IRSH 47 (2002), pp. 375–405 DOI: 10.1017/S002085900200069X
© 2002 Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis

Political Identity and Worker Politics: Silk and Metalworkers in Lyon, France 1900–1914

Keith Mann

Summary: This paper aims to explain the different political trajectories and identities of two sets of industrial workers in the city of Lyon, France during the years immediately preceding the first World War. Silk workers supported reformist socialist parties while metalworkers were pillars of the revolutionary syndicalist current that dominated the prewar CGT. Unlike base and superstructure models or political autonomy explanations, it is argued that the particular industrial structures and social relations within each industry interacted with local and national political opportunity structures in ways that rendered some strategies and forms of collective action more efficacious than others. The programs and strategies proposed by revolutionary syndicalism matched the conditions of metalworkers and attracted their support, while reformist socialism struck a similar chord with silk workers resulting in similar results.

After an extended absence, political history is beginning to find its way back onto labor history's agenda.[1] Scholars are approaching the study of workers and politics from multiple angles using a variety of theoretical frameworks. Some have called for the return to the institutional and intellectual political history that was popular before social history began to influence labor history's agenda in the 1960s.[2] Others have been drawn to a

1. Notable recent work in European labor history and politics include Iowerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830–1870* (Cambridge, 1997); and Don Kalb, *Expanding Class: Power and Everyday Politics in Industrial Communities. The Netherlands, 1850–1950* (London, 1997). For recent scholarship on US workers and politics see the collection of essays in Julie Greene, Bruce Laurie, and Eric Arnesen (eds), *Labor Histories* (Urbana, IL, 1998).
2. Examples of this genre in French labor history include such classic works as George Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste sous la Troisième République en France, 1871–1942* (Paris, 1963), and Edward Dolléans, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier* (Paris, 1967). Calls to return to this type of history were already being issued twenty years ago. See Keith Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?", *Social History*, 5 (1980), pp. 249–271; and Tony Judt, "A Clown in Regal Purple: Social History and the Historians", *History Workshop Journal*, 7 (1979), pp. 66–94.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

linguistically driven labor history focusing on the discursive construction of social reality.[3]

More recently, a "reconfigured labor history" that combines some of the best insights of social history with attention to political process is emerging.[4] The relational approach that marks some of this work offers the possibility of accounting for an unusually large range of social and political relationships. Prothero, for example, insists in the work cited above that the study of worker politics take into account "the importance of political circumstances, the extent of toleration or repression, the balance of political forces, the nature of elite politics, the strength and confidence of a movement, the ways in which people read the situation and responded to it, the possibilities and strategies they canvassed".[5] Political scientists refer to such a package of political factors as "political opportunity structure" (POS). The current interest in social and political identity suggests new avenues of inquiry while fresh approaches to class analysis provide conceptual tools for labor historians to study workers and politics.[6] Together, these developments are particularly well suited to comparisons between groups, and over time and space. They offer far more dynamic ways of explaining worker political identity and behavior than the simple unidirectional relationship in which social relations determine political outcomes as seen in base-superstructure approaches or in the postmodern mode of viewing the political as an autonomous sphere.

Turn-of-the-century Lyon, France offers an intriguing setting to explore questions of identity and political process. Lyon was one of France's most important political and economic centers. The same Radical Party that dominated national politics made the city a bastion of progressive republican politics. Lyon had been an international center of the production of silk products since the Middle Ages. The second industrial revolution broadened its industrial base in the direction of metalworking, chemicals and electricity.

3. See Jacques Rancière, *La nuit des Prolétaires* (Paris, 1981); Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988); and Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge, 1983). These and other authors targeted historical literature written in the base-superstructure framework. Examples of the latter include Claude Willard, *Les Guesdists* (Paris, 1965); Rolande Trempé, *Les mineurs de Carmaux, 1848–1914*, (Paris, 1971); and John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Capitalism in Three Industrial Towns* (New York, 1973).

4. French labor historian Michael Hanagan uses this phrase to describe recent historical literature. See his book review published in the *Journal of Modern History*, (Winter–Spring, 1998), pp. 661–664.

5. Prothero, *Radical Artisans*, p. 315.

6. See Charles Tilly, "Political Identities", in Michael P. Hanagan, Leslie Page Moch, and Wayne te Brake (eds), *Challenging Authority: The Historical Study of Contentious Politics* (Minneapolis, MN, 1998). For a nonreductionist materialist approach to historically grounded class analysis, see Ron Aminzade, "Class Analysis, Politics, and French Labor History", in Lenard Berlanstein (ed.), *Rethinking Labor History* (Urbana, IL, 1993).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Silk and metalworkers were important players in the economic and political life of the city. Until the period under consideration here craft-based identities were widespread among both groups of workers. But by the turn of the century, each group developed distinct *political* identities. France's largest *fin-de-siècle* socialist party, Jules Guesde's Parti Ouvrier Français (POF) could count on strong electoral support from silk workers who provided the party with many of its rank-and-file members as well as local and national leaders. The POF was a junior partner in the left-leaning municipal government led by the center-left Radical Party. Metalworkers by contrast, were strong supporters of revolutionary syndicalist theory and practice and dominated the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) trade-union confederation. As such they were in constant opposition to local and national government.

Traditionally, these divisions have been explicitly or implicitly explained as ideological differences between entrenched political currents. Here, I argue that political identities are powerfully shaped by the interactions between a series of social relations within a given industrial setting and local and national political opportunity structures. The programs and forms of collective action proposed by political parties and formations (including the CGT under revolutionary-syndicalist leadership) that best match the combination of political and social conditions faced by any given set of workers, hold great appeal. Workers are attracted to currents that propose the most attractive strategies. Sustained identification with currents like revolutionary syndicalism and mainstream prewar French socialism translate into political identities.

Let us indicate at this point what industrial social relations and political structures mean. Social relations refer here to the relations between workers and employers and amongst workers in any given industrial setting. Shopfloor social relations involve degrees of worker control over labor processes, hiring, and apprenticeship.[7] Subcontracting and payment systems are also important. These are markers of the balance of forces between workers and employers, which were quite fluid during the second industrial revolution, but they also render certain forms of collective action more appealing than others. The structure of a given industry is important here as well. In particular, degrees of capital concentration also make some forms of collective action more possible than others.

These social relations and industrial structures powerfully shape the types of strategies that can be expected to attract worker support. However, unlike base-superstructure models, these relations and

7. The shopfloor perspective, once a mainstay of labor history, has also come under attack. But as Lenard Berlanstein has pointed out in his article "The Distinctiveness of the Nineteenth-Century French Labor Movement", *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), p. 685, this dimension should remain on labor history's agenda because "the struggle for power at the shop floor was a crucial source of worker's identity, grievances, and collective strategies".

