equally powerful symbol, that of the general interest, of the agent by which local grievances could be transmitted to receptive ears in Paris. Prefect and Mayor alike could play an important part in resolving workers' grievances in this

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1 AD XIVM 25/132 Prefect's comments concerning the problems of the Marseilles police, Telegram 20.6.1936.

new system.<sup>1</sup> The Government and the political parties of the Popular Front were perturbed at the prolonged duration of the strike movement in Marseilles, but the visit of Thorez to Marseilles and the application of pressure on employers to compromise succeeded in abating the strikes.<sup>2</sup> There is no evidence that Marseilles workers were very receptive to the suggestions from far Left groups that the strikes should be transformed into a revolutionary movement.<sup>3</sup> Amidst the euphoria workers who thought that a new era had indeed opened were willing, for the most part, to accept the notion that progress towards the millenium had to be gradual. After all, if so much had changed as the result of an

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1 AD XIVM 25/132. The Prefect wrote in his telegram of 25.6.1936 to the Minister of the Interior that he had:

personnellement arbitré le conflit du bâtiment, celui de la métallurgie, celui des autotaxis MATTEI, celui des Hôtels-restaurants, débitants de boissons et Cafés, celui des opérateurs de cinémas, celui des Mineurs dans Bassin Minier des Bouches-du-Rhône, celui des Etablissements POTEZ, celui des Raffineries St. Louis, celui des Chantiers Méditerranée, celui de l'Usine Alez Frogés et Camargue à Gardanne, celui de la Sté Provençale de constructions Navales La Ciotat, celui Grands Magasins Nouveauté et Couture. STOP Pour le règlement de tous ces conflits j'ai trouvé auprès de M. Le Maire de Marseille un appui auquel je ne saurais assez rendre hommage. Personnellement il a réglé de conflit des Tramways, celui du Gaz, celui de la Société l'Electricité de Marseille dont les conséquences étaient redoutables, celui des grands Services Municipaux, celui des Inscrits Maritimes dont la répercussion sur la vie de Marseille est si importante et dont j'espère pouvoir vous apprendre la fin de main (sic) matin, enfin d'inombrables conflits locaux dont celui et non des moindres des taxis concurrents de la firme MATTEI STOP En réalité si j'excepte le conflit des inscrits maritimes qui a brusquement mis en grève 6,000 inscrits et provoqué le chômage de nombreux commerces ou industries tributaires, le conflit a été lentement, mais progressivement, en diminution.'

2 AD XIVM 25/132 Prefect to Minister of the Interior 23.6.1936.

3 See Chapter 3, Part 4, e(i).

election, it would only be a matter of time before a new consensus could be created which would force employers to accord all workers' demands. For the moment the need was to unite within the trade unions, to offer solidarity to those workers still on strike, to fight off the threat of a fascist counter attack and to look forward to the first paid holidays.

TABLE 7.3

Daily Strike Information Marseilles July 1936

Date	Totals			New	
	Strikers	Strikes	Av. Size	Strikers	Strikes
1	3778	30	126	130	2
2	3822	30	127	134	2
3	4252	35	121	430	5
4	4712	39	121	540	5
6	4342	35	124	0	0
7	4342	35	124	0	0
8	4342	35	124	0	0
9	4342	35	124	0	0
10	*	*			
11	5545	37	150	2150	17
14	3590	22	163	0	0
16	1845	7	264	315	1
17	665	5	133	0	0
18	600	4	150	350	1
19	600	4	150	0	0
20	600	4	150	0	0
21	600	4	150	0	0
22	600	4	150	0	0
23	250	3	83	0	0
24	280	4	70	30	1
26	220	2	110	0	0
28	310	3	103	0	0
29	310	3	103	0	0
30	410**	4	103	100	1
31	320	3	107	0	0

Note:\* No information available concerning total number of strikes and strikers for 10 July. On that date, however, there were 29 occupations involving 3639 strikers.

\*\* On 30 July the total figure was increased by the inclusion of a new strike at a petrol refinery at Arles. As far as can be ascertained all the other figures presented are for Marseilles alone and not for the department.

Source: Daily Telegrams, Prefect to Minister of the Interior. AD XIVM 25/75

#### 4 Shock Troops for Spain - September 1936

The PC acted as a moderating influence on strikes during the later part of June, July and in August. In August the Party revived the idea of the French Front and was unwilling to see a resurgence of strike activity. Very little strike activity was observed during late July and August and although there was discontent at the rapidity with which prices seemed to be rising, this alone did not threaten to provoke industrial unrest.<sup>1</sup> There was a slight increase in agitation at the factory level at the beginning of September, as workers returned from their holidays to find the more militant employers prepared for action against union organisation. Strikes around questions of union organisation or the renegeing on promises made earlier were, however, not very extensive in early September and in no way could limited actions of this kind explain the explosion of activity which occurred on 8 September. On 7 September there were 1,060 workers occupying five different factories in the Marseilles region, all of them for fairly specific demands. A day later there were nearly 12,000 workers in occupation. On the 15 September the engineering workers evacuated the factories and by the following day their strike was at an end. The unions themselves claimed responsibility for starting the movement, saying that a meeting of trade union delegates at the Bourse du Travail on 8 September had decided to strike in response to the refusal of employers to submit the proposed collective contract to a commission paritaire for discussion. But, faced with accusations of launching a political strike, the unions declared that 'quoique

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1 The cost of living index rose by 15.3 per cent in Marseilles between May and November 1936 as against 13.5 per cent in France during the same period. See Chapter 8, part 2 for full details.

solidaires de leurs camarades français et espagnols' the strike was exclusively concerned with the issue of the collective contract.<sup>1</sup> The employers, meanwhile, declared that they were not prepared to discuss anything at all while their factories were occupied. It seemed that both sides had settled down to a long battle, with unions invoking employer intransigence as the cause and employers blaming the strike on political agitation. The strike did not, however, last very long. On 14 September an agreement was signed whereby both sides agreed to negotiate after the factories had been evacuated. The workers duly left the factories and unions and employers agreed to discuss the collective contract. The strike in fact, neither lasted long nor achieved much. In contrast to June 1936, unions had been forced to agree to employers' demands for the occupations to end before talks could take place.<sup>2</sup>

The union's explanation for the strike seem unconvincing. The reason used could have been used with equal validity at any other moment. Employers had admittedly behaved with some clumsiness, but was this really sufficient reason for a union which had spent most of the previous three months trying to prevent strikes, from suddenly putting so much energy into the organisation of a strike which achieved little? The strikes in Marseilles formed part of a national movement, and their motivation should be sought in national and international rather than in local developments.

Daniel Brower relates how Thorez, in a speech to Renault

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1 LPP, 9.9.1936.

2 LPP, 14 & 15.9.1936.

workers on 2 September cited with approval the example of those workers who "wanted to strike to protest against the (Spanish) blockade".<sup>1</sup> On 5 September delegates from the Paris Association of Engineering Unions met and approved action for two days later "in order to protest against the blockade which is killing their Spanish brothers". The pace of agitation increased, and on 7 September there was a confused and badly organised one hour strike in Paris engineering factories. Other action followed until 18 September when the CGT, using PCF tactics against the party, warned union members "against agents provocateurs who too often, under clever disguises, incite them to impulsive acts which only result in condemnations against themselves and against the regime". Despite Jouhaux's request the PCF did not insert this communique in L'Humanité, and the strikes continued at a reduced rate. Blum, meanwhile, had gone on the counterattack in his speech at the Luna Park stadium and had succeeded in showing some of the reasons why intervention in Spain might not be the perfect solution.<sup>2</sup>

In Marseilles support for the Spanish Republican cause was by no means total in September. It seems that the initial enthusiasm shown in July and August had dwindled. Workers were reluctant, and often had to be coerced, to give money to Spain,<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, meetings held in support of Spain attracted declining audiences. Whereas those during August had attracted nearly 10,000 people, the meeting organised by the PC on 11 September was attended by only 1,000 people.

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1 D. Brower, The New Jacobins, New York, 1968, p164 citing L'Humanité 4.9.1936.

2 D. Brower, *loc.cit.* pp169-170.

3 AD XIVM 25/76 CD to Prefect 2.9.1936. XIVM 25/84 CD to Prefect 15.9.1936.

Another meeting later than evening for dockers attracted only 500 of the 7,000 Marseilles dockers.<sup>1</sup> Lack of enthusiasm in Marseilles for the Spanish cause meant that a strike movement similar to that organised in Paris could hope to succeed only if it was restricted to the most disciplined and highly organised Communist-controlled group of workers, the engineers, and if a purely economic pretext could be found to justify the strike, both to workers and public opinion.

Police reports from the beginning of September indicate that, on the instructions of the national party, the local PC was trying to generate discontent in Marseilles factories through raising an ever increasing number of complaints and grievances against employers.<sup>2</sup> The agitation was, in the first instance, restricted to the highly unionised and Communist-dominated engineering sector.<sup>3</sup> According to one report on PC agitation in this sector:

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- 1 AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 12.9.1936. It is true that in AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 18.9.1936 6-7,000 people are reported as having attended a meeting in support of Spain on 15 September. It seems likely however that attendance at this meeting was inflated by the publicity for it which had promised that Dolorres Ibarri ('La Pasionaria') would attend. She did not arrive to speak.
  - 2 AD M6 10817 CD to Prefect 7.9.1936. AD XIVM 25/76 CD to Prefect 4.9.1936.
  - 3 AD XIVM 25/76 CD to Prefect 4.9.1936. AD M6 10817 CD to Prefect 7.9.1936. These various interpretations were combined together in the report by the CD to the Prefect of 9.9.1936 contained in AD M6 11354. He wrote how:

*'Le parti communiste perdait du terrain depuis quelques temps et que pour le rattraper il profitait du mécontentement de la class ouvrière au sujet de la vie chère pour entretenir une constante agitation...Il avait prescrit aux secrétaires de rayons et de cellules d'entretenir ce mécontentement et que les ouvriers devaient toujours formuler de nouvelles revendications. Si celles ci étaient acceptées par les employeurs il fallait toujours en créer de nouvelles. C'est du reste ce qui se passait ces derniers temps dans la corporation des métallurgistes où le parti communiste est tout puissant.*

continued overleaf

'l'organisation du parti communiste est tellement méthodique dans la métallurgie qu'il suffit d'un mot de Paris, du Comité Central du parti, pour faire déclencher ce mouvement (the strike) qui sera suivi (sans enthousiasme d'ailleurs par les ouvriers mais par discipline du parti). Car, ... beaucoup d'ouvriers de cette corporation disent qu'ils en ont assez "de cette contrainte ennuyeuse du parti communiste"'.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to June, workers often struck simply in response to union instructions. Many had no idea at all of the reasons for the strike, or found those officially advanced less than convincing.<sup>2</sup>

It was estimated on 11 September that:

'50% au moins des ouvriers sont nettement hostiles à ce mouvement qu'ils ne suivent...que par discipline syndicale, mais le plus grand nombre se plaint de cette discipline qui commence par devenir tyrannique, si non odieuse pour certaines...'<sup>3</sup>

One report suggested that:

'Un fait typique s'est passé aux Forges et Chantiers où, ... trois meneurs ont été sérieusement malmenés par un groupe d'ouvriers hostiles à la grève, bien que ces derniers exécutaient la grève sur le tas. A la suite de cette altercation plusieurs ouvriers ont donné sur le champ leur démission de la CGT. Cette affaire a été soigneusement tenue cachée.'<sup>4</sup>

Discontent with the union was articulated by many workers' wives who complained that the wage rises won in June were not only being eroded by rises in the cost of living but by other causes too, as:

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continued from previous page

3 Il m'avait été également signalé que ce parti devait déclencher un grand mouvement vers le 20 septembre de façon à mettre en échec le Gouvernement. Ce mouvement devait commencer par l'occupation des établissements pour arriver enfin à la soviétisation totale. Le mouvement actuel des métallurgistes serait le commencement de cette agitation.'

According to AD XIVM 25/84 CD to Prefect September 1936, trade union membership grew from 3,000 in May to 7,000 in September 1936. There were 13,000 engineers in Marseilles.

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1 AD M6 10817 CD to Prefect 7.9.1936.

2 AD XIVM 25/146 CC to Prefect 8.9.1936.

3 AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 11.9.1936.

4 Ibid.

'chaque semaine la paie de leur mari est amputée d'une somme assez importante, tantôt c'est la cotisation syndicale, puis une aide quelconque à d'autres camarades en grève, ensuite pour le gouvernement espagnol . (Pour ces derniers ils ont été obligés de verser 10 francs). Ces femmes disent qu'en définitive l'augmentation des salaires n'a servi qu'aux dirigeants des syndicats et...par l'augmentation du coût de la vie. En fin du compte, il ne reste pas plus d'argent dans le ménage qu'avant les grèves.'<sup>1</sup>

The fear that workers might reject this union-imposed strike led its organisers to change the style of factory occupation from that practised in June. Whereas in June occupation by all the workers had been favoured as a way of increasing the solidarity and unity of the workforce, in September the factories were occupied by a token presence of union pickets.

It seems that the union was aware that workers were unenthusiastic about the prospect of spending a long time away from their families (sleeping at the factory) and that the solidarity engendered by such an occupation might this time be turned against, rather than operating in favour of, the union.<sup>2</sup> PC attempts to extend the strike movement to other industries encountered opposition from most workers and from ex-confédéré union leaders.<sup>3</sup> Faced with this opposition from all quarters PC union leaders welcomed the face-saving formula from the Prefect that the factory evacuations should take place at the same time as talks with employers began.<sup>4</sup> It was reported at the end of the strike that:

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1 AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 11.9.1936.

2 AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 9.9.1936.

3 AD XIVM 25/76 CD to Prefect 11.9.1936. AD M6 11354 Report of 13.9.1936, and AD XIVM 25/84 CC to Prefect 14.9.1936.

4 AD XIVM 25/84 Undated draft telegram from Prefect.

'On disait notamment que si les dirigeants du syndicat des métaux voulaient continuer la grève ils seraient bientôt tout seuls mais il fallait que la grève cesse ce matin même, sinon la majorité des ouvriers n'obéiraient plus aux ordres du syndicat.'<sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that the strike, called in response to the PC's new tough line on Spain, demonstrated both the potential and the limits of the political use of trade union power. The PC through its organisational strength, succeeded in mobilising workers, largely against their will, but in insufficient numbers to cow employers into submission. Whereas in June workers had first watched union members strike and then joined them in strikes and in the unions, in September the pattern was changed. Organisations which had spent much energy in attempting to control their memberships won in June, changed tactics and tried instead to mobilise them in a strike aimed more at the Government than at the employers. The workers, although initially willing to defer to the authority and expertise of union representatives soon became impatient with a strike which seemed unlikely to impress employers and which threatened to undermine the authority of a Government in which most of them still placed their faith. The strike was abandoned because of this lack of support, but before long the PC changed its policy and had returned to advocating caution to workers. It seems that Blum had called Thorez's bluff, and the PC was obliged to return to its role of loyal supporter rather than 'frère ennemi'. In Marseilles this change was noted from the end of September when Communist factory delegates began advising their colleagues of the need not to cause

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1 AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 15.9.1936. Compare this with the account in Brower of events in Paris at this time. See Brower, op.cit., p.169.

disruption in the factory which might weaken the position of the Government. By the beginning of October it was being reported that orders had arrived to the Marseilles and French PCs advising them to moderate their activities.<sup>1</sup> By late October Billoux was echoing the speeches Thorez was making in Paris, stating that:

'Il faut dans la période présente éviter le plus que possible les grèves et tout tenter pour régler les conflits par d'autres moyens.'<sup>2</sup>

It seemed that a disruptive episode in the life of the Popular Front was at an end. Trade union power had been tested and found to be impressively strong, certainly compared with its weakness before June 1936. The limits, however, both of trade union and Communist influence had also been demonstrated. It was clear that whilst workers still respected the authority and judgement of their trade union and political leaders such allegiance was not given blindly. Workers might be persuaded to undertake actions about which they were unenthusiastic, but they would be very reluctant to sustain such strikes for any length of time. The Summer of 1936 had seen the Communist leaders in Marseilles help create and win control of a very powerful, but also a potentially mutinous working-class army.

#### 5 October 1936 - May 1937: The Legitimacy, Legality, and Intensification of Industrial Conflict

The engineering strikes of September 1936 were undertaken in a highly unionised industry, and in response to largely political motives. After September 1936 the discussion of collective contracts,

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1 AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 29.9.1936. Inspector to Prefect 3.10.1936.

2 Rouge-Midi, 219, 20.10.1936.

and disputes about their implementation, provided the backdrop against which the majority of strikes took place. The contents of the various collective contracts, willingness to implement or extend them, and battles about their interpretation, all illustrated different aspects of the power struggle in the workplace. With Government as both the initiator and the interpreter of the new system of industrial relations, it became increasingly difficult to disentangle the political from the economic ramifications of workplace conflict.

The enormous increase in collective contracts which took place after June 1936 laid the foundations for increased Government intervention in industrial disputes. In the years 1930 - 1935 there had been an average of only 22 collective contracts signed annually in France. In the period from June to December 1936 alone the number of contracts signed was 2336, and for the entire period from June 1936 to September 1939 5620 contracts were signed.<sup>1</sup> There was a similar pattern in Marseilles where the Conseil de Prud'hommes registered 598 collective contracts, arbitration decisions and revisions to existing contracts, between June 1936 and June 1939. 268 of these contracts were received in the period from June to December 1936 alone.<sup>2</sup> As Colton points out, 'From June, 1936, on, collective bargaining supplanted individual bargaining and became firmly established as the basis for industrial relations.'<sup>3</sup> This

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1 J. Colton, Compulsory Labor Arbitration in France, 1936 - 1939, New York, 1951, p20.

2 AD XIVM 25/202 Letters from the Conseil de Prud'hommes of 31.5.1938 & 5.6.1939.

3 Colton, p21.

transformation required, however, collective organisations to be workable. Henceforth, industrial relations would be regulated between representative organisations rather than individuals, and Government would be obliged to play the notably political role of arbitrating between these representatives.

Individual disputes continued to be regulated by the Conseil de Prud'hommes, which in Marseilles dealt with more cases in 1936 than at any other time. 4,557 cases were referred to the Conseil and it judged 1,600 of these.<sup>1</sup> Most of these cases were, in fact, brought by trade unions on behalf of their members. More important than the role of the Prud'hommes, however, was that played by the various public authorities in the solution of disputes. Of the 214 strikes recorded in the Bouches-du-Rhône between July 1936 and August 1937, the Mayor, Prefect, or another public official intervened to conciliate between the parties in 43 cases.<sup>2</sup> The arbitration and conciliation law of 31 December 1936 led to an even higher level of such interventions. Over four fifths of the conflicts between 1 January and 13 May 1937 involved the intervention of the Prefect, Mayor, Labour Inspector or other public official, or went through the various stages of the conciliation procedure.<sup>3</sup> All

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- 1 Adrien Bles, 'Marseille et son Conseil de Prud'hommes', Marseille, No. 121, 1980, pp28-33. This article, written by an ex-general secretary of the Conseil, shows that in 1920, the previous high point, there were 2600 'affaires déposées' at the Conseil and that in 1979 there were 3366.
  - 2 Bulletin du Ministère du Travail 1936-1937. The figures for Marseilles were however lower than the national average. In France as a whole the Bulletin lists 7889 strikes between July 1936 and August 1937 and interventions by officials in 2126 of these, an intervention rate of 26.95 per cent.
  - 3 AD XIVM 25/203 Prefectoral report to Minister of Labour. For a comparison with national figures see Colton, and Olga Dulais, L'Arbitrage Obligatoire dans les Conflits Collectifs du Travail, Paris, 1938. Between 1 January and 15 May 1937 (13 May in the case of Marseilles) 157 conflicts were brought to the attention of the local Prefect compared with a total of 3,496 such conflicts of which all French Prefects were informed. 48 per cent of these conflicts in the Bouches-du-Rhône were

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parties to industrial disputes came to realise that there was a very high probability that their actions would lead them at some stage to the Prefecture for negotiations. Whilst the new system of arbitration and conciliation was successful in establishing a useful framework for the solution of industrial disputes, this success was mitigated by the way in which the system itself attracted the anger of those whose cases were not upheld. In the case of workers such anger was initially directed to the new procedures but, in time, it was turned towards the Government itself. The guerilla war of factory conflict had changed more in level than in nature, moving first into the arbitration court and then to the political debating chamber. Workers who placed their faith in the efficacy of the new industrial relations machinery were likely to see its failure to grant their demands as reflecting upon the Government itself. Involving the working class in the process of regulating industrial disputes had been a good way of integrating into the polity a previously excluded group, but it would also provide a sharper focus for the anger resulting from frustrated expectations.

The last quarter of 1936 saw a relatively low level of industrial conflict in Marseilles. Reports at the end of September indicated how, following appeals for calm from Jouhaux:

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3 resolved without recourse to the Commission Départementale de Conciliation. This figure reflects the extent to which the new procedures intervened in industrial relations. There were also elements of continuity however. The fact that 48 per cent of local conflicts as against 42 per cent of national conflicts were not resolved through the new industrial relations procedures suggests that in Marseilles the local Prefect and Mayor were still intervening frequently to resolve conflicts.

'un large courant de sagesse se dessine-t-il dans les milieux syndicaux qui comprennent que toute espèce d'agitation ou d'intransigeance de leur part se heurterait non seulement d'une bonne partie de la population, mais encore et surtout, pourrait être désavouée par les dirigeants-mêmes de la CGT.

C'est ainsi que les revendications de quelques syndicats, qui auraient pu, à un autre moment, être exploitées par des meneurs, sont mises en veilleuse et l'étude en est confiée à des commissions qui comprennent précisément des membres enclins au calme.'

Appeals for calm from leading trade unionists coincided with PC overtures to the Radical Party.<sup>2</sup> Lack of union and political support for militant strike activity meant that, more than ever, workers tended to limit themselves to defensive strikes. Such strikes were aimed at protecting established privileges, securing employer implementation of the collective contracts signed in June 1936, and at resisting actions inspired by the newly aggressive attitude of local employers. Unions were willing to demonstrate their support for the Government and responsibility to the community in return for the recognition of their authority in the workplace. It was precisely such recognition that many Marseilles employers were unwilling to concede. Indeed, locally and nationally, employers were preparing to mount a counter offensive against unions and Government alike, and Colton describes how:

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1 AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 29.9.1936.

2 Rouge-Midi, 213, 29.9.1936 report of speech by Croizat. Report of speech by Nédelec in Le Midi Syndicaliste, 191, 1.10.1936. PCF overtures to the Radicals included their letter to Daladier which affirmed that:

'Comme vous, nous pensons que l'ordre public est indispensable.'

For full text see N. Racine & L. Bodin (eds.) Le Parti Communiste Française Pendant l'Entre-Deux-Guerres, Paris, 1972, pp255-260.

'By December (1936), almost every industrial leader who had taken part in the original Matignon conference had been replaced in management organisations by a more militant figure.'<sup>1</sup>

Militant Marseilles employers such as Jean Fraissinet needed little encouragement to seize the initiative and sack militant shop stewards in their firms.<sup>2</sup>

Price rises, employer militancy and delays in introducing the forty hour week all combined to generate a more radical rank and file. Although only partial, this radicalisation did contradict the desire for industrial calm of unions and parties alike. When conflicts in the private sector disturbed this calm trade unions could always attempt to attribute the responsibility to employer provocation. This argument was less persuasive, however, when, as happened in Marseilles in December 1936, public sector workers went on strike. Workers such as the Marseilles street cleaners had, in the past, been willing to engage only rarely in strike action, depending instead on the political influence of their union leaders to win improved conditions for them

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1 Colton op.cit. p28.

2 Jean Fraissinet's combination of commercial and political activities made him one of the most hated employers in the town. He had been a member of the Croix de Feu and his enthusiasm for employing members of this organisation often led him into conflict with local trade unions. In June 1936 he participated in the meeting called by Simon Sabiani at which Sabiani made his infamous appeal for followers to clean up the streets of Marseilles. Fraissinet was also one of the more militant members of the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce. A description of some of his activities may be found in his autobiography, significantly entitled, Au Combat à Travers Deux Guerres et Quelques, Revolution Paris, 1968. Details of this particular conflict may also be found in the letter from Fraissinet to Prefect 23.12.1936. in AD XIVM 25/111. For another example of his hostility to the CGT see AD XIVM 25/111 where there is a copy of a letter that Fraissinet issued to his employees on 30.12.1937. In the letter Fraissinet explained how, it would be inappropriate for those representatives of his office workers who were in the CGT to follow the company custom of going to shake hands with Fraissinet and his Directors on 2 January to wish them a Happy New Year. Fraissinet explained that any of his staff who were members of an organisation dedicated to the overthrow of the employer class could not be permitted to participate in this gesture of goodwill. Letters such as these seemed calculated to increase the militancy of CGT union members.

from sympathetic municipalities. It appears that in 1936 workers expectations rose at the same time as their union leaders links with the municipality and the Government strengthened. Wildcat strikes were the result of the combined effects of this increase in loyalty without any parallel increase in material rewards.<sup>1</sup>

The Marseilles street cleaners' strike of December 1936 raised an issue which was to be at the centre of working-class mobilisation during the following two years; namely the compatibility of strike action with support for the Popular Front.<sup>2</sup> The issue became all the more acute when the ability of the Government to guarantee the smooth running of the country conflicted with the desire of its working-class supporters to assert and defend their newly won rights in the factories. Workers not only needed to defend themselves against attacks from employers, they were also becoming increasingly impatient with the Government's delays in enacting the necessary decrees to implement the forty hour week. Workers' impatience with the Government coincided with the latter's desire to reassure business

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1 An example of the close links between trade unions and employers in this sector is contained in Le Petit Provençal (LPP) 29.9.1936, where the section des cantonniers of the Syndicats des Municipaux calls members to a meeting at which the demand will be advanced for the union's right to the 'ratification de la liste des candidats aux avancements'. This control over promotion was something which many unions sought at this time, but the municipal workers came closest to obtaining it.

2 The strike was strongly condemned in LPP of 13, 14, & 15.12.1936, and in Le Provence Socialiste of 18.12.1936. On 13.12.1936 the LPP condemned the 'grève déclenchée sans préavis aucun, avec par surcroit, l'occupation des garages', and Tasso, commenting on the fact that negotiations were in progress with the union protested that the strike 'a été décidé sans que même l'organisation syndicale ait été avisée.' The following day, Tasso referred to 'le caractère apparemment plus politique que corporatif de ce mouvement de protestation.'

circles, regulate strikes, and to reassert legality and authority.

The Government intended that the December 1936 legislation on industrial arbitration and conciliation would render unnecessary unorthodox measures such as factory occupations. Factory occupations had been condemned by the Government's spokesmen from as early as 7 July 1936 when the Minister of the Interior, Salengro, had promised to take action to end any future occupations.<sup>1</sup> The will of the Government had been demonstrated on the 7 October 1936 when police had been used to evacuate an occupied factory.<sup>2</sup> In Marseilles, the first forced factory evacuations took place on 11 and 12 January 1937.<sup>3</sup> Police intervention in local industrial disputes became a regular feature after January 1937, making strikes more difficult to win and workers more cynical about the Popular Front. This cynicism was reinforced when Blum declared his 'pause' on 13 February 1937.

From the Autumn of 1936 onwards, Government statements, by stressing the dual needs for economic recovery and the maintenance of the electoral coalition, had created a more difficult ideological climate for strikers. Already, in October 1936, Léon Blum had declared that:

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1 Colton, op.cit. p24.

2 G. Lefranc, Histoire du Front Populaire, Paris, 1974, p206.

3 AD XIVM 25/132 Telegrams from Prefect to Minister of the Interior 11 & 12.1.1937. AD M6/10874 contains two descriptions of the evacuation of the St Gobain chemical factory on 11.1.1937. There was rarely much resistance to such evacuations, and indeed on occasion they seemed to resolve stalemated strikes. According to a police report of one factory evacuation, the trade union actively aided police efforts: 'le Secrétaire Général (of the union) m'a demandé de faire un geste symbolique témoignant de l'emploi de la force pour l'évacuation du garage. Pour sauver les apparences, j'ai accédé à cette demande et fait des sommations et dévisser deux boulons de la porte d'entrée qui a cédé aussitôt. Immédiatement après les grévistes évacuaient le local dans le calme' Cited by Bally op.cit. pp76-7.

'Après les immenses changements que nous avons introduits dans la vie sociale et économique, la prospérité du pays, la santé du pays exigent impérieusement une période suffisante de stabilité, de normalité,'<sup>1</sup>

The suggestion that there should be some kind of trade-off between social reforms and industrial peace was implicit in statements of this sort. The notion was reiterated four months later, in February, when Blum declared the need for a pause. Blum's declarations rendered strikes even less acceptable to public opinion. With unions dedicated to support for the Government, the parties of the Left unwilling to undermine the coalition, and public opinion persuaded that workers should moderate their demands and use the new arbitration procedures to avoid strikes, any conflicts that did break out had to be fought in a largely unsympathetic environment. Already the experience of workers was providing them with the evidence that their defence of their economic interests conflicted with the strategy decided on by their political representatives.

Faced with workers' increasingly strident demands for action, unions sought to use the ritualistic commemoration of February 12 and Mayday 1937 as a way of defusing the pent-up energies and aspirations of the local working-class and directing them into celebrations of the Popular Front.<sup>2</sup> 1937 was a year of record attendance for both occasions, a testimony both to the energy employed by their organisers and also to the enthusiasm and optimism of the local working-class. It was still thought that mobilisation on the streets served a purpose, in

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1 Lefranc, Histoire du Front Populaire, op.cit.p205.

2 See AD M6 10823 for details of the 12 February demonstration. AD M6 10820 contains reports of CC and CD for Mayday 1937. 1937 was the year in which the PC urged tramworkers to strike only in the morning so that small shopkeepers should not be deprived of potential custom in the afternoon.

showing employers and the Government alike that the working-class was organised, united, and desirous of action.

But workers' desire for action could not always be expressed through the symbolic commemorations of February 12 and Mayday strikes and demonstrations. The strike on the Général Metzinger, Champollion, and André-Lebon ships on 4-5 March reflected sailors' impatience at delays in arbitrating their wage demand and in implementing the forty hour week. The Communist shop stewards who organised the strike hoped that it would speed up the arbitration decision and undermine the position of Ferri-Pisani, leader of the union and Socialist Party councillor. When Ferri-Pisani went to tell the striking sailors to return to work he was met with catcalls and threats of violence. Ferri-Pisani's appeals to a general assembly of sailors on the following day, however, met with greater success. The press reported the union leader's speech to what must have been a turbulent meeting:

'Je sais...que tous, vous êtes impatients de savoir si votre demande d'augmentation de salaires sera acceptée. Ce ne sont pas là cependant les seules revendications que nous avons à formuler. N'oublions pas que nous avons un projet important qui devra nécessiter la refaite du Code de travail maritime. Pleinement d'accord avec le Ministre de la Marine Marchande (i.e. Tasso), j'ai terminé le travail préparatoire de cette réforme. Laissez-moi le temps de terminer nos travaux, et je suis certain du résultat.'<sup>1</sup>

The sailors' endorsement of Ferri-Pisani's leadership suggests they placed more faith in the results to be achieved from negotiations between Socialist leaders than in Communist-orchestrated strikes. There is some evidence, however, that the Communist sailors had themselves been following a more radical policy than that endorsed by the local PC.

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1 LPP 6.3.1937. Also see AD XIVM 25/202 CD to Prefect 3, 4, & 5.3.1937 and Bally op.cit. p79.

Ten days after the strike the Communist-sponsored Amicale du Front Populaire du paquebot "Champollion" issued a statement reaffirming support for the union leadership and denying any part in the organisation of the strike.<sup>1</sup> Recurrent incidents on board the ship suggested that Communist sailors were in a more militant mood than such self-righteous statements might suggest.<sup>2</sup>

The month of May 1937 saw an outbreak of strikes on such a scale as to place considerable strain on the social consensus created by the Popular Front. The total number of strikers in the département reached its highest level since June 1936. These strikes also cast doubt upon the efficiency of the arbitration system.

A strike of 800 brewery workers between 28 April and 26 May 1937 produced several violent confrontations with the police.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the arbitration sentence concerning Marseilles engineering workers which was announced by M. Chaillé (Inspecteur Principal au Ministère du Travail) at the beginning of May caused uproar among the whole Marseilles trade union movement. Chaillé proposed a wage increase which was less than the increase in the cost of living index, thereby casting into doubt

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1 LPP 14.3.1937.

2 Bally, op.cit. pp80-81 relates one such incident on board the ship on 20-22 March 1937. The Communist delegates on the ship had demanded the equal sharing between the crew of tips from passengers. These tips had previously been limited to the restaurant workers only. The delegates did not achieve their aim but in the meantime they demanded the sacking of a chambermaid who had not supported their demands. The ship was held up in port for a short while before the chambermaid in question decided of her own accord to leave the ship. There were also several minor dock strikes in March 1937. Details of these strikes may be found in LPP, 17, 18, & 22.3.1937 and in AD XIVM 25/108 report dated 20.3.1937.

3 For details see Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille (ACCM) Registre de deliberations, May 1937, passim, and T 26 Statement of 5.5.1937. See also Bally, op.cit. p83 and La Vie Ouvrière, 13.5.1937.

the principle of the échelle mobile and undermining some of the advantages won by engineers in June 1936. With the reemergence of inflation employers were delighted at this attack on the échelle mobile, and then used the workers' refusal to accept the Chaillé decision as the pretext for locking out 8,000 engineering workers from 7 May.<sup>1</sup>

The Chaillé arbitration put the Marseilles trade movement in an impossible position. Communist and Socialist parties and the trade unions were all behind the Government in May 1937, yet a Government representative had produced a 'solution' to a conflict, which, if applied, would constitute the first major working-class defeat since June 1936. Support for the Government notwithstanding, such a defeat could not be accepted. The dilemma was to recur, since the échelle mobile was unusually common in Marseilles collective contracts.<sup>2</sup> The Government, meanwhile, encouraged nationally-appointed arbitrators to grant wage increases which were not in line with the cost of living index. Colton estimates that most arbitrators made

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- 1 Details of the dispute itself may be found in LPP 4, 7, 8, & 23.5.1937. By July 1938 it was estimated that about 80,000 workers were covered by agreements including indexed wages. (LPP 15.7.1938) Details of employers attempts to revoke the échelle mobile are contained in ACCM T 47. A letter from the Society for the Defence of Marseilles Industry and Commerce of 24.9.1937 complained at the frequency with which new cost of living indices were issued. The President of the Chamber of Commerce suggested in a letter of 12.7.1937 to the Prime Minister that it would be more appropriate to issue an index every two years rather than quarterly. One member of the Chamber of Commerce was, meanwhile, engaged in writing reports on the deleterious effects of the échelle mobile. These reports, written by Elzéar Abeille may be found in ACCM T 47.
- 2 A list of collective contracts containing the échelle mobile is contained in ACCM T 47 dated 13.12.1937. The very act of drawing up such a list was indicative of the mood of the Chamber of Commerce. The list included details of the notice required to terminate each contract.

settlements which granted workers only between one half and two thirds of increases in the cost of living, and remarks how:

'The expectation that arbitrators under a Popular Front sponsored arbitration system might throw caution to the winds and serve only the interests of labour proved unfounded. The very opposite proved to be the case and the unions had occasion to complain of the "anti-June 1936, spirit" of the arbitration decisions. There is no doubt that the excessive caution of the arbitrators and a consuming concern for preventing inflation resulted in many instances in injustice to labour...'

In Marseilles, such 'injustices' were so much in conflict with established practices that, paradoxically, there would be many cases such as the May engineering lock-out, when an arbitration process designed to resolve and avoid strikes actually provoked them.<sup>2</sup>

The problems of the Marseilles engineering workers were reviewed with sympathy by other groups in the town. Many collective contracts were due for renewal in May and the implementation of the Chaillé decision would have opened the way for other employers either to dilute or abolish the sliding scale of wages.<sup>3</sup> This fear prompted several trade unions to urge a general strike, but, in a rare example

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1 Colton op.cit. p86, See also p77. A more detailed study of the decisions of surarbitres announced between 19 January and 14 May 1937 concluded that:

'L'échelle mobile intégrale, c'est-à-dire la variation de tout le salaire en fonction du cout de la vie n'a jamais été accordé, sous cette forme absolue. (In 7 cases) Les arbitres n'ont octroyé qu'une échelle mobile partielle...Mais la plupart (10 cases) des sentences rejettent l'échelle mobile'. Suzanne Bugnet, Le Rajustement des salaires par l'arbitrage en 1937: Examen de deux cents sentences surarbitrales (19 janvier-14 mai 1937), Nancy, Faculté de Droit, 1938, pp51-52.

2 For a trade union view on arbitration procedures at this time see: Union Départementale des Syndicats Ouvriers des Bouches-du-Rhône, Congrès Départementale de Marseille les 26 et 27 Juin 1937: Rapports aux Syndicats, Marseille, 1937, p7.

3 Further details on the conduct of the Engineering lockout are contained in the following sources: AD M6/10874 CD to Prefect 11,13, & 15.5.1937, and 7.7.1937. Also see CC to Prefect 10,13, & 18.5.1937. CD to Prefect 15.5.1937 contains a general comment on the militancy of local unions as collective contracts are due to come up for renewal.

of united action, Nédelec the ex-unitaire and Armand the ex-confédéré chose instead to call workers to a protest meeting. The poster calling to the meeting included a fierce condemnation of the way police were used in strikes, which could be read as an indirect criticism of the Government, the Prefect, or both.<sup>1</sup> Some unionists, such as Lepori, deputy leader of the Syndicat des Métaux, went even further with this line of criticism, claiming that:

'L'attitude de M. le Préfet n'est pas celle d'un Préfet  
Républicain',

and that:

'Il était du côté du patronat par sa position dans le lock-out'<sup>2</sup>

Such overt criticism was, however, later disowned when the leader of the union, Enjalbert (who, like Lepori was also a senior member of the PC) protested:

'contre l'attitude de certains manifestants qui à l'issue de la dernière réunion et pendant que l'ordre du jour était porté à la Préfecture poussèrent des cris hostiles contre les pouvoirs publics. De tels procédés vont à l'encontre des intérêts de la classe ouvrière.'<sup>3</sup>

Clearly strikes of this kind made it difficult for union leaders to know just how much criticism of the public authorities could be tolerated in the name of mobilising pressure, before such criticism risked getting out of hand, opening the way for outright attacks on the Government or for uncontrollable actions which would benefit the Government's enemies.

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1 AD M6 10876.

2 AD M6 10815 Report of 13.5.1937. Lepori's militant speech provided a police investigation into his background. This investigation showed that he had become the Secretary of the Third Rayon of the Marseilles PC in 1935, and in 1937 was promoted to the post of Secretary of the Regional Committee of the PC. He was also Assistant General Secretary of the Syndicat des Métaux. The report concluded that Lepori was an 'orateur violent. Il est dangereux. C'est un des militants les plus actifs du PC; auquel aucune confiance ne peut être accordée.'

