

## **Extending Democracy: Railway Workers and the Popular Front in France, 1936-1938.**

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### **Abstract**

French railway workers played no part in the historic Popular Front strikes and workplace occupations of May-June 1936. Yet, in November 1938, this group of workers placed themselves in the vanguard of attempts to defend the social legislation passed by the Blum government. Both events have been analysed as evidence of the reformist aims and materialist calculations of French railway workers in the interwar period. Following the failure of the 1920 General Strike, railway workers are understood to have renounced political militancy, embracing a narrow corporatist vision of industrial relations. Their attempted participation in the 30 November 1938 General Strike has been similarly read as a defence of material interests. In contrast to such views this article argues that railway trade unionism in the Popular Front period built upon well-developed communist policies emphasizing workplace dignity and the extension of worker power within both the railway industry and capitalism more widely. Rather than pursuing purely materialist calculations, union policy sought to defend a vision for French industrial relations predicated upon shared responsibility and partnership between management and labour in economic decision making. Such an analysis raises questions regarding the wider meaning of the Popular Front for French workers and its longer term significance in contemporary French history.

### **Key Words**

Popular Front, France, Communists, Communism, Railway Workers, 1936, Strikes, Trades unions, Industrial Relations.

### **Introduction**

In the summer of 1936 France was rocked by a wave of strikes and workplace occupations. Drawing upon support from workers across large sections of the French economy, this strike movement has come to occupy a seminal moment in twentieth-century French history, inaugurating a then unprecedented, though short lived, period of social reform and industrial democracy in French

society. Yet, at the heart of these events lies a significant absence. French railway workers (cheminots), long among the most powerful, militant and highly organised group within the French economy were not among those who participated in this movement.

This article interrogates this absence. It poses the relatively straightforward question: why did cheminots play no role in the strikes and workplace occupations which shook France in this period? In answering this question, the analysis takes us to the heart of the meaning of the broader Popular Front experiment, offering a reading of the Popular Front and its wider significance within modern French history which is at variance with established analyses stressing anti-fascist alliance, *révolution manquée* or twentieth-century charivari. The Popular Front was of course all of these things to a greater or lesser extent, but central to this article is the contention that the period 1936-1938, from the June strikes and Matignon Accords to the abortive general strike of November 1938, was at base an attempt to fundamentally transform social relations in France. Beginning as an anti-fascist alliance, the Popular Front government was transformed by the strike wave of May/June into an experiment in industrial social democracy.<sup>1</sup>

Understood in this light, the absence of the cheminots becomes less as a puzzle. As will be demonstrated throughout this article, railway workers and crucially their communist trade union representatives had from the latter part of the 1920s onwards come to conceptualise their role within railway capitalism as predicated upon the extension of worker power and trade union legitimacy within the industry. This was viewed as constituting a direct challenge to the unqualified authority of rail company owners and managers. Having established an independent space for union action within the industry prior to June 1936 cheminots, therefore, could afford to take a back seat. The role of the cheminot trade union leadership through the period 1936-1938 in maintaining and advancing their position placed the cheminots at the heart of the Popular Front experiment in social democratic industrial politics.

At the heart of the Popular Front experiment were debates about power in French society. As a result of the June 1936 Matignon Accords representatives of organized labour, communists and non-communists, were for the first time brought into close, though hardly comfortable, working relationships with managers, directors and *patrons*. While the Popular Front is remembered for its

sweeping though short-lived reforms, the forty-hour working week; pay increases and the more enduring paid holidays, what is often left unexplored is the underlying motivation behind labour's demands on both the communist and non-communist wings. Such reforms were about improving the everyday lives and working conditions for ordinary French people, to be sure, but at the core of these demands was a programme which aimed to radically alter the landscape of French social and economic life.

The French trade union confederation, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), dominated to a large extent by communist militants, sought to extend worker power, influence and legitimacy within the decision making centres of Third Republic politics and society. This would be the enduring legacy of the Popular Front years, the period 1936-1938 operating as a training ground for trade unions and their rank-and-file, managers and political thinkers who would return to the fore in the aftermath of World War Two elaborating the political structures and industrial relations culture which would characterize French society during the so called '*trentes glorieuses*' of post-war prosperity.

Where then do the *cheminots* fit into this picture? As suggested above, railway workers have an ambiguous relationship with the Popular Front in much of the historical literature on the period. Railways figure prominently in the cultural memory of the Popular Front years, the enduring image is of large numbers of workers embarking on trains to enjoy their newly won paid holidays. Yet *cheminots* themselves played no role in the strikes and occupations of the summer of 1936 which brought such reforms about. This apparent lack of militancy stands in stark contrast to the established image of the *cheminot* within contemporary French political culture. In the period after 1945 *cheminots* would forge a reputation for militancy founded in large part upon their actions as saboteurs of the German war machine in the *bataille du rail* of the Nazi occupation.<sup>2</sup> Participation in the major post-war flashpoints, particularly the nation-wide strike movements of 1947 and 1968, together with the high visibility of industrial action on the railway network, earned the *cheminots* a position in the 'vanguard' of the French trade union movement.

The interwar years, however, presented a very different reality for *cheminot* politics. In the wake of defeat and victimization following the 1920 general strike, *cheminots* appeared to have

renounced political militancy in favour of a narrow corporatist and conciliatory approach to industrial politics. Crucially, railway workers played no significant role in the ‘social explosion’ of June 1936. Cheminots did not go on strike, nor was the railway network occupied. Traffic on the vital national communications arteries was almost entirely unimpeded through the years 1936-1938, a period synonymous with industrial militancy. This has led historians to characterize French railway workers as having been fully converted to reformism from the 1920s onwards.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in November 1938, in stark contrast to June 1936, French railway workers placed themselves at the forefront of attempts to defend the totemic social legislation which the strike waves of the summer of 1936 and the Matignon Accords had done so much to inaugurate. In November 1938 the infamous *revanche* of the French *patronat*, with the support of the French state, took place against the Popular Front social legislation. In a series of decrees in early November, the newly appointed Finance Minister Paul Reynaud announced the abrogation of the totemic forty-hour week legislation. The response of the labour movement was an eruption in spontaneous wild cat strike actions and, eventually, the calling of a national general strike for 30 November 1938. In his classic study of this last stand of the Popular Front, Guy Bourd  emphasized the centrality of the cheminots to the unfolding of events. Without the unambiguous support of railway workers, 70% of whom were organized within the CGT, the strike would have been unlikely to have taken place at all.<sup>4</sup>

The general strike of 30 November was, of course, a complete failure -- on the railways, in the face of individual requisition orders, the threat of imprisonment and a military occupation of key railway centres, cheminots were compelled to report for duty. The massive state response in support of employers, together with disastrous timing on the part of the CGT leadership in calling a general strike just as the wave of opposition to the decree laws appeared to be falling off, equally account for the failure of the opposition movement. Yet, as this article will demonstrate, right up to the eve of 30 November and even on the day of the strike itself, significant numbers of the cheminot rank-and-file as well as the union hierarchy were fully committed to industrial action in defence of the Popular Front. For Bourd , however, the apparent reversal of position represented by this new found militancy did not in fact amount to a major reorientation in the outlook of the railway workers. Rather it is material interests which are once more placed at the fore. Cheminots, argued Bourd , played a leading

role in calling for a general strike because, of all workers, they were the most materially affected by the Reynaud decrees of November 1938.