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

structures explain only part of the story. Political opportunity structures also render some forms of political activity and collective action possible while closing off others. Effective strategies are those which best match the entire constellation of social, industrial, and political relations and structures.

Contemporary social science literature on collective action, particularly theories of political opportunity structure (POS) help explain how the turn-of-the-century French political scene facilitated the formation of new worker political identities. In a recent essay, Doug McAdam has summarized and synthesized various versions of POS. McAdam distinguishes between political opportunities and the collective processes by which these changes are interpreted and framed. He identifies four dimensions of political opportunity. They are: (1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; (2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergrid a polity; (3) the presence or absence of elite allies; and (4) the state's capacity and propensity for repression.[8]

Let us briefly review each of these dimensions in the context of the Third Republic in turn-of-the-century France. The stringent property qualifications that limited the franchise to the wealthy earlier in the century were abolished and all adult male French citizens, regardless of wealth or social station, could vote. We can therefore conclude that the political system was relatively open. The second dimension concerns the structure of informal power relations. Shifting government coalitions and the fragility of parliamentary majorities induced left-leaning political parties to offer popular reforms to workers. The dynamics of the Radical Party helped provide openings that made alliances with it by the POS both attractive and possible. Diverse forces with different visions contested leadership of the party. Judith Stone has chronicled how "the Right of the party [...] hoped to transform the radicals into the spokesmen for the economic and social interests of small property owners, while [o]ther radicals, eager to remain men of the Left, reiterated their commitment to reform legislation essentially aimed at improving working class conditions".[9] In such a context, socialist electoral support could only bolster the fortunes of the left-wing radicals who in turn could use working-class support in their struggles with the right wing.

The same held true for the third dimension, the presence or absence of elite allies. The radical and reformist socialist parties and governments who promised reforms were of course powerful allies. Party activists could tell workers to vote for their "friends". Concerning the fourth dimension, the state's capacity for repression, the French state reserved its repressive

8. Doug McAdam, "Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Direction", in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 10.

9. Judith Stone, *Sons of the Revolution*, (Baton Rouge, LA, 1996), p. 340.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

apparatus for those who actually tried to threaten elite rule. Revolutionary syndicalists, anarchists, and others bore the brunt of state repression while the peaceful agitation favored by reformists was tolerated. Both sets of experiences seemed to confirm the programs of each respective current. This is, in general, how the national political opportunity structure in France at this time helped shape the formation of political identities for French workers.

The remainder of this article will explore in greater detail the ways that these developments in the worlds of work and politics shaped the political identities of Lyon's silk and metalworkers at the turn of twentieth century. We begin our analysis with a discussion of municipal politics in *fin-de-siècle* Lyon. Then in separate sections we examine the structure of industrial social relations in the silk and metallurgy industries and how those relations interacted with political structures to give silk and metalworker politics their distinctive shape.

THE REPUBLIC IN LYON

By the turn of the century, the Republic had been accepted by all but the most refractory elements of French society. The early struggles between republicans of all stripes on one hand, and monarchist opponents on the other, had been replaced by opposition between republicans and nationalists. Middle-class republicans sought to win workers to the Republic through the enactment of progressive social measures. In fact, for much of its life Third-Republic governments enjoyed the support of large sections of the middle class in town and country and at the minimum the passive support of many workers as well. Throughout most of its existence, the center of gravity of the Third Republic was the left-of-center Radical Party. The radicals were at the center of a broad republican alliance which included socialist organizations like Jules Guesde's Parti ouvrier socialiste (POF).

Republican forces enjoyed hegemony in Lyon from the 1880s on. The city's leading newspaper, *Le Progrès*, was the chief organ of republican sentiment. Its political color was summed up in the motto "neither reaction nor revolution". It was one of the rare newspapers in France to support Dreyfus, and was generally more friendly to progressive social reforms than its counterparts elsewhere in the country.

Reactionary, clerical, anti-Semitic, and royalist parties and groups, although deeply rooted in Lyon, played only a marginal role in the city. Their only real bastion of electoral strength was in the second *arrondissement*, which has remained a conservative stronghold to the present day.

The various versions of the Third-Republic *bloc des gauches* of radicals and reformist socialists always found a strong echo there. The radicals and their allies dominated local politics through their control of both the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

mayor's office and a majority of the city council made up of delegates from the city's nine *arrondissements*. By the turn of the century, the radicals and socialists were desisting in favor of each other in second rounds of electoral contests and the radicals were offering slots on electoral lists to labor activists in working-class districts.

Mayor Gailleton incarnated the Lyonais republican spirit in the 1890s, serving as mayor from 1891 to 1900. Gailleton supported center-of-the-road republicanism favorable to the separation of church and state but was not as militantly anticlerical as were other republicans, including his successors. It was during Victor Augagneur's reign as mayor between 1900 and 1905 that the grand alliance between reformist socialists and the Radical Party was forged. Augagneur constructed an electoral alliance of radicals, his own party, the Fédération autonome socialiste and Guesdists that won fifty-one of fifty-four seats in the 1904 municipal elections.[10] His association with socialists and the left radicals dated from 1898 when he had been the sole Lyonnais political figure, apart from the socialists, to support Zola's campaign on behalf of Dreyfus that appeared in *Le Progrès*. In the 1900 municipal elections he ran on a platform which supported the center-left government of Waldeck-Rousseau, suppression of the *octroi*, the local custom toll, raising the salaries of municipal employees, and promises to improve substandard housing – a platform that closely resembled the POF program of 1891.[11] At the end of his inauguration speech, he proclaimed "Vive la République démocratique et sociale" which earned him the accolades of the Socialist newspaper *Le Peuple*, which declared him "one of ours even if he doesn't belong to one of our specialized schools".[12] The right-wing organ of clerical reaction, the *Salut Public*, referred to Augagneur's declaration as a set of "Jacobin principles".[13]

Once in office, Augagneur pursued progressive reforms. Foremost among these was his unsuccessful campaign for a progressive household tax which the mayor considered as a precursor to a progressive income tax. Augagneur's suppression of the *octroi* (customs gate) was another notable reform appreciated by the socialists and *Le Progrès*, which hailed it as a great act of "social justice".[14] At the same time, his tough stand against the revolutionary syndicalists who dominated the local *bourse du travail* underscored the limits of his left-wing leanings – an example of his

10. Françoise Bayard and Pierre Cayez (eds), *Histoire de Lyon des origines à nos jours* (Lyon, 1991), p. 363.
11. *Ibid*., p. 362; and Jacques Prévosto, "Les Élections municipales à Lyon de 1900 à 1908", *Revue Historique du sud-est*, 14 (1979), 3, p. 52.
12. *Le Peuple* (21 May 1900).
13. *Le Salut Public* (1 June 1900).
14. *Le Progrès* (24 April 1904).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

adherence to the local republican notion of "neither reaction nor revolution".