3 Ibid.

## Conclusion

The strikes which occurred in the first few months of 1937 demonstrated that the new arbitration and conciliation procedures which were designed to prevent strikes, could in fact sometimes provoke them. The successful operation of the new industrial relations procedures presupposed some elementary agreement to negotiate between workers and employers, together with a willingness to accept the decisions of arbitrators. Neither of these preconditions for success existed in this period. There was, instead, a deterioration in relations, both in the workplace and between the working-class and the Government. The use of police to evacuate factories, unfavourable arbitration decisions, and the need to engage in strikes to pressurise the Government into honouring its promises concerning the forty hour week, all demonstrated an increasing divergence between the aspirations of workers and the aims of the Government. Employers and workers were readier to press their demands to the full by May 1937. The Government seemed set to undermine the working-class dominance in the factories established in June 1936, and employers, whose retreat had been inspired by a change in tactics rather than strategy, interpreted talk of the need for a pause as granting them the authority necessary to mount a counter-attack against the workforce. In this polarised atmosphere increasing numbers of workers were ready to resort to strike action and employers showed a new readiness to meet such challenges head on.

The situation by May 1937 had deteriorated to such an extent that two reports were drawn up in the Prefecture summarising the new situation in labour-management relations. One such report (for

details of the other see Appendix 7 ), written on 12 May 1937

described well the situation. The author noted how:

Les organisations patronales s'affirment beaucoup plus résistantes en face des revendications diverses formulées par leur personnel: En Con. de Conciliation sur toutes questions d'une certaine importance, il est beaucoup plus difficile d'obtenir une concession de la part des employeurs, dont la documentation paraît plus solide actuellement qu'il y a quelques mois, et dont la défense est plus âpre: On a pu maintes fois constater un désir de collaboration entre délégations patronales et ouvrières: et ce jour, elles paraissent davantage se considérer comme des adversaires et se dressent volontiers l'une contre l'autre. En C<sup>on</sup>. Mixte, à l'occasion de l'élaboration des Conventions Collectives, il est quotidiennement constaté une intransigeance en tout cas une fermeté catégorique, de la part des employeurs: Des clauses précédemment volontiers admises sont à présent longuement discutées et modifiées, parfois même catégoriquement refusées. (Le principe de l'échelle mobile, couramment admis, est actuellement couramment refusé).  
En ce qui concerne les arbitrages.....la question paraît se dessiner sur un plan qu'il n'est pas utile de souligner!  
Parallèlement à la fermeté patronale, l'attitude ouvrière ne fléchit pas, paraît au contraire se fortifier au contact de l'obstacle; s'il est permis de constater une rigidité bilatérale absolue, on ne peut, par contre, enregistrer aucune capitulation.

The improved quality of employers' submissions to conciliation meetings referred to in this report was just one aspect of the increased organisation of the employer response. Nationally and locally, employers' associations were ready to confront the power of organised labour if the opportunity should present itself. Some more militant workers were also spoiling for a fight. The presence of Blum in the Government, however, combined with PCF policy at this time, meant that the opportunity for widespread conflict raised by the new militancy of the working-class would, for political reasons, not be seized. But, if unions and Left parties would not authorise a general strike, neither could they hope, through appeals to the spirit of the Popular Front, to prevent strikes from breaking out in sensitive areas.

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1 AD XIVM 25/203 Report by M. Bouisson 12.5.1937.

Blum's replacement by Chautemps on 21 June 1937 did not cause the PCF much grief, but most workers saw it for what it was, as opening up the path to measures which would be even less favourable to the working-class.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CLASS MOBILISATION AND DIFFERENTIATION,

JUNE 1937 to SEPTEMBER 1938

### 1 Introduction

Between June 1937 and September 1938 the balance of power in society as a whole, in the workplace, and in the political system swung against the working-class, whilst its organisations continued to affirm that support for the Popular Front required acceptance of this change. The new adversity produced not unity but differentiation, both within the working-class itself and between the working class and the rest of the nation. The slogans of the Popular Front were now more effective in revealing the shortcomings of, rather than in rallying support for, the Government.

The increasing intensity of industrial conflict cast into doubt the local class alliance on which the Popular Front was founded. Militant employers increasingly won the support of government and public opinion, and, with the SPF unions, they succeeded in further dividing the working-class.<sup>1</sup> Strikes seemed both more necessary and less winnable, and workers wavered between the extremes of quiescence and extremism. The Union départementale (UD) was no longer either unchallenged or united and whilst Right-wing groupings set up rival unions, the Amis de Syndicats within the CGT threatened to split the UD at its June 1938 Congress.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3 section 5b for details of SPF unions.

Increasingly the Marseilles working-class was pushed onto the defensive, with strikes more often being aimed at protecting, rather than advancing upon, earlier gains.

## 2 June 1937 - February 1938

The militant mood of employers and workers seen in the engineering lock out of May 1937 led to a series of isolated, and often bitter, strikes between June 1937 and February 1938. There were some offensive strikes in June, but thereafter most were defensive and mounted in response to employers' attacks on union rights and established conditions.<sup>1</sup> The sacking of union delegates, attacks on the indexing of wages and the undermining of union organisations, all served as fairly standard reasons for strikes in this period.<sup>2</sup> Union leaders pointed out how employers were responding to the slowing down in the Government's reform programme by attempting to put the clock back to before June 1936.<sup>3</sup> Workers, however, had acquired a new self confidence from the factory occupations and refused to accept the attempts of employers and foremen to reassert their authority. Attacks, both verbal and physical, increased against employers and foremen who gave

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- 1 There were some offensive strikes such as that of Marseilles slaughterers which was aimed at putting pressure on the Government to prohibit imports of Algerian sheep carcasses. See LPP 10 & 11. 6.1937.
  - 2 See for example details of the strike of 650 coopers between 28 July and 11 September in defence of 45 sacked colleagues, in LPP, 5.9.1937, 9.9.1937 & 13.4.1938. See also Rouge-Midi, 17.9.1937 and M.Tournier, pp.19-20, 'Les grèves dans les Bouches-du-Rhône en 1938 et 1939,' (mémoire de maîtrise, UER d'histoire, Université de Provence), and the Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille (Referred to hereafter as ACC) T.26.
  - 3 La Vie Ouvrière, (VO), 29.7.1937 Report of speech by Enjalbert to meeting of 6,000 engineering workers, held on 20.7.1937.

unacceptable orders. The 'discipline' and good humour which had characterised the strikes of June 1936 was replaced by a daily war of attrition on the factory floor.<sup>1</sup> Notions of 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay' seemed absent from workers' practice if not from their unions' rhetoric. At Rocca, Tassy & de Roux, management claimed that since the abolition of piecework in June 1936 they 'se voient opposer dans leur savonnerie un freinage persistant', with workers effectively working only a six rather than an eight hour day. Even in those six hours production was less than either management, unions or the labour inspectorate proposed.<sup>2</sup>

Militant employers placed their faith in the SPF unions to wage the battle against the CGT. By July 1937 about 18,000 workers had joined SPF unions in the Marseilles area, and, encouraged by the Marseilles-based Société pour la Défense du Commerce, an increasing number of employers signed collective contracts with SPF unions between 1937 and 1938. The SPF unions also claimed to have won over two fifths of posts of délégué d'atelier elected during 1937. Whilst little faith may be placed in such claims they do testify to the extent of the SPF's campaign to win respectability and negotiating status.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 AD XIVM 25/95 contains an extensive file on problems at the Raffineries de Sucre in this period, where workers were refusing to do overtime and were generally resisting the authority of foremen.
  - 2 AD XIVM 25/118. See letter from management to the Prefect 10.9.1937 and the report of the Labour Inspectorate on the factory dated 7.1.1938.
  - 3 The AD contains extensive, but scattered, details on the activities of the SPF. See AD XIVM 22/40 for a list of SPF unions and their memberships compiled on 1.1.1937 for elections to the Conseil Supérieur de Travail, XIVM 24/54 note dated 22.2.1937, XIVM 25/210 Letter from SPF to Prefect 3.6.1938 concerning the number of delegates elected on the SPF 'slate', and notes of the CD of 27.7.1937 and 12.3.1939 in M6 10878 and 10792 respectively.

Employer support for SPF unions formed just one part of a more general attempt to claw back the concessions granted in June 1936. In the economic sphere, the rapid inflation of the Popular Front period meant that the indexation of wages continued to be a major source of conflict. Trade unions complained that quarterly publications of the index was insufficient to guarantee the real value of wages. Employers also protested that if wages were to be increased at the same rate as the cost of living index then their profit margins would have to be reduced unacceptably. The rapid rise in the cost of living index (24 per cent over 1 year and 40 per cent over the two years from May 1936) led employers to see the impending renewal of collective contracts in February 1938 as presenting a good opportunity to remove provisions for the indexing of wages.<sup>1</sup> Shoe manufacturers chose to anticipate the

1 Local and national indices of the cost of living, based on a figure of 100 for 1930 may be found in ACC T 47 and Alfred Sauvy, Histoire Economique de la France entre les deux guerres: 2, (1931-1939), Paris, 1967, p503 respectively.

Date	Marseilles Index	% Increase	French Index	% Increase
May 1936	84.4	0	80.3	0
Nov 1936	97.3	15.3	91.1	13.5
Feb 1937	98.9	17.2	96.5	20.2
May 1937	104.6	23.9	99.4	13.8
Aug 1937	107.6	27.5	103.8	29.3
Nov 1937	114.5	35.7	110	37
Feb 1938	117.5	39.2	113.2	41
May 1938	118.2	40.1	115.3	43.6
Aug 1938	120.2	42.4	117.2	46
Nov 1938	124.1	47.0	120.3	49.8
Feb 1939	125.3	48.5	122.3	52.3
May 1939	125	48.1	122.6	52.7

Trade union comments on and criticism of the local situation may be found in V0 9.9.1937 & 17.2.1938 and Rouge-Midi (RM) 3.9.1937.

renegotiation. of collective contracts, deciding simply to refuse to pay their workers the 40 centimes extra per hour due to them after the issuing of a new cost of living index on 15 January 1938. Workers negotiated for a month before occupying their factories on 16 February, only to be removed by the police after a short while. The 2,000 striking shoemakers won on 9 March when employers guaranteed the indexation of wages and promised to honour holiday commitments.<sup>1</sup> When, as in this case, employers took the initiative in breaking an agreement, workers could respond by resorting to legal procedures or to the coercive power of a strike. The legal opportunities for redress were deficient. One union leader complained that:

'La procédure d'arbitrage avance à l'allure d'un escargot. Il faut parfois des semaines avant qu'un arbitre rende sa sentence'.<sup>2</sup>

And even after sentences were issued in workers' favour the same leader pointed out that:

'...il faut bien souvent engager la bataille et 'montrer les dents' si l'on veut que celle-ci soit appliquée par les patrons.'<sup>3</sup>

Problems with the arbitration procedure contributed to workers' disillusionment with the administration and the Government.<sup>4</sup> As disillusionment spread, appeals for loyalty to the Popular Front carried less weight and no longer proved sufficient to prevent key workers such as bakers and gasmen from going on strike.<sup>5</sup>

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1 For details see LPP 1.2. & 9.3.1938. ACC T 26, and Tournier op.cit.

2 Charles Nédelec quoted in VO 9.9.1937.

3 Ibid.

4 See the letter from Morotti, union leader at the Raffineries du Sucre to the Prefect 23.2.1938 in AD XIVM 25/95.

5 Bakers went on strike over Xmas and gasworkers occupied their factory at the end of February 1938. For details on these disputes see, Tournier, op.cit. pp36-37, AD XIVM 25/202 trade union to Prefect 20.2.1938, and XIVM 25/129 Note to Prefect (undated). Also see RM 1.3.1938.

### 3 The Chemical Workers' Strike, March-April 1938

Disillusionment with the Popular Front spread during 1938 as workers increasingly found themselves opposing militant employers backed up by the force of adverse arbitration decisions. On 3 March 8,000 chemical workers occupied 46 factories after employers had cited a recent arbitration decision to justify granting workers a 15 centime hourly wage increase rather than the 45 centimes justified by the local price index. Marseilles workers must have had difficulty in understanding how, for the second time in a year (see page 288) an arbitration decision taken under a Popular Front Government had played into the hands of employers by overturning the long-established local indexing of wages. Such adverse arbitration decisions left workers with little chance of redress. Factory occupations were soon ended by police intervention, and the chemical employers demonstrated their militancy by refusing to grant immunity to strikers in return for such factory evacuations. Instead of immunities the chemical employers responded to the factory occupations by sacking many of the strikers. These victimisations surprised the Prefect and provoked local unions into organising a successful one hour general strike on 21 March. Employers refused, however, to give way, and although work had begun by 14 April, by 19 April 993 workers in fourteen local factories had still not been rehired. Employers had made use of the strike to dispose of the most 'difficult' workers, and, more generally, to reduce the size of their workforce with minimum opposition. By September appeals against the original arbitration decision had found in favour of the workers

and restored the échelle mobile. The 'victory' was, however, a hollow one, since in the intervening six months employers had been able to undermine union power in the factories, to pay reduced wages, to reduce the workforce, and to build up a rival SPF union structure. Workers who asked for their jobs back were simply informed that there was no work for them.<sup>1</sup>

The privileged relations between the CGT and the Government had won few advantages for Marseilles chemical workers. Quite the reverse. Having been forced into a defensive strike through a Government-inspired anti-inflationary arbitration decision, workers were then led back to work by their unions before winning any concessions because of the need to:

'...montrer que les travailleurs ont conscience des événements qui mettent le pays en péril'<sup>2</sup>

There were few signs that this sense of national responsibility on the part of the workers would be rewarded by government. Whilst the Austrian Anschluss of 13 March increased the external pressures on France, the replacement of the second Blum Government by Daladier (8 April) marked the end of labours' claim to a special relationship with the Government. In this changed climate SPF unions made some headway with their suggestion that henceforth their influence on sympathetic employers could aid workers more than could a CGT deprived of its political influence. The SPF itself was not

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1 Details of this dispute may be found in AD XIVM 25/120, Prefect to Président du Conseil (undated), Prefect to Minister of Interior Telegram 7.3.1938, Letter from chemical union to Prefect 23.4.1938. There is additional material in AD M6 10881, RM, 385, 13.5.1938., Tournier, op.cit. pp39-42, and LPP 4,8,9,12,17,19 & 22.3.1938. and 1 & 2.4.1938.

2 AD M6 10881 CC report 10.4.1938.

unwilling to make political capital out of events taking place abroad, except for them the fate of Bukharin in the third Moscow trial (2-13 March) received rather more attention than did the Austrian Anschluss. An SPF leaflet described the changed domestic situation emotively but not inaccurately, arguing that:

'Nous défendrons vos intérêts avec beaucoup plus d'efficacité que la CGT parce-que nous obtiendrons plus facilement qu'elle des avantages des patrons, et ceci parce-que nous n'entendons pas supprimer le patronat ni le salariat comme le veut la CGT....'

'La CGT est en complète déliquescence, elle n'a plus les rênes du gouvernement, elle les a perdues pour toujours, elle ne peut plus compter ni sur la Chambre, ni sur le Sénat, elle ne peut même plus compter sur ses propres adhérents. Elle est finie, elle est foutue...Vous ne vous laisserez pas abuser par des flots de salive, vous ne voudrez pas que la politique prenne pied dans le syndicalisme, ne voulant pas être sous la domination des patrons, vous refuserez de vous mettre sous la domination des syndicats révolutionnaires qui vous vendent à l'étranger.'

#### 4 The Engineering Workers Strike of June - August 1938

(See Appendix 5 for detailed chronology)

Events in the engineering industry between June and August 1938 provided proof of employers' desire to challenge union power in the factories. For workers, solidarity strikes seemed a more efficient way of combatting such attacks than appeals to a long, unwieldy, and often unsatisfactory arbitration system. Such actions, however, would be condemned as unpatriotic and converted into lock outs by employers who were keen to build up rival union structures. The decline in union power was accompanied by an increase in internal dissent, seen at the June 1938 UD Congress where the Syndicats

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1 AD M6 10881 CD to Prefect 23 & 26.4.1938.

movement gained ground.<sup>1</sup> Attempts simply to maintain workers' positions would henceforth be condemned from within as well as from outside the trade union movement. Meanwhile, the PC was behaving in a more militant manner. On Mayday 1937 the PC had been keen not to antagonise the middle classes and had pleaded for the operation of the trams so that small shopkeepers might profit from the extra trade of the holiday. By Mayday 1938 the PC was encouraging tramworkers to strike and ensure a total work stoppage in Marseilles. Billoux explained how the situation had changed, reaching a point where:

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1 Syndicats, hebdomadaire du monde du travail, was a weekly newspaper which began publication on 16 October 1936, and was aimed at countering the influence of Communists within the CGT together with that of their newspaper, La Vie Ouvrière. The main national figures involved in Syndicats were Belin, Froideval, and Delmas. The movement developed from the base of the newspaper and became a rallying point for ex-confédérés who were disillusioned at the growth of Communist influence within the CGT. The movement had a considerable following among the ex-confédéré union leaders in Marseilles. There were frequent contributions to the newspaper from Syndicats members in the Bouches-du-Rhône from 1937 onwards. In time, the Marseilles Amis de Syndicats became more active and in April 1938 a manifesto 'Pour l'Indépendance du syndicalisme' was launched. Considerable support was attracted and by June 1938 Syndicats won 28,000 votes against the 108,000 cast in favour of the rapport moral at the UD Congress. Although the Amis de Syndicats organised around a platform which called for trade union independence, their main raison d'être was anticommunism. Prominent Marseilles members of Syndicats such as Ferri-Pisani and Jean-Francois Leca were themselves SFIO town councillors. By January of 1939 there was an open split between the Communist dominated UD and UL and the Amis de Syndicats led by Ferri-Pisani. For more information on the national movement see: M-F Rogliano, 'L'anticommunisme dans la CGT: "Syndicats"', Le Mouvement social, 87, 1974, pp63-84. Contributions from Marseilles may be found in the issues of Syndicats for, 13.5.1937, 24.6.1937, 8.7.1937, 5.8.1937, 20.4.1938, 11.5.1938, 29.6.1938, 6.7.1938, 26.10.1938, and 22.2.1939. Also see appendix 4 on the growth of a trade union opposition movement.

'devant l'offensive patronale...le Gouvernement suivra le grand patronat qui ne désire qu'une seule chose, de porter atteinte aux lois sociales...En résumé c'est l'offensive fasciste qui se manifeste tant à l'interieur qu'a l'extérieur'.<sup>1</sup>

The sacking of Papazian (General Secretary of the Syndicat des techniciens métallurgistes) by the management of Société Provençale de Constructions Navales (SPCN) was one example of the employer offensive referred to by Billoux. The Marseilles Chamber of Commerce made clear its belief that:

'...la paix sociale ne sera obtenue que si les agitateurs professionnels sont mis hors d'état de nuire',<sup>2</sup>

and local employers responded by locking out those workers who joined solidarity strikes in favour of Papazian. Unions advised their members to return to work on 11 July after more than two weeks on strike, but they warned employers that:

'Cette reprise ne s'effectuera malgré tout que si elle est générale, s'il n'y a aucune sanction pour personne, si Papazian est réintégré. Si les grévistes obtiennent satisfaction, la reprise du travail sera immédiate; sinon, techniciens et ouvriers dégagent leur responsabilités dans la continuation du conflit'.<sup>3</sup>

But employers were not in the mood for compromise, claiming instead that they needed discussions with their federations in Paris before opening the factories. If the union action had been brought about by the workings of professional agitators, then it seemed that the employers' response, too, was the result of a nationally-coordinated strategy.

The unions reluctantly accepted the Chaillé decision which pronounced the laying off of Papazian as a condition of a return to

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1 AD M6 10828 CD to Prefect 27.4.1938.

2 ACC T 26 Letter from President of the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce to Daladier 28.6.1938.

3 Cited by Tournier, op.cit. p56

work without reprisals. But this acceptance by unions gave an impression of weakness, which encouraged Coder to press the victory home by keeping his factory closed until the strike organisers had been sacked. Nédelec wrote to the Prime Minister about Coder's action complaining that:

'si les patrons ne risquent rien quand ils violent les sentences, il n'en est pas de même lorsque les ouvriers les font respecter',

and requesting that:

'L'on cesse d'une façon générale de faire jouer l'arbitrage à sens unique, c'est-à-dire avec rigueur contre les travailleurs et avec la plus large élasticité lorsqu'il s'agit du patronat'<sup>1</sup>

Such appeals were in vain, however, and, confronted with Coder's opposition, trade unions tried to rally the support of the local population in a way reminiscent of May 1936. As in 1936 the Coder union branch issued a leaflet addressed to 'la Population de St. Marcel' calling for a meeting at the Bar de la Métallurgie.<sup>2</sup>

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1 La Vie Ouvrière, 4.8.1938.

2 The leaflet is attached to a report from the CC dated 17.8.1938 in AD XIVM 25/141 and reads as follows:

'Monsieur CODER continue ses provocations envers son personnel. A peine un conflit qui a duré 40 jours, survenu à cause de cette même attitude provocante est-il terminé, que Monsieur CODER, voulant se poser en dictateur licencie quatre camarades dont trois délégués parmi lesquels le Secrétaire et le secrétaire adjoint de la section syndicale.

...Il veut décapiter le mouvement syndical qui a permis aux ouvriers d'obtenir des améliorations dans les conditions de travail...

(il) ne craint pas de plonger encore une fois plus d'un millier de familles dans la misère et, par répercussion, mettre les petits commerçants dans une situation critique du fait que les ouvriers perdent leur salaire.

Les ouvriers de chez CODER sont décidés à ne pas se laisser faire; ils l'ont prouvé ce matin en occupant l'usine et en demandant la réintégration des quatre camarades licenciés injustement.

La population de St. Marcel doit se ranger aux côtés des ouvriers de chez CODER.

Les petits commerçants ont intérêt à ce que les ouvriers de chez CODER sortent vainqueurs de ce nouveau conflit provoqué par la direction, car ils savent qu'elle était leur situation lorsque Monsieur CODER était le maître divin, et ne voudront pas qu'une telle situation leur soit encore faite.'

This attempt to appeal to the spirit of unity between all classes in the area was, however, less effective than in the past, since by 1938 the Popular Front experiment was perceived as having failed. The desire of unions to refer the conflict to an arbitrator (Chaillé) who had already shown himself less than favourable to local workers (in his arbitrations of May 1937 and July 13 1938) indicated how much more modest were the demands of 1938 than of 1936. Similarly, Daladier's speech of 21 August when he declared the need to 'remettre la France au travail' provided further indication that the Popular Front had been buried. If further proof were needed, the decision of the Cour Supérieure d'Arbitrage on 26 August to annul Chaillé's arbitration demonstrated just how far the arbitration process had moved away from serving the demands of workers.<sup>1</sup> Confronted with this hostility from employers, government, and the adverse operations of the arbitration system, unions resorted to appeals to a public opinion which was more preoccupied with the needs of national than of worker defence. The Chamber was the same one as that of May 1936, the employer was the same one whom Marseilles workers had defeated in that month, but the world was a much changed place and it seemed, by the Summer of 1938, that Coder and other employers had better incorporated the lessons of the workers' mobilisations of the previous two years than had the workers themselves.

##### 5 The Dockers' Overtime Ban, July - September 1938

(See Appendix 6 for full Chronology)

The overtime ban operated by dockers between July and

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1 For fuller details on this strike see: AD XIVM 25/141, & M6 10882, Tournier p56ff. ACC T 26, La Vie Ouvrière, 14.7.1938, 4.8.1938. 11.8.1938, and 1.9.1938. Le Midi Syndicaliste, 212, 20.11.1937.

September 1938 marked an important departure as the first offensive mobilisation by a major group of workers since 1937. The dockers were traditionally the group which established the parameters of local working-class action, and, just as their strike of February 1936 had opened up the way for the better known June 1936 strikes, so the 1938 overtime ban anticipated the national general strike of November 1938. It was the Marseilles dockers' overtime ban which persuaded Daladier that a relaxation of the forty hour week legislation would have to be imposed on the unions, with his August decrees anticipating the more brutal action later taken by Reynaud.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Antoine Prost, pp104-5 'Le Climat Social', in R. Rémond & J. Bourdin eds., Edouard Daladier, Chef de Gouvernement Avril 1938 - Septembre 1939, Paris, 1977, gives a rather different view. Prost writes of Daladier's policy on the forty hour week as follows: 'Quoi qu'il en soit, au début du mois de septembre, la politique de Daladier n'a pas encore changé radicalement. Il cherche toujours un assouplissement aux 40 heures dans les seuls secteurs nécessaires à la défense nationale. Certes, il procède désormais par voie d'autorité, et non plus par la négociation, mais il s'en tient aux industries de guerre. On est très loin de la politique qui prévaut avec Paul Reynaud et le décret-loi du 12 novembre 1938. A ce moment-là, triomphe en effet la politique préconisée par la droite, et il s'agit d'en finir avec la CGT... Il ne s'agit... plus d'apporter au système de 1936 les quelques assouplissements rendus nécessaires par l'approche de la guerre, mais d'en finir avec lui.' This view, although correct in terms of government policy, stands up only if such policies are viewed in isolation. Daladier's attempts to relax the forty hour legislation were extended far beyond the case of industries working for the purposes of national defence. His intervention in the dock strike used the pretext of national defence in an industry which was not directly involved in such defence. More important still, his actions although not calculated to smash the CGT, could have provided succour only to those who sought such an end. The use of emergency measures, such as the conscription of dockers, to end the dispute, makes Bourdè's view of events seem more convincing than Prost's. Bourdè writes that 'Le conflit des dockers marseillais préfigure la grève générale du 30 novembre 1938'. G. Bourdè, La défaite du front populaire, Paris, 1977, p93.

Despite the vigorous claims to the contrary by the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce and the press, it does not seem that the overtime ban was conceived as an attack on the Government. The motive for the action dated back to an abortive attempt to draw up a new collective contract in February 1938, and the choice of an overtime ban rather than an all-out strike is not consistent with any direct challenge to the Government. The timing of the action may be best explained by the tactical consideration that it was during the Summer months when perishable Algerian grapes and wine were being imported that an overtime ban would exert the greatest leverage on employers. Probably the union leaders knew that the hard line adopted by local employers would get only harder in the future, that the date for renewal of the collective contract in February 1939 would not constitute a particularly propitious time for a strike, and that an offensive action at a favourable moment by unions could both preempt later action by employers and succeed where a defensive action conducted later might fail. The demands of the dockers lend credence to this interpretation. They were fairly moderate, and the main wage related demand - for parity with pay in other ports - dated back to June 1936.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Other, less than plausible explanations for the strike were advanced in AD XIVM 25/139, CD to Prefect 12.7.1938, CS to CD 26.7.1938, and CD to Prefect 6.9.1938. The full demands of the dockers are contained in AD XIVM 25/139 Note of 25.7.1938 and AN F 14/15475. They may be listed as follows:

1. Wages: An increase in daily pay from 55.40 francs for 6 hours 40 minutes to 64.99 francs per day. The claim was advanced on the grounds that Marseilles dockers were paid less than those in other ports. Although it was true that only in Brest were dockers paid less than in Marseilles, had the wage claim been granted, Marseilles dockers would have become the best paid in France.

continued overleaf

continued from previous page

- 1 2. An extension of the definition of 'dirty cargoes': This was a wage related demand since such cargoes involved an additional 2 francs payment for each 3 hour 20 minute shift worked. The original list of such cargoes had been established in the Collective Contract of 1928, and dockers had attempted since then to have the definition broadened. They had succeeded in doing this first on 13.6.1936 and then later through the arbitration of 5.5.1937.
3. An increase in the 'l'indemnité de panier' for working at lunchtime; Normal dock work ceased between 11.20 am and 14.00 hours. If dockers were called upon to work during this time they were paid the normal hourly rate plus 60 per cent amounting to 13.3 francs. In addition to this they were paid an 'indemnité de panier' which brought their hourly pay to 17.30 francs. The union wanted this special payment increased to 6 francs from 4 francs since they argued that it had been unchanged since June 1936.
4. Guarantees against the sacking of shop stewards.
5. Priority in hiring for those usually working for a company.
6. Payment of wages to those dockers absent for military service.
7. Holidays: 25 days paid holiday for weekly or monthly paid dockers, and 16 days for daily paid dockers.
8. Sick Pay: Payment of full wages during three months to weekly and monthly paid dockers involved in accidents and for three weeks to daily paid dockers. The same arrangements for sick pay as well with an additional three months at half pay for monthly and weekly paid dockers, and an additional three weeks for daily paid dockers, also at half pay.
9. Redundancy payments for dockers fired without good reason, if paid monthly or weekly. Payments to be linked to period of service, and only applicable to those employed for three years or more.
10. Increase in number of workers per team.
11. A maximum of 1 hour overtime per shift.

The wide range of demands presented here should not necessarily be read to suggest a high level of militancy. They may have been introduced simply for negotiating purposes. The list of demands is interesting however for the insight it provides into working conditions in the docks. Whether the grievances were mere irritants or sources of more serious problems is impossible to say. More details on these demands may be found in: Dossiers de l'Action Populaire, 1938, pp1689-1710, 'Le conflit des dockers marseillais', G. Hourdin, 'Le conflit des dockers de Marseille' pp358-9 in Droit Social, 1938, J. Marchegay, 'La Marine Marchande et les Ports', pp1328-1337, in Revue d'économie politique, No.3-4, Mais-Aout, 1939, J. Colton, Compulsory Labor Arbitration in France, New York, 1951, pp124-7, ACC Délibérations de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille, Régistre, 1938, pp579-585, & 599-606. Antoine Olivesi, 'La situation sociale en province: Marseille et le Sud-Est', pp169-180, in R. Rémond and J. Bourdin eds., Edouard Daladier, Chef de Gouvernement, Avril 1938 - Septembre 1939, Paris, 1977, and in AD XIVM 25/77 CD to Prefect, 26.6.1936.

The dockers' union had tended to avoid large scale confrontations with employers since June 1936. Indeed, some sources suggested that the overtime ban was started precisely because of the need to allay the irritation felt by some members at the passivity of the union.<sup>1</sup> Dockers' leaders had devoted the period 1936-1938 to the twin aims of building up union strength and asserting union control over hiring and working conditions. In a casual industry where work was scarce such control could be a powerful asset in recruiting and retaining members. The very success of the union in this sphere led, however, to changes in its character, and increasingly dockers found themselves with a corporatist rather than an activist style of organisation. Activism and strike successes in 1936 had helped to establish the union but thereafter the loyalty of the 5,500 members was retained more because of the union's ability to allocate work than through enthusiasm for the organisation as such. By 1938 the low levels of attendance at union meetings testified to the change and were a source of worry to union leaders. The warm reception that one proposed remedy received - namely that non-attenders should be fined and denied work on the day following union meetings - was itself an illustration of the move towards a coercive corporatist union.<sup>2</sup> Whereas, prior to June 1936, exemplary and successful activism by union militants had won increased members and power for the union, by 1938, this same power was being used to retain an increasingly disenchanted membership. In the past, union leaders had to win the loyalty of the dockers, by 1938 they sought to impose it.

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1 AD XIVM 25/139 CS to CD 26.7.1938.

2 AD M6 10881 Report dated 12.5.1938 concerning meeting held on previous day.

The coercive role of the union was exercised most effectively over the least secure, foreign, workers. For these workers the union delegates probably represented the local 'patron' in a recasting of the traditional patron-client relations with which they had been familiar in their country of origin. The nature of the clientelistic relationship between foreign dockers and their union delegates meant, however, that the loyalty of client to patron was of a precarious and passive kind, always subject to being outbid by the offers of rival patrons in the form of employer-sponsored unions such as the SPF. French dockers on the other hand might fall into a different category. Some of them might be sincere union activists, often holding the most privileged jobs and able to offer work to members of the union, and the PC at will. Others would be dockers of long standing who, although keen to join the union in the period of its activist ascendancy of 1936, would have established their own network of contacts within the docks sufficient to guarantee them work. This latter group of dockers would be the one least exposed to coercion either from employers or unions.

Differences within the dockers were of some importance during the overtime ban. In the Summer of 1938 only 1,500 out of 6,900 dockers were French by birth. A further 1,500 had French citizenship by naturalisation, and there were 1,400 'colonials' and 2,500 foreigners. Earnings varied greatly too. There were about 2,000 privileged dockers who obtained as much and the types of work they desired and earned as much as 2,000 francs per month. The

majority of dockers were, however, employed irregularly, working an average of only three days a week and usually earning less than 700 francs a month.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, the French dockers had been guaranteed the most regular work, but as union control over hiring increased there was a tendency for work to be given to the most politically malleable elements of the workforce, the foreigners. The contrast was often drawn between 'professional' dockers who were usually of French nationality and of long standing in the port, and 'foreigners' who could gain work through showing a union and often a Communist Party card. A murder attempt made on Dubos, the Communist shop steward at the loading bay of the Ville d'Alger on the Joliette Quay, was welcomed by most 'professional' dockers since:

'DUBOS...affilié au parti communiste, n'embauchait que des membres de ce parti, la plupart étrangers, mais opposait un refus formel aux autres travailleurs qui ne pourraient présenter la carte communiste.'<sup>2</sup>

Other reports during the same month also referred to the protests from dockers that the union was showing preference to foreigners in its hiring policy.<sup>3</sup>

Union attempts to tamper with traditional hierarchies of hiring in this semi-casual labour force, accusations of favouritism being shown to foreigners and to Communist Party members all combined during the Summer strike and overtime ban. The notion that

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1 See AD XIVM 25/139 undated, unsigned note in file, and AN F14/15475. Loew, op.cit. gives details of the different lifestyles and productivity of the various ethnic groups working in the docks.

2 AD XIVM 25/139 CD to Prefect 2.8.1938 and CS to CD 8.8.1938. A reference to this incident, albeit a rather veiled one, is contained in the otherwise informative article by Nédelec in La Vie Ouvrière, 22.9.1938.

3 AD XIVM 25/140 Reports of 24 & 25.5.1938 re events at the Estier company.

a Communist-controlled trade union would show favouritism to foreigners over French dockers combined well with stories in the press that the PCF was foreign-financed and controlled, that it was seeking a war against fascism which would benefit only foreigners, and that its encouragement of the overtime ban was going to damage French economic interests. Police reports described just how divided dockers were, concerning the overtime ban:

'La plupart des Dockers professionnels français qui ne sont pas la majorité, vu le nombre d'étrangers embauchés..., l'ont désapprouvé dès le début, toutefois, il se voient contraints de suivre leurs camarades de peur de représailles....Les meneurs, ne sont pas aimés par le vrai Docker professionnel, mais par contre ils sont soutenus et même défendus s'il le fallait par l'élément étranger qui a été embauché en très grand nombre à leur detriment'.<sup>1</sup>

This division between French and foreign dockers broke down on an economic as well as a racial and political basis:

'Dans la situation actuelle qui se prolonge les avis des intéressés sont partagés. Ceux qui, dans la situation antérieure, étaient toujours embauchés en "première main" et qui travaillaient autant qu'ils le voulaient le jour comme la nuit et les jours de semaine comme les dimanches ne sont pas satisfaits. Ceux qui, au contraire, ne travaillaient qu'irrégulièrement se rejouissent de cette situation puisque la nécessité d'assurer le trafic pendant un nombre d'heures extrêmement réduit oblige les entrepreneurs à augmenter le nombre des "mains" dans toute la mesure du possible'.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst the overtime ban revealed the divisions between the dockers it was met by an increasing willingness by the Government to listen to the employers' view of events, and to concentrate attention on the damage caused to the nation's military effort by

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1 AD XIVM 25/139 CS to CD 25.7.1938.

2 Ibid.

such industrial conflict. All the parties in the dock strike declared its outcome as a victory, but from the union's point of view the wage increases that were won could never compensate for the loss of union authority over the membership, the decline in membership, and the loss of credibility in the eyes of the government and public opinion alike.

Support for the overtime ban among dockers themselves was far from unanimous, but once underway, the action quickly began to escape the control of the union. Dockers became more militant and, having started the overtime ban at the instigation of the union, many of them then proved less ready than the union itself to reach an early compromise solution.<sup>1</sup> Daladier and the employers also showed little desire for compromise. Marseilles union and Communist leaders seemed to be caught in the middle, faced with the hostility of the Government, employers, and public opinion on one side, and with the suspicion of their members on the other side. Reports compiled in the middle of August indicated a desire on the part of the UD and the PC to end the dispute quickly.<sup>2</sup> But the employers' hard line together with Daladier's attacks on the forty hour week meant that negotiations would be difficult and that any agreement would be likely to be perceived as a defeat imposed on a weakened labour movement. To allow the strike to continue, however, risked increasing divisions among the dockers, as Leftists would attempt to gain control of a movement which might then be weakened by the attempts of other dockers to restart normal working.

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1 Bally, op.cit. pp110-111.

2 AD XIVM 25/139 CC to Prefect 12.8.1938.

Foreign policy considerations further complicated the dilemma faced by the largely Communist union leaders. Government attacks on the forty hour week needed to be opposed if such leaders were to retain the confidence of their members, but such opposition had to be conducted in such a way as to ensure that it could not be seen to prejudice the common foreign policy aim of the PCF and the government themselves: the defence of France against her fascist neighbours. The Government's decision to use wartime legislation to mobilise the dockers for work meant that the overtime ban was squarely placed in the centre of the foreign policy debate. No longer were employers merely claiming the dockers' action benefitted a foreign power, but the Government too claimed that their work was vital to the defence of the nation. For union leaders to acquiesce in the mobilisation of the dockers would be read as weakness, but for them to resist would be interpreted as being unpatriotic at a time when the nation was in danger. In the light of this dilemma the confusion of local union and communist responses was understandable. It seems that dockers' union officials decided to co-operate in the mobilisation of the French workers at the same time as their fellow union officials in the UD organised meetings in opposition to the weakening of the forty hour legislation.

The succession of events in the town, the engineering workers strike and lock out, the slow progress in the dockers overtime ban, the attacks by Daladier on the forty hour week, had radicalised the UD. But for the foreign policy imperatives of the PC, the UD would have organised a general strike in Marseilles at the beginning of September in opposition to the mobilisation of the dockers and the accompanying attacks on the forty hour week. By the end of November (following

Reynaud's decree laws) the grounds for organising such a strike had increased and a general strike was now in keeping with PCF foreign policy aims, but the enthusiasm for such action among the local working-class had been reduced by their embracing of governmental foreign policy perspectives. Munich, while freeing the hands of the PCF for action, succeeded in tying those of its clients, the working-class.

The analysis just offered, however, anticipates the events on which it rests. Between 26 August and the beginning of September a bitter fight took place for the support of the dockers. De Monzie issued his decree regulating dock work on 26 August, and the following day union leaders urged their members to accept the new provisions pending new negotiations. This encouragement from union leaders seemed, at least initially, to have been successful. Dockers worked normally on 28 August for the first Sunday since the beginning of the overtime ban and they accepted the De Monzie decree at a meeting on the following day. Propaganda from the far Left had, however, taken root among the workers and was reflected in the decision on 30 August to go back on the previous decision and to refuse the new agreement. This change of mind by dockers was taken against the advice of their union leaders, who then went on actively to co-operate in the organisation of the requisitioning of dockers which ensued. Requisitioning at least promised to dispose of the irritant of anarchist and Trotskyist propagandists making headway amongst the dockers.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Examples of anarchist and Trotskyist leaflets distributed to dockers may be found in AD XIVM 25/139.