These were not, however, the terms in which cheminots, particularly the union leadership for which the most complete documentation exists, understood their political engagement.<sup>5</sup> In response to the November 1938 decree laws the cheminot leadership made explicit the material impact upon their members, to be sure, but in their public pronouncements and in correspondence with railway managers and the French state the core of their opposition focussed upon the principal of shared power and collective responsibility between management and workforce. It was this principal that cheminots felt had been at the heart of the Popular Front experiment, an experiment in which the cheminots can be seen as playing a leading role between 1936 and 1938.

This article while not neglecting the material gains of the Popular Front years stresses rather the symbolic dimension of Popular Front policy. By emphasizing the centrality of demands for expanded power and dignity for men and women in the workplace it demonstrates that, far from being marginal participants, the example of the cheminots takes us to the heart of the meaning of these years for a great many ordinary workers. For the Cheminot Federation, Popular Front legislation was symbolic of a fundamentally transformed social republic in which workers played a significant role in the public sphere. It was in defence of this conception of national economic organization that the railway workers attempted to act in November 1938.

The argument develops through three sections. Section one explores the significance of the ‘social explosion’ of May and June 1936 in terms of the established patterns of interwar French industrial politics, emphasizing the social-democratic ethos which dominated the strike wave from the outset. Contrasting the interwar experience of railway communists who pursued a strategy of the contesting of company power and authority on the part of ordinary workers, this section demonstrates how June 1936 saw large numbers of French workers, and the French Communist Party, catching up with the strategy of railway communists. Section two moves beyond June 1936 exploring the experience and activities of the Cheminot trade union leadership up to 1938. This section stresses that, far from being marginal to the Popular Front period, French railway workers were at the heart of this experiment in industrial democracy. This centrality of the railway workers to the Popular Front years

is further emphasized in section three which examines how the cheminots placed themselves in the vanguard of efforts to defend the totemic social legislation, the forty-hour working week, in the general strike of 30 November 1938. Once more, cheminot participation in defence of Popular Front politics was expressed through the language of shared power and responsibility within the industry. In the face of muscular repression from a now hostile state, however, the Popular Front experiment in industrial was ultimately crushed, though its echoes would once more emerge in the post-1944 era.

### **I. The Summer Strike Wave and Interwar Labour Relations**

Following hard upon the election of the first Socialist government in French history, May Day 1936 was always going to be a moment of celebration for French workers. At Le Havre and Toulouse, at the Bréguet and Latécoère aircraft works, confrontations between employers and employees emanating from May Day actions set events in motion which would, in less than a month, develop into a nation-wide strike movement. Following the May Day demonstrations striking workers at the two factories were sacked. In response workers at Bréguet and Latécoère went on strike on 11 May and 13 May respectively, occupying their workplaces overnight. The result was a stunning victory for the aircraft workers with employers acceding to their demands. In the following days the strike movement spread, first to further aircraft factories and then elsewhere in the French economy.

By the end of May the strike wave had reached the Parisian banlieue, increasing dramatically in scale. On 1 June there were ten occupied workplaces in the Paris region. By midday on 2 June this had reached sixty-six, by that evening 150 workplaces had been occupied.<sup>6</sup> In response the newly elected prime minister Léon Blum announced in parliament on 6 June that the government would be immediately implementing a programme of social legislation. The next day in secret talks with representatives of French employers at his official residence, the Hotel Matignon, Blum ensured that French workers would gain the right to join unions, elect shop stewards and enjoy pay increases across the board. It was as, Herrick Chapman notes, a ‘stunning breakthrough for the CGT.’<sup>7</sup> The Matignon Accords were announced on Monday 8 June, yet they failed initially to curtail the strikes.

Occupations persisted through June, finally petering out in early July at which point 12,000 workplaces had been affected by the strikes, 9,000 occupied.<sup>8</sup>

The strike wave was notable for both its unprecedented scale and the relatively novel tactic which witnessed striking workers occupying their factories and workplaces. Significant too was the context in which these events occurred. The interwar years have long been acknowledged as a period in which employers, by and large, gained the ascendancy over their workforces. Following an extended period of militancy from the late nineteenth century to 1914 and then from 1917 to 1920, workers in France now appeared to be on the back foot in the aftermath of the failure of the nationwide general strike of May 1920. Divided politically from December 1920 between the established Socialist Party, the *Section Française de L'Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO) and the newly created Communist Party, *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), the trade union movement in turn split a year later into a numerically dominant *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) and the more aggressively militant and soon-to-be communist dominated, *Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire* (CGTU). Thus divided into two often warring sections and with membership continuing to follow the historically weak trends common to French labour, workers proved unable to defend the social gains made during World War One. A significant proportion of strike actions in the 1920s and early 1930s ended in defeat for the workers and trade union organizations entered a period of decline.<sup>9</sup>

In 1934, however, this established situation showed signs of change. Following a major demonstration of the right-wing extra-parliamentary leagues which quickly developed into violent rioting and an attempted march upon the Chamber of Deputies, an anti-fascist alliance of the political Left and Centre began to take shape in France. A first step on this road was a major anti-fascist rally held on 13 February in Paris at which, despite the best efforts of organizers to keep them apart, CGT and CGTU rank-and-file joined together to demonstrate their opposition to the *Ligues*. Unity movements between CGTU (by far the numerically weaker partner on the national level) and CGT gathered pace until, in early 1936, an extraordinary congress saw the remaining CGTU militants reabsorbed into the CGT. In the political arena overtures between PCF, SFIO and the centrist Radical Party saw an anti-fascist common programme agreed and an electoral alliance signed for the May

1936 general election. These elections witnessed a significant victory for the Popular Front alliance against the Right.

Much discussion has been occasioned regarding the motivations and causes of the creation of the Popular Front alliance on the one hand and the May-June strike waves on the other. Taking the movement toward unity on the Left first, historians are unanimous that developments within the communist movement were key, yet disagreement continues as to the extent to which this is primarily imputable to developments within France or whether the broader strategy of the Comintern and Stalin are the more significant factors. The debate, however, falls outside the scope of this article.<sup>10</sup>

More germane to this argument are differences surrounding the underlying causes of the ‘social explosion’ of the summer of 1936 as such analyses take us to the heart of the contested meanings and significance of this period in modern French history. It is a relatively un-contentious point among scholars that the impetus for the strikes and workplace occupations developed from the bottom up rather than emanating from within the hierarchies of the trade unions or political parties. That said, important research has emphasized the organizational work conducted by PCF militants on the ground in preparing the way for the discontent in the summer of 1936.<sup>11</sup>