In the 1904 elections the local republican coalition led by Augagneur was even more solid than in 1900. From the first round, radicals and socialists ran on the same lists in the third, fifth, and sixth *arrondissements*. The results were a major political victory for Augagneur. In the third, fourth, and sixth *arrondissements*, the entire slate of the *bloc républicain et socialiste* was elected. In the third, the *bloc* took 63.4 per cent – the highest percentage in the city. In the second round, the *bloc* conquered the sole remaining bastion of right-wing political strength – the second *arrondissement*. Socialists presented separate lists from those of the *bloc* in only one *arrondissement*, the second, where they received 16.7 per cent of the vote. All told, the *bloc républicain et socialiste* won 51 out of 54 seats in the city council that year, results which "surpassed the hopes" of *Le Progrès*.[15] On the national level this was the period when the *bloc des gauches* used its parliamentary weight to carry out most of its program, including worker pensions, the separation of church and state (1905) and factory legislation.

In 1905, Lyon's political landscape was disrupted by the sudden departure of Mayor Augagneur, who accepted the post of Governor of Madagascar for motives which remain unclear to this day.[16] Although some considered the local reformist socialist politician, Colliard, as Augagneur's natural successor, the mayor insisted that the city's top political office would remain in radical hands.[17] His hand-picked choice was the young Edouard Herriot, who over his fifty-year reign as mayor combined these local duties with those of Deputy, Minister and later Prime Minister.

Herriot enlarged the ruling coalition he inherited from Augangneur by drawing parts of the right and the left towards the center. His administration continued to court working-class votes and collaborated with the socialists through progressive reforms. These included cutting the workday of city employees to eight hours and nine hours for city manual workers with a full day off weekly for both. This was noteworthy at a time when most workers worked eleven hours a day, five and a half days weekly. In the Croix-Rousse, where unemployment among struggling silk weavers, the *canuts*, had reached alarming proportions, the municipality organized soup kitchens and announced plans for the construction of low-cost lodging for workers.[18]

15. *Ibid.* (2 May 1904).
16. Bayard and Cayez, *Histoire de Lyon*, p. 363.
17. Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste*, p. 178.
18. *Le Progrès* (18 April 1908).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

The ruling coalition of radicals and the POF faced opposition from the revolutionary syndicalists who led the local CGT labor exchange, the *bourse du travail*. Throughout the entire period under consideration here, revolutionary syndicalists clashed with the municipality. One particularly bitter arena of conflict was the *bourse*, which relied on municipal subsidies. In 1891, future mayor Victor Augagneur, then a member of the city council, accused *bourse* leaders of wasting money by paying the travel expenses of certain union leaders. In 1892, the city government suspended the salaries of *bourse* personnel and closed its offices for six months.

French law stipulated that the *bourses* had to furnish the authorities with membership lists. While this law was not systematically enforced, it could and was occasionally used to repress radical trade unionists. The Augagneur administration met stiff opposition when it tried to use this law as a weapon in its showdown with revolutionary syndicalist unions.[19]

In 1905, conflict over the use of the *bourse* for benefit concerts for strikers and infirm union militants led to a new round of conflict. Augagneur claimed that the modest entrance fee of 30 centimes contravened city regulations. He canceled the 10,000-franc municipal subsidy to the *bourse* which effectively prevented it from functioning. The conflict eventually led to the expulsion of the offending unions from the *bourse*,[20] which was carried out by the police on Augagneur's orders on 4 October 1905. The unionists left the *bourse* singing the *International*.[21] The majority of the unions left at the time, but about one-quarter of them took the side of Augagneur and maintained their affiliation with the *bourse*. Nationally known revolutionary syndicalists like CGT leaders Victor Griffuelhes and Georges Yvetot publicly supported the expelled unions.[22]

While the "clash in Lyon between reformist and revolutionary syndicalists occurred often within each union", it is notable that "amongst those who immediately signaled their fidelity to the municipality were the silk dyers and mechanical weavers".[23] Purged of revolutionary syndicalist influence, Lyon's *bourse du travail* remained firmly in reformist hands; indeed, between 1907–1911, it produced no antimilitarist or revolutionary propaganda.[24]

19. *La Depèche* (January 1905).
20. Jacques Leschiera, "Les débuts de la CGT à Lyon, 1890–1914", (unpublished *mémoire*, University of Lyon, 1972), p. 63.
21. R. Chevailler, B. Girardon, V.T. Nguyen, B. Rochaix, *Lyon: les traboules du mouvement ouvrier* (Lyon, 1971), p. 106.
22. Leschiera, "Les débuts", p. 66.
23. *Ibid*., pp. 67 and 75.
24. *Ibid*., p. 100.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

TWO PROGRAMS

This was the local political context in which activists belonging to national political organizations worked to attract workers to their organizations and programs. Lyon was home to local branches of most of the parties and tendencies espousing socialism prior to the 1905 unification of the five most important of these into the SFIO. Anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists were also well represented there.

The groups with the most influence among Lyonais workers were the Guesdists of the POF and the revolutionary syndicalists. The POF had built a strong base among the city's silk workers, edging out anarchists who enjoyed early silk-weaver support. The revolutionary syndicalists drew most of their support from metalworkers, an industry in which they enjoyed near hegemony. In this section we review the programs of each tendency and how they built their bases amongst distinct groups of workers.

By the 1880s, Jules Guesdes' followers were well established in Lyon as an electoral force and an activist membership organization. They also enjoyed influence in important sectors of the local trade-union movement. By 1881, the Guesdists had firmly established themselves as an electoral force in the city's fourth *arrondissement*, the Croix-Rousse – the center of the silk trade which was both the work and residential quarter of the *canuts*. This neighborhood elected POF deputies to Parliament in the elections of 1889, 1893, and 1898, receiving over 30 per cent of the vote in the latter two contests.[25]

The POF was not merely an electoral force. In the early 1880s it organized a series of educational conferences featuring lectures on socialist theory by Guesde himself.[26] Five local militants were members of the POF's National Council. By 1884 the POF had established local groups in the principal working-class districts of Lyon and its suburbs: two in La Guillotière, two in Brotteaux, one in Villeurbanne, in addition to the two in the Croix Rousse.[27] The POF was also active in extraparliamentary political action. The success of the 1890 May Day demonstration in Lyon was largely due to their organizing efforts.[28] Many of the recruits to the POF in the 1890s were proletarianized silk weavers.