When dockers were mobilised on 26 and 27 August there were no reported cases of resistance. Gagnaire and the other union leaders visited the ships where mobilised dockers were unloading mail, and recommended that the dockers should work as normal.<sup>1</sup> Gagnaire's intervention was not, however, the decisive factor in ensuring that the mobilisation of dockers was accomplished without problems.<sup>2</sup> More important was the desire of those French dockers who were mobilised (and of many other foreign dockers) to work, and it is unlikely that a different line from Gagnaire would have both undermined this desire and induced many dockers to risk imprisonment. Enthusiasm for the overtime ban had been limited, and more militant action might have made less, rather than more, headway. If dockers were rightly cynical of the chances of achieving much through the operation of the much vaunted arbitration system, or for that matter through the influence of the Popular Front, they had even more reason to doubt the probable efficacy of any pursual of the kind of direct action tactics which the anarchists and Trotskyists were urging. Faced with the united opposition of employers, the Government, the police, army, trade union, and public opinion, successful direct action from the dockers would have required a unity of interest and purpose which they had long since lost.

The agreement eventually signed by dockers on 12 September 1938 was only a partial success. In allowing for a more equitable sharing out of work, through a system of shorter shifts, the settlement favoured those dockers who had been most enthusiastic about the overtime ban, the foreign workers. The agreement opened the way, therefore,

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1 Bally, op.cit. p111.

2 AN F 14/15475 Report by Director of the Port 9.9.1938.

for a revolt by the better paid and more privileged French dockers, thus further exacerbating the divisions within the workforce which had already been brought out during the overtime ban. In reality, however, the greatest beneficiaries from the settlement were the employers, since it gave them much greater flexibility in work organisation as well as control over the hiring and promotion of the important agents de maîtrise. The enthusiasm of the employers for the settlement and the desire of union leaders to set the seal on the agreement resulted in the surprising decision of the two sides to sign the agreement for a period until 1 March 1940. Perhaps the union officials predicted accurately the future development of French industrial relations and thought that an imperfect agreement of lengthy duration was better than the prospect of being forced to accept an even less favorable agreement after a short time.

The dockers' overtime ban had shown the extent to which working-class action could be influenced and constrained by foreign affairs. Daladier's firm line against the dockers had been influenced by his belief that the forty hour week stood in the way of French rearmament. The PC found itself divided between its conflicting foreign and domestic objectives: on the domestic front, primacy was accorded to defending the gains of June 1936, but meanwhile foreign policy considerations dictated that support be given to Daladier in his negotiations with Hitler. A meeting of Communist trade union leaders held on 9 September saw the dilemma posed for the Marseilles PC, as the bulk of their union leaders were advocating an immediate general strike against the advice of Gagnaire and Nédelec. By the end of the meeting Gagnaire and Nédelec had won over their comrades,

obliging them to forget the idea of a general strike. It seems likely, however, that this meeting saw the conflict of the domestic and the foreign strategies of the Marseilles PC, with the domination of the foreign strategy being asserted by the most highly placed and politically responsible members, Nédelec and Gagnaire. In this pre-Munich period Communist union leaders were asked to put aside their trade union instincts, to postpone industrial unrest, and to satisfy themselves with delivering stirring speeches about the forty hour week and attempting to revive moribund local Popular Front committees.<sup>1</sup>

On the eve of the Munich agreement the dockers' dispute revealed Communist trade unionists endorsing the cautious line of their opponents in Syndicats, in the vain hope that this manifestation of the Popular Front spirit at home would stave off concessions to fascists abroad.<sup>2</sup> Attempts to create a sense of national unity at this late stage, however, could only go against the longer term interests of the PCF. In late September the paramount preoccupation of the Marseilles population was the danger of war and the accompanying military mobilisation. Workers were no more ready to mobilise for a political than for a military adventure. If Daladier could deliver them from the threat of war then workers would concede more in the

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1 AN F 14/ 15475 CD to Prefect 10.9.1938.

2 AD M 6 10790 CS to CD 5.9.1938 gives one example of such attempts to revive the Popular Front. The report concerns the creation of the Popular Front Committee of Portworkers and says that it was 'une filiale du parti communiste qui lui fournit l'argent nécessaire pour sa propagande en vue de regrouper les ouvriers qui délaissent quelque peu le parti communiste' (Underlining added) Communist attempts to revive enthusiasm for the Popular Front in a more general way may be judged from the unusually high level of PC and union meetings in August and September 1938. See the list in AD M6 10789 Prefect to Interior 21.9.1938.

workplace than would otherwise have been the case. Communist attempts to mobilise resistance thereafter would be interpreted as an unwelcome prelude to a mobilisation for war, and as such these calls to activism would be both unwelcome and ineffective.<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

The events of this period demonstrated to workers that class mobilisation was facing increasingly adverse conditions. Government, employers, and the administration were all far readier to oppose working-class demands with force. Public opinion, too, had changed in that it now regarded working-class demands as being excessive, purely sectional and selfish in nature at a time when national unity was required. The procedures designed to regulate industrial conflict merely demobilised workers and gave employers the tactical advantage in increasingly bitter conflicts. These increasingly harsh conditions for mobilisation were accompanied by growing divisions within the working-class. Where for a brief time during the early Popular Front period there had been a unity of all classes against the two hundred families, now there was no longer even such a unity within the working-class. The organisations of the working-class were torn by internal strife, with the Syndicats group becoming increasingly belligerent within the UD, and rival trade unions mounting a more energetic campaign from the outside. Before the Munich Agreement, however, such disputes, revolved around the issue of Communist union leadership

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1 AD M6 10789 CD to Prefect 27.9.1938 gives an impression of the extent to which people were above all preoccupied with the threat of war. The CD reported that: 'le moral de la population est mauvais. La lenteur de l'affaire Germano-Tchéque cause une nervosité croissante d'heure en heure et...on s'attend à la mobilisation générale et à la guerre au début de la semaine prochaine...dans tout l'arrondissement où la mobilisation de quelques classes a causé une atmosphère d'angoisse dans les familles. Un affolement règne depuis environ trois jours et cet affolement se manifeste plus particulièrement aux Caisses d'Epargne où l'on voit défiler des centaines de personnes attendant leur tour.'

and had few implications for union policy orientation since both factions usually pursued a similar strategy, using militant language to obscure their relatively cautious practice. Union members were more divided by political developments. Some saw the failure of the Popular Front strategy as a reason for increased militancy, whilst others saw in it a reason for a retreat into individualistic acquiescence in the workplace. Others followed this latter path in a more active way, seeking through membership of employer sponsored unions, the advantages as individuals which the CGT had offered them as a class. The working-class had reverted to its traditional fragmentation, and where in the past, this had been concealed through mobilisation, now it was heightened. The fragmentation was political and economic: it was economic in that the unions had done little to remove or challenge hierarchies of pay and conditions in local industry, preferring instead to adapt these hierarchies to maintain control over a difficult or unwilling membership; and it was political in that the coming of war increased the salience of a 'national' appeal at the same time as a class attack was being launched on the gains of June 1936. Where the actions of 1936 had created a united working class the events of 1938 seemed to have undone this work, producing a return to the heterogeneity, albeit a restructured one, of the period prior to the Popular Front.

CHAPTER NINE: FAILED MOBILISATION, CLASS FRAGMENTATION & POLITICAL  
REINTEGRATION: SEPTEMBER 1938 TO AUGUST 1939

1 Introduction

The general strike of 30 November 1938 was the central event in the period from September 1938 to August 1939. As the first attempt at a national general strike since 12 February 1934, the failure of 30 November seemed to confirm the death of the Popular Front in the same way that the earlier strike had announced its creation. The failure of the strike of 30 November 1938 confirmed the end of a three year period of advances in working-class organisation. Already, before November, the trade union movement had been weakened in the political arena through government attacks on the forty hour week, and in the economic field through increased employer resistance to workers' demands. Indeed, it seems likely that the reason for calling such a limited general strike for the single day of 30 November 1938, was perhaps aimed less at reversing the decree laws of Reynaud than at demonstrating to employers that unions could still mobilise their members. The relatively high participation rate in Marseilles could not, however, disguise the fact that the issue of trade union power had been largely settled, and to the disadvantage of the local unions before November 1938. Just as the strikes by Marseilles dockers and engineering workers in 1935 and 1936 had shown the possibilities for united working-class action, so, their defeats in 1938 had demonstrated the extent to which a hostile Government and militant employers' movement

could reverse previous gains. Government use of troops and emergency legislation in the dockers' overtime ban had already demonstrated its resolve to end disputes, and indeed prefigured the November strike when many workers would act as the dockers had done, and respond to mobilisation orders by working normally.

Within the trade union structure, too, Marseilles anticipated later national events. The consequences of 30 November in Marseilles opened up the way for extensive bloodletting in the UD and UL, with the Syndicats movement leaving the UL and two rival unions of seamen being established. The trade union splits which occurred nationally in September 1939 had already emerged in Marseilles by the Spring as a consequence of the defeat of the general strike and the subsequent lockouts having come so close on the heels of the defeats of the Summer of 1938.

If it was often the case that local events anticipated national ones by a few months, this was not true for the last major attempt at mobilisation in Marseilles before the outbreak of war. The wholesale firing of municipal employees in the Summer of 1939 was the only issue around which local trade union organisations could succeed in mobilising some support in 1939. The mobilisation of support promised to be impressive and but for the outbreak of war this promise would have been realised. The issue at stake was, however, one which represented a return to traditional Marseilles politics rather than opening the way to a new wave of working-class mobilisation. The defence of a corrupt municipality, and of the right

of a trade union to secure employment in that municipality for its members in return for promises of political support, was hardly the stuff of which class-conscious mobilisation was constructed. Clearly, council workers needed to defend their livelihoods, but the resistance offered to the new broom being used to sweep out the more corrupt elements of local administration, merely confirmed the impression already shared by many, that the Popular Front, both locally and nationally, had not been a valiant ideological crusade, but rather a corrupt and inefficient attempt to satisfy the inflated demands of an idle working-class. Resistance to sackings of council workers took on, therefore, the aspect of a purely sectional and local campaign and underlined the diminished stature of the local trade union movement; it was reduced from its role as a major component in a dynamic and broad-based coalition to that of a rather shaky alliance of interest groups squeezed between the contradictory demands of national, class, and individual aspirations.

## 2 The Background to the Strike of 30 November 1938

The desire of almost all the most influential organisations for confrontation was rewarded by the general strike of November 1938. Employers hoped that a general strike launched by the workers against the Government would provide a good opportunity to hit out at union organisation within their plants, thus removing from the workforce those elements whose presence was neither economically necessary nor politically desirable. Meanwhile, Government, primarily in the person of Reynaud, hoped that opposition to the November decree laws would justify firm repressive measures against the unions in the name

of national security. The Communist Party, from its strong position within the trade union movement, also sought a confrontation. In the minds of party leaders the Munich Agreement had undone any claims that Daladier may have had to represent the Popular Front and freed them from their loyalty to a man who, having refused to declare war on Germany, used the resulting international calm to wage war on the PCF at home. The decree laws provided the Communists with the pretext they sought to mobilise the working class against the Government. Munich had been an ineffectual (and even counterproductive) rallying cry in this battle, whereas the November decree laws permitted a long planned assault on Daladier's Government to be launched in the name of defending the material (but perhaps above all - the symbolic) gains of June 1936. Moderates within the CGT did not want such a confrontation with the Government, fearing that in the event of success the credit would accrue exclusively to the Communists within their ranks, whereas failure would severely damage the movement as a whole. Moderate opinion was, however, squeezed on all sides, and, albeit with a heavy heart, Jouhaux was obliged to follow the analysis of the ex-unitaires within the CGT: confrontation was inevitable.<sup>1</sup>

With so many groups pushing towards confrontation there was little time to stop and enquire what the attitude of those workers who would be called upon to strike would be? The clash of organisations was so great that it is possible that the amour propre of trade union leaders counted for more in their decision to go ahead and strike than

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1 For further information on attitudes to this strike see the contributions of Fridenson & Bruhat to the volume edited by R. Rémond & J. Bourdin, La France et les Français en 1938-1939, Paris, 1978. Fridenson's references to the case of Renault (p146) are particularly pertinent to Marseilles. See also G. Bourdè op.cit. and F. Herbette, L'Expérience marxiste en France, 1936-1938, Paris, 1959.

did their assessment of the chances of success. Indeed, the stakes which were being played were so high - the reversal of decree laws on which a Government had staked its reputation - that it is difficult to know what those trade unionists involved would have regarded as success. The overthrow of the Government? Revolution? Such aims were hardly likely to be achieved through a one day general strike. If the aim was merely the defence of the forty hour week then the general strike could perhaps have succeeded. But, as many commentators have correctly pointed out, the forty hour week was not merely a simple provision, but rather a highly significant symbol for trade unions, employers and the Government alike. An attack on the forty hour week was intended and interpreted as an attack on the political, as well as the economic, position of trade unions and the working-class.<sup>1</sup>

Marseilles employers did not wait until 30 November 1938 before launching their attack. After all, the defeat of the dockers in the Summer of 1938 had shattered the myth of the invincibility of the Marseilles working-class. From the Autumn onwards employers in Marseilles took a more militant stand in dealings with trade unions. The newly militant mood of employers was matched by that of those Communist led unions which sought actions in protest at the Munich agreement. The membership was not, however, enthusiastic at the prospect of campaigning against the Munich agreement, and it seems likely that divisions within the union movement over foreign policy

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1 A. Prost 'Le climat social' in R. Rémond & J. Bourdin, Edouard Daladier, Chef de Gouvernement Avril 1938-Septembre 1939, Paris, 1977, p111. See also P. Reynaud, Au coeur de la mêlée, 1930-1945, Paris, 1951, pp289-292.

may have weakened their ability to mobilise workers. At a meeting of the Syndicat d'Alimentation in September 1938 the divisions within, and attacks on, the trade union movement were apparent. The meeting was addressed by Billoux and Nédelec and it was claimed that, despite his absence, Tasso had promised to attend. Whether or not the claim was true, Tasso's absence from the meeting was greeted with catcalls and whistles from the audience, thus demonstrating the strains within the Popular Front alliance.<sup>1</sup> Billoux and Nédelec spoke about the attacks of employers on both the forty hour week and on the rights of unions in factories. Nédelec criticised employers who sacked workers' delegates, and added; 'qu'à l'heure actuelle il faut être courageux pour accepter le titre de délégué'.<sup>2</sup> Billoux asserted, however, that courage alone was insufficient and promised the prospect of direct action:

'Si le gouvernement ne veut plus défendre la loi de quarante heures, qui seule assurera la vraie défense nationale, nous irons, nous, la défendre dans la rue, comme les camarades russes ont, jadis, défendu leurs droits'.<sup>3</sup>

The attention of the union movement locally was not restricted to the defence of the interests and rights of French, or even of Russian, workers, but extended to an interest in the position of Czechs as well. The UD issued a declaration in favour of the rights of the Czechs on 30 September and this move was followed by similar ones from the Communist-run unions of dockers, railwaymen, and chemical workers in the days following.<sup>4</sup> Attempts meanwhile by teachers', shopworkers', and postal workers' unions to express their approval within the UD of Daladier for having saved the European peace, were

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1 Marseille-Matin, 23.9.1938. Cutting in AD M6 11377.

2 AD M6 10789 CD to Prefect 23.9.1938.

3 Marseille-Matin, 23.9.1938. Cutting in AD M6 11377

4 RM 30.9.1938 in AD M6 11377 for UD declaration. See LPP 8.10.1938 for the declarations of chemical and dockworkers' union. LPP 21.10.1938 quoted the railwaymen's solidarity statement that:

met with hostility and opposition from Communist unionists.<sup>1</sup> This division over foreign policy objectives meant that the Marseilles union movement was plagued by factionalism even before the 30 November strike. Afterwards, the tendency to split would be even more pronounced.

Despite employer attacks and Communist urging there were no strikes in Marseilles in the two months after the Munich agreement. It seems likely that because unions became more militant whilst their members deserted them over foreign policy issues a curious kind of stalemate in union employer relations may have emerged, with unions being reluctant to try and mobilise support around their increasingly violent demands, and employers being sufficiently impressed by the violence of union language not to try and press home their advantage. The relative success in mobilising workers on 30 November, however, when combined with the concerted and decisive response of local employers to that strike, illustrated the fact that this stalemate had been an inherently unstable one.

If the feelings of workers played little part in the uneasy industrial stalemate which existed in Marseilles during October and November, the same was true of the event which upset this stalemate. The decree laws which Reynaud published on 12-13 November did not produce any spontaneous outbursts of fury from the Marseilles working-class. Whilst elsewhere in France the PCF was doing all in its power to encourage workers to refuse the implementation of

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continued from previous page

4 'Comme Français, comme républicains, comme pacifistes, comme antifascistes (nous souffrons)...cruellement de l'injuste sacrifice imposé à votre pays.

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1 AD M6 10789 CC to Prefect 1.10.1938 reporting meeting of 30.9.1938.

the decree laws, in Marseilles there was very little reaction. The violent strikes at Communist bastions in the Paris suburbs and the Nord between 18-25 November certainly had no parallel in Marseilles.<sup>1</sup> Reports in Le Temps suggested that Marseilles was at boiling point between 22-25 November, but there is little evidence to suggest that this was anything more than an ill-founded rumour.

On 25 November the CGT took the decision for the general strike of the 30th. Prior to this decision there were few attempts in Marseilles to organise serious resistance to the new decree laws. The issues which probably worried the greatest number of workers were the decrees reinstating the six day week (even if the number of weekly hours worked remained the same) and the reduction in rates for, and relaxation in controls on, overtime. The most militant union, the Syndicat des Métaux, announced its attitude towards the decree laws on 21 November when it ordered its members to try not to work overtime, and if it was unavoidable, to do such overtime only at the old, higher, rates.<sup>2</sup> Later reports suggested, however, that even in this highly unionised industry some workers had been obliged to accept additional overtime, managing to hold out only for such overtime to be worked during a five rather than a six day week.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, where the length of the working week was at stake it seems that the provisions of the decree laws, making Saturday working mandatory, went beyond the desires of many local employers, and needlessly antagonised many workers. This hostility on the part of the workers did not lead to

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1 See Bourdé, op.cit. Chapter Six for details on these strikes.

2 LPP 21.11.1938.

3 LPP 25.11.1938.

many incidents though. In the Chemical industry the decree laws meant that factories previously working five eight hour days were suddenly forced to change, and work five days of seven hours each followed by a Saturday with five hours work. Resistance was encountered at the Kuhlman factory at l'Estaque and at a varnish factory in the Endoume quarter of Marseilles, but these examples of worker resistance were swiftly and peacefully ended by the intervention of the police.<sup>1</sup> At another factory workers insisted on continuing to work an eight hour day and no action was taken against them. In general, the new working arrangements provoked little violent opposition, and in those factories where they suited neither employers nor unions representations were made to the authorities for a relaxation in the law. According to the Prefect there were ten such factories and he informed the Minister of Labour that his promise to request a relaxation of the law on six day working in some factories, had been given only after trade unions had promised him in exchange to abandon their opposition to the new work regime in other factories.<sup>2</sup> A revised decree from the Minister of Labour on 25 November met the Prefect's requests, since it allowed a five day week to be continued in those industries having no direct contact with the public. By 28 November the Prefect was able to report that this new provision:

'paraît avoir mettre fin à toute agitation en supprimant la cause du conflit. Cette mesure a puissamment contribué à maintenir le calme dans l'ensemble des établissements industriels de mon département.'<sup>3</sup>

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1 The actions at Kuhlmann may also have been motivated out of sympathy with the strike by workers in the same company at Aubervilliers

2 AD XIV M 25/119 Note by Prefect 23.11.1938

3 AD XIV M 25/203 Prefect to Ministère du Travail 28.11.1938.

Calm in the factories did not mean that local unions were not doing all in their power to ensure that the strike of 30 November would be a success. A demonstration was called by the UD for 26 November but at the last minute was cancelled due to the Prefectoral ban on demonstrations and a meeting was held in its place. The meeting was addressed by many of the most important union, Communist and Socialist (fewer of this last category) leaders and despite union claims that 80,000 people had attended, a figure of 20,000 would seem more reasonable.<sup>1</sup> A low attendance at this meeting would be consistent with events in the following days which preceded the strike. There were relatively few meetings and the local labour movement did not give the impression of being very active. There were also signs of opposition to the proposed strike: 1,200 Bank workers met on 29 November to decide on their attitude to the strike and a strong majority voted against participating on the 30th.<sup>2</sup> A joint meeting of dockers and agents de maîtrise, held on the same day voted in favour of the strike, but police reports suggested that had the agents de maîtrise been allowed to hold a separate meeting they, too, would have voted against participation.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Eynard, the leader of the gasworkers union issued a statement that his members would achieve the remarkable feat of continuing production of gas and of carrying out all the necessary safety measures, whilst they

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1 LPP 26 and 27.11.1938 give accounts favourable to the union side. AD XIV M 25/135 Report of 26.11.1938 suggested that only 10,000 were present. It seems reasonable to assume that police would not have underestimated those present by more than one half.

2 AD XIV M 25/133 CC to Prefect 30.11.1938.

3 AD XIV M 25/133 CC to CD 29.11.1938. The accuracy of this report was confirmed later by Cornago, the union leader. Speaking on 19.7.1939 Cornago said that 700 of the 780 agents de maitrise had in fact worked on 30 November 1938. AD M6 10792 CD 21.7.1939.

were participating in the strike. Eynard explained that this seemingly contradictory policy was being adopted because while gasworkers wanted to join in the strike against the decree laws they had no desire to harm their customers.<sup>1</sup> Eynard and other union leaders in the public utilities were spared from any further such agonising when the Government mobilised its agents and requisitioned all civil servants for 30 November. From 8am on 29 November the main Marseilles railway station was occupied by Senegalese sharpshooters and soldiers from an infantry regiment. From 10pm on that day Le Petit Provençal reported that 'tous les centres vitaux de la ville: usine à gaz, usine d'électricité, central téléphonique et radiophonique étaient à leur tour placés sous la surveillance de l'armée et de la garde mobile.'<sup>2</sup>

The lack of enthusiasm which some unions showed towards the strike, and the measures taken by the Prefect to assure the 'liberté du travail', were accompanied by a propaganda campaign against the strike. Le Petit Marseillais of 28 November gave prominent coverage to Daladier's statement that:

'Vendredi 25 Novembre, à l'annonce de la prochaine signature d'une déclaration commune de la France et de l'Allemagne pour le respect mutuel et l'intégrité de leurs frontières a répondu dans les vingt quatre heures la menace de grève générale. Le prétexte, c'est de protester contre les décrets-lois, contre la destruction des lois sociales.'<sup>3</sup>

This view of the strike as being prepared by forces hostile to peace and owing allegiance to foreign powers was also advanced by the local branch of the PPF. Sabiani issued an appeal against the strike on 29 November.

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1 LPP 29.11.1938.

2 LPP 30.11.1938.

3 Le Petit Marseillais, 28.11.1938 quoted by Tournier op.cit.p165.

'Il est temps que les Français se ressaisissent, que tous les partis nationaux s'unissent pour qu'enfin un front populaire d'ordre et de paix soit opposé au bolchévisme et à l'anarchie,'<sup>1</sup>

and this plea was joined by those of the CFTC and SPF unions urging their members not to participate in the strike. Even Le Petit Provençal, generally favourable to local union demands, made clear its opposition to the strike and its fear of failure should it go ahead. The newspaper suggested that the strike was 'premature' and that there were still possibilities of negotiations which had not been exhausted.<sup>2</sup> On the day of the strike itself the newspaper changed its tone to one of rather weary resignation, expressing the hope that: 'Que du moins l'épreuve ne soit trop rude ni trop dommageable à la classe ouvrière et au pays.'<sup>3</sup>

Campaigns against the strike fell on fairly fertile ground. Workers were still loyal to their unions, but this loyalty was often given unwillingly. A report of 23 November suggested that many workers were thoroughly fed up with their trade unions and that:

'Dans les conversations privées avec les ouvriers, il apparaît que ceux-ci soient excédés par la tyrannie syndicale mais ils ne peuvent faire autrement que de s'y soumettre. Tel est l'état d'esprit de la majorité de la classe ouvrière en ce moment.'<sup>4</sup>

A few days later, on 27 November, when local trade unions were campaigning actively for the strike the same source reported that:

' parmi de nombreux ouvriers, cet ordre de grève est loin d'être accueilli avec satisfaction mais la tyrannie des délégués de chantiers appartenant pour la plupart au parti communiste est si grande que les ouvriers marcheront pour ne pas avoir d'histoire avec leur syndicat.'<sup>5</sup>

If this report is to be believed then it seems that participation in

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1 Le Petit Marseillais, 29.11.1938 quoted by A. Olivesi, p171 in R. Redmond & J. Bourdin, La France et les Français en 1938-1939, Paris 1978.

2 Quoted by Olivesi in *ibid.*

3 Le Petit Provençal quoted by Olivesi p172. *loc. cit.*

4 AD XIV M 25/135 CS to Prefect 23.11.1938 quoted by Tournier *op. cit.* p95.

5 AD XIV M 25/135 CS to Prefect 27.11.1938 quoted by Tournier *ibid.*

the strike would be linked to the rate of unionisation in each plant, and that union discipline rather than ideological conviction would be the decisive factor in the success of the strike. In the long term, however, such discipline was based either on a record of union success or else on an extraordinary degree of community or political solidarity. The spectacular defeat of the November strike meant that, thereafter, unions could not rely on the effectiveness of such appeals to workers' sense of loyalty to their organisations.

### 3 The General Strike of 30 November 1938

The general strike of 30 November 1938 was the third general strike to take place in just over four years. Unlike the strike of 12 February 1934 or the more diffuse (but essentially general) strike of June 1936, the strike of November 1938 did not take place within the context of a benign or indifferent State. The strike of 1938 was more reminiscent of that of May 1920 than it was of the more recent past. As in 1920, workers participating in the General Strike of November 1938 were very clear that their action was directed as much against the State as against employers. The situation was, however, even more difficult than in 1920, since in 1938 (and paradoxically as a result of the Popular Front) the State was more powerful, more extensive (because of nationalisations) and drew its legitimacy from a much wider section of the community than had been the case in 1920.<sup>1</sup> Confronted with the opposition of the State, employers, and much of public opinion, participation in the 1938

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1 Cf. G. Bourd 's remark that the earlier major strikes of 1934 and 1936 had in fact only succeeded because of the neutrality of the State apparatus, 'La gr ve du 30 novembre 1938', Le mouvement social, 55, 1966, p91.

general strike required as much courage as earlier strikes had required hope. Workers awoke on 30 November to find the town of Marseilles guarded by an impressive force of police, gardes mobiles and gendarmes, who were posted around the most important installations and were also manning sixty specially prepared locations.<sup>1</sup> After the strike was over it was estimated that between 30 November and 1 December 31 people had been arrested in Marseilles for 'entraves à la liberté du travail'.<sup>2</sup> This use of the law against the strikers of 1938 underlined how much the situation had changed compared with 1936.<sup>3</sup>

The bitterness of the strike makes it more than usually difficult to judge its extent, because each side indulged in extensive propaganda and misinformation before, during and after the strike. Strike statistics are a minefield at the best of times, and on this strike they are both more plentiful and misleading than is usually the case. Le Petit Provençal informed readers on the day following the strike that, 'Dans l'ensemble, la vie de la cité n'a pas connu de ralentissement'<sup>4</sup>, whilst Rouge-Midi replied in its headline that:

'La presse aux ordres de la radio multipliant les fausses nouvelles veulent cacher ce que chacun a vu  
MARSEILLE ET LA REGION PROVENCALE ONT ARRETE 24 HEURES  
TOUTE VIE ACTIVE ET TOUTE PRODUCTION.'<sup>5</sup>

There is little doubt that the claims of the Communist

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1 A. Olivesi, in Rémond and Bourdin op.cit. p173.

2 Tournier, op.cit. p110.

3 See Chapter 7 p267 for details of arrests in 1936.

4 LPP 1.12.1938.

5 R-M, 2.12.1938.

newspaper concerning the strike were unfounded, and leading local Communists at the time of the strike and since then have admitted that the 30 November was a failure.<sup>1</sup> What is clear, however, is that Marseilles on 30 November 1938 must have had a very different appearance from normal. Even if most of the cafés, restaurants, hotels, stores, banks and offices were open, the fact that tramdrivers responded to their requisition order by going to the garages and remaining there until lunchtime before starting work, meant that the streets must have looked very empty, and, that for those people who wanted to go to work, they would have been faced with the lack of trams. The functioning of the trams had always been seen as a key issue in the success of strikes in Marseilles, and it seems likely that the strong tradition of trade unionism amongst the tramworkers helped them respond to their mobilisation orders with such an efficiently executed, and united demonstration of disobedience.<sup>2</sup> Given the absence of trams the strike might have been expected to be more extensive in Marseilles. The first police reports suggested that in the major industries two-thirds of the workforce had worked. This estimate was, however, based on a sample of factories employing only 61,500 workers, and it is likely that in many of the other, smaller factories, the level of participation in the strike was lower.<sup>3</sup> The counting of 23,500 strikers in a town the size of Marseilles did not amount to a very impressive demonstration of strength. Support did, however, spread beyond the factories, and, according to one report, about 1,000 small shops were closed for the day of the strike.<sup>4</sup>

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1 A. Olivesi, in Rémond and Bourdin op.cit. p173.

2 Tramworkers were very highly unionised, as well as being one of the key groups in determining the success of a strike movement.

3 The figure of 23,500 strikers in a workforce of 61,500 comes from AD XIV M 25/133 CC to Prefect 1.12.1938.

4 AD XIV M 25/133 CC to Prefect 1.12.1938.

The strike of the tramworkers was backed by the action of taxi and bus drivers. According to a police report taxi drivers managed an almost complete strike in the morning, before some of them returned to work in the afternoon, whilst about seventy per cent of bus drivers struck.<sup>1</sup> The main railway stations in Marseilles saw some of the strongest concentrations of police, and their presence, combined with the mobilisation of train drivers by the Government, ensured that no train drivers went on strike. Yet in the offices and workshops of the railway company there was a strike, estimated by Rouge-Midi to have involved seventy to eighty per cent of the workers, but only thirty per cent according to police sources.<sup>2</sup> In the port there was a more confused picture. Rouge-Midi attempted to give the impression that all the dockers had struck. It was the case that most, if not all, of the unionised dockers did go on strike (4,300 according to Rouge-Midi), but during the course of the day there were between 500 and 1,500 other dockers to take their place.<sup>3</sup> Sailors played no part in the strike and worked as usual insofar as they were able to given the partial strike of dockers.<sup>4</sup>

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1 AD XIV M 25/134 31.12.1938.

2 RM 2.12.1938 & AD XIV M 25/134 31.12.1938.

3 RM 2.12.1938. Olivesi, in Rémond and Bourdin op.cit. claims p174 that 1,500 dockers worked in the morning and that 1,000 did in that afternoon. AD XIV M 25/136 contains a labour inspector's report that 500 dockers worked whereas a police report in AD XIVM 25/134 suggests that only 100 dockers joined the strike. Another report suggests by contrast that 2,000 out of 4,000 dockers struck. AD XIVM 25/133 1.12.1938. ACC T 26 contains a letter from Fraissinet giving details concerning his hiring of 102 men to work on the day of the strike.

4 RM 2.12.1938 claimed that sailors went on strike, but this report is not substantiated by any other source.

Amongst Government and local authority employees the strike was a spectacular failure, with only one or two per cent participating.<sup>1</sup> Teachers seemed more ready to strike than did other groups of public employees but even they managed at best only a strike rate of nine to ten per cent in the Marseilles primary schools.<sup>2</sup> This low participation rate in the strike from civil servants resulted from a variety of factors. Amongst such factors must be included the close surveillance to which all Government employees were subjected on 30 November, the fact that civil servants' trades unions had been heavily involved in the factional struggles against Communists - who were in turn seen to be the most enthusiastic supporters of the strike, and the fact that, although among the most ardent supporters of the Popular Front, civil servants had never had their 'June 1936' and stood, therefore, to lose less from attacks on the gains of that month.<sup>3</sup> The provisions of the decree laws, on overtime, the forty hour week, and on the position of factory shop stewards, were of much more relevance to workers in the private than in the public sector.

In the private industry the success of the strike was generally greater but also more variable. Almost all (96 per cent)

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1 AD XIVM 25/134 31.12.1938.

2 Cf. Tournier op.cit. p110. Also see AD XIVM 25/133 CC to Prefect 1.12.1938 suggesting that 40 teachers and 210 postal workers joined the strike.

3 AD XIVM 25/133 contains detailed reports on absenteeism among civil servants. Civil servants' trades unions had manifested the widespread feeling of frustration with successive governments during the two years following on from June 1936. Civil servants may have felt that they had given full support to Blum and Co., that they had behaved responsibly, but that their patience had won them fewer material benefits than workers in private industry had gained through strikes. Civil servants though, still had greater job security than did workers in private industry.

of the 2,000 Marseilles shoemakers participated in the strike.<sup>1</sup> In other sectors, however, reports were more contradictory. Early police reports (and those destined for publication) suggested that 5,000 of the 12,000 engineering workers, 3,500 of the 10,000 chemical workers, and 2,000 of the 16,000 building workers had participated in the strike.<sup>2</sup> But later, and probably more reliable, reports gave a rather different impression, suggesting that 80 per cent of engineering workers, seventy per cent of chemical workers, and 60 per cent of building workers had struck.<sup>3</sup> Confusion over the success of the strike was in part deliberate, as an attempt to minimise its impact, and in part the result of incomplete reporting. Estimates of the extent of the strike in the engineering and building industries, for example, varied according to the number of factories and sites examined. Trade union sources claimed that success in the engineering industry was complete, because they recognised only the existence of 8,000 engineering workers in the town of Marseilles. Since the engineering trade union claimed a membership of over 11,000 members in Marseilles in 1938, a 100 per cent strike rate could clearly not have been achieved with only 8,000 strikers.<sup>4</sup> One detailed study of 35 engineering works, employing about 10,500 workers, showed that 66 per cent of the workers had struck on 30 November.<sup>5</sup> Even this, the most detailed evidence on the extent of the engineering strike, was incomplete, and the global figure conceals the very great variations between factories. Amongst the three largest

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1 AD XIVM 25/136 Report of Labour Inspector.

2 AD XIVM 25/133 CC to Prefect 1.12.1938.

3 AD XIVM 25/134 CD to Prefect 31.12.1938.

4 VO 8.12.1938 claimed that 8,000 Marseilles engineers had struck. Rouge-Midi 2.12.1938 claimed that there had been a total shutdown in the engineering sector. The figure for trade union membership is from Rapport aux Syndicats...1938. G. Bourd , La d faite du front populaire, Paris, 1977, pp328-329 gives a table of data on engineers' strikes in major French towns.

5 AD XIVM 25/136 CC to Prefect 5.12.1938.

factories alone the success of the strike varied enormously. At Coder, employing 1,200 workers there was only a 23 per cent strike rate, whereas at Aciéries du Nord with 1598 workers there was a 59 per cent strike rate, and at the factory of the Société Provençale des Chantiers Navales on the Chemin de Madrague employing 1,720 workers there was a 97 per cent strike rate.<sup>1</sup>

The notably low strike rate at Coder suggests that workers' enthusiasm for strikes may have been worn down during the long and inconclusive battles of the previous summer.

Building workers' participation in the strike varied almost as much as did that of engineering workers. The fear of unemployment and the fragmented nature of the workforce made it a difficult industry to mobilise from above. According to a labour inspector the strike had no success on sites employing less than 15 men, was about 50 per cent successful on sites employing between 15 and 50 men, and totally successful on the largest sites.<sup>2</sup> It appears likely that the larger sites tended to be better organised by trade unions and these variations in the participation in the strike would have reflected differing levels of union organisation and the greater ease of united action on larger sites. Building workers were among those most affected by the decree laws. In a seasonal industry the issue of the amount of, and pay for, overtime work was of key importance. Similarly, the casual nature of much building employment meant that trade union and delegates rights were important if employers were not

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1 AD XIVM 25/133 CC to Prefect 6 & 7.12.1938. The initial impression from these figures, of a close correlation between plant size and strike participation, is not borne out for the whole range of factories.

2 AD XIVM 25/136 Report of Labour Inspector.

to be able to hire and fire workers at will. For all these reasons the police reports suggesting that building workers were very committed to their trade union, seem plausible.<sup>1</sup>

The preponderance of Italian workers and workers of Italian origin in the building industry meant, too, that ethnic solidarity could help reinforce that provided by the trade union itself.<sup>2</sup>

Building workers' receptiveness to trade union complaints about the proposed new terms for overtime did not, however, mean that they were ready to refuse entirely the opportunity which overtime provided for increasing their earnings.<sup>3</sup>

In other industries, too, the strike provided an opportunity for the testing of the strength of trade unionism and the climate in each factory. All the workers in the textile sector were reported to have struck, and this success may in part have been due to energetic leadership provided by the union leader Alix André, and also, perhaps more importantly, to the high morale of the industry following the successful strike of 700 dyers and launderers in September 1938.<sup>4</sup> In the major food processing plant of the town, the St. Louis sugar refinery, the strike was followed by nine tenths of the workers, and, once again this may have been the result of the activities of a particularly energetic local union leader, Morrotti. For sugar workers though, the incentive to strike was provided not so much by memories of past victories but rather in anticipation of future hardships, since the two refineries in Marseilles were practising short-time working, and the cheaper overtime which

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1 AD XIVM 25/134 CD 31.12.1938.

2 *ibid.* refers to Italian building workers.

3 *ibid.*

4 Details from Tournier *op.cit.* p180.

the decree laws authorised might have been perceived as a danger to the jobs of some workers. Such a fear was, in fact, proved to be justified, as one of the two refineries was closed in early 1939.<sup>1</sup> In the chemical and oils industry the success of the strike varied greatly between factories. Unionisation was generally high in this sector but it seems that this alone was an insufficient condition to guarantee high participation in the strike. The strike of the Spring of 1938 had still left its scars on this industry, with many of the strikers still without work by November. It seems fair to assume that past failure may have weighed heavily on the minds of workers in the industry and dissuaded them from participating in such a difficult strike as 30 November 1938 threatened to be. The very mixed nature of the workforce in this industry must have made union solidarity difficult to sustain after the élan provided by a series of strike victories had been broken. The many North African workers in the industry meant that a large element of the workforce was doubly vulnerable in undertaking a strike - exposed both to the reprisals of employers and of the State - in a way which French workers were not. For these reasons some factories which had previously seen very militant strikes were not very much affected by the strike of 30 November. The most notable example of such a factory is the case of Rocca, Tasy & de Roux, prominent in earlier strikes, where on 30 November several members of the PC factory cell joined their colleagues in working as usual.<sup>2</sup>

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1 For more details on the Marseilles sugar industry see, L. Pierrein, Industries traditionnelles du port de Marseille. Le cycle des sucres et des oléagineux, 1870-1958, Marseille, 1975.

2 AD XIVM 25/134 CD 31.12.1938.

#### 4 The Consequences of the General Strike

'La France sait maintenant, par expérience, qu'elle est gouvernée...

'Pour elle, une expérience est close: celle de l'anarchie...