Underlying debates regarding the provenance of the strike movement has been the difficult question regarding motives. Dating from contemporary analyses, questions have been posed regarding the extent to which the Popular Front strike waves represented a revolutionary attempt to overthrow the Third Republic, with occupied factories seen as Soviets organizing themselves on the Russian model. The lack of disorder proved disorienting for elements within French society. In his analysis of the 1936 occupations, Léon Blum argued that it was precisely the peaceful nature of the movement which most scared ‘bourgeois’ France. Defending himself and the Popular Front in 1942 against the puppet Vichy government’s charges of having failed to neither morally nor materially prepare France for war, Blum argued that the very fact that such occupations appeared to take place in relative peace, without widespread sabotage, looting or disorder, had provoked fears of an imminent expropriation of the ‘means of production’ among ‘bourgeois’ French people.<sup>12</sup>

In the analysis of contemporary anarchist Daniel Guérin the social explosion represented a *révolution manquée*, with the revolutionary ambitions of the working class betrayed by the political



hierarchies. The bureaucratic structures of the Communist Party and CGT, in this analysis, worked together to curtail the popular élan of the movement.<sup>13</sup> Later historians have equally pointed to the manner in which trade union hierarchies and the PCF leadership succeeded in defusing the subversive potential of the occupations.<sup>14</sup> Railway workers certainly were a highly organised, highly unionised sector of the French labour movement. What is more, as we shall see, the cheminot union did work hard to convince its members to remain at work. Yet, as Alastair Reid has recently observed in a study of British shipyard workers, it is not satisfactory to assume a radical disjuncture between the ambitions of the leadership and those of the rank-and-file.<sup>15</sup> There was more at work keeping cheminots from occupying the railway network than the constraining influence of union leaders.

In recent years scholarly attention has broadened out from such debates.<sup>16</sup> Yet, still too often neglected from Popular Front accounts is the ethos of industrial social democracy which animated Popular Front politics. The Popular Front was more than a ‘defence of democracy’, it was predicated upon its *expansion* -- a redefinition of the public sphere to include the workplace as a legitimate political arena in which workers would have a free voice, unencumbered by fears of arbitrary employer actions or dismissal. As Antoine Prost has argued the social explosion was predicated on the underlying desire on the part of workers to demonstrate that the *patron* could not expect to be ‘at home’ in his factory or business ‘in the same way as he was at home in his house with his family’.

The strike wave of June 1936 thus served to legitimize the workplace as a site of political competition, placing it resolutely in the ‘public’ rather than the ‘private’ sphere.<sup>17</sup> This interpretation echoes the important research of Herrick Chapman. While pay increases did play an important role in the demands of striking workers, of greater significance were questions concerning workers’ rights and managerial authority which, for Chapman, lay ‘at the heart of most strike demands.’<sup>18</sup> The initial factory occupations in Le Havre and Toulouse were themselves reactions to arbitrary dismissals of union militants and the attempt to counter such practices was a running motif of the Popular Front strike wave. In this context collective contracts negotiated between labour representatives and employers served as a significant step towards ‘replacing the authoritarianism of the patron with something akin to a social contract.’ Chapman argues how, ‘In aviation, at least, the strike wave was a rebellion against employer autocracy, a struggle to make the aircraft factory a more secure and

sensible place to work.<sup>19</sup> This analysis can be extended beyond the relatively narrow confines of French aircraft workers and into the broader experience of the nation's labour movement more generally.

Highly significant was the fact that the Popular Front witnessed the spread of collective conventions, contracts negotiated between employers and workers which regulated the relationship between employer and employee within formal frameworks. Such contracts acted as a check to arbitrary employer power which was in turn balanced by the development of shop-stewards in the workplace.<sup>20</sup> The Popular Front experiment, then, was more than the events of the summer of 1936. Despite the disappointment and disillusionment of some anti-fascists, for a great many workers the experiment in democratic industrial politics inaugurated by Matignon endured through to November 1938. The question of power in the form of job security and the desire to combat arbitrary employer authority was at the centre of the workers' movement.

With this in mind, the absence of the railway workers from the strike movement in May-June 1936 becomes less of a puzzle. Conceptualized as a push for greater worker power and representation in the workplace, worker participation in the Popular Front strike movement can be read as a concerted attempt by ordinary workers to gain the job security and associated benefits already enjoyed by *cheminots*. These benefits had been gained as a result of the railway statute, passed into law in October 1921 in the aftermath of the general strike of May 1920. This had laid down the rules and regulations for wage levels and working procedures as well as introducing elected worker delegates who met regularly with management and state officials at a local, regional and national level. Railway work was relatively secure, with some, principally workers with families, enjoying modern company built housing.

All of this can, to an extent, be read as further evidence in support of the railway workers having been 'bought off' by management strategies, with militancy creamed off and channelled into bureaucratic avenues -- the 'negative integration' identified, for instance, by historians of the nineteenth-century German labour movement.<sup>21</sup> Such an analysis is unsatisfactory on two counts. Firstly it presupposes a revolutionary avenue open to workers which the rank-and-file would have been otherwise willing to take, something which the demands emanating from the grass-roots during

June 1936 suggests was not the case. Secondly, it does not fully take into account the agency of worker delegates, particularly members of the communist-led CGTU, who were able to reconceptualize participation in railway industrial politics as a sphere in which management and state power could be challenged and cheminot representation and influence extended.

The quest for increased cheminot power within the railway industry, consisting of worker participation in management decisions affecting them and the challenging of employer power and legitimacy, had been at the core of communist trade unionism on the railways from the late 1920s. Increasingly from 1931 it also became an important element in the more moderate CGT Federation's policy. From 1927 onwards elected communist cheminot delegates participated with the national railway industry advisory committee, the *Conseil Supérieur*. They also sat on company management/worker liaison committees and, following their introduction in 1931, dominated the elected railway safety delegate positions.<sup>22</sup>

Such actions demonstrate a startling flexibility among communists on the railways during the sectarian 'class against class' Third Period in international communist history and suggests an increasingly nuanced reading of these years is required than has often hitherto been the case in the French context.<sup>23</sup> Germane to this discussion, however, is the manner in which communists acted in this sphere. Such committees were used as platforms to challenge the legitimacy of railway companies as well as rival unions, notably the CGT, to represent the 'true' interests of the railway workers.<sup>24</sup> Participation in these committees was thus understood as forming another front in the on-going class struggle, a form of 'hostile participation' in railway industrial politics.<sup>25</sup> Yet, at the same time as this rhetorical re-coding was taking place, railway communists were also involved in gaining substantive improvements for their members and, in the sphere of railway safety, working to improve working conditions and seeking redress for cheminots who suffered injuries in the workplace.<sup>26</sup>

The increasing flexibility of railway communists was met by the growing radicalization of the rival CGT Cheminot Federation. As Aimée Moutet has noted, from 1931 the attitude within the CGT towards management hardened considerably.<sup>27</sup> The onset of economic depression in France and an increasingly vocal critique of rationalization techniques which analysed the crisis in capitalism in part to a machine driven crisis of overproduction led a more militant CGT towards the adoption of

economic planning as a platform from which to challenge private capital. On the railways CGT militants became increasingly prepared to engage in condemnations of railway management as the economic situation led to a collapse in railway finances and *cheminots* faced cuts in their salaries and in the established benefits associated with railway employment.<sup>28</sup>

The increased militancy of the *cheminot* CGT Federation undoubtedly contributed to the strength of the unity current on the railways which saw CGT and CGTU unions fusing from 1934 onwards, with the 1921 schism finally healed in 1935. This process left former *unitaires* narrowly in the majority in the reunited Federation, a position which was largely not echoed among other groups of French workers as CGTU Federations limped toward reunification with the CGT.<sup>29</sup> In opposing arbitrary company power on the railways, however, communists led the way. Interwar railway industrial politics had witnessed communists attempting to advance the scope and strength of workers' power within the railway industry. The underlying ambition was to counter the seemingly arbitrary power of employers, regularly conceptualized as 'arrogance' in their relations with the workforce. This was a strategy which the reunited *Cheminot* Federation would seek to follow in the radically transformed circumstances of 1936-1938.