From 1884–1895, the Guesdists of the POF in Lyon were the dominant force in the local trade-union movement. Leading members, like the former weaver Gabriel Farjat and the shoe cutter B. Peronin, were POF

25. Madeleine Thévenet, "Le Guesdisme à Lyon, 1882–1905", (unpublished *mémoire*, University of Lyon), 1971.

26. Chevailler *et al.*, *Lyon: les traboules*, p. 101.

27. Yves Lequin, *Les ouvriers de la region lyonnaise, 1848–1914*, 2 vols (Lyon, 1971), vol. 2, p. 231.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

militants.[29] The POF actively organized workers in the city's new industrial sectors including mechanical weaving, dyeing, and finishing.[30] The influence of the POF grew in 1891 when the anarchists were expelled from the local union umbrella organization, the Conseil local Lyonnais (CLL) and the Blanquists turned their attention to the conquest of the *bourse du travail*, inaugurated in Lyon on 8 February that year.

Though they claimed to be revolutionary followers of Karl Marx, the Guesdists were considered reformists by revolutionary syndicalists and others in the labor movement due to the emphasis they placed on parliamentary reforms.[31] While they opposed the entry of Alexander Millerand, a leading promoter of class collaboration and reformism, into a "bourgeois" government in 1899, their actual political practice had led them into electoral alliances with the radicals much earlier. They also downplayed the importance of trade-union struggles and strikes, except where they could advance a favored political struggle.

In 1905 France's principal socialist parties merged into the French Section of the Workers' International, SFIO. In June of that year Guesdists and independent socialists formed a local branch of the party at a meeting of 5,000 featuring a speech by Jean Jaurès. In 1911, it began the publication of a weekly newspaper, *L'Avenir socialiste*. The same year it opened a cooperative as well.[32]

The founding of the SFIO did not fundamentally change the political orientation of local socialism, which remained anchored solidly in electoral politics and alliances with Herriot's radical-led municipal government. The new party acquired an important working-class audience in prewar Lyon. In addition to its influence in the reformist unions it had an impressive electoral record; in 1906 SFIO candidates held two local seats in the Chamber of Deputies and four out of the region's ten by 1914.

In Lyon as elsewhere, the Guesdists competed with anarchists for worker support. In the 1880s the southeast in general, and Lyon in particular, was one of the most important if not, *the* most important center of French anarchism.[33] With their intransigent opposition to electoral alliances, (indeed of electoralism of any kind) and their fierce mistrust of parliamentary reform and middle-class politicians, the anarchists proposed a very different strategy for defending worker interests.

In the 1890s revolutionary syndicalism arrived on the scene. This current enjoyed a modest but significant influence in the French labor

29. Leschiera, "Les débuts", p. 9.

30. Lequin, *Les ouvriers*, vol. 2, p. 287.

31. Robert Changy, "La Presse Socialiste à Lyon, 1896–1914", (unpublished *mémoire*, University of Lyon, 1960), p. 35.

32. Chavailler *et al.*, *Lyon: les traboules*, p. 103.

33. Michelle Marigot, "L'Anarcho-Syndicalisme à Lyon, 1880–1914", (unpublished *mémoire*, University of Lyon, 1966), p. 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

movement from 1895 to 1914, and even into the postwar period. Its roots are found in the anarchist tradition as well as the revolutionary tradition begun by August Blanqui, and the revolutionary socialist current represented by Jean Allemane. The revolutionary syndicalist leader Delesalle had been an Allemanist.

Revolutionary syndicalism represented a combination of anarchist thought and union action. It challenged the socialists for the loyalty of French workers over the next few decades. Though never a clearly defined doctrine, syndicalism

> [...] stressed three points: complete hostility to the existing system; a belief that the only way to attack this system was by economic rather than political means, notably a great general strike; and a vague indication that the future society would be organized without a central political structure, on the basis of local economic units directed by producers themselves.[34]

However, while the revolutionary syndicalist preoccupation with strikes in general and the general strike in particular has attracted much attention, revolutionary syndicalism was a much more complicated phenomenon that went beyond the purely economic dimension. Revolutionary syndicalist leaders were anxious to promote an autonomous working-class culture free from bourgeois influence. They did this by pointing out what they considered to be a glaring contradiction in French society. While the French Republic integrated workers into the nation as citizens, it ignored them as producers. That is, workers were politically integrated, but socially marginalized.[35] The Third Republic granted universal manhood suffrage, but it rested on a political and social alliance of the middle classes and peasantry, excluding the industrial working class. By the late 1880s, policies favorable to these interests over railroad, school, and tariff questions were in place.[36] The goal of pre-World-War-I French syndicalism was to align consciousness with this reality, to transform the workers' everyday experience as a socially ignored class into a conscious attitude.[37] According to the revolutionary syndicalists, socialist politicians and parties were not only no better than their bourgeois counterparts; indeed, they were worse because, according to the syndicalists, "their demagogic promises turned workers away from the sole profitable action

34. Peter Stearns, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor: A Cause without Rebels* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1971), p. 9.

35. Jacques Julliard, *Autonomie ouvrière* (Paris, 1988), p. 23. Also see Marcel van der Linden, "Second Thoughts on Revolutionary Syndicalism", *Labour History Review*, 63 (1998), pp. 182–196.

36. Stone, *Sons of the Revolution*, p. 9. This view of the social foundations and political dynamics of the Third Republic has been advanced by a number of historians. See Sanford Elwitt, *The Making of the Third Republic* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1975); and Stanley Hoffman, *In Search of France* (Cambridge, 1963).

37. Julliard, *Autonomie ouvrière*, p. 24.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

for the working class".[38] The type of cross-class alliances and focus on elections advocated by reformist socialists went in the opposite direction. Viewed from this angle, the bitter denunciation of socialist leaders and organizations by the revolutionary syndicalist leadership of the CGT becomes quite understandable.

Nationally, the CGT was led by revolutionary syndicalists from its founding in 1895. In Lyon, Guesdists led the union confederation until 1903 when local revolutionary syndicalists took over.[39] It was they who participated in and usually led various CGT campaigns like the committee for the eight-hour day, the committee for the general strike, and the antimilitarist association.[40]

In Lyon, many of the early revolutionary syndicalist militants came from the anarchist-Blanquist current which had a solid presence in the southeast. In the 1880s this current had established a strong base in the newly industrialized neighborhood of La Guillotière in the third *arrondissement* where many metalworkers lived and worked.