'Celle de 1936 a définitivement pris fin hier, à l'instant où les Français de toute condition se sont rendu compte que l'ordre général était respecté, que la liberté de chacun était assurée et que partout il se manifestait une autorité et une seule.'<sup>1</sup>

Bulletin Quotidien de la Société d'Etudes et  
d'Informations économiques  
1 December 1938

This comment amounts to a realistic assessment of the outcome of the general strike. The strike had been undertaken as a trial of strength between the Government and employers on one side and trade unions and the parties of the Left on the other. The strike was, therefore, essentially a political battle, and willingness of groups of workers to engage in it was determined by their political opinions and assessment of the political situation, within their factories, and within the country and the continent as a whole. The wide variation in the extent of participation in the strike served to underscore the degree to which, even after four years of increasingly 'national' politics, the willingness to participate in a nationally-organised political strike could be determined by essentially local factors. The degree of union organisation, the memory of past strike victories or defeats, an awareness of the militancy of local employers, or the threat of redundancy hanging over a workforce, all these factors entered into workers' considerations of whether or not to participate in a strike to which employers, the

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<sup>1</sup> F. Herbette, op.cit. p321.

State, and much of public opinion was opposed. The weight of the forces massed against the strikers meant that, having undertaken an unsuccessful strike, many workers felt obliged to increase the stakes of the game and respond with further strikes when employers decided to lock them out of the factories.

In Marseilles, the general strike lasted not one day but, in some sectors, up to two weeks. In the textile, engineering, and chemical sectors strikes continued until 17 December. These strikes were, in part, attributable to employers enforcing lock-outs, but also to the propaganda of the local Communist Party which insisted that prolonging the strikes would force the Government to resign.<sup>1</sup> This analysis was proved to be wrong, since continuing strikes and lock-outs weakened the trade unions far more than they did the Government. Such actions do, however, provide an illustration of the determination and solidarity of some groups of workers in the Marseilles labour force.

Marseilles employers were, however, not only more determined and united in their approach to the general strike, they also had the advantage of support from the Government. It was this knowledge of the Government's support which helped the Société Pour la Défense du Commerce in orchestrating a campaign for employers to rehire strikers only on the basis of individual requests. This move was designed both to allow for the filtering of 'disruptive elements' from the labour force, and also as a way of reasserting the authority of employers against that of unions. The widespread application of this formula for rehiring strikers emphasised the increased unity of

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1 AD XIVM 25/134 CD 31.12.1938

employers at a time when trade union unity seemed more shaky than at any time since the unification of 1936. Employers' moves against strike leaders were often indistinguishable from reprisals against the CGT. The coal importers' federation, for example, informed the Chamber of Commerce of Marseilles of its determination:

'de ne pas réembaucher les dirigeants syndicalistes ou révolutionnaires ayant entraîné leurs camarades dans la grève,'<sup>1</sup>

and in consequence to remove recognition from the CGT union, and to lay off all their workers for two days.

Lock-outs, layoffs and sackings were the most frequent measures taken by employers in the first days of December. The engineering firm of Coder operated a selective lock-out after 30 November 1938, refusing to accept back those workers who had struck.<sup>2</sup> According to Le Petit Provençal, on 1 December 10,000 engineering workers, 1,600 textile workers, and several thousand workers in other industries were locked out by their employers. In the textile industry the lock-out spread over the following days, with additional firms locking out their workers.<sup>3</sup> In the engineering industry, after total or selective lock-outs for a few days, the continued absence of workers was then attributable more to the refusal of unions to allow their members to make individual requests for rehiring than it was to the action of employers. Where employers had attempted to use a lock-out as a reply to a strike, the stronger unions such as the

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1 ACC T 26 Note dated 2.12.1938.

2 LPP 2.12.1938 reported that 900 of the 1,200 Coder workers had been allowed to return to work.

3 LPP 2 & 4.12.1938.

engineers replied, in turn, with a further strike. Police reports on factories in the engineering industry which normally employed 10,569 workers, showed that only 34, 57, 61 and 63 per cent of the workforce were present on 30 November, 5, 6, and 7 December respectively.<sup>1</sup> A sample of Marseilles industry as a whole showed that on 8 December 23 factories employing 8,337 workers, were still closed by strikes and a further thirteen factories were subject to partial strikes involving 2,355 of their total workforces of 4,520.<sup>2</sup> By mid-December most of these strikes had ended, but few strikers had been rehired. Further strikes in these conditions proved the determination of some workers, but they also strained union discipline severely. The case of the SPCN shipyard at La Ciotat provides a fairly typical example of the kinds of pressures which arose between unions and their members in this period. The SPCN union took a stand against the employers' demand that strikers make individual requests for rehiring, but this union advice was rejected in a secret ballot, and the workers chose to make individual requests to management rather than depending on the union to obtain collective rehiring.<sup>3</sup>

Defeats often constitute a difficult time for trade unions, and when as in Marseilles in December 1938, such defeats were accompanied by wide spread sackings, the problem is compounded. Employers had planned reprisals against strikers for some time, and many companies requested police protection during the first few days

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1 AD XIVM 25/133 CC 6 & 7.12.1938.

2 AD XIVM 25/144 Prefect's note dated 8.12.1938.

3 LPP 6.12.1938. Of the 600 workers voting 500 were in favour of individual requests to the employer, 100 were opposed, and 50 abstained.

of December when they intended to exclude certain workers.<sup>1</sup> When engineering factories reopened on 12 December one estimate suggested that 1,194 workers out of a total of almost 10,000 were refused entry by employers although, in time, some of these workers were rehired on an individual basis.<sup>2</sup> According to an investigation made on 19 December, 464 engineering workers were still without work as a result of the strike. Sixty five of these sacked engineering workers had been active as shop stewards before the strike. In other industries, on the same date, it was estimated that 170 strikers had been sacked in the oil and soap industry, 189 in the petrol refining industry, 129 in the chemical industry, and 177 in the textile industry. These figures were fairly high since, according to the same Prefectoral investigation, these industries employed 12,000 in engineering, 5,000, 2,360, 2,000, and 500 in oil and soap, petrol refining, chemical and textile industries respectively.<sup>3</sup> An estimate made a few days later when the situation had stabilised a little, suggested that 7 per cent of chemical workers, just over 5 per cent of engineering workers, 5 per cent of workers in oil refineries, and 24 per cent of oil storage workers had been sacked for participating in the strike.<sup>4</sup> According to this report, the total number of strikers sacked in the département was 1129, 134 of whom had been shop stewards.<sup>5</sup> By early

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1 AD XIV M25/136 lists 24 factories requiring police protection in the aftermath of the strike.

2 AD XIVM 25/144 CC to Prefect. Similar figures in Le Radical, 12.12.1938.

3 AD XIV M 25/203 Prefect to Ministère du Travail 19.12.1938. The unusually high proportion of textile workers sacked, 177 out of a total workforce of 500, suggests that management may have been carrying out a double set of reprisals, for the November strike, and also against the launderers who had participated in the September strike. See also LPP 14.12.1938.

4 AD XIVM 25/144 Note to Prefect 22.12.1938.

5 Ibid and UD letter to Prefect dated 19.12.1938 in AD XIVM 25/144. According to the UD, Marseilles alone had 850 victims of employers' reprisals after the strike.

1939 it became clear that many of these strikers had been permanently sacked rather than merely suspended by employers. On 13 January 1939 the Prefect informed the Minister of Labour that 900 sacked strikers in his département were still without work, and that their employers were unlikely to rehire them<sup>1</sup> A week later, the Syndicat des Métaux declared that 400 of its members had still not been rehired by their old employers.<sup>2</sup> By the beginning of March 1939 there were still about 650 sacked workers who remained without work, and few of those who had succeeded in finding work had returned to their old jobs. Meanwhile, 180 vacancies created by the sacking of strikers had been filled from the lists of the local Office Départemental de Placement.<sup>3</sup>

Faced with widespread sackings trade unions resorted to the conciliation and arbitration system in an endeavour to find redress for their members. The State's legal procedures, however, were not very well adapted to the needs of sacked workers requiring speedy action. Not only were such procedures ill-adapted to the needs of workers, but they were, on occasion, used against workers who had been involved in organising the strike. From 8 December 1938 to 24 February 1939 about sixty people were found guilty in the departmental courts of offences connected with the strike of 30 November 1938.<sup>4</sup> Amongst those workers imprisoned were some of the leaders of the Marseilles building and chemical workers trades unions.<sup>5</sup>

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1 AD XIVM 25/146 Prefect to Minister of Labour 13.1.1939.

2 AD XIVM 25/146 Syndicat des Métaux to Prefect 18.1.1939. By March 1939 the union write another letter to the Prefect informing him that 250 of their members were still out of work as a consequence of the November strike. Some sacked workers had found other jobs, but not in the engineering industry.

3 AD XIVM 25/146 Prefect to Minister of Labour 9.3.1939.

4 Olivesi in Remond and Bourdin op.cit. p176.

5 V0 6 & 19.1.1939.

Direct repression of this kind struck a chord of hostility among most Marseilles workers, including those who had not themselves participated in the general strike. One police report compiled at the end of December suggested that:

'à la suite des sanctions prises contre les ouvriers... l'esprit de solidarité s'est manifesté et ce n'est pas en vain que les dirigeants syndicaux ont fait appel à cet esprit en abandonnant au profit de leurs camarades une journée de leur salaire.'<sup>1</sup>

Many workers may have experienced sympathy for their victimised colleagues, but the lesson they drew from the experience was that trade union membership after November 1938, was in many sectors, more of a liability than an asset. With the renewal of trade union cards at the beginning of 1939 the decline in trade union membership seen at the end of 1938 became more obvious.

## 5 Mobilisation Thwarted, Organisations Abandoned.

### a The decline in trade union influence

Trade unions which had been created to such a large extent by successful mobilisation could not expect to remain immune to the effects of the failed attempt at working-class mobilisation which they had initiated in November and December 1938. The decline in membership of 1938-9 was not quite as spectacular as the growth of 1936 had been, but it was certainly dramatic. By the end of 1938 police reports indicated that subscriptions to the building workers' union had fallen by a quarter whilst those to the chemical, engineering, and other main industrial unions had declined by fifteen per cent.<sup>2</sup>

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1 AD XIVM 25/134 CD to Prefect 31.12.1938.

2 *ibid.*

By the beginning of 1939 the decline in support for the CGT was even more obvious. Nédelec reported to the UD in February 1939 that only 110,000 cards had been sold, compared with 140,000 in 1938.<sup>1</sup> By March 1939 the CGT dockers' union had placed 4,204 membership cards - 1,500 fewer than had been sold in the previous year. Subscription payments declined even more dramatically. Whereas in 1937 and 1938 the 6,000 CGT dockers had paid their union dues regularly, by February 1939 only 2,500 subscriptions were collected. The decline continued, with 1,500 dockers paying in March and only 1,200 in June 1939. Gagnaire, the dockers leader, described the situation as disastrous.<sup>2</sup> Engineering union leaders were equally concerned by declining membership, and they were forced to admit by March 1939 that, in spite of an extensive campaign for membership renewal, the number of workers who had failed to renew their membership was 'very great'.<sup>3</sup>

Defections from the CGT were accompanied by increases in the membership of rival trade union. The SPF and CFTC confederations

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- 1 AD M6 10791 Report (14.2.1939) of speech to dockers' delegates on 10.2.1939. Building, engineering, and chemical workers' unions had all gone to extraordinary lengths to get their members to renew their membership cards at the beginning of 1939. See the column Mouvement Ouvrier in LPP for January and February passim for details & R-M 27.1.1939.
  - 2 According to AD XIVM 25/135 CD 31.3.1939 by March there were 4,204 dockers actually in possession of a membership card, but as indicated, only a small fraction of them were paying their dues each month. Other reports on the union in the same box dated 20.2.1939 and 5.7.1939. See also the Report of the CD in AD M6 10888 that dockers' union leaders were planning to withhold the monthly sum of 15-20 francs usually paid to soldiers, because of shortage of funds.
  - 3 AD M6 10792 CD report 20.3.1939.

reported 10,000 and 4,000 applications respectively during the month of December.<sup>1</sup> Other trade union organisations were able to establish themselves for the first time in Marseilles. The PPF-sponsored Confédération française du travail unique (CFTU) registered a Marseilles branch in March 1939 and had recruited over 2,500 members by June.<sup>2</sup> The success of these unions may, in part, have been the result of pragmatic factors, with workers believing that membership would both help them find employment and retain their existing jobs. But there was also evidence of disillusionment with the politics of the CGT. By the end of 1938 one third of local workers were reported to be refusing to donate money to the Spanish Republican cause.<sup>3</sup>

The challenge to the CGT was not limited to one purely of membership. Rival union confederations threatened to attack CGT influence in the factories as well. Delegate elections at CGT strongholds such as Coder produced unfavourable results for the CGT when the company-sponsored Amicale ouvrière won sixty per cent of the votes in an election which attracted a 71 per cent turnout. Right-wing newspapers wasted no time in celebrating the fact that after these December elections only one delegate (délégués titulaires) out of fourteen was a Communist.<sup>4</sup> Within the CGT union organisation itself there was a noteworthy reaction against Communist control.

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1 AD XIVM 25/134 CD to Prefect 31.12.1938.

2 AD XIVM 24/62 Report of 19.6.1939.

3 AD XIVM 25/134 CD to Prefect 31.12.1938.

4 Cited by Tournier op.cit. pp161-162.

At the Société Provençale des Chantiers Navales factory at La Ciotat, union elections in March 1939 ousted the Communists and replaced them with Socialists.<sup>1</sup>

There was a strong fear within the CGT that the range of challenges it faced could undermine its claim to be the 'most representative union' as defined in the labour law. If other unions could claim to be more representative than the CGT, then employers would be able to renege on collective contracts concluded with the CGT and draw up new ones with rival organisations. The loss of membership (and hence of income) and of factory delegates could be compounded still further by the withdrawal of the right to negotiate on behalf of workers. The old rights won by the CGT during its period of membership growth could still be useful now in slowing down the wave of defections. Disaffected members would be reluctant to leave an organisation which could still exercise considerable power in some sectors, over issues such as the organisation and allocation of work. The CGT's privileges could not, however, stem, let alone reverse, the impact of a wave of rising disenchantment.<sup>2</sup>

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1 AD M6/10792 Report of 21.3.1939. The significance of the replacement of a Communist union leadership by Socialists in La Ciotat should not be missed. It provided yet more confirmation that the challenge of class as against clientelistic politics raised by the PC in June 1936 had been roundly defeated. See Chapter 5 for details on unions in this shipyard.

2 AD XIVM 25/135 CD 20.3.1939 quoted the fear expressed by Semat, a national official of the engineering union that 'si les syndicats professionnels et catholiques arrivent à signer des conventions collectives la CGT perdra tout'. Disenchantment with the CGT did act to the benefit of other union confederations. By May 1939 the Syndicat Professionnel Français du Port had over 1,000 members. AD M6 10888 CD to Sûreté 26.5.1939. AD XIVM 25/134 CD to Prefect 31.12.1938 refers to the diminished authority of CGT dockers' leaders.

b Some causes of CGT decline

Declining trade union membership, defeats in delegate elections, and the rise of rival trade union confederations, all testified to the diminished influence of the CGT. The most obvious damage to the CGT had been that inflicted by the defeat of the November general strike. The defeat was a double one, since the low level of participation in the strike added to the humiliation of its failure to force the Government to withdraw the decree laws. The sense of frustration felt by those workers who had followed PC advice and joined continuing strikes in December must have been even greater.<sup>1</sup> Such adversity probably further weakened the attachment of most members to the CGT whilst strengthening the resolve of a few, more militant workers.<sup>2</sup>

Even without the defeat of 30 November 1938 there are some grounds for believing that 1939 would have been a year of decline for the CGT. The Government now stood united with employers, and both were determined to challenge the forty hour week and trade union authority.<sup>3</sup> Rising unemployment rendered the CGT vulnerable to the challenge of rival unions which could win jobs for their members through offering employers a refreshingly docile workforce. Such external attacks and adverse conditions were made worse by increased divisions within the working-class movement.<sup>4</sup>

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1 The PC had encouraged workers in the belief that the prolonging of the strikes would increase the chances of victory rather than of victimisation. Tournier op.cit. p114.

2 There were still plenty of elections for the post of delegate in 1939 which returned majority votes to CGT candidates. See Le Petit Provençal, 4.1.1939 & 12.2.1939 Mouvement Ouvrier column.

3 See this Chapter, p.326

4 With the rising importance of the CFTC, SPF, and CFTU groups at the same time as Syndicats made headway within the UD and UL CGT.

c The consequences of weakened trade union organisations

Political divisions within the trade union movement were both a consequence and cause of the decline in trade union influence. Electoral success and the institutional rewards of successful working-class mobilisation had brought together the rivals of Communists and Socialists, and unitaires and confédérés. This alliance of enemies had been cemented by the mass following which the slogans of the Popular Front had attracted. But the alliance partners maintained their individual identity and their initial suspicion. In the Autumn of 1938 the Popular Front ceased to be an effective rallying cry and the contradictions of a platform which was both antimilitarist and antifascist became evident. The magic of the alliance waned, mass support evaporated, and the old antagonisms resurfaced.<sup>1</sup>

As working-class mobilisation became more difficult parties and trade unions became increasingly preoccupied with organisational, rather than class, advances. Whereas previously Communist takeovers within the trade union and Popular Front movement had resulted from the high degree of working-class mobilisation (and had, indeed, further aided it), the organisational 'advances' of 1939 were possible precisely because of the lack of such mobilisation. In a year which saw only five minor strikes in the Bouches-du-Rhône, Communists won control of the Marseilles Union Locale and were within reach of winning the Bourse du travail as well.<sup>2</sup> Shrinking organisations

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1 Most notably in the seamens' union which split in two in January 1939 after Communists had invaded a meeting and attempted to oust Ferri-Pisani. 28 confédéré trade unions later left the Marseilles UL in protest at the Communist control of the organisation. AD XIVM 25/149 Dossier 'Agitation chez les inscrits maritimes, Janvier 1939.' AD M6 10792 CD to Prefect 2.3.1939 & Rouge-Midi, 472, 7.3.1939.

2 AD M6 10792 CD report of 13.3.1939.

were hit still harder when their Communist leaders used them as platforms from which to make unpopular denouncements of Government foreign policy. Increasingly, not only was mobilisation difficult to achieve, but the trade union and political attempts to organise it were counter-productive. On Mayday 1939 there was no strike at all in Marseilles, and only 5,000 people could be attracted to the evening meeting called by local trade unions.<sup>1</sup> The turnout on 12 February had been even worse and the attendance of 500 (compared with 25,000 in 1937 and 12,000 in 1938) stood as striking testimony to the death of the Popular Front movement.<sup>2</sup> The quiescence of the working-class was matched by an increasingly strident tone of political parties which revealed themselves to be more interested in stating a position than in defending the working class.<sup>3</sup>

The declining influence of trade unions and the demobilised state of the Marseilles working-class did not indicate that the material reasons for working-class discontent had been removed. Quite the reverse. The period after November 1938 was one of working-class defeat, and the workers themselves suffered as much as their organisations. The sliding scale of wages which trade unions had fought so hard to defend in 1937 and 1938 was now simply ignored by many employers. Prices continued to rise rapidly, but employers were confident that unions could do little to prevent a unilateral renunciation of a measure guaranteeing

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1 AD M6 10820 CD & CC to Prefect 1 & 2.5.1939.

2 AD M6 10792 CD to Prefect 25.2.1939.

3 AD M6 10792 CD to Prefect 27.3.1939 commented on the lack of activity in political and trade union circles: 'la classe ouvrière n'a formulé aucune revendication et les réunions de la Bourse du Travail n'ont pas offert un intérêt particulier car la question corporative était tout a fait secondaire...La majorité de la classe ouvrière se désintéresse de toutes ses manifestations, qui, sous le couvert de l'action syndicale, sont plus spécialement politiques et organisées par le parti communiste.'

wage levels.<sup>1</sup> Whilst basic wage rates failed to keep pace with inflation many workers found themselves obliged to work increased hours without the old compensation of high overtime rates. In the local engineering industry, unions complained without effect that employers were free to hire workers for 60, 70, or even 80 hours a week.<sup>2</sup> Changes in the official statistics on working hours in large factories (over 100 employees) in the Marseilles region revealed the impact of relaxing the forty hour week legislation. The percentages conceal the most extreme cases where very long hours were being worked, but they show both the impact of the initial forty hour legislation and that of its relaxation in 1938. Whilst

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TABLE 9.1

The Length of the Working Week (% of workers)  
Factories Employing over 100 Workers in Marseilles Region

	1934	1935	1938	1939
Over 48 hours	85	83	-	-
40-48	6	5	-	21
40	5	5	92	67
32-40	4	5	3	8
32	0.13	1.12	2.5	1.7
Less than 32	0.65	0.58	2.95	0.75

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Notes:The factories affected were in the Marseilles industrial region. In 1935 it included 383 factories and 85,402 workers, and in 1939 441 factories and 100,616 workers. Mines are excluded from these statistics. All figures refer to the situation on April 1st of each year.

Sources: 1934 & 1935 figures from AN F60 630.

1938 & 1939 figures from Journal Officiel, Mai 1939, pp6091-6092.

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1 AD XIVM 25/207 By May 1939 Chemical Industry employers had announced their rejection of the echelle mobile, and many other employers simply refused to implement it.

2 La Vie Ouvrière 18.5.1939.

conditions for those in employment deteriorated, the number of people deprived of employment also increased. There was always a seasonal increase in unemployment during the Winter, but Table 9.2 shows that the increase in 1938-9 over a six week period was greater than in the previous year in both percentage and absolute terms. (15.5 per cent in 1938-9 as against 12.07 per cent in 1937-8).

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TABLE 9.2

Assisted unemployed in Bouches-du-Rhône, Winter 1937-8 & Winter 1938-9

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Date	Unemployed	Date	Unemployed
30.12.1937	16,908	30.12.1938	17,276
7.1.1938	17,232	7.1.1939	17,932
13.1.1938	17,647	13.1.1939	18,680
20.1.1938	18,365	20.1.1939	19,527
28.1.1938	18,515	28.1.1939	19,342
3.2.1938	18,949	3.2.1939	19,954

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Source: Le Midi Syndicaliste, 20.2.1939

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The number of unemployed continued increasing and by the beginning of May 1939 there were 20,559 assisted unemployed in the département, 17,670 of whom were in Marseilles.<sup>1</sup> The total number of registered unemployed was even higher at 23,314 whilst there were no unfilled vacancies at all.<sup>2</sup> Those families which had the good fortune to be

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1 Journal Officiel, 1939, p6087

2 Journal Officiel, 1939, p6081

eligible for unemployment assistance received only 12 francs 50 a day at a time when the worst paid adult male engineering workers received a basic hourly wage of 6.87 francs.<sup>1</sup>

Adverse economic conditions created an inhospitable atmosphere for trade union activity. Attendance at trade union meetings declined drastically, and in key areas such as the docks, leaders who had previously seen strikes as an effective way of spreading trade union influence were now fearful that they would merely provide employers with easy targets. Gagnaire protested to a meeting of dockers' delegates about the imposition of overtime, but warned his audience that:

'il faudra bien se garder de faire grève, car se serait donner des batons pour nous faire battre.'<sup>2</sup>

Police reports suggested that Gagnaire's fear was justified and that if the union called a strike its orders would simply be ignored by the mass of dockers.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion

The Autumn of 1938 demonstrated yet again that the fortunes of the Marseilles working-class and of its organisations were intimately linked. Just as victorious strikes in the period 1934-1936 had generated improved pay and conditions and given birth to an enlarged and newly-united political movement, so the defeats of 1938 and the quiescence of 1939 restored the initiative to employers, opened the way for deterioration in working conditions and pay, and produced disarray within the organisations of the working-class.

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1 Rouge-Midi, 30.12.1938 & AD XIVM 22/15.

2 AD XIVM 25/135 CD to Sûreté 5.7.1939.

3 AD M6 10792 CD to Sûreté 13.7.1939.

The pattern of working-class mobilisation was closely linked to the success, viability of, and commitment of political and trade unions to, the Popular Front. As an ideology, as a strategy for broad-based mobilisation, as a rationale for organisational unity, and as a beneficent Government, the Popular Front had provided the preconditions for successful working-class organisation and action. Without the Popular Front the cement which bound the working-class to 'its' organisations was removed, the apparently invincible edifice collapsed, and the way opened for the reintegration of a divided working-class into an illusory 'national' rather than a broadly-based class perception of politics. Without the Popular Front, the only alternatives on offer to the Marseilles working-class were the old sterile options of a Socialist-directed municipal clientelism now deprived of spoils (by lack of funds, a freeze on Council hiring from November 1937, and its ousting by the arrival of a Government-appointed special administrator in the Spring of 1939), or a Communist rhetoric of opposition and narrowly-based class struggle without any strategy for action. The lesson of the past four years mobilisation was that the right political circumstances were the necessary but not the sufficient conditions of action and organisation. Without these circumstances the Marseilles working-class was condemned to suffer in an individual and collective manner, and employers were able to rejoice that: 'l'ouvrier a un meilleur esprit au travail'<sup>1</sup> The victory of one group was the defeat of another.

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1 The words were those of the Commissaire Divisionnaire who reported on 25.2.1939 that: 'La grève du 30 novembre dernier n'a....plus d'échos...l'état social est bon à l'heure actuelle et il semble que l'ouvrier a un meilleur esprit au travail.' AD M6 10792.

## SECTION FOUR: POLITICS AND ACTION

### CHAPTER TEN: THE POPULAR FRONT AND WORKING-CLASS MOBILISATION IN MARSEILLES

#### 1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have analysed three aspects of the Marseilles working-class during the period: the divisions within the working-class; the organisations of the working-class; and the strikes and other forms of mobilisation in which the working-class participated. The development of a working-class identity both facilitated and was itself engendered by the dramatic increases in political organisation and mobilisation seen in the period. The political fact which linked together the different elements in this process was that of the Popular Front. The Popular Front was, however a complex phenomenon; it was at the same time a grass roots movement, a political alliance, a Government, and a powerful mobilising myth. All these different manifestations of the Popular Front shared the common leitmotif of unity. 'Unity' itself was, however, present in three different and often mutually antagonistic forms: intra-class unity brought together the highly variegated and heterogeneous Marseilles working-class; inter-class unity created a political and electoral coalition; and, lastly, a form of national unity was created from the campaign for Republican defence against domestic and foreign fascism. The tensions between these different kinds of unity may be seen in the three aspects of the Popular Front Movement which

affected the process of working-class mobilisation: the ideological aspect, the organisational aspect, and the national aspect. The interplay of diverse notions of unity within these three aspects of the Popular Front Movement helps to explain the rhythm and dynamic of working-class mobilisation.

## 2 Class, Republic and Nation in the Popular Front

Considered as an ideological movement the Popular Front was inspired by contradictory traditions and generated the conflicting forms of intra-class, inter-class and national unity already described. The programme of the Rassemblement Populaire combined demands for the preservation of democratic liberties, increased pay and employment for the working-class, and peace in a world threatened by fascism.<sup>1</sup> The first demand was a recast version of the alliance of working and middle-classes for the purposes of Republican defence, the second was a moderately framed, specifically working-class demand, and the last was a demand for national defence and for international action against fascism. The three sets of demands were premised on different kinds of unity and did not form a coherent whole. Indeed, the creation and success of the Popular Front as an electoral coalition was possible only because of this broad alliance between rival groups with contradictory aspirations. The very breadth of the Popular Front alliance would, however, also open the way for its dislocation. Born in exceptional circumstances,

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1 See the programme of the Rassemblement Populaire in G. Dupeux, Le Front Populaire et les élections de 1936, Paris, 1959, pp179-183.

the Popular Front died through the restoration of normality.<sup>1</sup>

Antifascism was the most important element in the Popular Front ideology, but its significance lay more in its impact than in the originality of its origins and intellectual bases. The belief that the riots of 6 February 1934 had represented an attempt at a fascist seizure of power facilitated the dual reconciliation of the working-class with the Republic, and of the PCF with the nation. The distinction for France as a whole between the essentially national reaction of the working-class (to the internal threat of fascism) and the international reaction of the PCF (to the possibility of the spread of international fascism) is less valid for Marseilles. The large Italian and Spanish populations in the town could recognise fascism as a distinctly anti working-class, as well as an anti-Republican and expansionist international threat. Thus, the raison d'être for the Popular Front, the threat of fascism had a particular pungency in Marseilles. Paradoxically, the emergence of a movement based on countering a largely foreign threat rendered French politics more accessible to Marseilles immigrants and contributed to their integration into the French national political community.

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1 'Normality' in class relations induced through the exceptional international situation. With such 'normality' there was scope once again for the tensions between the demands of the working-class, middle-class and the nation, to emerge. When the anti-fascism of the French middle-classes was revealed to be only skin deep, the PCF felt free again to attack its Popular Front partners. Meanwhile, pacifist reflexes and Communist domination of the trade unions frightened Radicals and Socialists, and made the first group increasingly sceptical about the unity of interest of the middle and working-classes. Dupeux, op.cit. pp176-177 describes this breakdown of relations between the parties. P.Warwick, The French Popular Front: A Legislative Analysis, Chicago, 1977, passim gives a particularly good account of the sources of alliance breakdown at the parliamentary level, and provides evidence for the view that the alliance was never really complete.

Antifascism permitted the construction of a renewed Republican synthesis based variously on the democratic, anticapitalist, pacifist, and anticlerical traditions. Working-class parties in Marseilles were torn between their dual aims of increasing working-class unity and constructing an alliance broad enough to secure the electoral victory necessary to resist domestic and foreign fascism. The cross-class democratic and Republican traditions were easily able to accommodate these potentially divergent ends, but anticapitalist, pacifist and anticlerical demands threatened to place strains on the alliance.

Anticlerical demands illustrated well the tensions between a policy of class alliance and class mobilisation. The rather traditionalist Marseilles SFIO had long sought refuge in the typically cross-class Republican issue of anticlericalism from the more violently anticapitalist options favoured by some in the national party. Anticlericalism fitted in well with the SFIO's electoralist strategy of constructing a broad cross-class coalition around rather abstract principles.<sup>1</sup> The PCF had, for a long time, disdained this preoccupation with anticlericalism, as being a diversion from the real issues of class struggle.<sup>2</sup> But as the PCF itself became more interested in the construction of a broad base of political support it, too, turned towards issues such as anticlericalism. The Communist rediscovery of

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1 See Chapter 4 passim.

2 See Chapter 5.

anticlericalism paralleled their rediscovery of the Republic.<sup>1</sup> Communists linked the old Republican issue of anticlericalism with the newer issues of anticapitalism and antifascism; denouncing Right-wing employers for forcing workers to attend factory chapels and for providing crèches run by nuns in order to better indoctrinate the children of workers.<sup>2</sup> Communists also organised anticlerical excursions. After one such outing the traditional anticlerical gesture of daubing red paint over a statue of Christ was updated by the inscription 'La Religion est l'opium du peuple. Vive Thaelmann' alongside a hammer and sickle.<sup>3</sup> The use of the new marxist and antifascist language could not conceal the fact that Communist anticlerical activity was devoted to constructing and dominating a revived class alliance. Increased Communist activity in the previously much criticised anticlerical movement did improve the position of the Marseilles Party. But for Thorez, however, even the minimal political basis of anticlericalism seemed to offer too exclusive an alliance. The party which had first despised anticlericalism as a bourgeois issue, and then embraced it as an element in an alliance of middle and working-classes

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- 1 Compare the responses of the PC to 12 February 1934 (pp.217-8), disclaiming any concern for the bourgeois Republic, and the eminently Republican article which appeared in Rouge-Midi, of 2 February 1935, entitled, 'Défendons la laïque en péril'. It is significant that the PC newspaper had to search as far away as the département of the Manche in order to find a sufficiently scandalous story about the victimisation of a secular schoolteacher.
- 2 See Rouge-Midi, 56, 10.6.1934, and 115, 13.4.1935.
- 3 AD M6 8293 CC to Prefect 27.6.1934. Other reports also provide evidence of the newfound PC interest in anticlericalism. AD M6 10817 CS to CD 27.6.1934 reports how a communist-dominated group L'Orphelinat National des Chemins de Fer had organised seaside excursions for groups of several hundred children in 1934 and 1935 which ended in anticlerical demonstrations. Le Petit Provençal, 3.6.1936 provides further evidence of Communist anticlerical activity in the form of a letter from the former secretary of the AIL at Pont de Vivaux, complaining about his exclusion from the group by Communists.

now found it an embarrassment in the new enlarged national political vision where it was felt necessary to stretch out a hand to the sizeable number of French Catholics.<sup>1</sup> By June 1936 Rouge-Midi felt it necessary to draw attention to the help offered by nuns to strikers in the same factories where the Church had previously been held up as the prime ally of the employer.<sup>2</sup> It was by no means clear, however, that such conciliatory gestures towards Catholics would produce results in a town such as Marseilles. The clerical issue was too deeply entrenched in local mores to be transcended by a mere change in PCF policy. There were few Catholics who would vote for the traditionally anticlerical parties of the Left and the PC policy of la main tendue threatened to weaken activist commitment more than to rally Catholic support.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Maurice Thorez speaking on Radio Paris, 17.4.1936. The speech was published in the Cahiers du Bolchévisme, 15.5.1936.

2 Rouge-Midi, 180, 12.5.1936 story on strike at Ferrier-Fournier factory. Cf. with an anticlerical story on the same factory in Rouge-Midi, 115, 13.4.1936.

3 Anticlerical feeling had produced violent riots in Marseilles in 1925 which resulted in two deaths. See: AN F7 13313. The local Catholic population was never really reconciled to the PCF. Apart from sponsoring the anticommunist CFTC union confederation, the local religious hierarchy clearly did not believe Communist declarations of goodwill. AD M6 11354 Prefect to Interior 13.10.1936 reports the measures taken by the Bishop of Marseilles to facilitate the evacuation of nuns and priests from the country if revolution should break out. By 1936 the clerical issue was still important in the drawing of political lines but, among the working-class, it was no longer sufficiently salient to, of itself, produce significant class mobilisation. Anticlerical feeling was now seen as simply one part of working-class politics rather than as the key ingredient. Such symbols could still exert a powerful influence and the PC's conciliatory attitude to the Church did cause dissension. See the report of the very defensive speech made by Billoux on the subject in May 1938, AD M6 10881 CC to Prefect 9.5.1938.

The issue of war proved to be even more divisive than that of anticlericalism. Antimilitarism and varieties of pacifism, had long been popular among the Marseilles working-class. They were also embraced by those members of the middle-class who supported, or were members of, the SFIO. Indeed, the combination of antimilitarist and anticlerical feeling had long provided a solid ideological anchor with which to compensate for the flexible political practice of the Marseilles SFIO.<sup>1</sup> The Marseilles PC adopted a more extreme position than the SFIO in the 1920's and early 1930's making antinationalism and anticolonialism a cornerstone of its political practice, and devoting considerable energy to campaigns aimed at subverting the army. The Popular Front saw, first the PC's acceptance of the nation and its celebration of the newly-discovered joys of bourgeois democracy, and then its conversion to a belief in the necessity of conscription and national defence.<sup>2</sup> Antifascism had initially complemented both the belief in national defence and the old antimilitarist ideals, since it posed the option of resisting fascist militarism through a policy of collective security. In time, however, antifascism was revealed to require a more aggressive stance and the dilemma of appeasement with fascism or a military crusade against it was posed. The PC

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1 See Chapter 4 and comments by T. Judt in La Réconstruction du Parti Socialiste 1921-1926, Paris, 1976, p73 on the importance of the secular, Republican tradition in the Bouches-du-Rhône federation.

2 M. Thorez's speech on the 'Front Français' on 6.8.1936, reproduced in Racine & Bodin, op.cit. pp249-254, was illustrative of the changed attitude of the PCF. The abandonment of antimilitarism caused confusion in Marseilles, and sowed doubts about the PC in the minds of many workers. See AD XIVM 25/76 CD to Prefect 3.9.1936, M6 11354 Prefect to Interior 26.6.1937, and M6 11354 CD to Prefect 5.9.1936.

responded to the popularity of the Munich Agreement by launching a campaign for 'Peace and Liberty' which clearly involved the defence of the second through the abandonment of the first.<sup>1</sup> The local SFIO was also rent by the dilemma of antifascism or pacifism, and serious divisions of principle began to appear in the local party for the first time since the 1920's.<sup>2</sup> The pacifist and antimilitarist elements of antifascism which had initially provided such a broad-based rallying point were once again shown to contain as many points for division as for unity.

Anticapitalism was perhaps always the 'hardest', most exclusively working-class, political ingredient of the antifascist synthesis. Fascism was presented simply as a particularly vicious and brutal kind of capitalism, more anti-labour and heartless than most varieties of the system. The label 'fascist' was applied loosely to harsh employers and militaristic political movements. Capitalism

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1 The deteriorating international situation produced a hardening in the PC line in the Autumn of 1938, AD M6 10789 CD to Prefect 7.9.1938. The Communist-sponsored group Paix et Liberté then attempted to call a departmental congress of the Rassemblement Populaire in October 1938. Opposed by the national CGT, but supported by the UD, the congress did not manage to extend its appeal beyond that of the communist-dominated organisations. See, AD M6 10790 Reports dated 1.10.1938 & 24.10.1938, & Syndicats, 107, 26.10.1938.

2 The federation had cast all its 210 mandates for the majority line of the national SFIO leadership at the 1937 party congress. By the Royan Congress of June 1938, 19 per cent of the federation's votes were cast for a dissident line. In the Congress of Montrouge at the end of 1938 43.6 per cent of the federation's votes were cast for the Faure as opposed to the majority Blum position. 39 per cent of Bouches-du-Rhône votes were cast for the minority Faure position in the preliminary votes prior to the 1939 Nantes Party Congress. See N. Greene, Crisis and Decline: The French Socialist Party in the Popular Front Era, Ithaca, 1969, pp314-333. The Faure line of peace at any price had already become popular in the Bouches-du-Rhône over the issue of the Spanish Civil War. See Le Petit Provençal, 29.6.1938 report of speech by Raymond Vidal, SFIO Deputy.

was held responsible for the economic crisis, the decree laws, rationalisation and unemployment. And yet even these direct attacks on capitalism were not presented in the language of class war. The terminology used was a deliberately vague one. The complaints of the Radical Party against the two hundred families were adopted by the PCF. Appeals were made as often to the French people as to the working class. The vague slogan of 'faire payer les riches' was preferred to any concrete proposals for the nationalisation of the means of production. Insofar as there was an anticapitalist element in the antifascist synthesis it was one which was presented in the language of the bourgeois ('Le peuple et les gros') rather than the proletarian ('the dictatorship of the proletariat') revolution.<sup>1</sup> Once again, even on such seemingly class issues as the status of capitalism, the language of the Popular Front was devoted as much to the creation of a unified nation as to the task of mobilising a newly united working-class. The PC which had previously argued that only the most oppressed factory workers had an interest in fighting capitalism, now sought to unite the whole French nation in a struggle against a mere two hundred families. Later, as the Popular Front Experiment was shown to have failed, the working-class was called upon to act in terms of its own specific class

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1 See Pierre Birnbaum, Le Peuple et les Gros: Histoire d'un Mythe, Paris, 1979, pp27-63 passim. See also on this theme, M. Anderson, 'The Myth of the Two Hundred Families', Political Studies, 13 (2), June 1965, pp163-178. Locally, the calls for alliances with shopkeepers in the Coder strike of 1936 (Chapter 7, p.248 ) and the declarations of the UD CGT in Union Départementale des Syndicats Ouvriers des Bouches-du-Rhône, Congrès Départemental de Marseille les 26 et 27 Juin 1937: Rapports aux Sundicats, Marseilles, 1937, p10 and Le Midi Syndicaliste, 207, 12.7.1937 illustrate the theme.

interests, opposed both to those of the Government and employer class alike.