## **II. Railway Workers and the Popular Front**

The railway workers were absent from the summer strike wave of 1936, but this did not mean that they were marginal to the experience of the Popular Front. Having previously carved out a space within railway industrial relations for an independent *cheminot* political voice, the *Cheminot* Federation was now well placed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Blum government and the social legislation which had been ushered in by the Matignon Accords. Such reforms, however, now needed to be grounded within French economic life. Through the years 1936 to 1938 the *Cheminot* Federation were at the heart of this democratic experiment in industrial relations, but first the Federation needed to demonstrate that it could keep the rank-and-file onside.

While railway workers did not take any significant part in the strike actions of May-June, what is often neglected in accounts is the fear on the part of the authorities of what might occur should

the railways be brought to a standstill by cheminot action. Reflecting back upon the events, the historian Jacques Kergoat noted that a cheminot strike would have had ‘major consequences’.<sup>30</sup> Jules Moch, the SFIO’s interwar transport expert and Blum’s chief of staff in June 1936, highlights these fears. Moch noted that anxieties regarding the, as then unknown, feelings of the cheminots were a strong motivation behind President Lebrun urging Blum to move more quickly in taking up the reins of power in June 1936.<sup>31</sup>

Such concerns find further voice in the posthumously published analysis of the joint-leader of the railway workers’ Federation and former leader of the Communist Party, Pierre Sébard. Though in retrospect the absence of the cheminots from the strike wave seems an inevitability, in the febrile atmosphere of June 1936 such an outcome appeared far from pre-ordained. The Popular Front government, noted Sébard, harboured serious concerns regarding the potential economic dislocations and wider social impact of a railway strike.<sup>32</sup>

This was the context for an extraordinary meeting between leading representatives of the railway workers and key members of the Popular Front government at Léon Blum’s home in early June 1936. The only account of this meeting occurs in Sébard’s history of the Cheminot Federation. Six representatives of the Federation met with the highest ranking figures in the Blum government: Bedouce (Minister for Public Works with responsibility for the railways); Charles Spinasse (Minister of the Economy); Vincent Auriol (Finance Minister); Jules Moch and finally Léon Blum himself. Sébard does not give a date for this meeting but, judging from its location in his narrative and the items discussed by the delegates, it is likely to have taken place in the days immediately following the Matignon Accords of 6-7 June 1936. Significantly, the sole item on the agenda was what it would take to keep the railway workers at their posts. The cheminot delegation arrived with a clear set of demands, including three weeks’ paid holiday, as compared to the two weeks granted to other French workers. Despite some reservations from Spinasse on this point the government readily acceded to the Cheminot demands.<sup>33</sup> It was a period in which in spite of not going on strike, as Pierre Sébard noted, the railway workers ‘obtained everything we demanded.’<sup>34</sup>

The timing of the agreement was propitious. It is clear that at this point in early June, the Cheminot leadership were having trouble maintaining order amongst the rank-and-file. In an article

prominently published in the CGT newspaper, *Le Peuple* on 5 June. The Federation responded to reports of growing agitation on the railways calling upon its members to implement the *ordre du jour* of 'Confidence and Discipline'.<sup>35</sup> On 14 June, the detailed article *Ce qu'obtiennent les travailleurs du rail* was prominently published in *Le Peuple*. Details of the outcomes of discussions between the union, management and the state were discussed. Federation successes, it was stressed had been achieved, 'thanks to the strength of our Federation (...) thanks to its cohesion and the discipline of all its members.'<sup>36</sup> Séward had made the same point at an enormous meeting of cheminots in Paris two days previously on 12 June.<sup>37</sup>

A major breakthrough for the Cheminot Federation occurred with the creation of the SNCF and the elaboration of a collective convention on the railways in the course of 1937 -- the SNCF coming into existence on 1 January 1938. This was a major advance and concrete reward for the Federation strategy which sought to place cheminot power at the heart of railway decision making. The signing of the collective convention replaced the railway statute and would remain in force until 1950. Vitally, Article Two codified the relationship between management and workforce, with the CGT recognized as the sole representative of the railway workers. Employers were now formally obliged to liaise closely with CGT representatives. All this was to be undertaken, the convention made clear, in a spirit of collaboration founded upon the recognition of the rights and shared responsibilities of employees as well as management.<sup>38</sup> This was a major success for the Cheminot Federation's strategy for extending employee representation and power within the railway industry.

The Cheminot Federation, however, argued that nationalization offered significant opportunities for the nation as a whole. Invited before the Chamber of Deputies' Public Works Commission in 1937, joint-leader of the cheminots Jean Jarrigion insisted upon nationalization as a tool to bring a greater measure of social justice and economic organization into the French Republic.<sup>39</sup> Unlike in the aircraft industry worker control received little attention, rather state control of the railway network enjoyed widespread support.<sup>40</sup> Maurice Thorez, leader of the PCF and otherwise distinctly cool on the idea of nationalizations, announced that he was in agreement in with the policy that 'certain large, public interest concerns (...) should normally return to public ownership.'<sup>41</sup> The

creation of the SNCF with its 51% state stake holding was far from satisfying cheminots, the new society derided as the *sabotage de la nationalisation par le capitalisme ferroviaire* (SNCF).

Despite such grumbles, the CGT now had representatives sitting upon the *conseil d'administration* of the new body, the union leaders Sémard and Jarrigion. The presence of labour on a genuine managerial committee represented a significant step forward for the strategy aimed at the pursuit of power and influence at the heart of the industry.

### **III. November 1938**

Popular Front administrations proved hardly more durable than previous Third Republic governments. The first Blum administration was brought down in June 1937 and was followed by two administrations headed by the Radical Camille Chautemps before Blum returned for one final pre-war tenure in March 1938. Faced with on-going high inflation, associated labour militancy and growing discontent from French business and political elites who had never accepted the challenge to their prestige represented by the Popular Front, the continued existence of the democratic experiment of June 1936 was precarious. Yet it continued to endure, notably in the operation of the forty-hour working day legislation. The arrival in power of Radical Party leader Edouard Daladier, one of the original forces behind the creation of the Popular Front political alliance, would bring tensions to a head.