Voting patterns in this district reflected revolutionary syndicalist influence in La Guillotiere in two seemingly contradictory ways. On one hand, this quarter voted to the left of all others in all of the prewar elections for which information is available. On the other hand, it also led the city in abstentions and spoiled ballots. Antiparliamentarism was a key theme of revolutionary syndicalist theory and propaganda. CGT leaders called on workers to abstain or spoil ballots, but in no case to vote for any politician of the right or left. While some workers did follow CGT policy to the letter, we know now that, once in the booth, many workers who defended revolutionary syndicalist ideas secretly voted in fact for the most left-wing candidates on the list.[41] But La Guillotiere demonstrated both sides of this coin. It was the district in which the *bloc* in 1900 and 1904 registered some of its greatest successes, and where revolutionary socialists outside the *bloc* drew their highest percentage of votes. For example, in the 1900 municipal elections, the POSR, which refused to participate in the *bloc*, received 16.7 per cent in the third *arrondissement* (as opposed to 14.9 per cent in the sixth, and only 2.2 per cent in Croix Rousse (fourth)) although only 12.7 per cent citywide. In 1908, the SFIO received 18 per cent of the vote citywide. Once again, the third delivered the highest local vote percentage with 24.2 per cent.[42] It is reasonable to conclude that, given their concentration in this electoral district coupled with their tendency to vote as left as possible, many of these voters were metal-

38. Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste*, p. 99.
39. Leshiera, "Les débuts", p. 22.
40. Lefranc, *Le mouvement socialiste*, p. 71.
41. Some historians have cited this as evidence that revolutionary syndicalism was largely a rhetorical affair with a phantom base, a "cause without rebels" in the words of Peter Stearns.
42. Prevosto, "Les Élections municipales", p. 75.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

workers belonging to the CGT and otherwise in accord with revolutionary syndicalist ideology. At the same time, abstentions and spoiled ballots in the third *arrondissement* were also the highest in the city in the 1900, 1904, and 1908 elections. In 1900 for example, abstentions accounted for a full 47.3 per cent of the third district's ballots as opposed to 37.2 per cent in the fourth.[43] Once again, it is reasonable to conclude that many of these were by revolutionary syndicalist metalworkers.

Thus local politics reflected national trends: a left-leaning Radical Party in alliance with reformist socialists working for reforms in the parliamentary arena held municipal power while a vocal revolutionary syndicalist movement advocated worker independence and revolutionary politics. In the next two sections we will explore in some detail how the dynamics of industrial change and political opportunity structure shaped the particular political profiles of both groups of workers.

SILK WORKERS IN LYON, 1900–1914

As we have seen, silk workers were amongst the most faithful supporters of local socialist groups like the POF. As such, they were part of the alliance that linked the POF to the middle-class Radical Party and the radical-led municipal government that was at the heart of POF politics. Why did socialist political groups, promoting the program of electoral alliances with middle-class radical reformist politicians willing to enact progressive reforms in exchange for working-class votes, find a large echo amongst the organizations of Lyon's silk workers, and in neighborhoods where many silk workers lived and worked? We look first at industrial social relations in this industry and their implications for worker collective action. We then see how local and national political conditions and available political programs aimed at workers intersected with industrial social relations to give silk worker politics its particular shape.

There were about 15,000–16,000 workers employed in the various branches of Lyon's textile industry in the period under consideration here.[44] The transformation of raw silk into an article of clothing involved a succession of processes carried out in different places by different workers employing different techniques. The focus here is on workers involved in the latter stages of silk production: weavers (*canuts*), dyers (*teinturiers*) and finishers (*apprêteurs*). Traditonally, the *canuts* were semi-independent artisans who wove silk provided by merchant capitalists for an agreed-upon tariff. The *canuts* worked at home on their own hand-powered looms. They were assisted by female workers, usually their wives and daughters, who prepared the raw silk for weaving, and occasionally by

43. *Ibid.*
44. Lequin, *Les ouvriers*, vol. 1, pp. 166–167.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

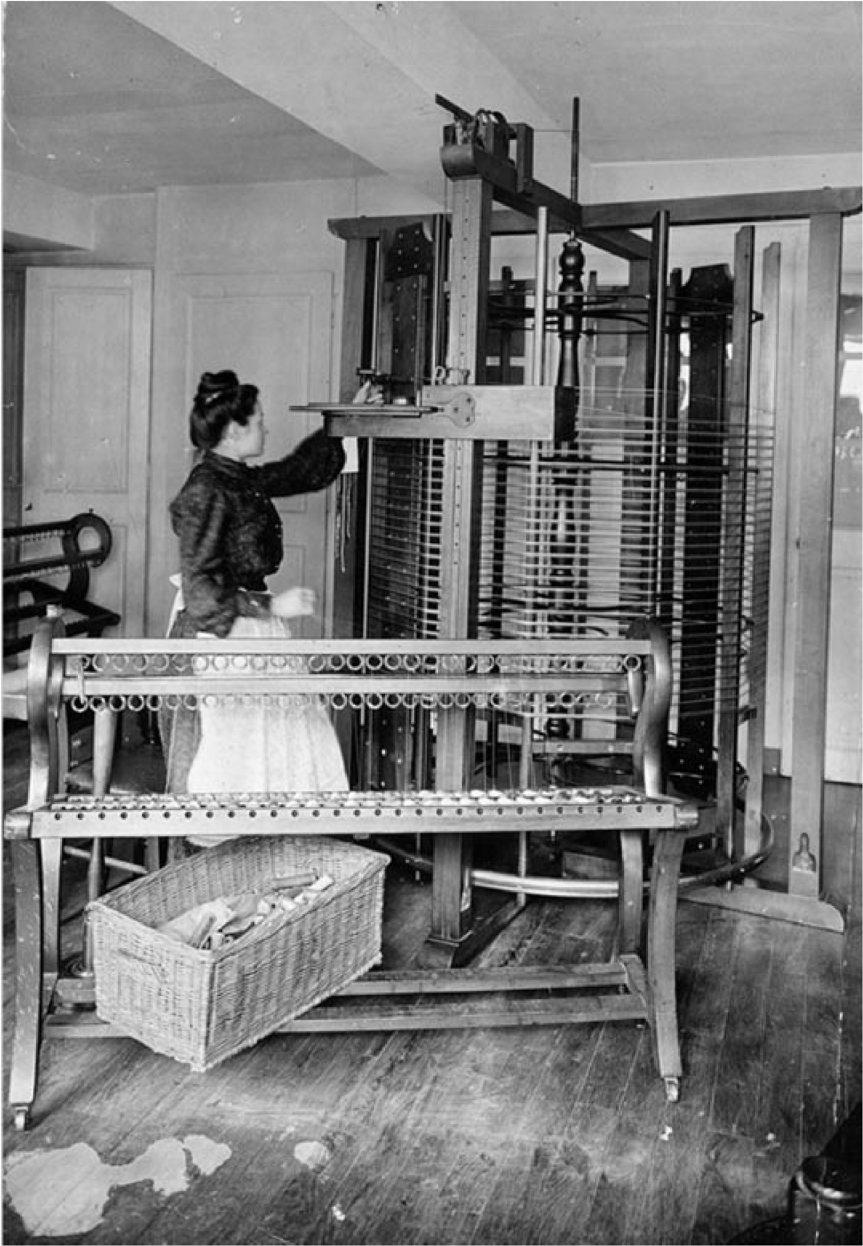

Figure 1. Female silk worker working at home on a hand-powered machine. This arrangement became increasingly rare as the century wore on.
Collection Archives municipales de Lyon

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

male journeymen or *compagnons*. Dyers and finishers were skilled male workers who learned their trade in apprenticeship programs organized and controlled by their trade organizations. They worked for wages in small shops. As in other industries during the second industrial revolution, employers sought to increase production and lower wages by seizing as much control over the labor process as possible. They did this through mechanization, capital and labor concentration involving large, mechanized, hierarchically organized factories and the abolition of worker-controlled apprenticeship programs.