### 3 Organisational Unity - The Temporary Cessation of Hostilities

The unity which was the leitmotif of the Popular Front called into question the basis for the divisions between its component organisations. Chapters 4 & 5 stressed the differences between the different branches of the Marseilles working-class movement, and yet these same organisations contributed to, and themselves benefitted from, the successful class unity and mobilisation of the Popular Front period. It is worth asking to what extent the Popular Front changed the character of the main working class organisations in Marseilles, and whether the organisational unity of the Popular Front period was ever anything more than skin deep?

The Popular Front posed a challenge to the political ideas and practice of the Marseilles PC, SFIO and trade unions. Through their temporary unity and assumption of some of the responsibilities of government, these organisations were able to participate in a mass movement and greatly to expand their memberships. Increased popularity, unity and responsibility permitted local working-class organisations to build on, and to a certain extent transcend, their previous characters.

The Popular Front seemed to add a missing national and

international dimension to the rather closed localism and clientelistic practice of the Marseilles SFIO. As the clientelism of the local SFIO and its trade union allies was extended it was also diluted. As a part of the governing party the Marseilles SFIO could hope to have greatly increased spoils with which to oil the wheels of its clientelistic machine. But whilst increased power at a national level may have produced increases in influence and rewards it also led to a corresponding increase in responsibilities. It was no longer so easy for the Marseilles SFIO to play upon localist sentiment and present all the improvements in local life as concessions wrested from a hostile government through the successful application of political pressure, with set backs and adverse decisions being attributed to the imposition of central power. The SFIO now had to take on responsibility for unpopular government decisions and attempt to defend them. The Amicale Socialiste movement reflected the ambiguous rewards of power, since the amicales were designed both to act as privileged trade unions with rapid access to the centres of power at the same time as they were expected to explain and justify the unpopular decisions of local and national government.<sup>1</sup> SFIO trade unionists who had previously so vigorously denounced the PCF for interfering politically in the trade union movement, were now themselves reduced to the role of defending the policies not merely of a party but of a Government.

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1 On the role of the AS movement see the article 'Role des amicales' in Marseille-Socialiste, 14.11.1936. For examples of the activity of the AS see AD M6 11354 CD to Prefect 28.12.1936, and the following issues of Le Tramway Socialiste - June, July, October and November 1937 - where government and municipal policies were particularly vigorously defended by Joblin.

The election of a Popular Front Government undermined more than it aided the Marseilles SFIO. The party showed itself unable to benefit from either the euphoria or the increased level of political mobilisation of June 1936. The dramatically raised aspirations and highly ideological mood of 1936 jarred with the traditions of the local SFIO. The stability and cosiness of the old SFIO, with its loyal ideological orthodoxy and clientelistic practice had few reserves of rhetoric, let alone of action, to deal with the millenarianism of a newly self-confident working-class. The vibrancy of the ideological debates of the Popular Front caused problems too. In the past such activities had been reserved to the committed few whilst the real politicians continued the task of maintaining their local power bases. With the coming of the Popular Front there was a premium on commitment - a commodity which the Marseilles SFIO lacked. Ideological debates on Spain, fascism, war, and strikes, acquired a new salience. And whilst such debates succeeded in mobilising considerable popular enthusiasm, their effect was transitory in terms of membership and votes, more permanent only in the damage they inflicted on the unity of the party. For the Marseilles SFIO the Popular Front must have proved to be a bewildering failure. United action had benefitted the PCF much more than the SFIO which had originally been the senior partner. The SFIO saw its voters switch allegiance to the PCF, its control over the trade union movement similarly undermined, and its traditional politics of clientelism confronted with the seemingly insuperable problems posed by vastly increased aspirations, depleted municipal

resources, and the uncomfortable vogue for ideological integrity.<sup>1</sup>

As the party which had been most enthusiastic about the Popular Front strategy, the PC was also the group which benefitted most from its realisation. Enthusiasm for the Popular Front aided the PC greatly in the period 1934-1937, but thereafter disillusionment with the results of the Popular Front governments and initial Communist reluctance to capitalise on such disillusion, meant that the previous membership growth was turned into a decline. The Popular Front strategy allowed the PC to devote more energy to strictly local questions than had previously been possible. A party which had previously been preoccupied with international and class specific issues was now interested in the traditions and specificity of Marseilles. The broad Republican alliance of le peuple was well adapted to Marseilles political and social traditions. The PC underwent an apparently dramatic change as it showed itself willing to put aside its own dogma in order to gain a better foothold in the community. The party's traditional obsession with organising in the workplace was now complemented by a rediscovery of the working-class (and indeed the broader) community. Communists became active in anticlerical associations, and then, when anticlericalism was deemed to be too sectarian, the party moved into the broad, and eminently cross-class CIQ movement.<sup>2</sup> Rouge-Midi began a campaign to clean

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1 The sense of decline produced a frustration in the local SFIO which was very obvious in their more polemical moods. See the article by Paul Quilici in Syndicats, 31, 13.5.1937, 'CE N'EST PAS UNE HISTOIRE MARSEILLAISE...Mais dix-huit mois de "colonisation active" dans les Bouches-du-Rhône.'

2 Billoux denounced the role of the CIQ's in his campaign for the municipal elections of 1935 saying: 'on réalise actuellement quelque chose qu'autant qu'un adjoint...se fait accrocher par un Comité d'intérêt de quartier...' Rouge-Midi, 117, 20.4.1935. AD M6 10817 CD to Prefect 23.7.1936 reports SFIO concern at the PC move into the CIQ's. Rouge-Midi, 363, 25.2.1938, contains an article on the problems of the suburb Les Crottes which concludes with the recommendation that

up Marseilles which took in the important but cross-class issues of drainage, prostitution, and crime.<sup>1</sup> Communist campaigns around these issues succeeded in going beyond the rather bland and essentially complacent pronouncements of the other local parties. For the PC had the advantage of being unsullied by ever having held municipal office, of being led by men who were above reproach (from the point of view of their personal and business morality), and of appropriating for itself a monopoly of ideological purity. The rhetoric of antifascism was used to denounce the interconnections between the worlds of business, politics and organised crime. Prostitution was presented in both a moral and a political light as being caused by the corruption of working-class girls by decadent members of the upper classes and their fascist gangster accomplices. An emphasis on moral issues allowed the PC to use a strident and often self-righteous tone in the pursuit of what might otherwise have seemed a moderate electoralist strategy similar to that of the SFIO.

The moderation of the PC was most obvious in its attitude to strikes during the Popular Front. Before Blum's coming to power the PC had encouraged strikes in the hope that successful workplace mobilisation would bring significant material rewards to the workers, boost the self-confidence of the local working-class,

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continued from previous page

2 local inhabitants place their faith in the activity of the CIQ. Rouge-Midi, 456, 13.6.1939, contains a similar enthusiasm for the CIQ in Saint Mauront, another Marseilles suburb.

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1 Encompassed in the campaign for Marseille-Propre waged by Rouge-Midi. For two among many examples see Rouge-Midi, 119 & 316 for 27.4.1935 and 18.2.1938 respectively.

and aid the PC's own bid for power within the trade unions. These hopes were realised and the strikes of June 1936 succeeded in unifying the Marseilles working-class, vastly strengthening the local trade unions, and increasing the role within the union movement of those who were perceived as the most active working-class activists - the Communists. The PC then went on to use its newfound influence less to advance working-class interests than to pressure Government into pursuing a vigorously antifascist policy. The growth in working-class organisation (by 1937 more than half of the Marseilles blue and white-collar workers were members of the CGT) both extended the political resources at the disposal of the PC in the advancement of its foreign policy aims, (as in September 1936) and gave it some cause for concern on the domestic front. Rapid trade union growth was one manifestation of the working-class unity long sought by the PC, but it also reflected a new aggressive self-confidence on the part of workers which conflicted with PC desires for the maintenance of cross-class unity within the Popular Front alliance. At the same time, the enlarged size and new national political role of trade unions opened the way for intensified political debate and conflict within the working-class.

Factionalism within the reunited trade union movement cast doubt upon the extent of the changes in the character of local political organisations. The CGT and CGTU in the Bouches-du-Rhône had long been enemies, and even at the time of their reunification in 1936 doubts were expressed as to whether the unity was anything

more than skin deep.<sup>1</sup> Communists benefitted most from the explosion in trade union membership, and by Autumn 1936 they had ousted the ex-confédéré leader of the UD, before going on to win a majority of unions in the UD.<sup>2</sup> Communist successes were not purely fortuitous, they were planned and executed in the face of fierce ex-confédéré resistance. The continuity in political allegiances within the reunited union movement testifies to the superficiality of such unity. Socialists began to react to Communist domination from the Autumn of 1936 and, with the creation of the national weekly newspaper Syndicats, they were provided with a forum in which to justify their actions. Syndicats claimed that its only interest was in resisting political interference in the trade union movement, but such protestations were especially hollow in Marseilles. The local SFIO had always taken an active interest in the local trade union movement and had recruited prominent union leaders such as Ferri-Pisani and Joblin and encouraged them to stand as local councillors. Anticommunism rather than a belief in the political independence of trade unions was what motivated Ferri-Pisani and the other Marseilles members of the Amis de Syndicats.<sup>3</sup> The euphoria and expanded membership which 1936 had brought was insufficient to overcome the years of hostility and mutual suspicion between the

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1 Comments on the lack of unity in the UD and UL reunification Congresses may be found in AD M6 10793 CD to Prefect 5.1.1936 (for the UD) and M6 10792 CD to Prefect 24.2.1936 (for the Marseilles UL).

2 The ex-unitaire Nédelec replaced the ex-confédéré Chauffard as leader of the UD in October 1936. Officially Chauffard resigned for reasons of health but informed sources suggested that he had been ousted. See AD XIVM 25/76 CD to Prefect 16.10.1936

3 Ferri-Pisani's attempt to combine political and trade union office had indeed been the subject of attacks from those believing in trade union independence at the reunification congress of the UD in January 1936. It was Nédelec, the PC trade union leader, who rose to Ferri-Pisani's defence on this occasion. See AD M6 10793 CD to Prefect 5.1.1936.

Communist and non-Communist elements of the Marseilles working-class movement. The unity within the working-class movement was facilitated by, and itself aided, membership growth, but as decline set in old conflicts re-emerged, based less on principle, or personality, than on the antagonism of two organisations considering themselves the natural leader of the local working class.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4 National Integration & Reconciliation

The Popular Front saw an integration of local into national politics. The old arguments about the specificity of Marseilles, and its corresponding need for a distinctly local politics, were made to seem less plausible. Increasingly, the hopes and fears which mobilised opinion in Marseilles were expressed at the national or international level (eg fears about fascism, the economy, and the coming of war) and perceived as being subject to action by national rather than by local government. In the meantime, economic changes tended to integrate Marseilles better into the national economy, whilst reform of the industrial relations system produced a more uniformly national system which permeated down to the lowest factory floor level.

The new industrial relations system produced by the Popular Front illustrated well the move to a more nationally integrated, organised, and better ordered society. Working-class mobilisation was increasingly affected by the whole panoply of agreements and structures which operated at national and local level. Following the Matignon Agreement collective contracts were negotiated on a national, regional and local basis for almost every industry. The centralisation of negotiations about pay and conditions produced an increasingly centralised and co-ordinated pattern of industrial conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 4 shows the continuity in trade union positions.

Strikes might break out in individual factories to force the application of a collective contract, or at the level of an entire industry to secure the implementation of a decree or the renewal of a contract. The new system of collective contracts and compulsory arbitration and conciliation procedures encouraged the growth of trade unions as intermediaries and negotiators in the labour market. Meanwhile, arbitrators' own awareness of and attention to national trends reflected and reinforced the nationalisation and politicisation of industrial conflict. Henceforth, strikers would lay down their tools less out of consideration for specific conditions within their own factory, but rather with their eyes on the trade union, the Prefecture, the arbitration court, and the Government. Meanwhile, the institution of elected factory delegates allowed trade unions to keep in contact with workers' demands and to co-ordinate better their aspirations and actions.

Economic changes also contributed to this nationalisation of industrial protest. Marseilles industry underwent changes which meant that it was increasingly dependent on the French rather than the international economy. At this time, too, the actions of the Popular Front Government in establishing a nationalised aircraft industry, made the Marseillais more attuned to the economic policies pursued in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

The Popular Front was a political movement against fascism,

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1 The hard line adopted by the aircraft industry concerning the rehiring of workers sacked after November 30 1938 suggests that in a nationalised sector such as this, the anti-union policy of a government might be brought home to workers even more vividly than in the private sector. See, AN F60 640 Minister of Air to Président du Conseil, 5.4.1939, and La Vie Ouvrière, 15.12.1938, and 5.1.1939 for information on sackings in this sector.

but it was also a reflection of the economic aspirations of the working-class. Views varied as to how the organised working-class should relate to the new Popular Front Government. Nédelec welcomed Blum's election as a 'victoire du peuple,' but suggested that the CGT would:

'rester une force indépendante du Gouvernement qu'elle aidera au dehors en luttant contre le grand capitalisme, mais sur lequel elle doit aussi être en mesure de faire pression.'

The June strikes were precisely an example of the kind of pressure referred to by Nédelec, but the CGT played a more active role in their conclusion than commencement. The Souchier agreement negotiated in Marseilles was an attempt to implement locally the provisions of the national Matignon agreement. Thereafter, until November 1938 there was more evidence of the CGT responding to, rather than exerting pressure on, the Government. After the Matignon agreement had been concluded trade union leaders placed stress on the role of the working-class in preserving rather than in changing the status quo. Workers were urged to behave 'responsibly'; strikes were presented as 'disciplined' and 'orderly' movements, and trade unionists were encouraged to prevent rather than to foment strikes.<sup>2</sup> Trade union and political leaders were prepared to moderate their demands and workers' frustrations were smoothed over in order to maintain the antifascist alliance.

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1 Le Midi Syndicaliste, 15.5.1936.

2 See eg. Le Midi Syndicaliste, 188, 14.7.1936, Marseille-Socialiste, 6.6.1936, and Rouge-Midi, 180, 12.6.1936.

The new-found moderation of organised labour was the product of a new national consciousness as much as of political calculation. An effective antifascist strategy required a strong economic base as well as a political coalition. The Communist commitment to antifascism led the party to give greater priority to national and international rather than to local considerations in industrial disputes. When the Government seemed to be pursuing a political line consistent with an antifascist outlook then Communists were willing to restrain the workers in the factories and resurrect the language of national sacrifice. In this manner, Communist dockers were prepared in 1936 to argue that the forty hour legislation should be applied over six rather than five days in order to maximise port efficiency.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, after the Munich Agreement and when the Government's decree laws were aiming precisely to move from five to six days working, Communists were first in the line of defence for 'la semaine a deux dimanches.' Clearly the attitude adopted in defence of workers' claims could vary as a function of foreign policy changes. Thus, forced evacuations of factories carried out on Government instructions in January 1937 were met with a vigorous protest from the UD which was nevertheless careful to avoid,

'de faire porter la responsabilité de ces faits au Front Populaire, dont nous avons encore besoin pour écarter le fascisme.'<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in April 1938, Nêdelec recommended that chemical workers resume work after a strike:

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1 See Syndicats, 31, 13.5.1937.

2 Union Départementale des Syndicats Ouvriers des Bouches-du-Rhône, Congrès Départemental de Marseille les 26 et 27 Juin 1937: Rapports aux Syndicats, Marseille, 1937, p7.

'Bien que la victoire ouvrière soit incomplète (parce qu'il)...faut montrer que les travailleurs ont conscience des événements qui mettent le pays en péril.'<sup>1</sup>

'National' arguments such as these compounded the way in which the rationale as well as the resolution of strikes was removed from their immediate surroundings.

The active role played by Popular Front Governments in industrial disputes called into question both the localism of Marseilles reformism and the antiparliamentary attitudes of the revolutionary movement. The Popular Front demonstrated that sympathetic Governments could be more productive than past conflict with resolutely hostile employers. The extensive strikes of the Popular Front period refuted rather than confirmed the old syndicalist adage that 'le syndicat suffit à tout.' Workers may have themselves organised the June 1936 strikes, but it was Government pressure which forced employers to sign the Matignon Agreement. The strike of 30 November 1938 showed the limitations on working-class action when there was neither a favourable political climate nor a pro-labour Government. Whilst June 1936 had been an example of successful working-class mobilisation the emphasis in subsequent years was turned towards the improvement of working-class organisation and its ability successfully to apply pressure to extract favourable administrative and political decisions.<sup>2</sup> The focus of interest moved away from the factory itself towards the Prefecture, the Chamber of Deputies, the Government, the trade union and the arbitration court. The consequence for workers was that improvements in wages and conditions were no

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1 AD M6 10881 Report of 10.4.1938.

2 Eg. Rouge-Midi, 213, 29.9.1936.

longer won from employers, but rather given by Government and the administration, or negotiated on workers' behalf by trade unions. Changed circumstances produced a changed attitude towards working-class mobilisation. Early victories had been won through such mobilisation, later ones were granted to a more organised but less mobilised working-class. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the national power emerged greatly increased from this period. It was national government which had granted so many of the advances of the Popular Front period. Similarly, working-class organisations had accustomed their member to viewing representatives of the central authority as allies against both the internal and external enemies.

The nationalisation of Marseilles politics reinforced some of the contradictory tensions already described. As conflict was increasingly provoked, regulated, and resolved through the operation and interplay of national rather than local forces and mechanisms, a greater premium was placed on the type of inter-class unity which would influence national Government. Meanwhile, the events and issues which mobilised local opinion were ones related to the national and international rather than to the local context. Whilst the move towards a more organised society created a more national politics in the territorial sense, the external threat of fascism and war converted the previously constructed intra and inter-class unity into a revived and extended 'national' sentiment. The reconciliation of the working-class with the State through the increased intervention and favourable material concessions of the Popular Front cemented this national unity. Confronted with the threat of war and reality of organisational division and defeat, the working-class would then choose the option of national unity rather than the intra-class unity so painfully constructed in past mobilisations.

## 5 The Process of Working-Class Mobilisation in Marseilles

The study of strikes during the Popular Front in Marseilles confirms the key role played by political events in their mobilisation. The political and ideological upheavals of 1934-6 cleared the way for partial strikes whose own success opened the path for the broader-based strike movements of 1936. Successful strikes under a newly sympathetic Government facilitated the creation of a mass working-class movement. The newly created working-class organisations then played a key role in determining the timing and extent of strike movements. Economic factors played very much a secondary role during this process of mobilisations, and even if the economic situation may have set the parameters of protest in the early stages and then provided powerful pretexts later on, it was political factors which produced the key dates of the period (12 February 1934, June 1936, and 30 November 1938) and influenced the rhythm of strikes as a whole during the Popular Front. Events in Marseilles were rarely perfectly synchronised with those in the nation as a whole, but the significance of the local mobilisation lay less in its dissimilarities with national movements than in its common origins and impact. The Popular Front taught the Marseilles working-class the dual lessons that organisation and action at the periphery was closely linked to events at the centre, and that the local working-class was, in spite of its heterogeneous origins, very much a part of a French national political culture. Whilst different forms of unity were the keynote of the Popular Front, territorial and ideological integration were the long term products of the three

stage experience of working-class mobilisation.

a Mobilisation & National Integration (February 1934-June 1937)

Reform, reconciliation and resistance were the key elements in the construction of the Popular Front in Marseilles. Reforms were demanded to improve the position of civil servants, eradicate municipal corruption, and to reverse the deflationary policy of the Government. Reconciliation of the working-class with the other Republican forces was considered the prerequisite for effective resistance to be mounted against local, national and international fascism and their French representative; the two hundred families.

The campaign for the Popular Front was marked by an increase in working-class mobilisation, solidarity and organisation. Such increased working-class activity was both aided by, and itself facilitated, the growth of intra-class unity. Workers were more ready to undertake solidarity strikes for victimised colleagues, and, if successful, to go on to construct united and much enlarged political and trade union organisations. Parties and trade unions were themselves readier to help in the construction of the inter-class unity necessary to a successful electoral coalition. The reciprocal relationship between workplace and political mobilisation was illustrated when Cristofol was elected Conseiller d'Arrondissement in October 1934 after his rise to notoriety both as a civil servant sacked for opposition to the decree laws and as a prominent local Communist and organiser of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement.

The election of the Popular Front Government seemed to confirm for many workers both the legitimacy and the possibility of attempts to carry the political victory into their daily lives through demanding a corresponding democratisation of power and profit in the workplace. Far from fearing as in the past that strike action would meet with Government repression, workers now felt that their strikes would be likely to actually help the Popular Front Government. More important still, the notion of national unity within the Popular Front movement gave workers good cause to believe that their 'just' strike demands could meet with the opposition of only a small and henceforth politically defeated minority. After May 1936 it was thought that all would welcome workers' attempts to defeat their greedy, rapacious, and anti-Republican employers, and that for the first time self-conscious working-class action would meet with the approval of public opinion in the country at large. Even the election of a Popular Front Government could not be expected instantly to abolish the roots of a social conflict, and this illusory and optimistic view of an entirely united society could not be expected to last for long. In the real world workers aspirations were high, the Popular Front alliance shaky, and employers far from defeated. The newly powerful and 'responsible' working-class organisations, themselves created through the triumphant manifestation of intra-class unity, were presented with the problem of how to stop an aggressively self-confident working-class from provoking conflicts which might undermine the inter-class and national unity on which the Popular Front rested. Initially, in 1936, the trade unions were

relatively successful in persuading workers that the purpose of strikes and other mobilisation should be limited to increasing government authority, so that the Government itself could then be entrusted with the task of improving the position of the working class, and hence it would be argued, of the country. Political and trade union organisations seized upon the mood of triumph and reconciliation in June 1936, to persuade their members that the newly established national consensus was a shaky one, that premature action by workers could frighten middle-class supporters of the Government into the arms of its opponents, and that the timing of strikes should be decided by the organisations themselves on the basis of political considerations.<sup>1</sup> This view of the purposes and procedures for working-class mobilisation was one which was accepted by the working-class for as long as its faith in the Government could be maintained; effectively only until June 1937.

#### b Intermittent Mobilisation and Class Fragmentation

(Summer 1937 - Summer 1938)

In this second phase workers found that the balance of power in society, the workplace, and in politics, was turning against them, at the same time as their organisations, which to some extent affected their perceptions of these changes, were still committed to a maintenance of the political status quo, the Popular Front. Workers' experience of frustrated expectations, and of increasingly bitter conflicts in which the support of the public authorities could

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<sup>1</sup> Le Midi Syndicaliste, 191, 1.10.1936. 194, 1.12.1936.

no longer be depended on, led to the realisation that the 'popularity' and cross class nature of the Popular Front had done nothing to reduce the distinctive nature of the position of the working-class and its correspondingly specific needs. Class mobilisation was proposed now, not only as a lever for Government to use against recalcitrant employers but also as a way of applying direct pressure to the Government itself to fulfil its promises and be responsive to new demands.

The national and international functions of a Popular Front Government as a barrier to fascism meant that working-class organisations continued to give it political support. But, in view of the Government's unresponsiveness to working-class demands, such support would no longer be given uncritically. Trade unions were now prepared to authorise the exercise of pressure on, if not opposition to, the Government, and were to concede the role for action at the grassroots to contest the distribution of social power. This, latter admission meant that even if strike action was still used selectively with a view to its political consequences, its class nature was accentuated. Organisations, with their ever widening range of social as well as political activities, succeeded in creating an increasingly class conscious working-class. This class consciousness was accompanied by a political realism and a sense of discipline which meant that it was still rare, even in a time of increasing political disillusionment for class mobilisation to take place in such a way as to seem like a direct attack on the Government.

The ideological underpinnings of this new phase of class conscious and uniquely social conflict were varied and often contradictory. It was still asserted that there was a fundamental political consensus in society, and yet it was equally clear that there was a severe conflict at the workplace. To explain this, trade unions and the parties of the Left resorted to an explanation based on the belief in a generalised conspiracy of fascists, employers' associations, and the two hundred families: such groups, it was argued, deliberately provoked conflict in the workplace in order to meet their dual aims of sabotaging the economy and of discrediting the political consensus on which the Popular Front was based.<sup>1</sup> Such a view presented workers as being a group whose interests, although recognised as being based on fairly distinctive concerns, could be assimilated with those of the nation at large. Workers, it was claimed, found their desire for employment and ever increased production, sabotaged by fascist employers who deliberately provoked unemployment and strikes. It is difficult to believe that many people, let alone workers, would have found this view entirely convincing. It was clearly not true that workers were overwhelmingly preoccupied with increasing production to aid the Government. Nor was it true that the only strikes were defensive ones, adopted as a last resort in order to resist provocative employers' attacks.

Working-class organisations were forced into an increasingly contradictory position during this period. Obligated to face up to the

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<sup>1</sup> Rouge-Midi, 213, 29.9.1936.

opposition of the Government and of the employers and emphasise intra-class unity in the workplace, they were unwilling to accept that such resistance might raise scepticism on all sides about the broader unity required for an effective antifascist policy. Communist-dominated organisations continued to affirm a community of national interest and to present working-class action, such as strikes, as being purely defensive, thus conceding in advance much ideological ground to their increasingly well organised and class conscious opponents. The very nature of the conflicts and strikes which occurred increased the differentiation of the working-class (both internally and externally) at the same time as on the political level, a unity of national interest continued to be asserted.

c Failed Mobilisation, Class Disintegration, and National Reintegration (Summer 1938 - Summer 1939)

The trade unions and political parties of the Left were ill-prepared to resist attack, when, in the Autumn of 1938, the national unity which they had so vigorously advanced, began to operate to their disadvantage. The advocacy during the Popular Front of an identity of interests between the working-class and the nation provided a useful basis for Governments which were hostile to organised labour to use the advance of war to detach the working-class from its organisations and to integrate it into a new national political and social consensus.

Antifascism had been one of the most powerful sentiments in mobilising the working-class in support of the Popular Front. But

later disillusionment with the labour policies of the Popular Front was accompanied in 1938 by a decline in enthusiasm for the antifascist cause. The optimistic period of international crusades against fascism was clearly something of the past, since the working-class overwhelmingly preferred the policy of appeasement towards Hitler and welcomed the Munich Agreement and the promise of an isolationist peace, rejecting the attempts of its organisations to launch two new antifascist campaigns, one for Spain and another for Czechoslovakia. With the Munich Agreement the integration of working-class opinion into the body of national opinion was continued but this time it was to occur in the face of the opposition of the class organisations, and at the expense of an effectively organised working-class movement.

If the ability of the trade unions and parties of the Left to secure the political mobilisation of the working class was much diminished by the Munich Agreement, the period following upon it, and more particularly that after 30 November 1938, saw a reduction in their ability to achieve mobilisation on other levels. The working-class movement had accustomed its members to a defensive mentality where the response to employers' attacks took the dual form of an appeal to Government and public opinion and the recourse to strike action. In the Autumn of 1938, however, the deteriorating international situation provided the pretext for employers to attack the gains of June 1936. Government, public opinion, and much working-class opinion was convinced that measures such as the forty hour week were responsible for restricting productive capacity in industries of national importance, and that the decree laws of November 1938 could be justified in terms of the need for national defence. In the face of such opposition it was difficult to mobilise effective resistance.

The strike of 30 November 1938 was rather less than effective and its aftermath saw widespread desertion from the Marseilles trade unions and an increased level of internal conflict. There was to be little chance of working-class mobilisation being achieved again, either on a class or a political basis. Groups such as the PCF were tempted to use their dominant role in the local union movement to make the more traditional and clientelistic elements respond to their calls for action. Communist use of strongarm tactics to win control of the clientelistic and politically important seamen's union failed, but the PC was still free to use the dockers' union, with its largely foreign, and hence more malleable, membership, for various unpopular political campaigns. This return to the traditional local practice of using different groups of workers to serve the interests of an otherwise unpopular political party, was indicative of the weakness of the local labour movement.

The most effective example of working-class mobilisation to be found in Marseilles after November 1938 was based on primarily localist sentiment. It concerned the resistance which was organised against the mise en tutelle of Marseilles in March 1939, with the accompanying by-passing of local political institutions and subsequent mass sackings in the public sector. The local outcry was sufficiently great for the trade union movement to succeed in sinking its differences and organising a campaign around these issues.<sup>1</sup> The campaign was successful in winning much support, but it is significant that such support was won

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1 La Vie Ouvrière, 17.8.1939 & 24.8.1939, F. Pauriol, 'Une initiative Daladier-Reynaud. L'Extraordinaire 'réorganisation' de Marseille.' No Place, no date (Marseille, August 1939?), Olivesi, in Edouard Daladier Chef de Gouvernement op.cit. p180.

neither on a class nor an ideological basis but on a purely local and defensive one. For some, the issue was the continuation of their right to employment in a vastly overstuffed and corrupt public sector, for others the problem was posed in terms of their continued right to base their political appeal on their ability to dispense power and hence patronage. The local Popular Front organisation had changed from seeking working-class mobilisation in favour of national and international political and ideological issues to a situation where its only possibility of action was in mobilising support for a movement based on a primitive localism which demanded the right for Marseilles to continue to govern itself according to ideologically vapid and morally corrupt principles.

This pre war period was characterised by a reduced level of working-class mobilisation and conflict, together with the disintegration of a distinctive working-class politics, as the majority were reconciled to the anti-labour national political consensus and the minority threw itself into increasingly unpopular campaigns which merely confirmed its isolation on all fronts. As the issues which had once united the working-class behind the Popular Front and led it into the trade unions and parties of the Left had lost their salience, so the working-class movement began to disintegrate, its various elements being reintegrated into the new political consensus. The new political campaigns of the Left, and primarily its vigorous opposition to appeasement, evoked little favorable response among the working-class. On the economic and industrial front the splits provoked by earlier political conflicts prevented the elaboration of a united stand. When the Government attacked the forty hour week many workers were unsure as to what attitude

to take. The trade unions claimed that it would increase unemployment without increasing production. Many workers, however, had already abandoned the analyses put forward by the trade unions as to the political and economic response needed in the face of impending war. For workers in declining industries the forty hour week may well have appeared as a good way of preserving employment, but they could not fail to notice that the decline still continued. For other workers in the industries affected by the upturn in demand caused by rearmament, the abolition of the forty hour week opened the path for them to do what their unions and the law had previously prevented, namely to compensate for declining real wages by working overtime, albeit at reduced rates. The very nature of the forty hour question would mean that without a popular and powerful leadership, the working-class would respond in a piecemeal way, according to its diverse individual interests, rather than as a single entity. The united mass working-class movement of the Popular Front period was clearly a thing of the past. Most of the fragmented and divided working-class was now well integrated into the nation, but no longer on its own terms.

## 6. Conclusion

The focus and findings of this study of the Marseilles working-class movement during the Popular Front have been rather different from those found in most national accounts of the period. There has been relatively little discussion here of the alternative theories of working-class spontaneity or of Communist plots. The emphasis has instead been on a process of working-class mobilisation which, whilst triggered off

by national events, had its own very specific local origins and impact. The fragmented and quiescent Marseilles working class of 1933, with its narrowly local, clientelistic, and minority parties and trade unions was much changed by the experience of the Popular Front. By 1938 the narrowly defined racial identities of the past had been accompanied, and on occasion superseded, by a sense of class identity. The concerns of national and international politics had shown themselves to be more powerful stimulants to collective action and organisation than the old highly personalised local struggles between rival clientelistic systems. The issues of fascism and antifascism and the campaign for the Popular Front had shown that Marseilles, although perched on the edge of France, was very much a part of the political life of the Nation and of Europe. The Marseilles working class too was obliged to seek its identity through the enlarged possibilities offered by the construction of a national, rather than a local, coalition. The benefits of such a strategy could be greater than any offered in the past system, but the costs were far from negligible. By 1938 it was the turn of the working class rather than of employers to experience the bitter taste of defeat at the hands of the enlarged and strengthened national consensus which they themselves had helped construct.

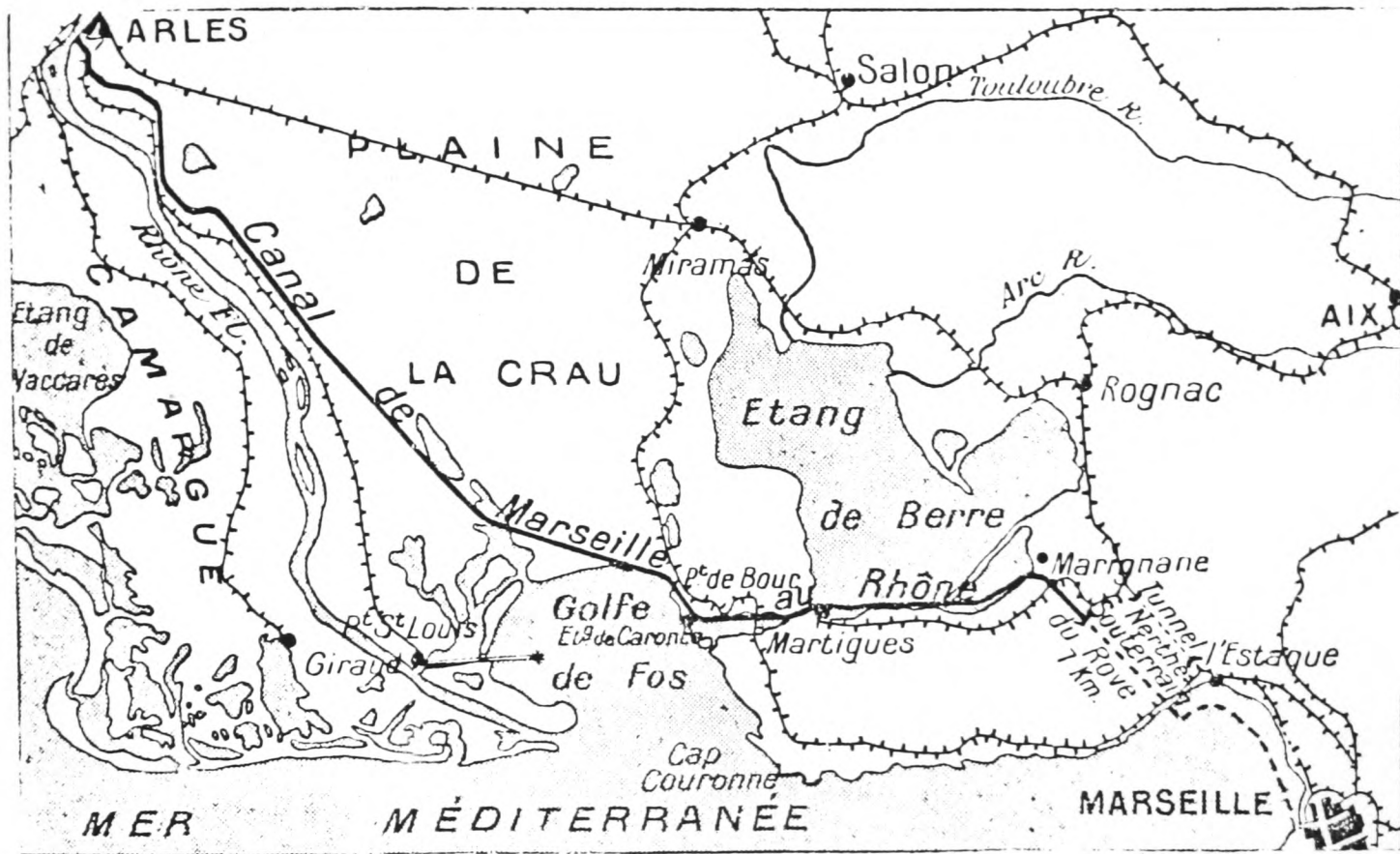
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1MAPS

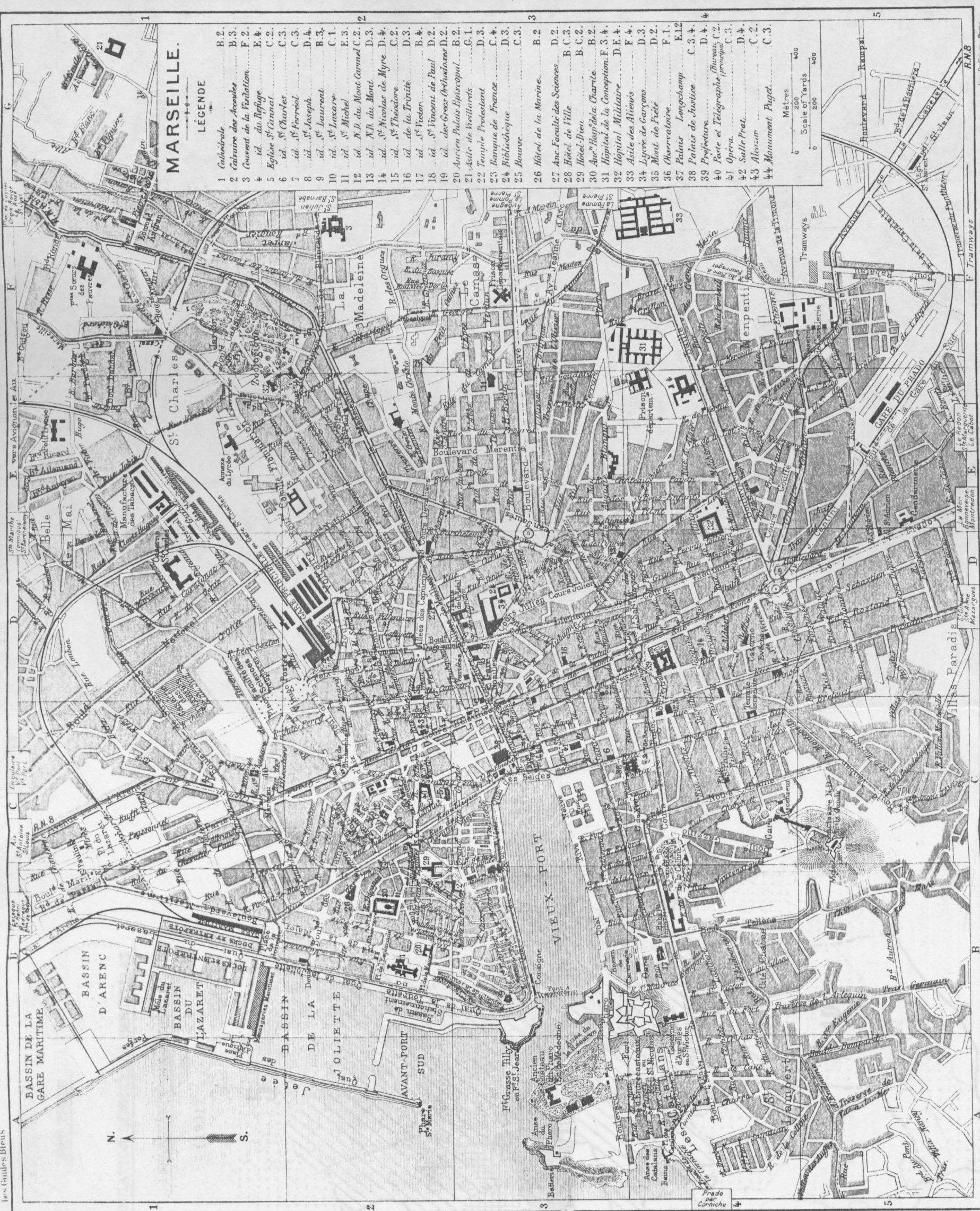
1. Marseilles and its adjoining ports
2. The Centre of Marseilles
3. Population in Marseilles - Inhabitants per hectare (1931)
4. Baptismal Orthodoxy in Marseilles in 1921
5. Marseilles Church Attendance in 1953
6. The Marseilles Port Complex
7. The Distribution of Dockers' Homes in Marseilles in 1942, by Country of Origin
8. The Industries of Marseilles

MAP ONE

MARSEILLES AND ITS ADJOINING PORTS



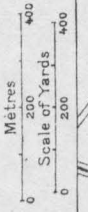
Source: J. Léotard, Le Port de Marseille, Paris, 1922, p. 203.