Having taken over as head of the government in April 1938, Daladier became increasingly frustrated with the social conflict weakening France in the face of the threat from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. To put an end to such divisions, in November 1938 the Daladier government moved to re-establish employer power within the French economy. Through concerted state action on 30 November the French state, in concert with employer organisations, confronted and defeated the labour movement, ending the Popular Front's democratic and consensual industrial relations strategy. The role and experience of railway workers was central to the unfolding events.

Autumn 1938 saw a new policy of firmness on the part of the Daladier government in the sphere of international policy. The Munich agreement of late September 1938 had marked 'the high-water mark of France's retreat before the resurgence of Germany.' Now the French government

issued guarantees to Poland, Romania and Greece.<sup>42</sup> Daladier's more bullish approach to foreign affairs proved popular in the country. Support for Munich, argues Daniel Hucker, proved ephemeral, the government's firm response to Italian demands over Corsica, Nice and Haute-Savoie met with the strong public approval.<sup>43</sup> For Daladier, meeting the international challenges faced by France necessitated a decisive break from Popular Front economic organization. In early November the Prime Minister served time on the Popular Front experiment, removing the centrist supporter of greater state regulation of the economy, Paul Marchandau, and replacing him with the 'champion of economic liberalism' Paul Reynaud.<sup>44</sup> In a radio address upon taking office Reynaud made clear his position. 'We live', he announced, 'in a capitalist system. For it to function we must obey its laws. These are those of profits, individual risk, free markets and growth by competition.'<sup>45</sup>

Upon taking office Reynaud moved quickly. In mid-November a series of decrees was issued by the government which aimed a decisive blow against Popular Front social legislation, in particular against the forty-hour week, which became for both sides of the debate a totem of the gains (or losses) of 1936. This measure, which had not formed any part of the common programme upon which the Blum government had been elected in May 1936, had been forced upon the government as a result of the June strikes.<sup>46</sup> Historians have been unanimous in condemning the measure, noting its negative impact upon the French economy as it attempted to respond to the exigencies of government rearmament policies. In the depths of depression, the life breathed into the economy by the September 1936 devaluation was sucked out by the law of January 1937.<sup>47</sup> The implementation of the law created a vicious inflationary spiral, as Adrian Rossiter has argued, 'in expectation of higher labour costs because of the imminent reduction in the working week, the bosses indulged in prophylactic price rises, which in turn justified higher wage demands.'<sup>48</sup>

Yet, as historians have become increasingly aware, labour's attachment to the forty-hour legislation was not quite as straightforward as often portrayed.<sup>49</sup> The Communist Party leadership and communist militants moved increasingly towards accepting the need for greater flexibility in the implementation of the forty-hour legislation, the better to ensure that France could meet the challenge of an expansionist Germany. The attitudes of cheminot union leaders in negotiations through 1937 and 1938 is revealing in this regard. What emerges strongly from the Federation's position regarding



the forty-hour week is the symbolic significance of the policy. Its importance lay not in the strict number of hours which were being worked, over which the union was prepared to give ground. Rather, their fundamental position rested upon the premise that workers' representatives should have a decisive voice in the regulation of the workplace environment.

Through the second half of 1936 the Cheminot Federation, having been invited by the rail companies to participate in discussions, threw itself enthusiastically into negotiations over the introduction of the forty-hour week on the railways.<sup>50</sup> The head of the industry delegation, Robert Le Besnerais, recorded with satisfaction the cordial relations between union and management representatives.<sup>51</sup> For its part, the Cheminot Federation demonstrated a magnanimity towards management which had been far from characteristic of the previous decades of railway industrial relations.

The spirit of optimism and cooperation endured beyond the summer. When, in December 1936, Le Besnerais was replaced at the head of the company delegation by Henri Gréard, Pierre Sémard delivered a fulsome tribute to Le Besnerais, going on to assure Gréard of the 'spirit of confidence and the desire for collaboration' which animated the union delegation.<sup>52</sup> Having spent three months negotiating over competing plans, by 14 January a decree text had been agreed by all parties.<sup>53</sup> As a result of this close cooperation the decree came into force on 18 January 1937, several months ahead of the full extension of the forty-hour week to the whole of the French economy.<sup>54</sup>

As Jones makes clear,<sup>55</sup> the Cheminot Federation were zealous in overseeing the operation of the new working-time regulations. However, far from being seen as an impediment to the operational interests of the SNCF cheminot engagement in fact received high praise from Le Besnerais, now President of the SNCF. In meetings of the *Conseil d'Administration* in July and August 1938, Le Besnerais spoke warmly of the genuine openness of the personnel to implementing a more flexible interpretation of the forty-hour week. In August he announced that 'the representatives of the Federation have given their agreement to a relaxing of the working regulations created by the decree of 18 January 1937. They have promised to meet with their representatives in the *comités du travail* and to give them (...) directives concerning the cooperation they are going to bring to this loosening.'<sup>56</sup>

The extant documentation, if not entirely supporting Le Besnerais's reading of the union position, does demonstrate that the Cheminot Federation recognized the need for a pragmatic implementation of the regulations. From their perspective, however, the law as it stood allowed for the flexibility which Le Besnerais and the SNCF called for. The Federation did announce, though, that they were willing to proceed with discussions on the basis of the prior agreement negotiated between railway management and workforce.<sup>57</sup> By August, however, if Le Besnerais's view is to be trusted, the union had let it be understood that it was prepared to go much further in this regard.

How might we account for the apparent development in Cheminot thinking in the summer of 1938? In many ways this adaptation, from a cautious engagement with the issue in June to a more open willingness to confront far-reaching reform of the forty-hour legislation by August, reflects the wider ambiguities on the issue within French communist politics. Following 1936 the Communist Party had placed itself at the forefront of calls for a firm response to Nazi Germany. The communist hierarchy followed through with the logic of this position, recognizing the need to ensure the readiness of France's war industries and to strengthen the economy as central elements in meeting the German menace. From 1937 the party called on its militants to work to raise production and, by 1938, the party leadership supported a re-negotiation of the forty-hour laws. In this policy the party, however, ran into the determined resistance of its rank-and-file militants, particularly those active in the trade unions.<sup>58</sup>

The ambiguities of the Cheminots' position on the issue of the forty-hour law may itself emanate from similar difficulties between leadership and the rank-and-file, with the union hierarchy attempting to find a way of negotiating between the strongly held views of the rank-and-file and its new-found position of responsibility at the heart of railway politics. What is clear, however, is that the engagement of the Federation was applauded by both SNCF managers and state representatives. The Reynaud decrees, however, struck at the heart of this collaboration.

The decree laws launched a new wave of labour protest across France. While the national CGT leadership vacillated, wildcat strikes and lockouts spread through Paris and beyond. In comparison to 1936, however, this new wave of strike action was met by determined employer and state resistance.<sup>59</sup> From 21 November, metalworkers and chemical workers struck and factories were

occupied in Paris, Nord and Basse-Seine. Now the railways too were affected. The local network near Valenciennes, for instance, was occupied with traffic severely interrupted in the area of the crucial railway hub of Somain.<sup>60</sup> Rank-and-file activism continued to put pressure on the CGT. At the head of the Confederation Léon Jouhaux and René Belin saw the strike movement as a communist inspired plot and remained strongly suspicious of it, standing firm against sanctioning a general strike. The actions of the Cheminot Federation, however, proved decisive in shifting opinion within the CGT. The tipping point was reached when the railway workers voted overwhelmingly in favour of the general strike.