Between 1885 and 1929 mechanical weaving gradually edged out handloom production. According to figures provided by Yves Lequin, only 5,000–6,000 of the region's 120,000 silk looms were mechanized. By 1889, the number of mechanized looms had nearly quadrupled to 19,319 while the number of handlooms had declined by nearly half to 66,000–72,000. After 1905, the number of handlooms diminished even more sharply, by more than two-thirds in the following ten years. By 1914 "the metamorphosis was total" with 40,623 mechanical looms to 17,270 handlooms which continued their rapid decline. By 1924 only 5,400 handlooms remained.[45] By 1933 there were 47,000 mechanical looms and virtually no handlooms left.[46]

Mechanical looms were owned by industrial capitalists and weaving took place in factories. By 1904, 80 per cent of Lyon's mechanical weavers worked in factories of over 100 persons.[47] Some of them were considerably larger, like the Gindre weaving factory established in 1893 on the rue Henon, in the historical silk-weaving neighborhood of the Croix Rousse, and employing over 500 mostly female workers.[48] Work was no longer dominated by skilled male labor. Mechanized looms were designed for maximum productive capacity and minimal worker input. A large majority of these semiskilled workers were women. In 1903 there were approximately 2,500–3,000 mechanical weavers in the Lyonese agglomeration, 80 per cent of whom were women.[49]

The evolution of apprenticeship programs is an important indicator of the changing status of skilled workers and changes in the organization of production. Traditionally, worker-controlled apprentice programs were a way for workers to exercise control over access to their trade. Professional training in general became rarer in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Where it survived it was conducted by professional schools catering to and often run by employer's organizations rather than trade organizations. The decline of apprenticeship programs signified a loss of

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 84.
46. Bayard and Cayez, *Histoire de Lyon*, p. 325.
47. Lequin, *Les ouvriers,* vol. 1, p. 190.
48. Bayard and Cayez, *Histoire de Lyon*, p. 323.
49. Lequin, *Les ouvriers*, vol. 1, p. 190.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

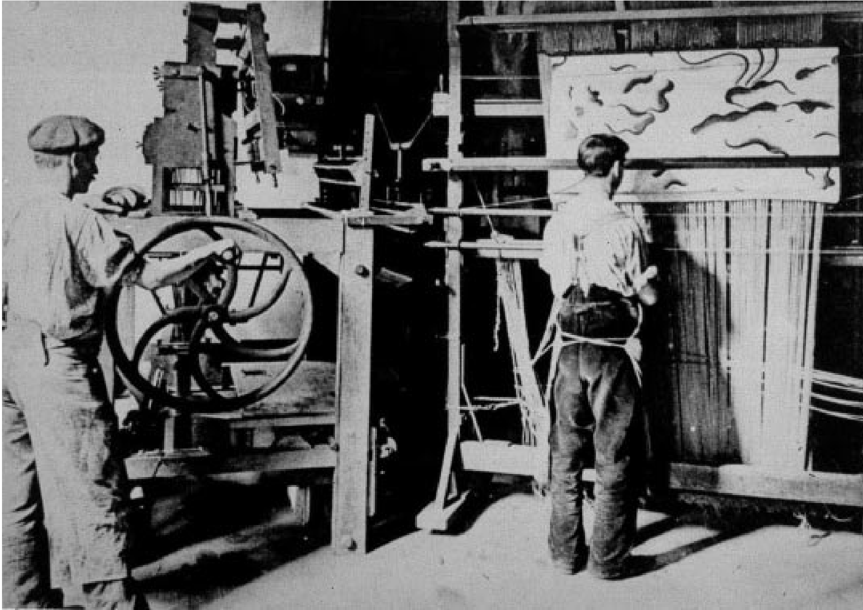

Figure 2. A traditional hand-powered silk loom. Such looms were owned by the *canuts* themselves and installed in their apartments in Lyon's traditional silk weaving district, the Croix-Rousse. By 1914, they had been largely replaced by mechanical looms located in factory settings.
Collection Bibliothèque municipal de Lyon

worker control over access to their trade, hence an important aspect of their control over the labor process.[50] So within a few decades silk weaving was transformed from an occupation of skilled male artisans working at home on their own hand-powered looms for a tariff, to a largely female one involving semiskilled mechanized factory work for wages.

The dyeing and finishing branches of Lyon's silk industry were also greatly transformed in the opening years of the century. Changing women's fashions placed higher value on colors than intricate designs, which stimulated research into artificial dyes which involved mechanization. From 1890 on, investment in mechanization for this sector of the textile industry equaled that devoted to weaving machinery.[51] By 1906, eighteen factories in the Lyonese agglomeration specialized in dyeing in pieces.[52] In this sector employers were able to take advantage of recent

50. For more on the decline of apprenticeship for weavers see, Keith Mann, "Class and Worker Politics: The Silk and Metalworkers of Lyon, 1900–1935", (unpublished doctoral dissertation, New School for Social Research, New York, 1998).
51. Lequin, *Les ouvriers*, vol. 1, p. 88.
52. *Ibid*, p. 89.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 3. Skilled male workers dyeing silk products around 1900. By World War I they had largely been replaced by semiskilled female workers employed in larger mechanized factories. Some of the former skilled male silk dyers were now employed as foremen.
Collection Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon

technological advances to decrease their reliance on skilled dyers, the colorists, and increasingly hired unskilled workers working under the supervision of foremen, who were often former colorists themselves. Skilled dyers were threatened by the introduction of a technological innovation called *trempage de soupe.* The use of this technique, in which semiskilled workers were paid 4 francs a day, rather than the 5 stipulated in the settlement following the great 1903 textile strike, helped to provoke an important strike in 1909. An article in the SFIO weekly *L'Avenir socialiste* explained that if adopted, this system would lead to the suppression of a majority of dyers' jobs.[53]

The nature of the finishing process facilitated an even more rapid and brutal reorganization of the work process than that which occurred in dyeing. Skilled finishers saw their traditional monopoly over the labor process rapidly decline. Mechanization meant worsened work conditions. The shops were humid and workers' feet were often splashed by acid and alkaline saturated water which, depending on the stage of the process, could be either extremely cold or boiling. Air circulation was poor and harmful vapors permeated the work spaces.[54]