# MARSEILLE.

## LÉGENDE

- 1 Cathédrale B. 2.
- 2 Calvaire des Accoules B. 3.
- 3 Couvent de la Vierge F. 2.
- 4 id. du Refuge E. 4.
- 5 Eglise St. Lannal C. 2.
- 6 id. St. Charles C. 3.
- 7 id. St. Pierre C. 3.
- 8 id. St. Joseph D. 4.
- 9 id. St. Laurent B. 3.
- 10 id. St. Laxare C. 1.
- 11 id. St. Michel E. 3.
- 12 id. N. D. du Mont Carmel C. 2.
- 13 id. N. D. du Mont D. 3.
- 14 id. St. Nicolas de Myre D. 4.
- 15 id. St. Theodore C. 2.
- 16 id. de la Trinité D. 3.
- 17 id. St. Victor B. 4.
- 18 id. St. Vincent de Paul D. 2.
- 19 id. des Grands Orthodoxes D. 2.
- 20 Ancien Palais Episcopal B. 2.
- 21 Asile de Vieillard G. 1.
- 22 Temple Protestant D. 3.
- 23 Banque de France C. 4.
- 24 Bibliothèque D. 3.
- 25 Bourne C. 3.
- 26 Hôtel de la Marine B. 2.
- 27 Anc. Faculté des Sciences D. 2.
- 28 Hôtel de Ville B. C. 3.
- 29 Hôtel-Dieu B. C. 2.
- 30 Anc. Hôpital de la Charité B. 2.
- 31 Hôpital de la Conception F. 3. 4.
- 32 Hôpital Militaire D. F. 4.
- 33 Asile des Aliénés F. 4.
- 34 Lycée de Carsons D. 3.
- 35 Mont de Piété D. 2.
- 36 Observatoire F. 1.
- 37 Palais Longchamp E. 1. 2.
- 38 Palais de Justice C. 3. 4.
- 39 Préfecture D. 4. 4.
- 40 Poste et Télégraphe Bureau C. 2.
- 41 Opéra C. 3.
- 42 Salle Prati D. 4.
- 43 Alcazar C. 2.
- 44 Monument Pugin C. 3.



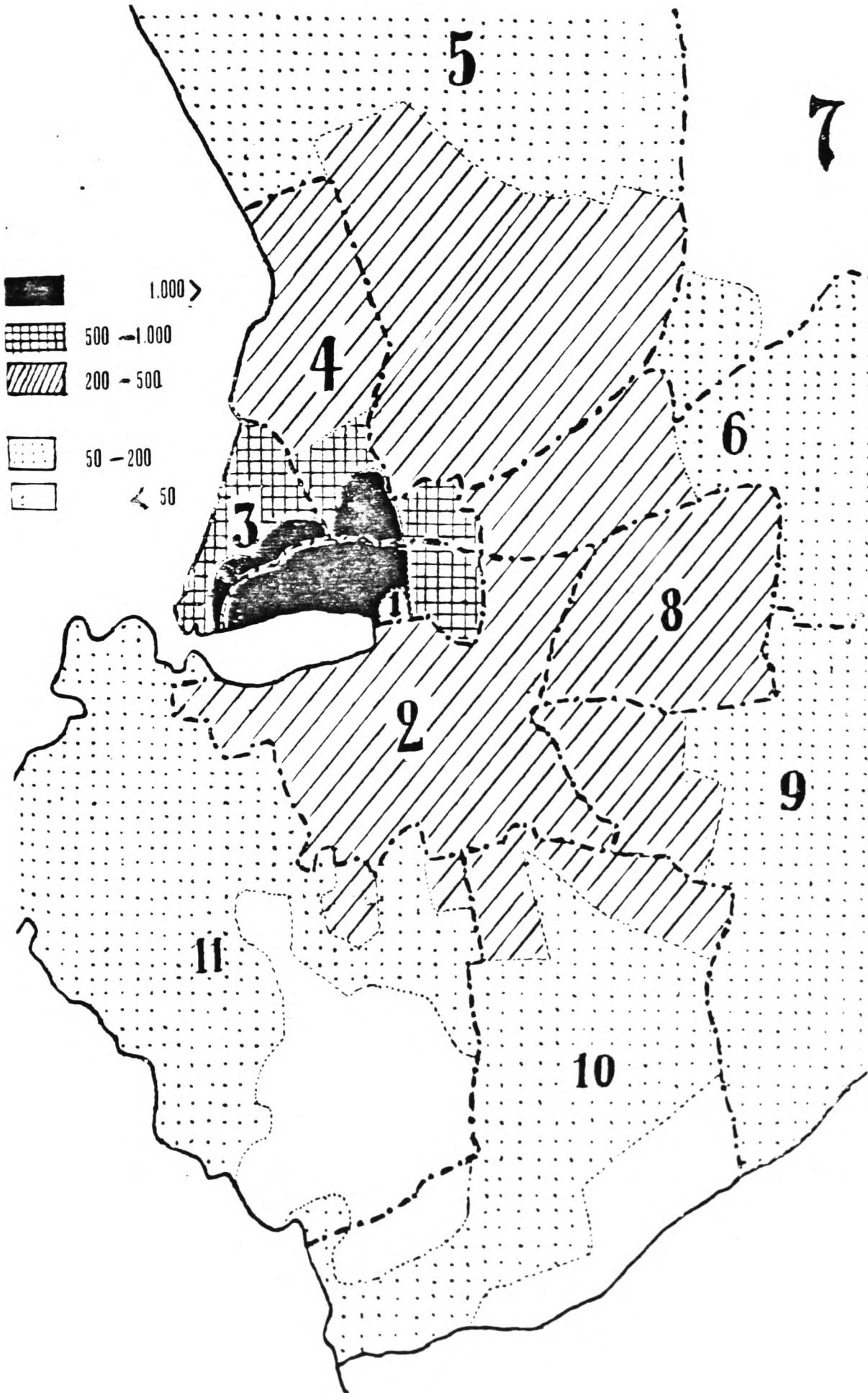
MAP TWO: THE CENTRE OF MARSEILLES - SOURCE: GUIDE BLEU, LA FRANCE: SUD-EST, PARIS, 1929

MAP THREE

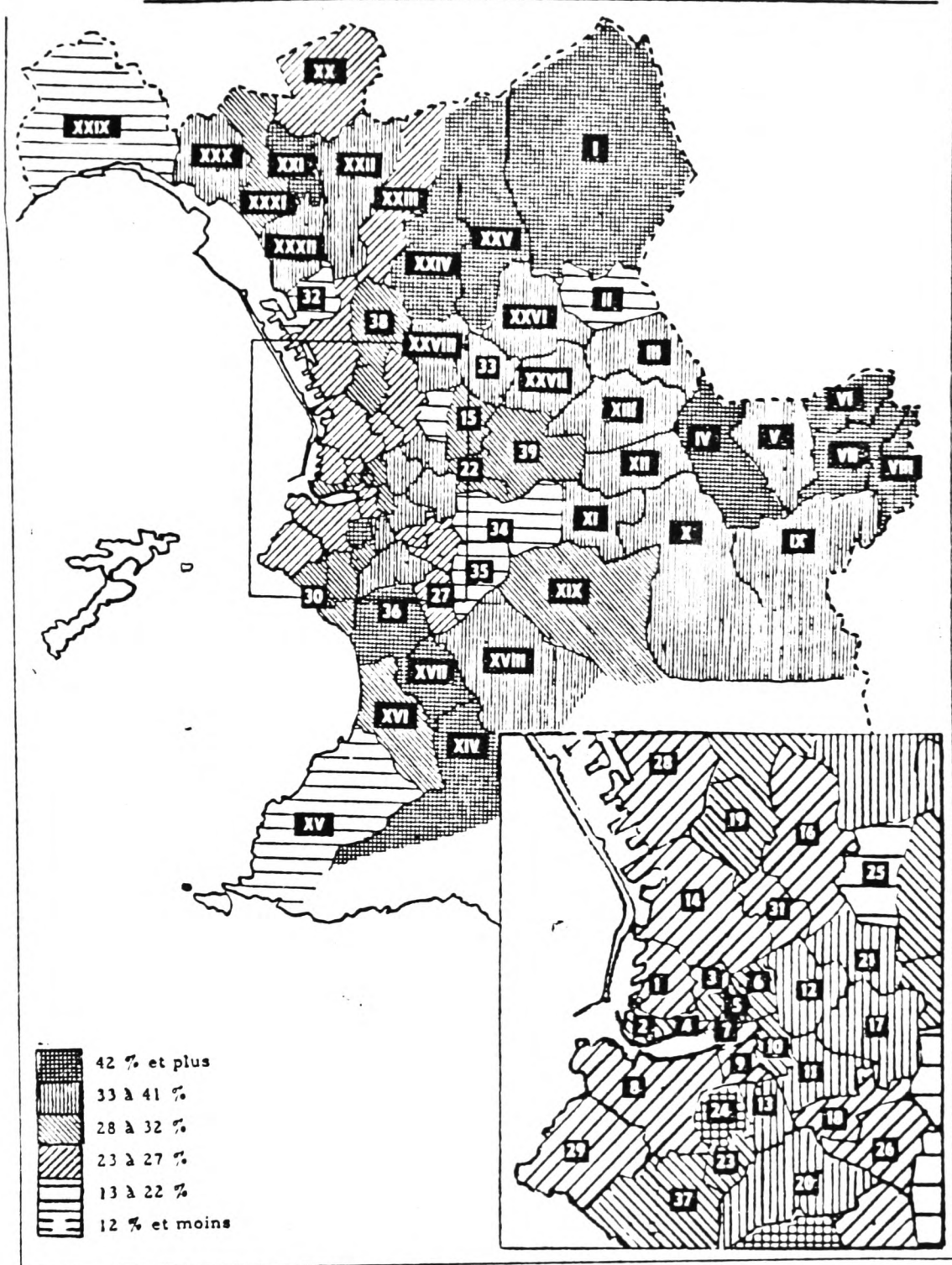
POPULATION DENSITY IN MARSEILLES

INHABITANTS PER HECTARE

(1931)



BAPTISMAL ORTHODOXY IN 1921 IN MARSEILLES



(Percentage of children baptised within 15 days of birth)  
Average - 28%

PARISHES

Centre :

1. La Major. — 2. Saint-Laurent. — 3. Les Carmes. — 4. Saint-Cannat. — 5. Saint-Martin-Saint-Paulin. — 6. Saint-Théodore. — 7. Saint-Ferréol. — 8. Saint-Victor. — 9. Saint-Charles I. M. — 10. Sainte-Trinité. — 11. Notre-Dame-du-Mont. — 12. Les Réformés. — 13. Saint-Joseph. I. M. — 14. Saint-Lazare. — 15. Les Chartreux. — 16. La Belle-de-Mai. — 17. Saint-Michel. — 18. Saint-Jean-Baptiste. — 19. Saint-Mauront. — 20. Saint-Adrien-Sacré-Cœur. — 21. Saint-Pierre-Saint-Paul. — 22. Saint-Calixte. — 23. Saint-François-Vauban. — 24. Saint-Philippe. — 25. Sainte-Thérèse-d'Avila. — 26. Saint-Défendant. — 27. Le Rouet. — 28. Les Crottes. — 29. Endoume. — 30. Saint-Cassien. — 31. Le Bon-Pasteur. — 32. Saint-Trophime (agg. 1901). — 33. Saint-Just (agg. 1901). — 34. Saint-Pierre (agg. 1901). — 35. La Capelette (agg. 1901). — 36. Saint-Giniez (agg. 1901). — 37. Le Roucas-Blanc (C. 1911). — 38. Le Canet (agg. 1921). — 39. Saint-Barnabé (agg. 1921).

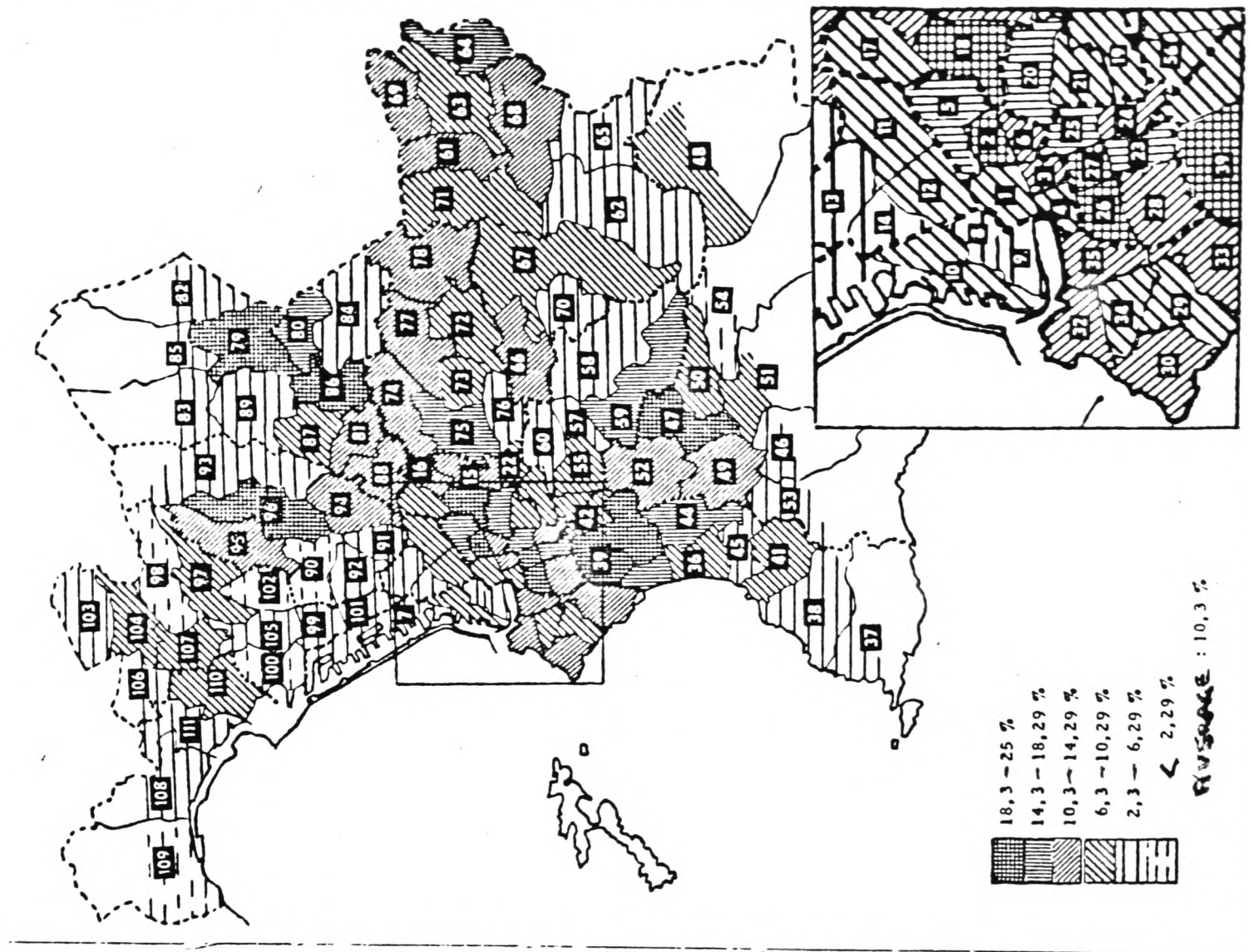
Suburbs :

- I. Château-Gombert. — II. La Croix-Rouge. — III. Les Olives. — IV. La Valentine. — V. Les Accates. — VI. La Treille. — VII. Les Camoins. — VIII. Eoures. — IX. Saint-Menet. — X. Saint-Marcel. — XI. La Pomme. — XII. Les Caillols. — XIII. Saint-Julien. — XIV. Mazargues. — XV. Montredon. — XVI. Bonneveine. — XVII. Sainte-Anne. — XVIII. Sainte-Marguerite. — XIX. Saint-Loup. — XX. Saint-Antoine. — XXI. La Viste. — XXII. Les Aygalades. — XXIII. Saint-Joseph. E. M. — XXIV. Sainte-Marthe. — XXV. Le Merlan (C. 1911). — XXVI. Saint-Jérôme. — XXVII. Montolivet. — XXVIII. Saint-Barthélemy. — XXIX. L'Estaque. — XXX. Saint-Henri. — XXXI. Saint-André. — XXXII. Saint-Louis.

Source: F. Charpin, op.cit. Carte X

MARSEILLES CHURCH ATTENDANCE IN 1953

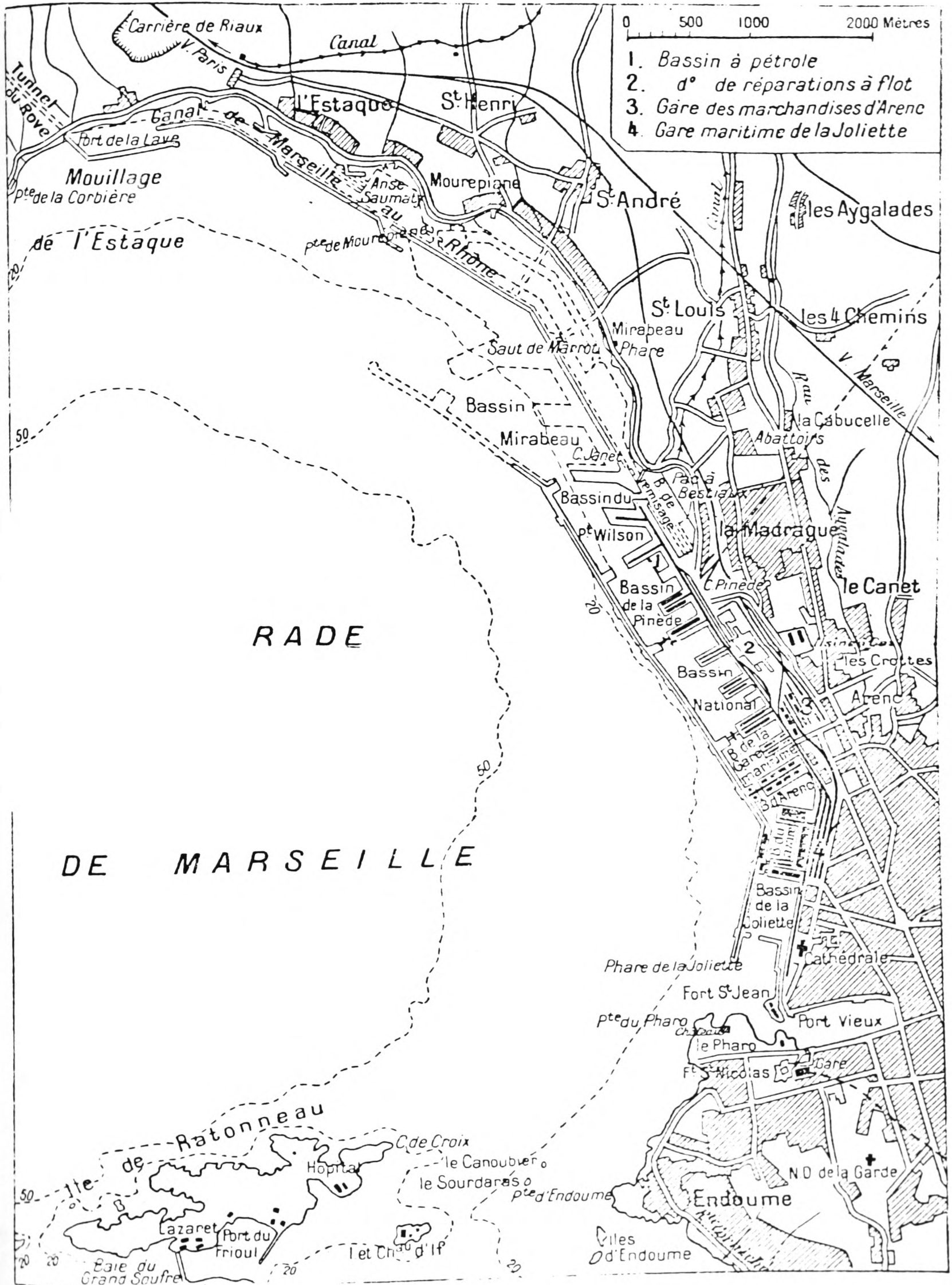
(Proportion of population over 14 years old present at Sunday Mass)



Key to quartiers & arrondissements

- I<sup>er</sup> arrondissement :**  
 1. Belsunce. — 2. Chapitre. — 3. Noailles. — 4. Opéra. — 5. Saint-Charles. — 6. Thiers.
- II<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 7. Arenç. — 8. Grands-Carmes. — 9. Hôtel de Ville. — 10. La Joliette.
- III<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 11. Belle-de-Mai. — 12. Saint-Lazare. — 13. Saint-Mauront. — 14. La Villette.
- IV<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 15. La Blancarde. — 16. Les Chartreux. — 17. Chutes-Lavie. — 18. Cinq-Avenues.
- V<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 19. Baille. — 20. Le Camas. — 21. Conception. — 22. Saint-Pierre.
- VI<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 23. Castellane. — 24. Lodi. — 25. Notre-Dame-du-Mont. — 26. Palais de Justice. — 27. Préfecture. — 28. Vauban.
- VII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 29. Bompard. — 30. Endoume. — 31. Les Iles. — 32. Pharo. — 33. Rouca-Bianc. — 34. Saint-Lambert. — 35. Saint-Victor.
- VIII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 36. Bonneveine. — 37. Les Goudes. — 38. Montredon. — 39. Périer. — 40. La Plage. — 41. La Pointe-Rouge. — 42. Le Rouet. — 43. Saint-Giniez. — 44. Sainte-Anne. — 45. Vieille-Chapelle.
- IX<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 46. Les Baumettes. — 47. Le Cabot. — 48. Carpiagne. — 49. Mazargues. — 50. La Panouse. — 51. Le Redon. — 52. Sainte-Marguerite. — 53. Sormiou. — 54. Vaufrèges.
- X<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 55. La Capelette. — 56. Mementi. — 57. Pont-de-Vivaux. — 58. Saint-Loup. — 59. Saint-Tronc. — 60. La Timone.
- XI<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 61. Les Accates. — 62. La Barasse. — 63. Les Camoins. — 64. Eoures. — 65. La Millière. — 66. La Pomme. — 67. Saint-Marcel. — 68. Saint-Menet. — 69. La Treille. — 70. La Valbarelle. — 71. La Valentine.
- XII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 72. Les Caillols. — 73. La Fourragère. — 74. Montolivet. — 75. Saint-Bar-nabé. — 76. Saint-Jean-du-Désert. — 77. Saint-Julien. — 78. Les Trois-Luca.
- XIII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 79. Château-Gombert. — 80. La Croix-Rouge. — 81. Malpassé. — 82. Les Médecins. — 83. Les Mourets. — 84. Les Olives. — 85. Palama. — 86. La Rose. — 87. Saint-Jérôme. — 88. Saint-Just. — 89. Saint-Mitre.
- XIV<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 90. Les Arnavaux. — 91. Bon-Secours. — 92. Le Canet. — 93. Le Merlan. — 94. Saint-Barthélemy. — 95. Saint-Joseph. — 96. Sainte-Marthe.
- XV<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 97. Les Ayalades. — 98. Les Borels. — 99. La Cabucelle. — 100. La Calade. — 101. Les Crottes. — 102. La Delorme. — 103. Notre-Dame-Limite. — 104. Saint-Antoine. — 105. Saint-Louis. — 106. Verduron. — 107. La Viste.
- XVI<sup>e</sup> arrondissement :**  
 108. L'Estaque. — 109. Les Riaux. — 110. Saint-André. — 111. Saint-Henri.

THE MARSEILLES PORT COMPLEX

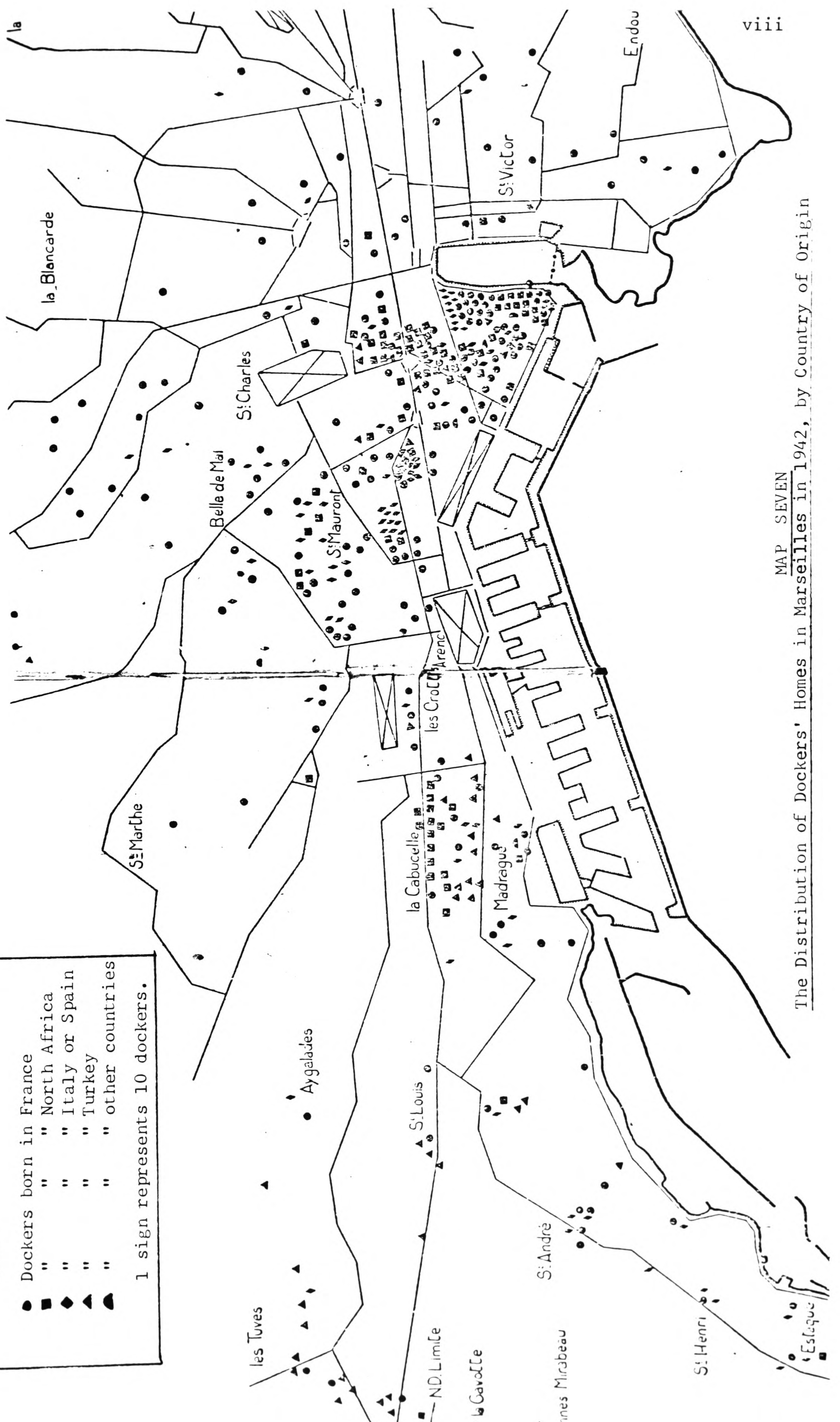


Source: J. Leotard, Le Port de Marseille, Paris, 1922, pp. 72-3

Key

- Dockers born in France
- " " North Africa
- ◆ " " Italy or Spain
- ▲ " " Turkey
- ◐ " " other countries

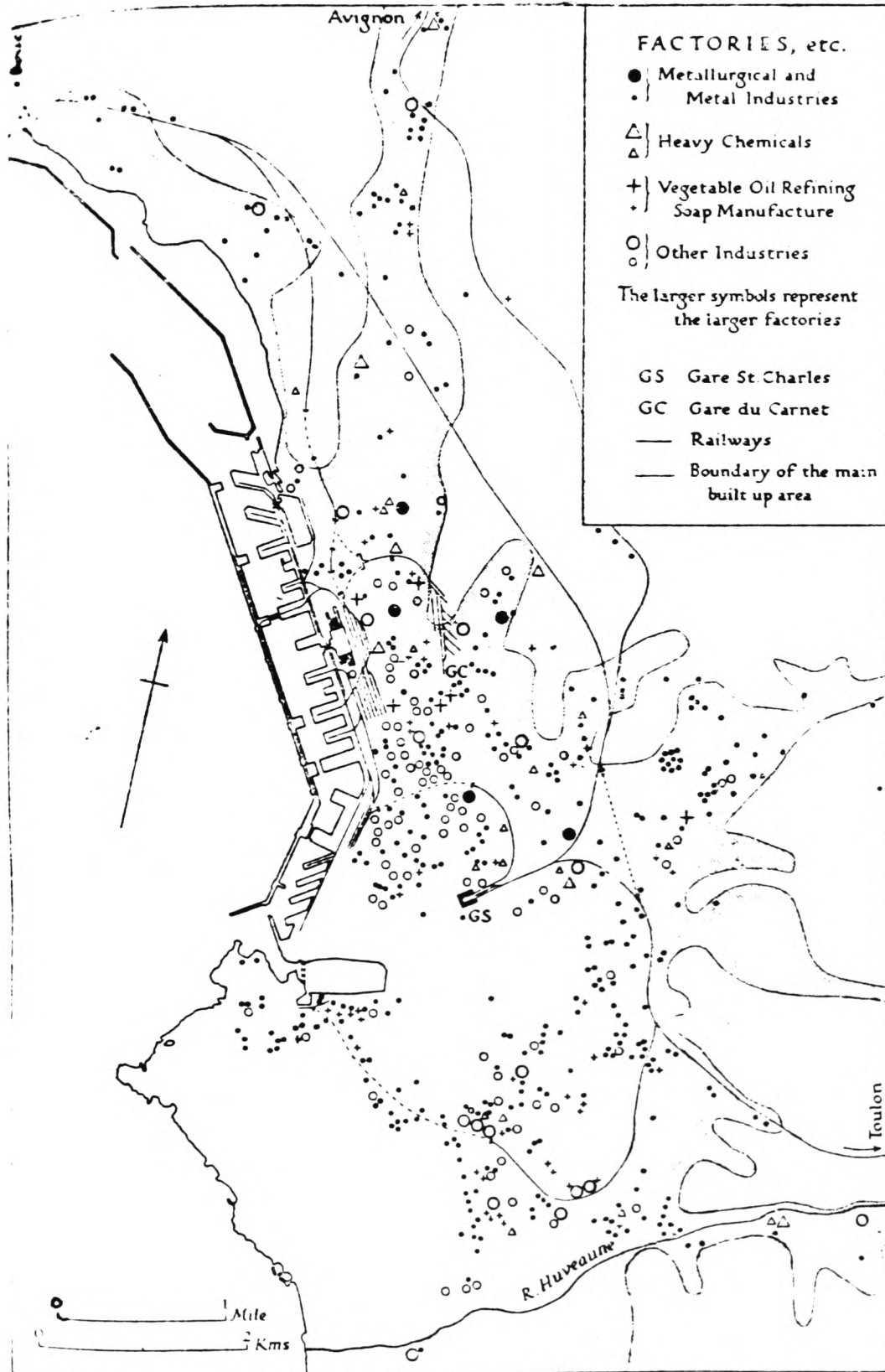
1 sign represents 10 dockers.



MAP SEVEN  
The Distribution of Dockers' Homes in Marseille in 1942, by Country of Origin

MAP EIGHT

THE INDUSTRIES OF MARSEILLES



The factories have avoided the centre of the city and have spread north and south rather than inland to the eastward. While the many oil and soap factories are roughly equally divided by the centre of the city, most of the larger ones lie in the northern group, near the principal heavy industries.

Source: Great Britain - Naval Intelligence Division, BR 503C (Restricted) France,  
Volume IV: Ports and Communications, London, 1942, p.189

TABLE A2.1

STRIKES IN THE BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE 1919-1935

Year	Strikes	Strikers	Days Lost	Av.Size	Av.Length
1919	76	101200	1111884	1332	11.0
1920	61	87697	1537761	1438	17.53
1921	6	3771	8814	629	2.34
1922	17	28610	428397	1683	14.97
1923	17	9070	390552	534	43.05
1924	20	2837	28505	142	10.05
1925	27	11929	173330	442	14.53
1926	50	7108	88442	142	12.44
1927	8	531	4512	66	8.50
1928	33	22326	161295	677	7.22
1929	33	7665	64892	232	8.50
1930	18	3289	27340	183	8.31
1931	5	406	1859	81	4.58
1932	6	3366	34361	561	10.21
1933	1	1200	67200	1200	56
1934	6	3107	17017	518	5.50
1935	9	5450	35160	606	6.45
1919-1935 ) Annual Av.)	23	17621	245960	766	13.96

Source: Statistique des Grèves, 1919-1935.

STRIKES IN FRANCE 1919-1935

Year	Strikes	(000s) Strikers	(000s) Days Lost	Av.Size	Av. Length
1919	2026	1151	15478	568	13.4
1920	1832	1317	23112	719	17.6
1921	475	402	7027	847	17.5
1922	665	290	3935	437	13.6
1923	1068	331	4172	310	12.6
1924	1083	275	3863	254	14.1
1925	931	249	2046	268	8.2
1926	1660	349	4072	210	11.7
1927	396	111	1046	279	9.5
1928	816	204	6377	250	31.2
1929	1213	240	2765	198	11.5
1930	1093	582	7209	532	12.4
1931	286	48	950	169	19.7
1932	362	71	2444	196	34.4
1933	343	87	1199	254	13.8
1934	385	101	2393	261	23.8
1935	376	109	1182	290	10.9
1919-1935 ) Annual Av. )	883	348	5251	394	15.1.

Source: R. Goetz-Girey, Le mouvement des grèves en France, 1919-1962, Paris, 1965, p.73.

TABLE A2.3

STRIKES IN FRANCE & THE BOUCHES-DU-RHONE 1919-1935RATES PER 100,000 ACTIVE POPULATION

Year	Strikes		Strikers		Days Lost	
	BdR	Fr	BdR	Fr	Bdr	Fr
1919	17.5	9.3	23264	5299	255606	71260
1920	14.02	8.43	20160	6063	353508	106406
1921	1.38	2.19	867	1851	2026	32352
1922	3.91	3.06	6577	1335	98482	18116
1923	3.91	4.92	2085	1524	89782	19208
1924	4.64	5.06	658	1285	6614	18056
1925	6.26	4.35	2768	1164	40216	9563
1926	11.60	7.76	1649	1631	20520	19033
1927	1.86	1.85	123	519	1047	4889
1928	7.66	3.81	5180	954	37423	29807
1929	7.25	5.61	1685	1110	14262	12794
1930	3.96	5.06	723	2693	6009	33357
1931	1.10	1.32	89	222	409	4396
1932	1.32	1.68	740	329	7552	10309
1933	0.22	1.69	252	429	14088	5918
1934	1.32	1.90	651	499	3568	11811
1935	1.99	1.86	1143	538	7371	5834

Notes: Strike figures from previous tables.

Active population from censuses of 1921, 1926, 1931, 1936 applied respectively to data from 1919-1923, 1924-1928, 1929-1932, and 1933-1935

	1921	1926	1931	1936
France	21720604	21394088	21611835	20260456
BdR	434622	430650	454690	477298

## STRIKES IN MARSEILLES, THE BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE AND FRANCE, 1919-1935

(BY SECTOR)

SECTOR	STRIKES			STRIKERS			DAYS LOST		AV. SIZE			AV. LENGTH	
	M	BDR	FR	M	BDR	FR	M	BDR	M	BDR	FR	M	BDR
Agriculture	1	4	456	7500	10515	13226	6000	56033	7500	2629	290	5.33	0.8
%	0.37	1.04	3.04	3.15	4.03	2.23	0.22	1.86					
Mines/Quarrying	-	15	612	-	2999	963829	-	22087	-	200	1575	-	7.36
%	-	3.9	4.08	-	0.01	16.25	-	0.73	-				
Food Industry	40	49	619	17389	18405	103948	98527	107209	435	376	168	5.67	5.82
%	14.81	12.73	4.12	7.31	1.15	1.75	3.62	3.57					
Chemicals	31	43	475	22340	23949	197640	227321	246017	557	721	416	10.18	10.27
%	11.48	11.17	3.16	9.39	9.17	3.33	8.36	8.18					
Print/Paper	4	7	514	663	752	81451	6274	7389	166	107	158	9.46	9.83
%	1.48	1.82	3.42	0.28	0.29	1.37	0.23	0.25					
Leather/Hides	11	11	730	3317	3317	161967	80873	80873	302	302	222	24.38	24.38
%	4.07	2.86	4.86	1.39	1.27	2.73	2.97	2.69					
Textiles/Clothing	16	17	2293	4558	4607	1050101	30778	31611	271	285	458	6.76	6.86
%	5.93	4.42	15.28	1.92	1.76	17.70	1.13	1.05					
Woodworking	22	26	1284	8639	8803	152584	96673	104991	393	339	119	11.19	11.93
%	8.15	6.75	8.55	3.63	3.37	2.57	3.55	3.49					
Metal/Engineering	37	47	3039	32282	34287	1191553	827194	863311	872	730	392	25.62	25.18
%	13.7	12.21	20.25	13.57	13.14	20.09	30.42	28.72					
Building	46	79	3129	48949	55684	663084	878776	976174	1064	705	212	17.95	17.53
%	17.04	20.52	20.85	20.57	21.33	11.18	32.31	32.47					
Transport	53	76	1726	81215	86549	1121036	441984	484964	1532	1139	649	5.44	5.6
%	19.63	19.74	11.50	34.13	33.16	19.91	16.25	16.13					
Service/Other	9	11	133	11105	11168	112679	25110	25481	1234	1015	847	2.26	2.28
%	3.33	2.86	0.89	4.67	4.28	1.90	0.92	0.85					
TOTALS	270	385	15010	237957	261035	5932098	2719510	3006140	881	678	395	11.43	11.52
as % of BDR	70%	100%		91%	100%		90%	100%					

- Notes: 1. Percentages add down the columns to show the proportion of strikes, days lost, and strikers accounted for by each sector out of the total within the area.
2. The figures for France have been obtained from the summary table printed at the end of each volume of the annual Statistique des Grèves, entitled 'Importance et Résultats des Grèves dans les divers groupes d'Industries'. The numbers of days lost are not supplied. Totals may differ from the annual figures since some strikes affected more than one sector, and lack of information on other strikes prevented their inclusion in the table.
3. Figures for Marseille and the Bouches-du-Rhône were compiled by listing every strike for which the relevant information was provided in the Statistique des Grèves between 1919 and 1935. Where full information was not provided strikes have not been included on this table. Annual totals for 1919-1935 listed on other tables will therefore be higher than the ones listed here. Marseille has been listed separately but is included within the figures for the Bouches-du-Rhône.