On 25 November enormous demonstrations by cheminots took place in Paris. 4000 protested at Gare de Lyon, 5000 at Gare du Nord with 2000 more at Gare de l'Est. That day the Federation leadership voted by eighty-seven votes to twelve in favour of a general strike.<sup>61</sup> As Guy Bordé notes, within the CGT 'all opposition to the strike fell at a single stroke.'<sup>62</sup>

Within the Cheminot Federation both former *unitaires* and *confédérés* were in bellicose mood. Sépard charged the government with having promulgated a policy which represented 'a veritable destruction of the railways.'<sup>63</sup> Jarrigion condemned the manner in which the rights of the cheminots had been 'arbitrarily and abusively violated.'<sup>64</sup> In a letter to *Le Peuple* the Federation announced on 29 November that despite cheminots having worked in the national, collective interest the government had chosen to 'brutally' break with this collaboration. Efforts on the part of the government to intimidate the workers, announced the union, would serve only to reinforce the will of the cheminots and further demonstrate 'the bad faith and the repressive aims of statesmen.'<sup>65</sup> On the eve of the strike evidence suggests that the rank-and-file shared this bellicosity. On the former Paris-Orléans network a large meeting of cheminots voted unanimously to proceed with strike action.<sup>66</sup>

The general strike of 30 November 1938 was a failure. Yet this is not to be explained through a lack of identification with the Popular Front, rather the CGT call to arms ran into massive state reaction. Troops, including soldiers from the colonies, were used to ensure the railways remained operational. Soldiers were used to break up demonstrations. Sépard was incensed by the use of black troops to overpower French workers.<sup>67</sup>

The prominent role of cheminots in the build-up to the general strike has been explained by a key historian of the event as due to the fact that of all French workers, cheminots had the most to lose. They were particularly identified by the decrees as having gained significantly from Popular Front social legislation.<sup>68</sup> In many ways this fits into the central paradigm within labour history which sees material interests as key to explaining behaviour. It is certainly true that cheminots stood to lose out as a result of the Reynaud decrees, but this is not how they framed their opposition at the time. The position of the cheminot leadership was expressed firmly in terms of their desire to defend the democratic ethos of Popular Front industrial relations.

In a furious response to the introduction of the decree laws in mid-November, Jean Jarrigion made explicit the Federation's feelings. For the cheminots, 'the principle is the consultation between railway organizations: employers and workers.' For Jarrigion this principle was at the centre of their opposition to the decree laws, it was a principle which Reynaud had 'totally destroyed.' Jarrigion argued strongly against the government line that the decree laws were necessary to ameliorate the French economy. The cheminots, noted Jarrigion, had never ceased to collaborate with management, indeed the SNCF hierarchy had been fulsome in its praise for the cheminots in this regard.<sup>69</sup> In a letter of 22 November the Federation once more sought to undermine the rationale of increased economic efficiency behind the decrees. Emphasizing again the cheminots' collaboration with the SNCF, even on the most contentious of issues, the union leadership noted that the workers 'had never refused to take on their share of the sacrifices (...) and they have constantly offered their collaboration with a view to raising productivity and to achieve rational economies within the SNCF.'<sup>70</sup>

In short, according to the cheminot analysis, the Reynaud decrees could not be explained in straightforwardly economic terms. Rather, they represented for the cheminots a state sanctioned power-grab, once more giving employers the uncontested upper-hand in the workplace. According to the Cheminot Federation, the Reynaud decree laws were 'anti-democratic' motivated by a 'dictatorial will' and aiming at 'social regression.'<sup>71</sup>

The 1938 strike action is, therefore, best understood as a clash over two divergent conceptions of French industrial relations. On the one hand, employers, backed by the state, aimed to re-establish the uncontested authority of the *patron* within a reorganized free market economy.<sup>72</sup> On

the other, the French labour movement, both communist and non-communist, aimed to defend the social-democratic ethos of Popular Front industrial politics. On the railways both Sémard and Jarrigion made clear that what was at stake were not individual benefits or privileged working conditions over which they were prepared to give ground, but rather the wider principle of collaboration and cheminot representation within the workplace. Once more the key theme was opposition to arbitrary power, now identified with the ‘illegal’ and ‘fascist’ decree laws.

The Reynaud decrees’ rupture with the collaborative and democratic approach to industrial relations of the Popular Front period and the enormous victimization which followed in the wake of the failure of the 30 November general strike profoundly impacted upon the fabric of French society. What is more, as Talbot Imlay has convincingly argued, the liberal economic regime inaugurated by the decree-laws proved disastrous for French war preparations. The poisoned relationship between French elites and the working class population occasioned by the power contests of the Popular Front era would have significant implications for France’s ability to respond to the Nazi menace, even if the defeat of June 1940 is explicable primarily in military terms.<sup>73</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Far from being tangential to the Popular Front years, as they appear in many accounts, this article has argued that, rather, the experience of the railway workers in France sheds important light upon the wider significance of the period 1936-1938. By foregrounding the contest for power, legitimacy and representation at the heart of the meaning of the Popular Front experiment the example of the cheminots demonstrates a key element of the aims and ambitions of French workers. In the assault upon the citadels of arbitrary employer power represented by June 1936, the cheminots could afford to take a back seat having already carved out an important and independent space for worker representation within the railway industry prior to this moment. The long experience of muscular trade unionism in confrontation with management and state, however, ensured that cheminot representatives were well placed to make significant gains amid the febrile June atmosphere. A new

atmosphere of collaboration permeated railway industrial relations between 1936 and 1938 as communists, on the one hand, followed the logic of the altered Comintern line and, on the other, reinforced by an enormous membership, supportive state and, after 1937, a place at the heart of the SNCF executive, engaged for the first time from a position of strength. Such strength, as it turned out, was transitory. The collaborative industrial policy of the Popular Front was predicated upon the support, or at least the neutrality, of the state. Once this key-stone was removed in November 1938, the *cheminots*' position quickly unravelled.

Finally, this article raises questions regarding the wider significance of the Popular Front in modern French history. As Herrick Chapman noted, the Popular Front years are significant as an early testing ground for the economic and political structures which would be elaborated in the aftermath of the Liberation and form the basis of France's post-war 'economic miracle' of the 'trente glorieuses'.<sup>74</sup> In this sense the sombre, tragic analysis common in Popular Front scholarship is perhaps a little over done. In a similar fashion to the historical reassessment of the Second Republic, we can perhaps see the Popular Front years as a key period of gestation and education for politicians, technicians, communists and crucially, rank-and-file workers. It thus served as preparation for the industrial relations frameworks and culture which would form an important element in the post-war French economic and political landscape.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this it can be seen in a broader context of European movements in the interwar period, see Stefan Berger, *Social Democracy and the Working Class in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Germany* (Harlow 2000), 125.