Shops and factories became fewer and larger. There were some 3,500

53. *L'Avenir socialiste*, 145 (27 November – 4 December 1909).
54. Robert Chagny, "La Presse Socialiste à Lyon, 1896–1914", (unpublished *mémoire*, University of Lyon, 1960), p. 22.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

muslin and fabric finishers in Lyon in 1903.[55] Most worked in shops employing between fifteen and eighty-five workers. In 1906 there were ninety-six different finishing shops in the Lyonnais agglomeration.[56] Large mechanized and highly capitalized factories like Gillet's dyeing factories began to predominate.[57] By 1912 an estimated 3,000 dyers and finishers were working in only nineteen factories. Seven factories employed between 100 and 450 workers each including the 900 workers at Gillet.[58]

Worker-controlled apprenticeship programs for dyers and finishers sharply declined as well.[59] A former *contremaitre*, or foreman, explained some of these changes to the Lyon daily newspaper *Le Progrès* during the bitter strike that shook the city in late 1903. While the workforce in the factories and shops had formerly been dominated by skilled labor, he noted, it was now made up of 70 per cent *maneouvres* (unskilled) and only 30 per cent "professionals" (skilled workers). Furthermore, many of the *manoeuvres* had come to work on tasks that should have been reserved for the professionals who had undergone long apprenticeships. As an example, he spoke of dyeing in fragile colors – "a task in which practice can eventually bring the skills of an untrained worker up to par with those of a formally trained [that is, apprenticed] worker".

The situation of skilled finishers was even more precarious. "Unlike dyeing", he declared,

> [...] little time is needed to learn this trade. In order to get the cheapest labor the bosses do not hesitate to replace an older worker with a beginner as the older worker can command higher wages as his skill increases, which in turn swells the ranks of the unemployed and forces these workers to work for lower wages in other factories.[60]

The evolving nature of work and the changing social industrial relations they entailed had clear ramifications for work-centered forms of collective action and more generally for the political programs proposed by the socialists of the POF and their revolutionary syndicalist rivals. All workers had grievances at this time: The *canuts* were faced with extinction as independent producers, skilled dyers, and finishers faced deskilling, and the semiskilled weavers, dyers and finishers faced long hours, difficult and dangerous working conditions, and low wages. These developments lay behind much of the industrial strife of the period, forcing silk workers into

55. These are figures cited in prefectoral reports of this strike. Archives départementales du Rhone [hereafter ADR], 10/Mp/C24.
56. Lequin, *Les ouvriers*, vol. 1, p. 89.
57. See Bayard and Cayez, *Histoire de Lyon*, p. 327.
58. These figures are drawn from prefectoral reports from strikes in 1912; ADR, 10/Mp/C48.
59. Mann, "Class and Worker Politics", pp. 30–31.
60. *Le Progrès* (18 November 1903).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

several defensive and difficult strikes. However, the same changes that generated opposition and protest also made work-centered forms of collective action, particularly strikes, difficult to carry out.

One of the biggest problems facing strikers was the segmented nature of the workforce that arose as part of those industrial changes. While the nature of artisanal production and work sociability on and off the job coupled with widespread craft labor markets traditionally favored united collective action, a careful look at silk-worker strikes and other forms of collective action during this period reveals a sharp contrast in patterns of organization and collective action. The small shops – still the preserve of the skilled worker – and the larger, more mechanized industrial units, where the workforce was dominated by semiskilled factory hands, reacted in different ways to ongoing pressure from employers. The small units were the earliest and most energetic participants in strikes, and the longest to hold out, while workers in larger shops with a declining skilled worker component were much less combative. The work forces of these larger units were most susceptible to employer manipulation, and often were the first to end trade-wide strikes.

Within a very short period, male craft weavers and skilled dyers and finishers had become a beleaguered minority in their trades as semiskilled women workers without experience in labor organizations and enjoying very little control over the labor process came to constitute a majority of workers in these branches. The large factories were especially difficult to organize because seasoned skilled workers were either completely absent or isolated. Gillet in particular initiated a strict factory regime and met attempts to organize workers into unions with tough anti-union measures. For example, Gillet's Director of Operations, Monsieur Marnas, agreed to hire ten workers in June 1911, on the condition that they quit the union, which they did.[61]

The introduction of mechanical looms with their capacity to greatly increase production with less labor provides an excellent example of how conflicts arose between both the employers and their workers, and amongst workers themselves. The refusal to operate more than one loom at a time as demanded by the employers often figured prominently in strike demands. Correspondingly, workers who agreed to operate more than one loom at a time, either as a result of employer pressure or the promise of higher wages, were often the object of bitter hostility from their colleagues. For example, a 3-day strike in September 1906 in a weaving factory employing 102 predominantly women workers was prompted by the decision of one woman weaver to accept working with 2 looms. The sole demand of the strike was the dismissal of this worker.[62]

61. ADR, 10/Mp/C142.

62. Office du travail, *Statistique des Grèves*, 560 (1906).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Figure 4. Women silk workers leaving a factory. By 1914 mechanized weaving in plants such as these had largely replaced the hand operated loom of the *canuts*.
Collection Bibliothèque municipal de Lyon

Employers sought to take advantage of the continued existence of lower wage rates for apprentices and helpers even though changes in the organization of production had rendered these categories increasingly obsolete. Workers were hired as apprentices at apprentice wages, even though they carried out the same production tasks as skilled workers. A textile strike in 1906 involving 1,638 workers in fourteen different shops had as one of its four demands a limitation of the number of apprentices.[63] The union demand that "helpers" be replaced by workers was the key issue in a 1909 strike in a medium-sized dyeing plant.[64]

The 1903 silk strike illuminates many of the questions of interest here. The strike began with the dyers and finishers. The prefect noted that the strike of the dyers and that of the finishers which occurred at the same time "went through the same phases, and was led by a commission composed half and half by workers of each trade". In mid-December, 4,000 women mechanical weavers voted to make common cause with them. Behind the strike was one of the economic downturns which interrupted the long

63. *Ibid.*, 613 (1906).
64. *Ibid.*, 341 (1909).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

period of growth that the industry experienced between 1885 and 1929. In particular, increased production made possible through the technological advances discussed above placed an enormous strain on the remaining small artisanal dyeing shops on the left bank which still dyed in sheets.[65] Employers sought to cut wages and workers responded with a strike.