M = Marseille  
BDR = Bouches-du-Rhône  
FR = France

Source: Statistique des Grèves, 1919-1935.

STRIKES IN MARSEILLES 1-25 JUNE 1936

(Breakdown by standard sector)

<u>SECTOR</u>	<u>STRIKERS</u>	<u>STRIKERS AS % OF TOTAL</u>
I Agriculture	-	-
II Mines/Quarrying	-	-
III Food Industry	5450	13.9
IV Chemicals	6490	16.6
V Print/Paper	470	1.2
VI Leather/Hides	1645	4.2
VII Textiles/Clothing	4355	11.11
VIII Woodworking	1856	4.74
IX Metal/Engineering	5707	14.56
X Building	5654	14.43
XI Transport	7540	19.24
XII Service/Other	-	-
TOTAL	39187	99.98

Source: AD XIVM 25/75 Manuscript

Note: Fuller details in Table 7.2

The original table includes 1487 strikers from divers industries.

These have been excluded from the above table.

## STRIKE DATA FRANCE &amp; BOUCHES-DU-RHONE

1936-1939

Year	Month	Strikes		Factory Occupations		Strikers	
		BDR	FR	BDR	FR	BDR	FR
1936	J	4	50	-	-	c1000	8739
	F	3	38	-	-	c6000	9142
	M	-	39	-	-	-	12127
	A	-	32	-	-	-	12784
	M	5	65	1	?	c1315	13727
	J	111	12142	98	8941	71945	1830938
	J	63	1751	21	639	4524	181471
	A	8	542	3	199	656	56861
	S	18	699	11	310	9127	123592
	O	11	974	8	128	1728	66814
	N	7	363	4	133	1892	51501
	D	6	302	4	79	700	43589
TOTAL	1936	236	16997	150	10429	98887	2411285
1937	J	14	267	9	87	2287	39485
	F	14	376	8	75	2775	76152
	M	17	245	11	74	5389	40280
	A	5	736	3	89	291	60384
	M	15	586	2	66	16251	72633
	J	12	522	7	52	1319	30877
	J	19	375	4	41	1091	22794
	A	5	151	2	22	165	9144
	S	4	130	0	13	475	17966
	O	2	97	1	13	?	19602
	N	1	78	-	11	?	19587
	D	4	117	-	28	?	17683
TOTAL	1937	114	3688	47	571	30043	426587
1938	J	2	53		10	600	5983
	F	3	57		2	3218	11153
	M	8	73		13	20659	67277
	A	1	219		41	58	145706
	M	-	57		6	-	9819
	J	2	53		12	6070	146565
	J	2	47		6	5006	29452
	A	2	46		4	50	8877
	S	2	68		5	842	39818
	O	-	30		19	-	14094
	N	-	60		2	-	31507
	D	1	17		1	355	13717
TOTAL	1938	23	780		121	36858	523968
1939	J	-					
	F	2				205	
	M	-					
	M	3				135	
TOTAL	1939	5				340	

Notes to Table A2.6:

1. All the data on France presented here comes from the Bulletin du Ministère du Travail, 1936-1939. Figures were gathered each month from information supplied by Prefects in daily telegrams. Prefects varied as to their efficiency in supplying information to Paris, and the figures for most of 1937 and all of 1938 do not include information from many important départements. Missing information and duplication of strike reporting explain the variations between data collected monthly and later, annual, statistics. The Annuaire Statistique de la France Résumé Rétrospectif 1966, Paris, 1966, p.120 suggests that there were 16,907, 2,616, and 1,220 strikes in France in 1936, 1937, and 1938 respectively. In the same years, the Annuaire Statistique provides figures of 2,423,000, 323,800, and 1,333,000 strikers.
2. None of the information on strikes presented here includes general strikes such as Mayday strikes and the strike of 30th November 1938.
3. Information on strikes in the Bouches-du-Rhône from June 1936 to September 1937 has been taken from the Bulletin du Ministère du travail, 1936-1938. The same source provided details of the number of strikes in the département for the first five months of 1936. Information on the number of strikers in this period has come from J.Bally, op.cit. pp. 11-14, Rouge-Midi, 161, 1.2.1936, Le Petit Provençal, 19.5.1936, and AD XIVM25/83. Information on the number of strikers and strikes in the département from October 1937 to May 1939 comes from AD XIVM 25/203 and M.Tournier op.cit. pp. 176-182. The sign '?' indicates that whilst there is firm information as to the existence of a strike there is no information on the number of strikers involved. There is no systematic information available on the number of factory occupations in the Bouches-du-Rhône in 1938.

APPENDIX 3

THE GROWTH OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

DURING THE POPULAR FRONT

The national increases in trade union membership during the Popular Front, studied by Antoine Prost, were also experienced in Marseilles. The graphs and tables which follow give some indication of the scale of this growth within the CGT. The expansion in CGT membership was dramatic but there was also extensive organisational growth. Within the Marseilles Union Locale of the CGT the 113 trade unions which affiliated in February 1936 had grown to 177 by March 1939.<sup>1</sup> Whereas only 157 unions had been represented at the July 1936 Congress of the UD a total of 330 unions were affiliated a year later.<sup>2</sup> Within Marseilles itself, a total of 280 trade unions were created between 1934 and 1938. The rate of creation of these unions (which included unions which were not affiliated to the CGT) provides a good indication of the pace of organisational growth, and then consolidation, of the trade union movement.

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TABLE A.3.1.

Registration of New Trade Unions in Marseilles

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Year	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Number of Trade Unions Registered	7	22	157	44	25

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Source: AD XIVM 24/56

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Figure A.3.1. shows the pattern of change in trade union membership between 1914 and 1939. The level of membership during the Popular Front

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1 Le Midi Syndicaliste, 199, 25.2.1937 & AD M6 10792 Report of 6.3.1939.

2 Le Midi Syndicaliste, 188, 14.7.1936 & 207, 12.7.1937.

TABLE A.3.2.

## Marseilles Trade Union Membership - Major CGT Federations - 1936-1938

Federation	Membership		Percentage Growth	
	1936	1937	1936-1937	1936-1938
Building, Glass & Wood Industries	2645	13643	516	451
Chemicals	595	10700	1798	2014
Civil Servants, Teachers, & Postal Workers	3788	9006	238	266
Clerical Workers	2380	8494	357	334
Council & Public Service Workers	5487	7187	131	174
Dockers	4670	6936	149	171
Engineers	893	8069	904	1251
Food Industry	2246	11643	518	499
Hair Dressers	257	287	112	100
Hatters	187	328	175	143
Jewellers	350	170	49	36
Leather & Hides	152	1445	931	1122
Lighting & Power	1887	2531	134	139
Railways	2300	4052	176	240
Sailors	7100	8830	124	141
Singers/Actors Etc.	1378	581	42	37
Textile & Clothing Workers	470	4535	965	861
Tobacco & Match Manufacturers	177	762	431	318
Transport	5978	7536	126	116
Others	2246			
Total Marseilles CGT	45186	107911	239	260

Sources to Table A.3.2.

- 1 1936 statistics from AD M6 11354 & XIVM 24/53 CD to Prefect 23.6.1936. This list of union members compiled for a police report was probably taken from the trade union movement's own membership lists drawn up for the July 1936 Congress of the Union Départementale. The figures probably date from May or early June 1936 and although they do not take account of the dramatic increase in membership which took place after June they reflect the extent of membership growth which had already taken place in some sectors (most notably the docks) between 1934 and 1936.
- 2 1937 statistics from, Union Départementale des Syndicats Ouvriers des Bouches-du-Rhône, Congrès Départemental de Marseille les 26 et 27 Juin 1937, Rapports aux Syndicats, Marseilles, 1937, pp15-18 'nombre de timbres pris à l'UD au 30 Avril 1937'.
- 3 1938 statistics from, Union Départemental des Syndicats Ouvriers des Bouches-du-Rhône, Congrès Départemental de Marseille les 25 et 26 Juin 1938, Marseille, 1938, pp20-23 'Relevé des timbres pour l'année 1937-1938'.
- 4 The procedure followed here has been the same as that adopted by the trade unions themselves in that it has been assumed that there was one trade union member for every ten stamps paid.
- 5 The sources cited here provide data for each individual trade union. For the sake of clarity the tables are made up from data on unions grouped according to their relevant federation. The reports of the CGT congresses of Toulouse (1936) and Nantes (1938) have been useful for indicating which federations individual unions belonged to.

period far outstripped that achieved in the previous period of expansion - 1919-1920. It seems that 1936 was the year which saw the most dramatic increase in CGT membership before there was a slight fall-off at the end of that year. Growth picked up again during 1937 but there was a marked decline from the middle of 1938 onwards. Evidence presented in Chapter 9 suggests that the decline in membership in 1939 was probably even more marked than is indicated by Figure A.3.1. Table A.3.2. shows that whilst all the major Marseilles union federations experienced changes in membership between 1936-1938 these changes were very varied. In a period of very rapid growth some unions actually declined in size. Other unions, in sectors which had been relatively well organised before June 1936, grew at a slower than average rate. The growth rate of the industrial union federations was, however, the most pronounced development between 1936 and 1938. (See Figure A.3.2) Differential rates of growth in the Marseilles trade union movement dramatically changed its composition. Whereas industrial federations had only made up 23 per cent of total union membership in June 1936, less than a year later their share had increased to 50 per cent, with the previously dominant tertiary sector now having its share reduced to the remaining 50 per cent. The falling share of membership held by tertiary sector federations reflected their superior organisation prior to June 1936. Table A.3.3. shows the particularly high level of trade union organisation amongst public service workers before the strikes of 1936. This observation confirms previous statements about the clientelistic nature of trade union organisation within the public sector. Similarly, the fact that public service workers in Marseilles trade unions in 1938 alone exceeded the total number of such workers in the Bouches-du-Rhône in 1936 confirms the expansion in municipal employment which took place during the early years of the Popular Front. By contrast, the fact that members of the chemical workers' trade union for the whole of the Bouches-du-Rhône were

TABLE A.3.3.

Selected Unionisation Rates\* in Marseilles 1936 - 1938

Federation	Unionisable Population in Département	Unionisation Rate - Percentage		
		1936	1937	1938
Building, Glass & Wood Industries	32326	8.18	42.2	36.94
Chemicals	16451	3.62	65.04	72.84
Civil Servants, Teachers & Postal Workers	22165	17.09	40.63	45.45
Clerical Workers	51004	4.67	16.65	15.59
Council & Public Service Workers	7321	74.95	98.17	130.19
Dockers	11067	42.20	62.67	72.18
Engineers	25226	3.54	31.99	44.28
Food Industry	21182	10.6	55	52.86
Hairdressers	2479	10.37	11.58	10.41
Hatters	1764	10.60	18.59	15.19
Jewellers	595	58.82	28.57	21
Leather & Hides	3585	4.24	40.31	47.56
Railways	12673	18.15	31.97	43.57
Sailors	11901	59.66	74.20	83.94
Textile & Clothing Workers	10735	4.38	46.62	37.68
Marseilles CGT	278829	16.21	38.70	42.17

\* It has not proved possible to ascertain the total number of union members in the département in each federation and the 'unionisation rate' presented here is in fact the proportion of the unionisable population in the département which was made up from trade unionists in Marseilles. Since there is no occupational census for Marseilles alone the actual unionisation rate for Marseilles cannot be discovered. The imperfect procedure used here to determine unionisation rates results in underrecording. The broad trends are, however, still evident from this table and it is probable that, since Marseilles contained both the majority of union members and of the unionisable population in the département, the rates noted above are not greatly below the real unionisation rate. The total number of members in the building, chemical, dock, and food workers federations for the département in 1937 and 1938 have been found in relevant publications of the UD. (Rapports aux Syndicats...1937 & 1938). With the aid of these figures it is possible to calculate real unionisation rates for these four federations in the Bouches-du-Rhone. The results are as follows:

Federation	Unionisable Population in Département	Members BDR		Unionisation Rate BDR Percentage	
		1937	1938	1937	1938
Building & Wood	32326	15520	15958	48.01	49.37
Chemicals	16451	14216	17199	86.41	104.55
Docks	11067	7494	8621	67.71	77.90
Engineers	25226	10040	13538	39.80	53.67
Food	21182	12008	11771	56.69	55.57

These real unionisation rates give a more accurate picture of the extent of trade union membership but they do not alter the impressions given in the table for Marseilles alone either for trends over time or for the crucial degree of variation between industries (except in the case of chemicals, an industry which was both growing rapidly and widely dispersed throughout the département.)

Notes:

1 'Unionisable Population'

It is far from easy to ascertain satisfactorily the size of the unionisable population for each trade union federation. The total unionisable population in the département has been calculated as the total number of ouvriers, employés, and sans-emploi registered in the 1936 census for the Bouches-du-Rhône, minus those workers included in census categories 1,2, and 9A<sub>1</sub> (i.e. fishing, agriculture, forestry and the army), i.e. 278,829. A. Prost, La CGT à l'époque du Front Populaire, 1934-1939, Paris, 1964, p206 and J-L Robert, La scission syndicale de 1921: Essai de reconnaissance des formes, Paris, 1980, pp68-71 have both given some indications of the procedures they used in matching census categories to the trades covered by the various CGT trade union federations. The procedures of Prost and Robert are different and neither is satisfactory for the Popular Front period. (Prost's categorisations are too broad and Robert's are inapplicable to our period). The procedure adopted in the above tables is as follows:

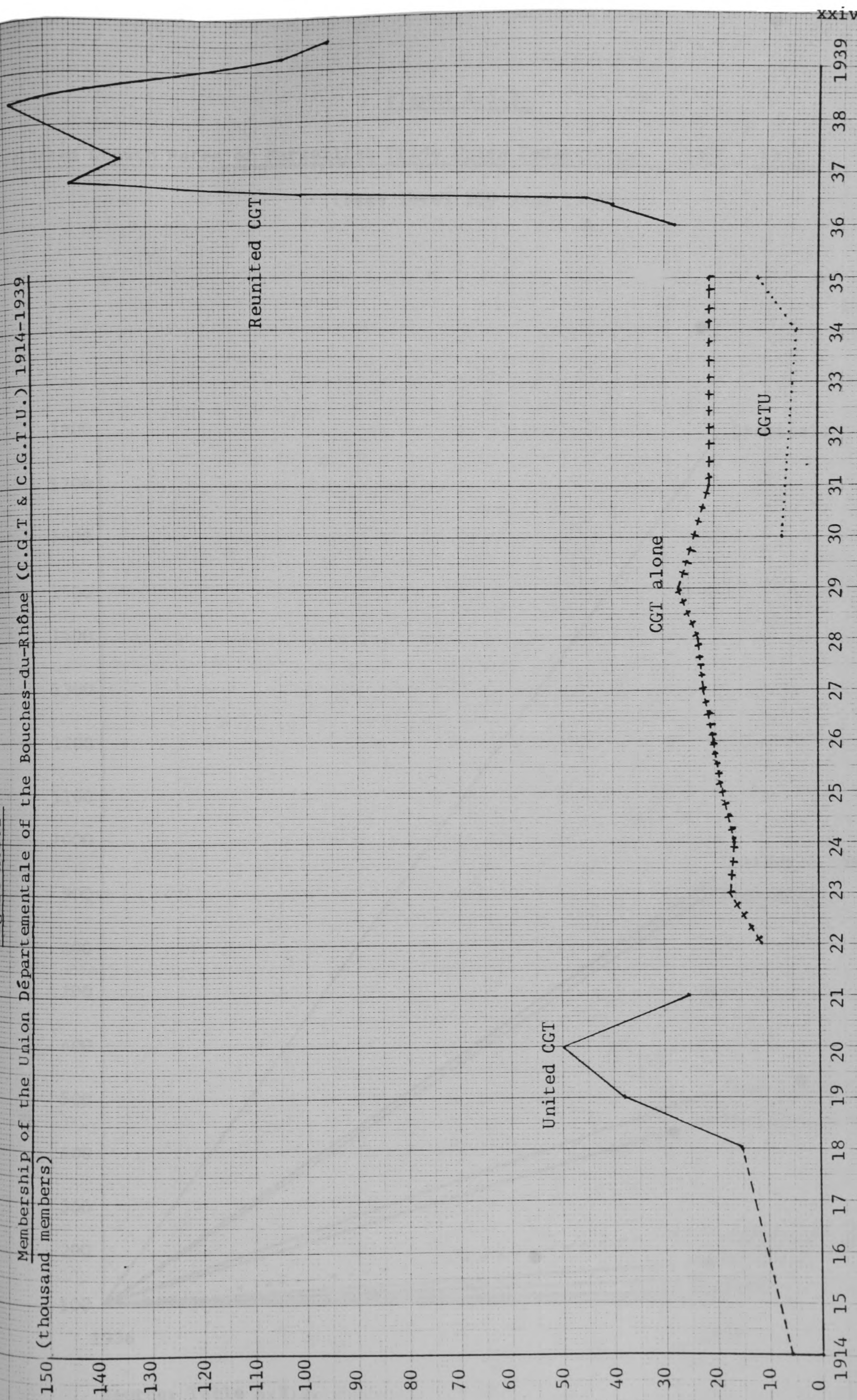
<u>Federation</u>	<u>Census Categories</u>
Building, Glass & Wood	3B+4Ha+4J+4P+4R
Chemicals	4C+4Da
Civil Servants, Teachers & Postal Workers	9A <sub>2</sub>
Clerical Workers	6+7-(6Ae+Af+7F)
Council & Public Service Workers	9B + 7F
Dockers	5A
Engineers	4K+4L-4Ln
Food Industry	4B
Hairdressers	8A
Hatters	4Ge
Jewellers	4Ln+4M+4N
Leather & Hides	4I
Railways	5Bb
Sailors	5Bc <sub>1</sub>
Textile & Clothing Workers	4F+4G-4Ge

Source: As in Table A.3.2. and France, Census, 1936.

more numerous in 1938 than the total number of chemical workers in 1936 had been, confirms the rapid expansion which was taking place in this previously under-unionised industry. Table A.3.2 also confirms the extent to which the trade union growth of the Popular Front was mainly a phenomenon which affected industrial workers. The small trade union movement of early 1936 which had succeeded in recruiting limited numbers of clerical workers, hairdressers, and jewellers for example, seemed to be very little more attractive (and in some cases to actually lose its attraction) when it expanded dramatically, and became identified with a new political movement.

Figure A.3.1

Membership of the Union Départementale of the Bouches-du-Rhône (C.G.T. & C.G.T.U.) 1914-1939  
(thousand members)

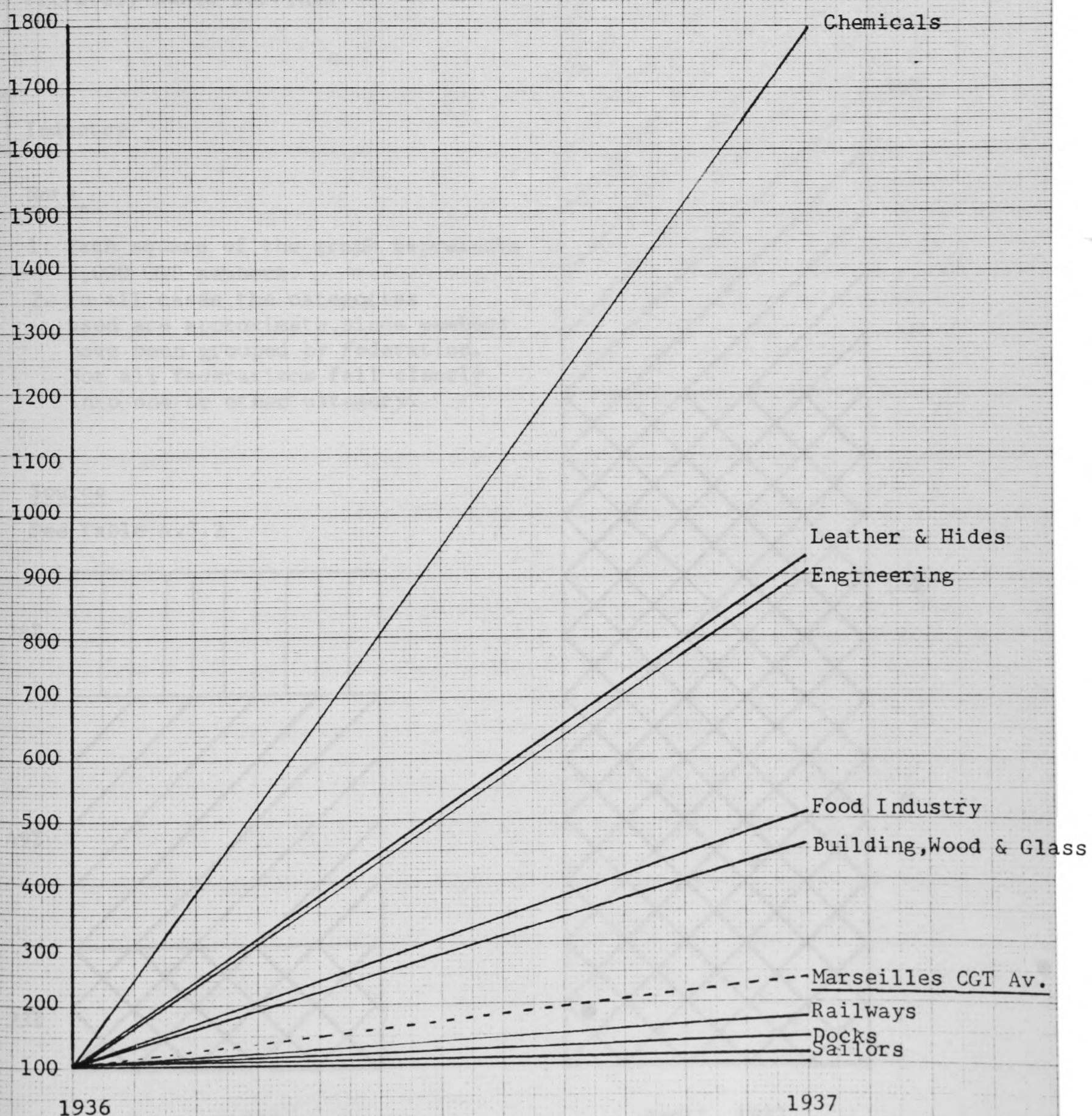


Source: See Table 3.11

Figure A.3.2.

Selected Growth Rates of Marseilles Trade Union Federations 1936 - 1937

(Base level 100 June 1936)



Source: Table A.3.2.

Figure A.3.3.

Marseilles Trade Union (C.G.T.) Membership by Sector, June 1936 & April 1937

Key

Publicly-owned services

Privately-owned services

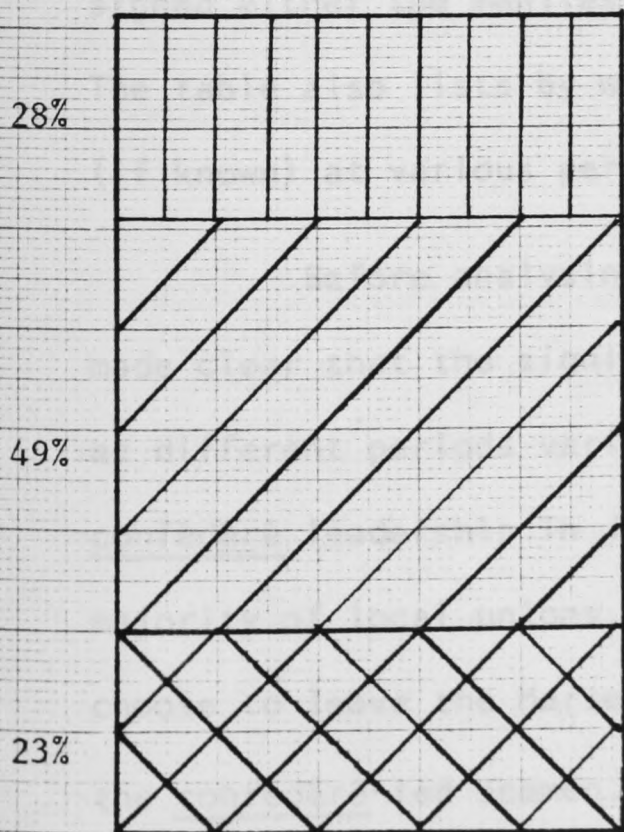
Industry

Note

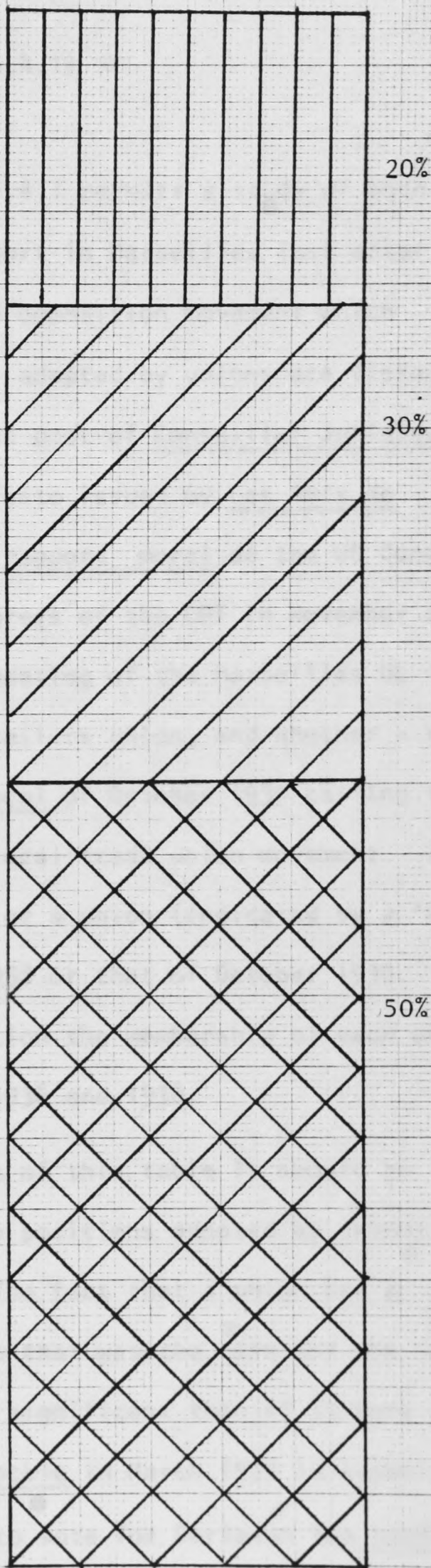
- 1. Each square of the graph represents 5,000 CGT members.
- 2. In all cases the categories used are approximate, since members have been grouped by federation. Not all federations fall clearly into one or other category.

Source

See Table A.3.2



June 1936



April 1937

APPENDIX 4THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN OPPOSITION MOVEMENT WITHIN MARSEILLES TRADE UNIONS:1936 - 1939

(Analysis of Table A.4.1)

The data presented in Table A.4.1 permits a study of both the bases of confédéré trade union support in Marseilles just after fusion, and of the confédéré orientated opposition movement which later developed locally. The positions adopted by unions are listed for six key issues; the elections to the post of Conseiller Juridique in October 1937, attitudes to the manifesto issued by Les Amis de Syndicats in April 1938, voting on the rapport moral at the UD Congress in June 1938, voting at the Nantes Congress of the CGT in November of that year, whether the union left the meeting of the Marseilles UL in March 1939 in support of the official sailors union, and whether a union signed the manifesto in Le Petit Provençal of October 1939 calling for the reconstitution of a non-Communist local trade union movement. The table lists whether individual members of a union (indicated by a 'W') signed either the manifesto of April 1938 or that of October 1939. The table also lists by way of information the membership of each union (if known) at various periods between 1936 and 1938.

Before analysing the contents of this table it should be made clear that the significance of the positions adopted by unions at different periods varied greatly. The fact that a union had a confédéré leadership in June 1936, when that was the case for the vast majority of local unions, was far less significant than if it were to choose to leave the Marseilles Union Locale in March 1939 in support of the confédéré-led seamen. Similarly, to vote for Carlavan the confédéré

candidate for the post of Conseiller Juridique in October 1937, although generally indicative of what had become an oppositional stance, did not require an enormous effort since it would not place a union in a position of overt conflict with the majority. Signing of the Syndicats Manifesto in April 1938, was by contrast, an expression of the type of opposition which could logically be followed by a vote against the rapport moral in June 1938, and probably a vote of opposition at the Nantes CGT Congress. Lastly, union support for the manifesto of October 1939, did not require an immense political effort but it did assume that a union was both still in existence, (after the dramatic falls in membership which followed after the strike of November 1938) and sufficiently active to put its name to a manifesto one month before the Congress of the reconstituted UD to which it would give birth. If these last two conditions were fulfilled, signature of the manifesto of October 1939 served both as an indication that a union was clearly not in the unitaire camp and, that for those unions which had previously wavered between opposing sides, there was a willingness after the Nazi-Soviet pact and the outbreak of war, to be reconciled to a confédéré-led consensus, albeit one based on a much reduced constituency.

#### 1 From Majority to Minority

Table A.4.1 shows the development of an opposition movement within Marseilles trade unions. Since such an opposition movement was very much based on a core of originally confédéré-led unions, its development can also be seen as indicative of the decline in confédéré positions within the local movement. The 65 confédéré led trade unions in Marseilles, with their membership of 28,491, accounted, according to a report of

TABLE A.4.1

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN OPPOSITION MOVEMENT WITHIN MARSEILLES TRADE UNIONS

1936 - 1939

Name of Trade Union	Membership and Tendency/Position						
	<u>1</u> Jun'36	<u>2</u> Oct'37	<u>3</u> Apr'38	<u>4</u> Jun'38	<u>5</u> Nov'38	<u>6</u> Mar'39	<u>7</u> Oct'39
1 Agents Assurances Sociales	54 X	125		147	-	X	X
2 Agents Navigation Intérieure	40 X	26		20	-	-	-
3 Agents Contrôle des Douanes	120 X	148		180 X	-	-	-
4 Agents des Lycées	30 X	60		101 X	-	-	-
5 Agents du Trésor	120 X	<u>77</u>		384	X	-	-
6 Agents du Service Général à Bord	2400X	3900X	X	4050X	XX	X	X
7 Agents des Poursuites	25 X	34					
8 Agents des P.T.T.	520 X	863	X	1094X	X	X	X
9 Agents Contributions Indirectes	230 X	250		<u>220</u>			X
10 Agents des Docks	350 X	515	X	<u>450</u>			W
11 Agents Militaires		90 X	W	90 X		X	X
12 Agents Revisions Foncières		24 X		17			
Agents Commissionnaires & Manutentionnaires							
13 a) Ports & Gares	80 X	158				X	
14 b) Ports				317			
15 c) Gares				<u>20</u>			
16 Agents de Maîtrise Ports & Docks		<u>749</u>		<u>1245</u>			W
17 Ambulants P.T.T.	152X	232		195X			
18 Allumettiers	22 X	310	W	180	XX		X
19 Asile St. Pierre	330X	<u>170</u>			XX	X	
20 Auxiliaires Ponts & Chaussées	25X	87		65			
21 Artistes Lyriques				7 X			
22 Administratifs Départementaux			W				
23 Boulangers	437 X	411	W	<u>230</u>			W
24 Bijoutiers	350 X	<u>170</u>	W	<u>125</u>			
25 Cuir et Peaux		<u>1445</u>		<u>1705</u>			W
26 Chapeliers	187 X	<u>328</u>		<u>268</u>			
27 Charbonniers Ports & Docks	650 X	248		380			
28 Chefs Ateliers Allumettes	30 X	17		21X	(XX)*		X
29 Chefs Ateliers Tabacs	40 X	54		60X	(XX)*		
30 Charcutiers		26X		26X	XXX		
31 Cantonniers Vicinaux	463X						X
32 Choristes	170X	108X		70X	XX	X	X
33 Civils de la Guerre Administratifs	129X	223	X	366X		X	X
34 Coiffeurs	257X	287	W	<u>258</u>			
35 Contrôleurs des Tramways	240X						
36 Communaux Départementaux	30 X	47		24X	XX	X	
37 Couture et Mode	450X						
38 Cantonniers Départementaux		389X		191X	XX	X	
39 Cantonniers Ponts & Chaussées		230X	W	98X		X	X
40 Cuisiniers	120X	<u>80</u>		<u>130</u>			
41 Cheminots		4052	W	<u>4732</u>			W
42 Chemins de Fer Bouches-du-Rhône			W	<u>700</u>	XX		

43	Cafés Concerts	268X	10		20X			
44	Colleurs de papiers peints		15		15			X
45	Danse	222X	25X		20X			X
46	Dockers		5457	W	6159			W
47	Douanes Sedentaires (Officiers)		12		12		X	
48	Douanes Actives		750		890			W
49	Enregistrement				50		X	
50	Employés des Tramways	3500X	3000	W	3200			X
51	Egoutiers	245X	175X		213X	XX	X	X
52	Electriciens	750X	716		789			X
53	Employés Bureau de Bienfaisance	98X	43	W	62			
54	Employés Chambre de Commerce	350X	280		285			
55	" C.P.D. Assurances Sociales	90X			105X			X
56	" Compagnies de Navigation	1030X	1558	W	1558	XX		X
57	" Credit Municipal	25X	39		43	XX		
58	" De Commerce (Magasins)		2050X		1750X	XX	X	X
59	" Centre d'Hygiene Mentale				466	XX	X	
60	" P.T.T.		973		1151	XX		W
61	Employés			X				
62	Enseignement Technique	52X	35		51	XX	X	X
63	Enseignement Primaire	1550X	1270X	X	940X	XX	X	X
64	Energie Electrique	250X			280			X
65	Gaz	727X	1070	W	1300			W
66	Grutiers							W

67	Hospitaliers			W	1910	XX		W
68	Ingenieurs Service Vicinal	45X			84X		X	
69	Ingenieurs T.P.F.	55X	50					
70	Instituteurs Détachés				8X			
71	Journalistes	10X	11	X	9X			X
72	Journaliers Municipaux			W				
73	Lithographes		188X		175			
74	Machinistes	148X	91X		37	XX		X
75	Marins Machine	2300X	2680X	X	3250X	XX	X	X
76	Marins Pont	2400X	2250X	X	2690X	XX	X	X
77	Mineurs Madrague	220X	128X	X	200X		X	X
78	Municipaux	2760X	4250X	X	5370X	XX	X	X
79	Musiciens	680X			300X	XX	X	X
80	Meuniers	140X	994		730			
81	Métaux		8070		11170			W
82	Opérateurs perfectionnistes		83X		130X	XX		
83	Ouvriers Mécaniciens-Dentistes		30		46	XX		
84	Pêcheurs Estaque	60X	39		40			
85	Pêcheurs Mazargues	180X			37		X	
86	Peseurs Jurés de Commerce	50X			31			

87	Employés de Préfecture	120X			72@			
88	Professeurs de Lycée	50X			186			
89	Personnel Départementaux des BdR	350X			407			
90	Personnel Administratif et Technique				330@			W
91	Peintres de Bord (Batiment Confédéré 1500X)132@			W	1200X			X
92	Pâtisseries		735		628X	XXX		
93	Personnel Gradé Trams & Bus		328		240X		X	X
94	" Office Public H.B.M.				3X			
95	" Sedentaire S.H.R.M.		50		215X			
96	Services Coloniaux du Port	20X	17		-		X	
97	Raffineries du Sucre		3415		3125			W
98	Tabacs Fédérés	60X	355	W	280X	XX	X	X
99	Tabacs Transits	25X	285	W	22X	XX		X
100	Tuilleries St. Henri	100X	202		480			W
101	Teinturiers	20X	470X	W	710			
102	Techniciens du Batiment		190X		378			
103	Techniques P.T.T.			W				W
104	Typographes		525	W	605			W
105	Techniciens			W				
106	Ouvriers & Employés Tramways Elect.					XX		
107	Techniciens Métallurgie		928		1580	@@		

TOTALS

		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
		Jun'36	Oct'37	Apr'38	Jun'38	Nov'38	Mar'39	Oct'39
106 UNIONS:	<u>Members/Votes</u>	28491	18616	-	22490	61	22760	-
<u>Confédéré</u>	<u>Unions</u>	65	20	11	36	29	27	33
<u>Positions</u>	<u>Individuals</u>	-	-	21	-	-	-	17
	<u>Members/Votes</u>	-	-	-	2352	6	-	-
<u>Registered</u>	<u>Unions</u>	-	-	-	3	3	-	-
<u>Abstentions</u>								
	<u>Members</u>	-	19209	-	2912	-	-	-
<u>Non particip-</u>	<u>Unions</u>	-	42	-	18	-	-	-
<u>ation in Vote</u>								

Key:

1. Trade Unions in Marseille led by ex-confédérés and their memberships.
2. Trade Unions in Marseille voting for the confédéré candidate as Conseiller Juridique, with membership level. Eligible unions listed elsewhere in this table not participating in the vote.
3. Signatories of the Syndicats Manifesto April 1938, as representatives, and as individuals.
4. Voting on the Rapport Moral June 1938: Confédéré votes, abstentions, & eligible unions not voting.
5. Unions casting votes at Nantes Congress, C.G.T. 1938. Maximum of three votes per union.
6. Unions leaving Assemblée Générale Marseille U.I. Membership calculated from previous congresses.
7. Signatories of the appeal to reconstitute a new U.D., either as representatives, or as individuals

See over for notes and sources

NOTES AND SOURCES TO TABLE A.4.1.

Sources:

1. Data for leadership of trade unions in June 1936 from A.D. M6 11354 & M XIV 24/53 Report of 23.6.1936.
2. Data for elections to post of Conseiller Juridique October 1937. Le Midi Syndicaliste Nos. 210 & 211, October & November 1937. Membership figures provided for information, either from above source, or, if union did not participate in the vote, from Union Départemental de Syndicats Ouvriers des Bouches-du-Rhône, Congrès Départemental de Marseille les 26 et 27 Juin 1937: Rapports aux Syndicats, Marseilles, 1937, pp15-16.
3. Signatories of declaration 'Pour l'indépendance du syndicalisme' in Syndicats No. 80, 20.4.1938, and in Le Tramway Socialiste, 20.4.1938.
4. Voting on Rapport Moral at Congress of UD in June 1938. Membership figures for unions taken from, Union Départementale des Syndicats Ouvriers des Bouches-du-Rhône, Congrès Départemental de Marseille les 25 et 26 Juin 1938: Rapports aux Syndicats, Marseilles, 1938, pp20-23.
5. Voting at Nantes Congress of C.G.T. Two votes held in which there was a motion proposed by the Syndicats grouping. Confédération Generale du Travail, Compte rendu sténographique des débats: 31e congrès 14 - 17.11.1938.
6. Unions leaving the Assemblée Générale of the Union Locale of Marseilles 5.3.1939. A.D. M6 10792 Report of 6.3.1939.
7. Signatories of statement in Le Petit Provençal 1.10.1939, entitled, 'Contre la Trahison de Moscou MANIFESTE des militants syndicalistes des Bouches-du-Rhône solidaires de la majorité de la C.A. confédérale.

Notes:

\* The two unions marked with an asterisk next to their votes at the Nantes Congress of the C.G.T. attended the congress as part of the general delegations of match and tobacco workers. The vote of the entire delegation has been inserted next to their name to permit a reading across the table. These votes are not included separately in the summary table.