<sup>2</sup> René Clement's 1946 film *La bataille du rail* played an important role in the creation of this image. See Martin O'Shaughnessy, 'La Bataille du Rail: Unconventional form, conventional image?' in H.R. Kedward and Nancy Wood (eds), *The Liberation of France: Image and Event* (Oxford 1995), 15-28; Ludivine Broch, 'French Railway Workers under the German Occupation', (Unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Christian Chevandier, *Cheminots en grève ou la construction d'une identité, 1848-2001* (Paris 2002), 142, 152; John M. Sherwood, 'Rationalisation and Railway Workers in France. Raoul Dautry and *Les Chemins de Fer de l'État*, 1928-1937', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15, 3, (1980), 443-474; Gérard Noiriel, *Les origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris 1999), 88; on the relative security of public sector jobs see Laura L. Frader, *Breadwinners and Citizens: Gender in the Making of the French Social Model* (Durham, NC. 2008), 196; for an

eloquent depiction of the difficulties faced by textile workers in the French town of Troyes see Helen Harden Chenut, *The Fabric of Gender: Working Class Culture in Third Republic France* (University Park, PA. 2005), 341-357.

<sup>4</sup> Guy Bourd , *La d faite du front populaire* (Paris 1977), 153; membership figures from Chevandier, *Cheminots en gr ve*, 150.

<sup>5</sup> Research on cheminot trade unionism is greatly facilitated by the existence of a relatively full union archive housed at the Conf d ration G n rale du Travail's 'Institut d'histoire sociale cheminot', Montreuil, Paris under the rubric 'Retour de Moscou' (Hereafter CGTIHS, RdM).

<sup>6</sup> Antoine Prost, *Autour du Front Populaire: Aspects du mouvement social au xxe si cle* (Paris 2006), 72.

<sup>7</sup> Herrick Chapman, *State Capitalism and Working Class Radicalism in the French Aircraft Industry* (Berkeley 1991), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Prost, *Autour du Front Populaire*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Magraw, *A History of the French Working Class. Volume 2: Workers and the Bourgeois Republic* (Oxford 1992), 209-212; G rard Noiriel, *Les ouvriers dans la soci t  fran aise* (Paris 1986), 154-164.

<sup>10</sup> On the Moscow origins of the strategy, Annie Kriegel and St phane Courtois, *Eugen Fried: le grand secret du PCF* (Paris 1997), 232; Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France. Defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge 1988), 32-36, presents a more nuanced view but ultimately comes down on the side of Moscow's influence. On the complexities of Moscow's position see Jonathan Haslam, 'The Comintern and the origins of the Popular Front, 1934-1935', *Historical Journal*, 22, 3 (1979), 673-691; see the discussion in Eric Weitz, *Popular Communism: Political Strategies and Social Histories in the Formation of the German, French and Italian Communist Parties, 1919-1948* (Ithaca 1992), 55, n.54.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Depretto and Sylvie Schweitzer, *Communisme   l'usine: vie ouvri re et mouvement ouvrier chez Renault, 1920-1939* (Paris 1984), 284; Bertrand Badie, *Strat gie de la gr ve. Pour une approche fonctionnaliste du parti communiste fran ais* (Paris 1976); Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, 86.

<sup>13</sup> David Berry, 'Fascism or Revolution! Anarchism and Antifascism in France, 1933 - 1939', *Contemporary European History*, 8, 1 (1999), 51-71.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Dell, 'Festival and Revolution: The Popular Front in France and the Press Coverage of the Strikes of 1936', *Art History*, 23, 4 (November 2000), 599-621.

<sup>15</sup> Alastair J. Reid, *The Tide of Democracy: Shipyard Workers and Social Relations in Britain, 1870-1950* (Manchester 2010), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Nord, *France's New Deal: From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton 2010); Jessica Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of the People: Political Culture in France, 1934-1938* (Basingstoke 2009); John Bulaitis, *Communism in Rural France: Agricultural Workers and the Popular Front* (London 2008); Simon Kitson 'Police and Politics in Marseille, 1936-1938', *European History Quarterly*, 37, 1 (January 2007), pp.81-108; Simon Dell, *The Image of the Popular Front: The Masses and the Media in Interwar France* (Basingstoke 2007); Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. 2005); Danielle Tartakowsky, *Le pouvoir est dans la rue: crises politiques et manifestations en France* (Paris 1998); Pascal Ory, *La belle illusion: culture et politique sous le signe du front populaire* (Paris 1994); Herrick Chapman, *State Capitalism and Working Class Radicalism in the French Aircraft Industry* (Berkeley 1991); Michel Margairaz, *L' tat, les finances et l' conomie: histoire d'une conversion 1932-1952* (Paris 1991); Si n Reynolds, 'Women, Men and the 1936 Strikes in France', in Martin S. Alexander and Helen Graham (eds), *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts, Comparative Perspectives* (Cambridge 1989), 185-200; Richard Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 1981).

<sup>17</sup> Antoine Prost, 'The Strikes of 1936: The Occupation of Factories and the Decline of Deference', in *Republican Identities in War and Peace: Representations of France in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford 2002), 311-337. Prost has more recently made the same arguments in a French language version, *Autour du Front Populaire: Aspects du mouvement social au XXe si cle* (Paris 2006), chapter 3, 71-103.

<sup>18</sup> Herrick Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 91.

<sup>19</sup> Herrick Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 90.

<sup>20</sup> Antoine Prost, 'The Strikes of 1936', 331-332.

<sup>21</sup> Laura Frader and Sonya Rose, *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca 1996), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Beaumont, 'Communists and French Railway Workers, 1920-1934: The Parisian Leadership of the *Cheminots Unitaires*', *Twentieth-Century Communism*, 5, (forthcoming: May, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> For a traditional assessment of 'class against class' and its imposition from Moscow see St phane Courtois and Marc Lazar, *Le parti communiste fran ais* (Paris 2000); for a more nuanced analysis see Bernard Pudal,

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*Prendre parti: pour une sociologie historique du PCF* (Paris 1989), 155-167; Julian Mishi, *Servir la classe ouvrière: sociabilités militantes au PCF* (Rennes 2010), 127.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Beaumont, 'Communists and Cheminots: Industrial Relations and Ideological Conflict in the French Railway Industry, 1919-1939', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Exeter, 2011);

<sup>25</sup> This phrase is adapted from P.R. Turner, 'Hostile Participants? Working Class Militancy, Associational Life and the "Distinctiveness" of the Prewar French Labour Movement', *Journal of Modern History*, 71, 1 (1999), pp.28-55.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Archives Nationales, Paris (Hereafter AN) F/14/14928, dossier E84D, Fédération Nationale des Travailleurs de chemins de fer au Ministre des Travaux Publics, 3/11/1933, concerning the case of a welder who lost an eye in an industrial accident.

<sup>27</sup> Aimée Moutet, *Les logiques de l'entreprise: la rationalisation dans l'industrie française de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris 1997), 339.