X = one vote or position for or as part of the confédéré faction

W = an individual from a union signing the declaration.

@ = An abstention

Where a figure is underlined in the table, the union adopted an ex-unitaire position or supported an ex-unitaire candidate.

June 1936, (a report which was probably based on the membership figures for the first post-unity congress in July 1936, and therefore dealt only with the situation until the end of April 1936) for 65.66 per cent of the CGT affiliated unions in Marseilles (99), and for 63.05 per cent of their total membership (45,186). The confédéré position was never restored to this level of strength, either in relative or absolute terms. When the opposition movement showed the greatest strength, at the November 1938 CGT Nantes Congress, it only succeeded in winning the support of 32 unions (if abstentions are counted in its favour) with c 27,720 members for the Delmas motion concerning trade union independence, i.e. less than one third of the Marseilles trade unions present and only 23.4 per cent of the members represented at the Congress. Although clearly reduced to a minority, 16 of those unions present at the Nantes Congress were sufficiently determined in their oppositional stance to follow it up with their departure from the Marseilles UL meeting in March of the following year. They may well have felt that the general decline in the union movement would, in time, work to their profit and that more unions would reject a leadership which could no longer achieve very much.

## 2 The Origins of the Wartime Leadership

The signatories of the manifesto of October 1939 were not only calling for the reconstitution of a non-Communist trade union movement, they were also establishing their claims to once again be the leaders of the local movement after the interruption of three years of Communist leadership. As already suggested, the signing of the October manifesto by a union did not of itself suggest a very radical stance since its sentiments accorded well with those of public opinion

and a sizeable element of the union movement itself. A study of the voting record of those unions which did sign it, shows very dramatically, however, the extent to which they had been entrenched in the opposition movement which had developed over the previous two years, and which, in some cases, had been born at the moment when 'unity' was established.

Thirty-three unions signed the manifesto of October 1939. The fact that twenty-eight of the signatories had been under confédéré leadership in June 1936 suggests the extent to which the manifesto represented the re-emergence of an old element within the union movement rather than the development of a new one. This view is made the more credible when it is observed that the remaining five signatories of the October 1939 manifesto had only been created after June 1936. It is, however, interesting that these five unions (Agents Militaires, Cantonniers Ponts & Chaussées, Colleurs de papiers peints, Employés de Commerce (Magasins), Personnel Gradé Trams et Bus) all came (with the exception of the very small union of Colleurs de papiers peints) from the traditionally confédéré-led public and service sectors. The significance that only five of the unions signing the manifesto in October 1939, had been created since June 1936 should not be overlooked. The fact that in a period when the Union Locale of Marseilles had expanded from a membership of 99 unions in June 1936, to one of 177 unions in January 1939<sup>1</sup> only five of the signatories of the October 1939 manifesto were new creations suggests once again the extent to which this supposedly new move represented in both political, institutional,

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1 Rouge-Midi, 472, 7.3.1939 & AD M6 10792 Report of 6.3.1939.

and sociological terms, a return to the past of a confédéré-led, minority union movement, based largely on the tertiary sector in general, and its publicly -run aspect in particular.

The narrow sociological basis of the confédéré unions prior to 1936 simply re-emerged in October 1939. The study of the thirty-three signatories of the manifesto demonstrates this. Thirty of them all came from either the tertiary sector or from publicly controlled manufacturing industries such as those for tobacco and matches. Of the three remaining unions, that of the wallpaper pasters was so small as to be of little significance, and those of the peintres de bord and the Mineurs de Madrague, had always had very strong confédéré personalities at their head; Pastergue in the first case, and Louis Armand - leader of the Marseilles UL until March 1939 - in the second case. A certain tradition of strong confédéré leadership, or the creation of a small and relatively inactive union, could explain why some of the signatories of the October manifesto came from the primary and manufacturing sectors. Such factors were not present, however, to encourage the traditionally unitaire-led and largest unions in the town to sign this overtly anti-Communist appeal. Unions such as those of the dockers, chemical workers, engineering workers, or building workers, did not sign the manifesto. Instead in some cases dissident individuals could be found to give their support, in return for which they would be entrusted with the task of building a new union in a non-Communist UD. It seems, however, that such non-Communist unions in these traditionally unitaire led sectors were only really ever shadow unions, having little support within their industries.

Table A.4.2 shows the voting record of those unions which signed the October 1939 manifesto. The vast majority had been confédéré-

TABLE A.4.2.

## The Voting Record of Unions Signing the October 1939 Manifesto

Union No.	Posn.	June '36	Oct. '37	Apr. '38	Jun. '38	Nov. '38	Mar. '39	Score
1	X						X	2
6	X		X	X	X	XX	X	6
8	X			X	X	X	X	5
9	X							1
11	N.A.		X		X		X	3
18	X					XX		2
28	X				X	XX		3
31	X							1
32	X		X		X	XX	X	5
33	X			X	X		X	4
39	N.A.		X		X		X	3
44	N.A.							0
45	X		X		X			3
50	X							1
51	X		X		X	XX	X	5
52	X							1
55	X				X			2
56	X					XX		2
58	N.A.		X		@	XX	X	3½
62	X					XX	X	3
63	X		X	X	X	XX	X	6
64	X							1
71	X			X	X			3
74	X		X			XX		3
75	X		X	X	X	XX	X	6
76	X		X	X	X	XX	X	6
77	X		X	X	X		X	5
78	X		X	X	X	XX	X	6
79	X				X	XX	X	4
91	X				X			2
93	N.A.				X		X	2
98	X				X	XX	X	4
99	X				X	XX		3
33	28	13	9	21	17	18		
				+ 1@				

Unions with 6 points = 5: No. 6, 63, 75, 76, 78.

Unions with 5 points = 4: No. 8, 32, 51, 77.

Unions with 4 points = 3: No. 33, 79, 98.

Unions with 3 points = 9: No. 11, 28, 39, 45, 58 (=3 + 1 abstention) 62, 71, 74, 99

Unions with 2 points = 6: No. 1, 18, 55, 56, 91, 93.

Unions with 1 point = 5: No. 9, 31, 50, 52, 64.

Unions with 0 points = 1: NO. 44.

Source & Key: See Table A.4.1.

led in 1936 but very few of them signed the Syndicats manifesto in April 1938. The majority of unions voting against the rapport moral at the June 1938 Congress of the UD already had a record either of confédéré leadership or one of opposition within the unitaire-led UD. The opposition movement peaked in June 1938, and seems to have been aimed explicitly at the local rather than the national leadership of the CGT, in view of the much smaller number who were prepared to enter into confrontation with the majority line of the CGT at Nantes. These local conflicts were exacerbated by the national defeat of the strike of 30 November 1938 and encouraged a greater number of unions to enter into open confrontation with the Communist leadership of the Marseilles UL at its meeting in March 1939.

Signing of the October 1939 manifesto did not only represent a return to a confédéré position which had been held in 1936; for many unions it also represented the culmination of their efforts at opposition within the UD over the previous three years. The vast majority of the unions which sought to reconstruct the Union Départementale by excluding all Communists from it had established a tradition of opposition for themselves well before 1939. Twenty-one unions scored between three and six points on Table 2 between June 1936 and March 1939. Amongst the twelve other unions, there were six with two points, five unions with one point (all as a result of confédéré leadership in 1936), and one union with no points as a small, recently created, union. The leadership of this opposition movement can be found amongst those unions having the highest scores, five or six points. Its membership includes three different groupings of seamen, all effectively led by

Ferri-Pisani and his ally Pasquini, two categories of council employees (Syndicats des Municipaux et Egoutiers), postal workers, miners, primary school teachers, and chorus singers from the Marseilles Opera.

The sociological bias of those unions which led the opposition movement within Marseilles trade unions confirms much of what Antoine Prost has written about the development of differing tendencies within the CGT nationally during this period.<sup>1</sup> Prost stresses that the political conflicts in the CGT were merely the product of clashes between unions with differing sociological bases. The non-industrial nature of the Marseilles opposition movement confirms in part the thesis of Prost. Such an explanation of itself, however, is insufficient to provide an understanding of why, for example, seamen should have been among the most ardent forces of opposition in Marseilles, whilst dockers provided the backbone of the unitaire-led union. It seems that local political traditions and practices counted for a great deal in the positions adopted by a union. The clientelistic practices of socialist union leaders such as Ferri-Pisani, and Carrega (of the Syndicat des Municipaux) put a sizeable amount of support at their disposal, and permitted them to support anti-Communist initiatives with little fear of opposition from within their unions. In the case of the dockers, Communist union leaders had succeeded in creating for themselves a fief of a similar nature to that which Ferri-Pisani had created in the Seamens' Union. The support which was initially won in such cases might have been based either upon political conviction, the efficacy of the union's practice, or on the more direct methods either of the guarantee of a job to new recruits, or of violence to dissenters.

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1 A. Prost, La CGT..., op.cit.

Whatever the methods by which a trade union was won to support either one side or another in the political conflicts of trade unionism, Marseilles illustrates well the necessity for taking into account the local political environment in assessing the reasons for the positions adopted by trade unions.

APPENDIX 5CHRONOLOGY OF ENGINEERING STRIKES & LOCKOUTS MARSEILLESJUNE - AUGUST 1938

- JUNE 18: Papazian, General Secretary of the Syndicat des techniciens métallurgistes de Marseille, trade union delegate, senior draughtsman, and shop steward at the Société Provençale de Constructions Navales, is sacked by his employers for absenteeism.
- 21: Strike starts at the Société Provençale de Constructions Navales factory (SPCN) in support of Papazian.
- 22: Meeting of Commission Départementale de Conciliation decides to send dispute to arbitration.
- 24: Strike spreads to 7 companies and 8 factories, involving 1300 technicians and about 4-5,000 other engineering workers. Unions claim that although the technicians themselves are engaged in a solidarity strike the other workers have been locked out by management.
- 30: Arbitrator Chaillé begins work in Marseilles. Both sides refuse to cede any ground.
- JULY 11: Unions advise members to go to factories to demonstrate their willingness to restart work if no reprisals for strike. Employers say that work cannot restart until they have received instructions from their federation in Paris.
- 13: Chaillé announces his arbitration decision. He decides that Papazian should be laid off for two years, that work should restart, and that there should be no sanctions against the strikers since there had been no breach of the collective contract.

17: The technicians' union decides to accept the Chaillé arbitration but to contest the decision to lay off Papazian for two years. All the factories reopen with the exception of Coder. Coder refuses to accept six engineers who, he claims, were the strike organisers in his factory.

AUGUST

3: The Commission Départementale de Conciliation examines the conflict at Coder. M.Coder declares himself ready to accept the workers back: 'Je veux appliquer la sentence Chaillé, mais mes collaborateurs ne veulent plus travailler avec les fomenteurs de grève'. His 'collaborateurs' meanwhile declare that: 'La grève de solidarité nous a été imposé, nous avons été menacés et brimés'

4: The Commission Départementale de Conciliation decides that the Coder factory should reopen on 5 August without the six engineers and that they should be paid by Coder while their case is referred to Chaillé for his decision.

16: Coder refuses admission to his factory to four workers (three of them union representatives) claiming that on 5 August they had insulted a chef d'équipe. The factory is occupied in solidarity with the dismissed workers and talks at the Prefecture result in an evacuation later that day.

17: Work restarts at Coder and the case of the newly dismissed workers is referred to Chaillé for a further arbitration.

26: The first Chaillé arbitration is overruled by the Cour Supérieure d'Arbitrage. The court decides that Chaillé went beyond his power in making a decision about the conflict at all the local engineering factories. His decision of a return to work without sanctions can be applied only to SPCN.

27: Chaillé, not having been informed of the decision of the previous day overruling his first arbitration decision, issues his second decision which - based on the first - declares that Coder must rehire the six engineers refused entry after the strike.

SEPTEMBER 12: Coder, referring to the decision of the Cour Supérieure d'Arbitrage overruling Chaillé sacks the six engineers not rehired after the strike.

28: The Engineering Employers' Federation sends a letter to the Prefect in which they cite the overruling of the Chaillé arbitration decision as granting them the power to take disciplinary action against any of their workers who had been involved in the strike of June-July.

NOVEMBER 30: Maspétiol, maître de requêtes aux Conseil d'Etat, is named as the new arbitrator to issue a decision to replace those of Chaillé.

DECEMBER 23: Maspétiol decides that the dispute should be referred back to the Commission Départementale de Conciliation.

JANUARY 28: The Commission Départementale de Conciliation, having failed to reach agreement allows each party to the dispute to choose an arbitrator. The trade union chooses Papazian as their arbitrator, the employers choose Rastoin, President of the Société de Défense du Commerce.

FEBRUARY 11: The arbitrators meet and, not surprisingly, fail to reach & agreement. The case is referred to the Prefect and Minister  
20: of Labour.

MARCH

Mouton, Conseiller d'Etat, is named by the Minister of Labour as the new arbitrator.

MAY

22: Mouton issues his surarbitrage. He decides that Coder must rehire the six engineers, or, failing this, he must pay them compensation.

APPENDIX 6

CHRONOLOGY OF THE DOCKERS' OVERTIME BAN

JULY - SEPTEMBER

1938

- FEBRUARY 28: End of collective contract regulating dockers' work. Renewal for one year and agreement to negotiate to establish new contract.
- JULY 11: The two dock trade unions decide to impose an overtime ban in view of the lack of progress being made in negotiations to establish a new contract.
- 26: Ramadier, Minister of Labour, calls the parties to Paris to negotiate. The lack of progress in negotiations leads the Minister to refer the dispute to the commission paritaire in Marseilles. Meanwhile an arbitrator, M. Masselin, is chosen to decide on the legality of the overtime ban.
- AUGUST 8: Publication of a decree allowing exceptions to be made to the forty hour law in industries suffering from a shortage of labour or working in areas related to the defence industry.
- 14: Masselin issues his arbitration decision. He says that the overtime ban is illegal, that the dockers should return to normal working, and that employers should continue negotiations to establish a new collective contract.
- 16: The dockers' trade union decides to ignore the Masselin arbitration, proclaiming that if the meeting of the Commission paritaire (scheduled for the following day) decides against it, an appeal will be launched for a national dock strike.

- 17: Ramadier convokes a meeting of the Commission paritaire at Paris. The employers, having heard of the dockers' refusal to accept the Masselin arbitration, refuse to attend. Representatives of the CGPF meet with the Minister and underline the position of the Marseilles employers. Racamond of the CGT and Le Gall of the Fédération des Ouvriers des Ports et Docks also meet the Minister.
- 18: Ramadier succeeds in getting both sides to accept the provisions of the Masselin decision - a return to normal working by the dockers in exchange for an agreement by employers to reopen negotiations on wages. Dockers' leaders agree subject to ratification by a general assembly of dockers.
- 19: Gagnaire addresses a meeting of dockers in Marseilles. He proposes an immediate return to normal working on the condition that the Commission paritaire meet and decide on the question of wages within two days. The meeting rejects Gagnaire's proposal. Meanwhile, in Lyon, after the announcement of an arbitration reducing building workers wages the builders start a general strike.
- 20: Daladier draws up contingency plans for the requisition of the port.
- 21: Daladier makes his speech declaring that 'il faut remettre la France au travail'. Post and passengers' baggage arriving in Marseilles are unloaded by the military under armed guard. Freight, however, is left for dockers to unload on the following day, Monday. Ramadier shows employers and union leaders his draft decree regulating work in the port of Marseilles. The decree went a long way towards meeting dockers' demands on wages and overtime payments at the same time as a more rigid control over the employment structure was devised which would permit the exclusion of any workers refusing to accept the new regulations.

- 22: Ramadier resigns over Daladier's plans to 'relax' the forty hour legislation. Employers and dockers alike reject Ramadier's draft proposals. Frossard, Minister of Public Works, resigns for the same reason as Ramadier.
- 24: M. de Monzie, the new Minister of Public Works, reopens & negotiations with employers and dockers. Dockers in Algeria
- 25: start an overtime ban in sympathy with their colleagues in Marseilles.
- 26: M. de Monzie issues a decree regulating dockers' work and pay. He proposes that dockers should work either shifts of 6 hours or half shifts of 3 hours 20 minutes in place of the old shifts of 6 hours 40 minutes and that they should be paid 61 francs for each full shift in place of 55.40 francs which they were paid before. Overtime would be worked on the old basis but these measures were designed to drastically reduce the necessity for overtime work, and were proposed by the employers themselves.
- 28: Marseilles dockers work normally on the first Sunday since the announcement of the new decree.
- 29: A meeting of dockers agrees to accept the new working conditions.
- 30: Dockers refuse to work according to the new shift system. Employers announce their intention to return to the old pay structure. Union leaders attempt to persuade dockers to work normally. They fail, and de Monzie issues a decree which requisitions the port. This measure is the first occasion on which the law of 12 July 1938 concerning organisation in the event of war is used.

SEPTEMBER

- 8: The requisitioning of dockers begins and encounters no opposition. In addition to the small number of French dockers requisitioned many other French and foreign dockers seek work each morning on the port.
- 9: A new wage scale is agreed according to which dockers either work two shifts of 3 hours 20 minutes each in return for 61 francs per day, or one shift of 5 hours 20 minutes in return for 65 francs per day. Sundays are paid at 106.75 francs and 14.65 francs is paid for each hours' overtime on weekdays.
- 12: Employers and dockers sign the agreement on the new wages and conditions in the port.
- 17: The control of the port is returned to civilian authority.

APPENDIX 7

Préfecture des  
Bouches-du-Rhône

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1er division

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Bureau

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ECONOMIE NATIONALE

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REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE  
Liberté-Egalité-Fraternité

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Marseille, le.....193  
(Mai 1937?)

Le Préfet des Bouches-du-Rhône  
a Monsieur LE PRESIDENT DU CONSEIL

PARIS

....Jusqu'à ce jour, l'heureuse action des procédures de conciliation et d'arbitrage instituées par la loi du 31 Décembre 1936 a permis de liquider tous les conflits en cours. La mise en oeuvre de ces procédures souples et rapides a rendu possible la suppression des causes des différends ou leur arrêt dès les premiers moments de leur développement. Dans ces commissions de conciliation, au sein desquelles se manifestait le plus large esprit de compréhension des situations souvent compliquées trouvaient des solutions qu'acceptaient assez volontiers les parties en présence. ....

...Au cours de ces dernières semaines une nouvelle évolution se manifeste nettement dans les opinions et dans les attitudes prises par les éléments en présence dans les conflits du travail. ...

L'abandon de positions successives amèment à penser du côté patronal que les revendications ouvrières ont reçu dans l'état actuel des choses des satisfactions suffisantes et que les situations anormales ayant été corrigées par les récentes lois sociales, il convient de mettre un terme aux concessions déjà faites. De nouvelles concessions n'auraient,

dans l'esprit des intéressés, d'autre conséquence que de provoquer de nouvelles demandes entraînant aussi la ruine des entreprises et par suite celle de l'économie nationale. ...

...Il semble..que l'on se soucie du côté patronal de se lier de moins en moins par des engagements, difficiles qui se manifestent notamment au cours de l'élaboration des conventions collectives de travail. Résistances devant les augmentations de salaires qui ne sont généralement acceptées qu'après arbitrages - Résistances des plus énergiques pour la conservation des prérogatives patronales en particulier en ce qui concerne le droit de licenciement et le choix du personnel.

En résumé, on constate du côté patronal une attitude beaucoup plus ferme, une défense plus aigre grâce à une documentation plus solide fournie par les organismes de défense professionnels. Cette attitude se manifeste également par l'emploi de tous les moyens qui peuvent résulter de la législation en vigueur notamment en matière de protection de la propriété.

...

D'une façon générale, l'opinion ouvrière accepte difficilement un arrêt même momentané de l'évolution sociale qui s'est manifestée au cours des derniers mois. Aux yeux de la plupart, l'égalité entre le capital et le travail est loin d'être réalisée. La résistance patronale est interprétée comme un désir de dissocier les forces syndicales, en leur opposant des organisations professionnelles de création récente et en brimant par des mesures d'une sévérité excessive et par des licenciements les éléments actifs du syndicalisme. Ces milieux soulignent chez le patronat le désir de fausser le jeu des lois sociales nouvelles notamment

celle sur la semaine de quarante heures.

Le malaise de ce cette situation tend à faire naître dans les milieux ouvriers et dans l'esprit d'un certain nombre de leurs dirigeants l'idée que les procédures de conciliation sont vouées à l'échec, qu'elles constituent pour le patronat un moyen dilatoire et que seule une action énergique s'inspirant de celle de 1936 permettrait de surmonter les difficultés opposées par un patronat qui a réagi et s'est ressaisi.

L'examen des revendications récemment présentées, ainsi que des affaires soumises à la conciliation et à l'arbitrage au cours des dernières semaines permet de déterminer quels sont les points sur lesquels portent plus particulièrement les demandes ouvrières.

Ces revendications semblent se limiter pour le département des Bouches-du-Rhône que sur un certain ordre d'idées que nous allons signaler.

1<sup>o</sup> - Réajustement des salaires en raison de l'augmentation du cout de la vie.

2<sup>o</sup> - Limitation de la liberté de licenciement de l'employeur et réglementation de l'embauche.

3<sup>o</sup> - Election des délégués au scrutin de liste et pour l'ensemble d'un établissement et non par atelier. Protection particulière assurée à ces délégués.

4<sup>o</sup> - Application stricte de la semaine de quarante heures et d'une façon uniforme. Le régime généralement réclamé est celui de cinq journées de huit heures.

Toutes ces demandes et en particulier les trois dernières

seulement du point de vue patronal la plus vive résistance et le heurt que en résulte peut-etre au cours de prochains jours, la source de nouveaux conflits, d'autant plus difficiles à résoudre que les positions semblent être nettement prises de part et d'autre et que ne pourront peut-être pas toujours maintenir les méthodes de conciliation si heureusement employées ces derniers temps.

...

LE PREFET.

Source: AD . XIVM 25/203.

APPENDIX 8TABLE A.8.1Communist Party Membership and Organisation 1932-1938

<u>APPENDIX 8</u>				
<u>Date</u>	<u>Members</u>	<u>Cells</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>National Figure</u>
1932	289	17	Marseilles	25-30,000
	575	23	Region*	
Dec	1500		Region	
1933	2000		Region	29,000
Dec	350	34	Marseilles	
1934	1700		Region	42,578
"	200		Marseilles	
Oct		173	Region	
Dec	600		Marseilles	
1935		332	Region	86,902
Oct	5500	365	Region	
"	1000		Marseilles	
Dec	6450		Region	
1936	2000		Marseilles	81,050
"	6000		Region	
Feb				90,845
March				101,475
April				106,551
May				131,149
June 4				133,048
June 24	3500		Marseilles	171,050
June 30				
July 10	9500		Region	185,650
Aug 6-7	12000		Region	225,000
Sept				265,925
Oct				278,365
Nov				284,194
Dec	15300		Region	288,483
1937	12640**	746	Region	338,357
Dec	10000	647	Dept.	340,826
"	7000		Marseilles	
1938	13450**	694	Region	c350,000

Sources

All national data comes from A. Kriegel, 'Le Parti Communiste sous la Ille République (1920-1939): Movement des effectifs et structures d'organisation' in Le pain et les roses, Paris 1973, pp. 307-315.

TABLE A.8.1 Continued

Local data comes from the following sources:

- 1932 AD M6 11379
- 1932 December, Parti communiste français, Compte rendu du VIIIe Congrès national du P.C.F. Villeurbanne 22-25 Janvier 1936, Report by Billoux
- 1933 REgional figure in AD M6 10809 bis, taken from speech by Billoux
- 1933 Marseilles figure in AD M6 11379
- 1934 February, Regional figure, Billoux speaking at Villeurbanne op cit  
February, local figure, Rouge-Midi No. 346, 28.12.37, Report of speech made by Billoux at Arles Congress of P.C.F.  
October, Figure on number of cells from P.C.F. Quatre années de lutte pour l'unité, le pain, la paix, la liberté (VIIIe Congrès national 22-25 Janvier 1936) pp 35-39  
December, AD M6 11379, Report No. 4145, 26.12.34
- 1935 June, Quatre années de lutte ... op cit  
October, AD M6 10809 bis Report of speech by Billoux 27.10.35  
December, P.C.F. Deux ans d'activité au service du peuple (Arles 25-29 1937) p 115
- 1936 January, Billoux speaking at Villeurbanne op cit  
June 24, Rouge-Midi, No. 185  
July 10, Rouge-Midi, No. 190  
August 6-7, Rouge-Midi, No. 198  
December, Deux ans d'activité ..., op cit p. 171
- 1937 September, Deux ans d'activité ..., op cit p.115  
December, Rouge-Midi, No. 346
- 1938 September, P.C.F. Une année de lutte pour le pain, la paix, la liberté, Rapports du Comité central pour la Conférence national du P.C.F. (Gennevilliers, 21-23 janvier 1939) p.135.

Notes to Table A.8.1

- \* The Region: The definition of the region changes constantly making year to year comparisons difficult. The areas included in the region in this table are as follows: 1932-1934, the Bouches-du-Rhône, the Vaucluse, and the Var; October 1935, the Bouches-du-Rhône, the Vaucluse, the Var, and Corsica; December 1935, the Bouches-du-Rhône, the Durance part of the Basses Alpes, the Var, and Corsica; January 1936, the Bouches-du-Rhône, Durance, the Var, and the Vaucluse; July 1936, the Bouches-du-Rhône, the Var and Durance; Aug-Dec 1936, the preceding areas with the addition of Corsica; 1937, the Bouches-du-Rhône and Durance; 1938, the Bouches-du-Rhône, the Durance area, and Vaucluse.
- \*\* A change in the definition of the Region gives the false impression that local membership grew between September 1937 and September 1938. In fact membership declined in this period. PCF, Une année de lutte ..., op.cit. p.135 shows a rising membership curve for the Marseilles Region, from 12,640 members in 1937 to 13,450 in 1938. Whilst the first figure includes only the Bouches-du-Rhône and the Durance, the second includes the Vaucluse as well. If the Vaucluse is added to the first figure, with its membership of 2,100 in September 1937, the true picture of decline emerges, from 14,740 in 1937 to 13,450 in 1938. Since the Bouches-du-Rhône itself only had 10,000 members in 1937, or 67.8% of the membership of the new (1938) region, it is likely that by 1938 it would have had only 9,119 members assuming that its share of total membership in the region remained constant.

FIGURE A.8.1  
COMMUNIST MEMBERSHIP IN MARSEILLES & FRANCE 1932-1938

(For sources see Table A.8.1)

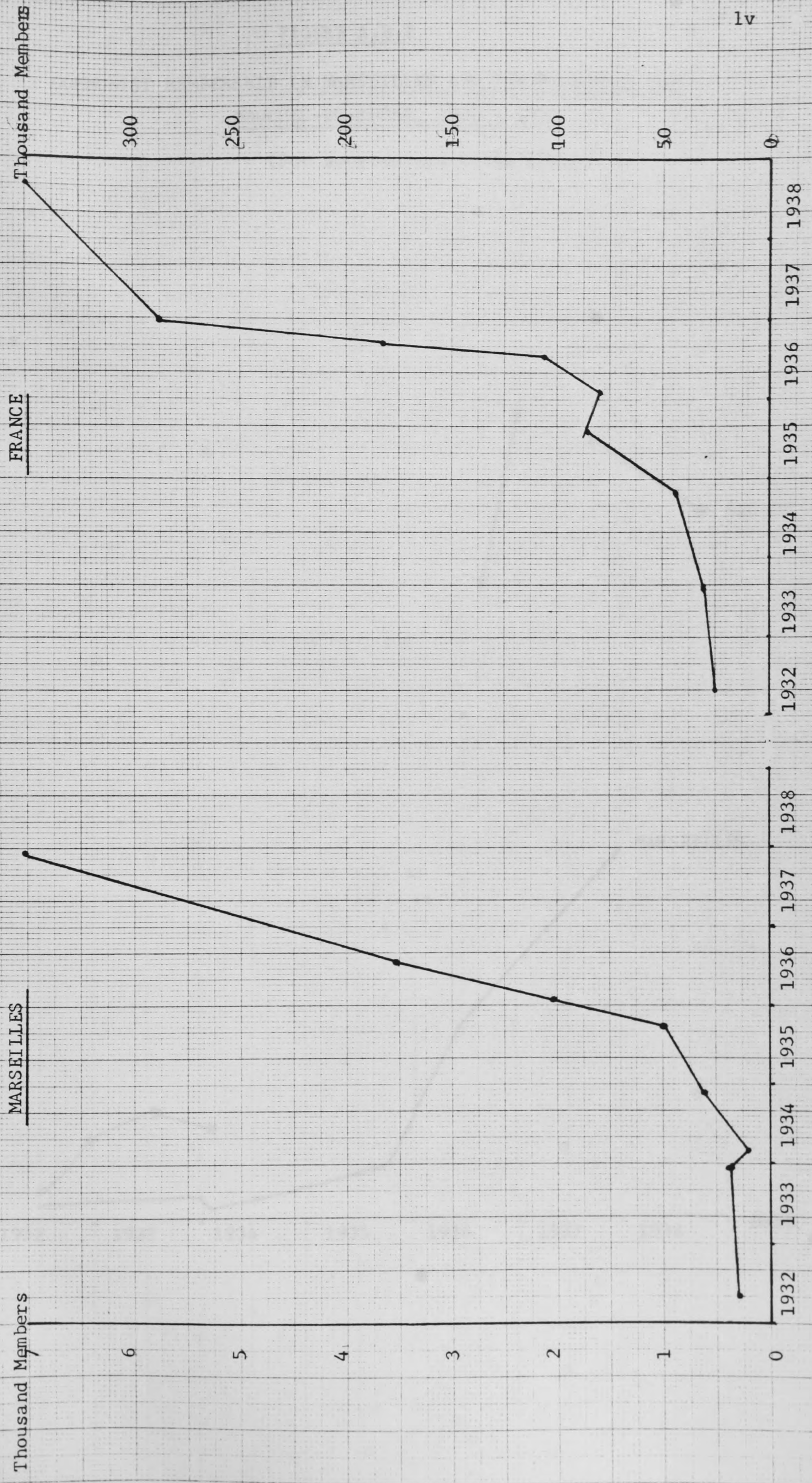
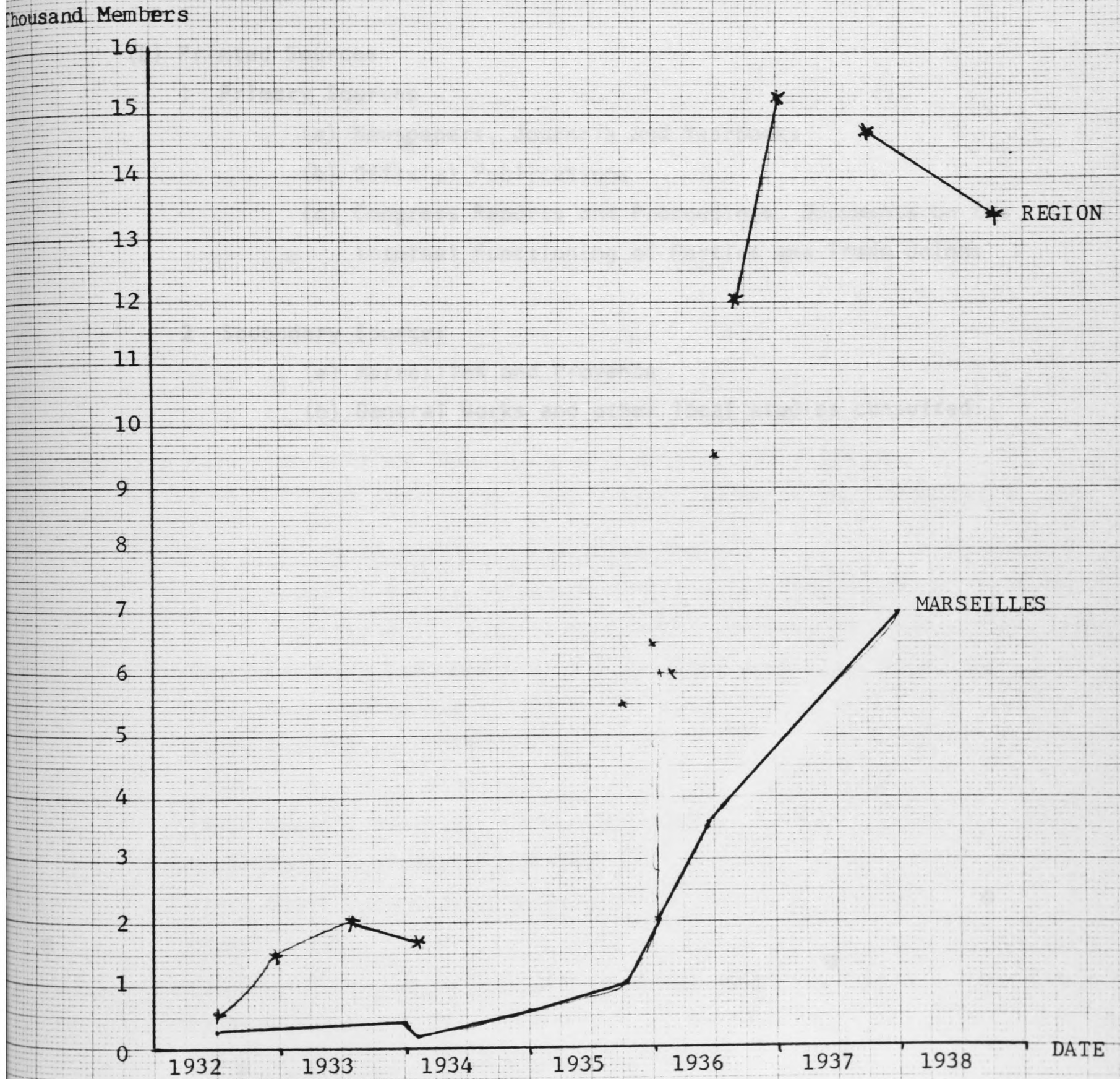


FIGURE A.8.2

COMMUNIST MEMBERSHIP IN MARSEILLES AND THE REGION OF THE  
BOUCHES-DU-RHÔNE, 1932 - 1938

(For sources see Table A.8.1)



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2233 Finances communales 1924-1940

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51	" feuilles signaletiques	1930-1936
52	" - Correspondance	1935-1940
53	" Statuts	1936
54	" Recensement - statuts	1936-1937
55	" Feuilles signaletiques	1937
56	" " " " recensement	1938

61	"	Activités diverses, manifestations	1920-1930
62	"	"	1932-1939

XIV M 25 Conflits du Travail - Grèves

51	Grèves des dockers		1919
52	Grèves diverses		1919
53	Main d'oeuvre militaire - grèves		"
54	Rapport de police sur le 1er Mai		1920
55	Grèves chemins de fer		"
56	Mouvements ouvriers		"
57	Grèves des Tramways, bâtiment etc		"
58	Grèves des inscrits maritimes		1920-1922
59	Congrès Communiste - incidents		1921
74	Grèves & rapports		1934-1935
75	Protestations contre les occupations d'usine - statistique des conflits 1936		
76	Grèves diverses		1936
77	Correspondance & rapports sur les grèves 1936		
78	Rapports de police, manifestations du 1er Mai 1936		
80	Conflits - Agriculture et bâtiment 1936		
81	"	Alimentation	"
82	"	Employés	"
83	"	Inscrits maritimes, Ports, Docks, Transports	1936
84	"	Métallurgie	1936
85	"	Produits chimiques I	"
86	"	" II	"
87	"	" III	"
88	"	Vêtements & textile	"
89	"	divers	"
93	"	Agriculture	1937
94	"	Alimentation I	"
95	"	" II	"
96	"	" III	"
97	"	" IV	"
98	"	" V	"
99	"	Bâtiment I	"
100	"	" II	"
101	"	" III	"
102	"	" IV	"
103	"	" V	"

104	Conflits	Employés	I	1937	
105	"	"	II	"	
106	"	"	III	"	
107	"	"	IV	"	
108	"	Inscrits Maritimes, Ports, Docks, Transport	I	1937	
109	"	"	"	"	II "
110	"	"	"	"	III "
111	"	"	"	"	IV "
112	"	Métallurgie	I	1937	
113	"	"	II	"	
114	"	"	III	"	
115	"	"	IV	"	
116	"	"	V	"	
117	"	Produits chimiques	I	1937	
118	"	"	II	"	
119	"	"	III	"	
120	"	"	IV	"	
121	"	Vêtements & textiles	I	1937	
122	"	"	II	"	
123	"	"	III	"	
124	"	"	IV	"	
125	"	corporations divers	I	"	
126	"	"	II	"	
127	"	"	III	"	
128	"	"	IV	"	
129	"	"	V	"	
130	"	"	VI	"	
131	"	"	VII	"	
132	"	Télégrammes		"	
133	Grève générale			1938	
134	"			1938	
135	"	rapports de police		"	
136	Grèves diverses-rapports			"	
137	"	Agriculture-alimentation		"	
138	"	Bâtiments-Employés		"	
139	"	Dockers		"	
140	"	Ports, Docks, Transports		"	
141	"	Métallurgie I		"	
142	"	Métallurgie II & Vêtements		"	
143	"	Produits chimiques		"	
144	"	Diverses I		"	

145	Grèves	Diverses	II	1938
146	"	Rapports de police		1939
147	"	Alimentation, Bâtiment		"
148	"	Fonctionnaires		"
149	"	Inscrits maritimes, Ports, Docks, Transports		1939
150	"	Métallurgie		1939
151	"	Diverses		"
200	Conventions collectives: procédure de conciliation et d'arbitrage 1917-1939			
201	"			1923-1938
202	"			conciliation et d'arbitrage 1937-1939
203	Situations des conflits du travail			1936-1939
204	Procès verbaux de la commission de conciliation			1936-1938
205	"	"	"	1938-1939
206	Conventions collectives			1938
207	"			1939
208	Sentences des surarbitres			1937-1939
209	"			1937-1938
210	Arbitrages			1939

U<sup>6</sup> A Prud'hommes

20	Elections 1er tour		1936
21	"	2ème tour	"
24	"	Aix-Marseille	1935-1940
30	Marseille. Elections et révisions		1938-1943

X<sup>1</sup> (Previously in M6) Sociétés Mutualistes

3009	Sociétés de Secours Mutuels - Statistique			1932-1933
3011	"	"	"	1933
3013	"	"	"	-Etats des Sociétés 1935
3014	"	"	"	" 1936
3015	"	"	"	" 1937
3016	"	"	"	1937
3017	"	"	Etat recapitulatif	1934-1935
3029	"	"	"	1936-1937
3030	"	"	"	1937
3031	"	"	"	1937
3049	Sociétés mutualistes-Etats statistiques			1937-1939
3052	Elections au Conseil Supérieure de la Mutualité			1937-1941

IV Y 2

21 Internements 1940

(c) Archives de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille (ACCM)

- T.26 Travail et Main d'oeuvre. Réglementation. Conflits du travail 1914-1947
- T.27 Travail et Main d'oeuvre. Remunération, Salaires et coût de la vie 1920-1944

Régistre de délibérations de la Chambre de Commerce de Marseille:

- 145 - 1936
- 146 - 1937
- 147 - 1938
- 149 - 1939

(d) Archives Communales de Marseille

- 63F Elections prud'homales 1901-1927
- 64F Grèves 1921-1936

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