<sup>28</sup> On the impact of this see Archives de la Société National des chemins de fer français, Le Mans (Hereafter SNCF), 25LM636, Décrets Doumergue et Laval, Conditions de rémunération, 'Modifications successives apportées aux conditions de rémunération du personnel depuis l'application du statut', 14-17; on CGT reactions see Centre d'Archives du Monde Contemporaine, Fontainebleau, (hereafter CACF), 19940500/0198, Commissaire Divisionnaire de la Gare du Nord au Directeur de la Sureté Générale, 8/12/1934, 1-3; AD Nord, M595/92, Commissaire divisionnaire de la police spéciale au Préfet du Nord, 19/3/1933, 1-2; Beaumont, 'Communists and Cheminots'.

<sup>29</sup> Christian Chevandier, *Cheminots en grève*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Kergoat, *La France du Front Populaire* (Paris 1986, 2003), 151.

<sup>31</sup> Jules Moch, *Le front populaire: grande espérance* (Paris 1971), 138.

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Séward, *Histoire de la fédération des cheminots* (Confédération Générale du Travail, Institut d'Histoire Social Cheminot, Cahiers de L'Institut 17, 3ème trimestre, 2002), 74.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Séward, *Histoire de la fédération des cheminots*, 74-75.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Séward, *Histoire de la fédération des cheminots*, 75.

<sup>35</sup> *Le Peuple*, 5/6/1936.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Peuple*, 14/6/1936.

<sup>37</sup> Christian Chevandier, *Cheminots en Grève*, 144.

<sup>38</sup> SNCF 505LM136, dossier 14, 1938, relations syndicats/SNCF, convention collective, livre 1, droit syndical; Christian Chevandier, *Cheminots en grève*, 149.

<sup>39</sup> AN C//15196, Tome 2, procès verbale 10/2/1937, pp.3-4.

<sup>40</sup> Herrick Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 112-113, 145-147.

<sup>41</sup> Archives de la Prefecture de Police de Paris, DA866, SNCF Correspondence 1934-1945, à sujet de la nationalisation des chemins de fer, 2/3/1937, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy Making, 1933-1939* (Oxford 2000), 298, and chapter 9.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Hucker, 'French Public Attitudes Towards the Prospect of War in 1938-1939: Pacifism or War Anxiety', *French History*, 21, 4 (2007), 431-449, (444).

<sup>44</sup> Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics and Economics in Britain and France, 1938-1940* (Oxford 2003), 262.

<sup>45</sup> Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, 264.

<sup>46</sup> Adrian Rossiter, 'Popular Front Economic Policy and the Matignon Negotiations', *The Historical Journal*, 30, 3 (1987), 663-684, (663).

<sup>47</sup> Alfred Sauvy, *Histoire économique de la France entre les deux guerres* vol.2 (Paris 1965-1975), 297-298.

<sup>48</sup> Adrian Rossiter, 'Popular Front Economic Policy', 684.

<sup>49</sup> Talbot Imlay, *Facing the Second World War*, 249-250.

<sup>50</sup> CGTIHS, RdM, Conseil du direction des réseaux, dossier comité de direction des grands réseaux, momento de réunion, 24/9/1936, p.3.

<sup>51</sup> AN F/14/14959, Dossier semaine de quarante heures, rapport du directeur du contrôle du travail à sujet de l'application de la semaine de quarante heures aux agents des grands réseaux de chemins de fer, p.2.

<sup>52</sup> CGTIHS, RdM, Conseil du direction des réseaux, dossier comité de direction des grands réseaux, 30/12/1936, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> AN F/14/14959, Dossier projets et observations, rapport au Président de la République, 14/1/1937.

<sup>54</sup> Alfred Sauvy, *Histoire économique*, p.243.



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<sup>55</sup> Joseph Jones, *The Politics of Transport in France*, 83.

<sup>56</sup> SNCF 505LM138, dossier 18, extrait de Conseil d'administration, 3/8/1938.

<sup>57</sup> SNCF 505LM139, Dossier 18, Fédération des Travailleurs de Chemins de Fer Français à M. le Président de la SNCF, 8/6/1938.

<sup>58</sup> Georges Vidal, 'Le parti communiste français et la défense nationale (septembre 1937-septembre 1939)', *Revue Historique*, 630 (avril, 2004), 333-370, (361-363).

<sup>59</sup> Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front*, 111.

<sup>60</sup> Service Historique de la Gendarmerie, Vincennes, 59E57, Section de Valenciennes, 24/11/1938, pp.361-364.

<sup>61</sup> *L'Humanité* 26/11/1938. Also quoted in Bourdé, *La Defaite*, 153.

<sup>62</sup> Bourdé, *La Defaite*, 153.

<sup>63</sup> *Le Peuple*, 28/11/1938.

<sup>64</sup> *Le Peuple*, 28/11/1938.

<sup>65</sup> *Le Peuple*, 29/11/1938.

<sup>66</sup> CACF, 19940500/0198, rapport assemblé des cheminots Paris-Orléans, 29/11/1938.

<sup>67</sup> AD Nord, M595/92, CGT Cheminot bulletin d'information no 5, 20/12/1938, pp.7-8.

<sup>68</sup> Bourdé, *La Defaite*, 152.

<sup>69</sup> CGTIHS, RdM, Conseil de direction des grands réseaux, déclaration de M. Jarrigion relative aux décrets lois, 16/11/1938, pp.1-2.

<sup>70</sup> SNCF, 025LM203, Fédération des Travailleurs des Chemins de Fer de France à M. le Président de la SNCF, 25/11/1938, p.1.

<sup>71</sup> SNCF, 025LM203, Fédération des Travailleurs des Chemins de Fer de France à M. le Président de la SNCF, 25/11/1938, p.1.

<sup>72</sup> Talbot Imlay, 'Paul Reynaud and France's Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940', *French Historical Studies*, 26, 3 (Summer 2003), 497-538, (506-515); Richard Vinen, *The Politics of French Business, 1936-1945* (Cambridge 1991), 80.

<sup>73</sup> Talbot Imlay, 'Democracy and War: Political Regime, Industrial Relations and Economic Preparations for War in France and Britain up to 1940', *Journal of Modern History*, 79, 4 (March 2007), 1-47; idem. 'Mind the Gap: The Perception and Reality of Communist Sabotage of French War Production During the Phoney War, 1939-1940', *Past and Present*, 189, (November 2005), 179-224; idem. *Facing the Second World War*.

<sup>74</sup> Herrick Chapman, 'France's Liberation Era, 1944-1947: A Social and Economic Settlement?' in Andrew Knapp (ed.), *The Uncertain Foundation: France at the Liberation, 1944-1947* (Basingstoke 2007), 103-120.

<sup>75</sup> See Maurice Agulhon's work reassessing the Second Republic, recently analysed in Edward Berenson, 'The Second Republic', in Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert and Christophe Prochasson (eds), *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates* (Ithaca 2011), 27-34; on shared power and the post-war 'social contract' see Irwin Wall, 'The French Social Contract: Conflict amid Cooperation', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 50 (Fall, 1996), 116-124.