Throughout the strike, divisions arose between workers of different skill and pay levels. This was especially clear when factories dominated by semiskilled labor are compared to those in which the proportion of skilled workers remained significant. For example, in the Gillet factory – by far the largest and most mechanized dyeing factory in Lyon – workers began drifting back to work well before the workers in the small- and medium-sized shops (characterized still by higher percentages of skilled workers) began to do so. At the daily mass meeting of the strikers on 10 December 1903, attended by 1,800 striking dyers and finishers, the Gillet workers were sharply criticized for their failure to join the strike and the union. Tensions flared further when a Gillet worker stated that he and his fellow workers were satisfied with their wages and saw no need to join a union that they felt did not function properly.[66] During the strike, daily meetings of strikers, which drew up to 2,000 workers, often voted to march on the Gillet plants and the other large factories in an effort to pressure those workers into joining the strike. As the strike progressed, employers played even more on divisions between the skilled and semiskilled. At one point the employers sent letters to the semiskilled, calling on them publicly to ask for work. Union leaders issued public warnings of expulsion from the union to any unskilled dyer who went along with the ploy.[67]

Although police reports claimed that the strike caused a large "perturbation" in the silk industry, employers were able to complete previously contracted work by sending it to the countryside and to different towns of the region. While the employers were able to weather the strike, the same reports said that the strike was particularly hard on the workers' families in the new industrial quarters of Villeurbanne, Charpennes, and Brotteux.[68] A partial return to work began on 23 December and increased in the following days. "Completely demoralized", the strike committee accepted the intervention of the mayor on 26 December concerning the employer's propositions, and work resumed on the morning of the 28 December. Though larger and longer than most, this strike was typical of those of the period in that skilled workers struck in defense of their shopfloor position and all workers struck for wage and working conditions. It was typical also in its failure to stem the sea changes taking place in the industry.

65. Lequin, *Les ouvriers,* vol. 1, p. 89.
66. ADR, 10/Mp/C24.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

The failure of the unskilled workers in the large shops where mechanization and technological change had made the most progress to engage in the same level of social protest as the organized skilled workers of the smaller establishments was clear well before the 1903 strike. The first May Day demonstration of 1890 was marked by a sharp contrast between heavy participation in the traditional artisanal quarters of the city and the relative quiescence in newer large factories in neighborhoods such as Vaise. Of the estimated 8,000 demonstrators who marched in the rain that day, at least 3,000–4,000 were from the Croix Rousse – the work and residential center of the still significant *canuts*. Only 100 people participated in the contingent that left from Vaise that day.[69] The forces of order reported with a certain satisfaction that Monsieur Gillet was quite touched by the fact that all of his approximately 1,400 workers showed up for work.[70]

This was not merely a phenomenon linked to the first May Day. Future demonstrations confirmed the contrast between the new, large industrial units employing a majority of unskilled workers, and the slowly declining smaller units which were bastions of traditional skilled worker militancy. Among those who failed to strike and demonstrate in the 1905 May Day demonstration were workers from Gillet and Vulliod, the two largest dyeing factories in the city. In contrast, the Bath dyeing shop and the Durant Jr finishing shops which employed fifty-five and forty workers respectively were empty.[71]

The highly charged and well-documented 1906 May Day reflected these differences even more starkly. In nearly all trades and industries, smaller units almost always experienced total absenteeism while the larger units either failed to strike or saw only a minority strike and march. Dyeing shops like Bertrand, Clair and Alberti, Feydel, and Pierry and Rossignol which employed 20, 10, 30 and 60 workers respectively, were completely abandoned that day. Once again, the 1,600 workers at the Gillet Villeurbanne factory and the 500 dyers at the Vulliod factory were all present, as were all 400 mechanical weavers at the Gindre factory in the Croix-Rousse. Medium-sized shops saw part of their personnel participate in the strike and demonstrations, while others, sometimes a majority, went to work; such was the case at the Latruffe and Co. dyeing factory where 200 struck and 100 came to work, and at the Rivat finishing shop where 20 struck and 80 worked.[72]

While industrial social relations made strikes, which were at the center of revolutionary syndicalist strategy, difficult to coordinate and win, the Guesdist approach of winning parliamentary reforms through alliances

69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. ADR, 10/Mp/C141.
72. *Ibid.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

was far more fruitful. Guesdist activists had chosen to focus on recruiting textile workers from early on. In Lyon, where they had a presence from the 1880s, their aggressive organizing in working-class quarters allowed them to establish links with silk workers although early arrival on the scene gave Guesdists an advantage over their rivals. Other factors contributed to their success in winning silk-worker support. Reformist socialists strove to deliver real aid to the workers of this industry so central to Lyon's economy. During the 1903 strike, for example, the socialist parliamentary delegation made a substantial monetary donation and questioned the government in Parliament on its use of troops against the strikers.

Turn-of-the-century radical municipalities and politicians were willing to support workers to some extent in order to keep them in the broad republican alliance. Although the Augagneur administration's behavior during the 1903 strike (including the use of police against strikers) underscored the limits of Radical-Party solidarity with workers when the interests of employers were at stake, the overall balance sheet of the radical municipal government was relatively friendly to worker interests.

METALWORKERS, 1900–1914

In the same way that turn-of-the-century textile workers were often identified with Guesdist socialism, French metalworkers of the day were closely associated with revolutionary syndicalism. Nationally, metal-worker unions were mainstays of the revolutionary syndicalist tendency within the CGT from its beginnings.[73] This was likewise the case in Lyon where organized metalworkers – along with construction workers – were the groups most favorable to revolutionary syndicalism and its glorification of the general strike.[74]

This section on metalworker politics begins with an overview of the structure of social industrial relations in metallurgy during this period. It

73. Claude Willard, *Les Guesdists* (Paris, 1965), p. 38.

74. ADR, 10/Mp/C29. According to a police report, the Corporation of Copper Workers, Polishers and Nickel Workers was made up exclusively of militants and revolutionaries. Revolutionary syndicalist metalworkers in Lyon were organized into a Metallurgy Action Committee made up of the ten most revolutionary unions: jewelers, mechanics, slag removers, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, nickel polishers, foundry molders, locksmiths, and ironsmiths. This committee was the "vanguard of revolutionary syndicalism" in Lyon. A February 1904 police report stressed that it was "seriously organized" and played a preponderant role in all the revolutionary and worker's actions. The majority of these militants were also members of the international antimilitarist association. Revolutionary syndicalists were also active in the committee for the eight-hour day and the committee for the general strike. According to a police report, the Corporation of Copper Workers, Polishers, and Nickel Workers was made up exclusively of militants and revolutionaries.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

then looks at the types of collective action industrial change generated, and finally how those relations and forms of collective action intersected with political structures to give metalworker politics its particular shape.

Lyon's close proximity to the Saint-Etienne coal basin and its geographical position at the crossroads of European trade routes favored its emergence as one of France's most important industrial centers, especially in metallurgy. Many firms which had previously furnished the silk industry with the metal products necessary for production in that industry proved flexible enough to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by the changing economic and industrial climate at the end of the nineteenth century. The Teste company is a prime example. Founded in nearby Vaise in 1841, it initially manufactured metal pins. In 1885, it began to produce industrial cables. From 1891 on it specialized exclusively in cables for mines, bridges, etc. By the end of the century, various firms were specializing in electrical tools, copper boilers, boilers for the local chemical industry, machinery for the needs of the increasingly mechanized silk industry, naval equipment, and especially for the nascent automobile industry. The automobile industry became quite important to the local and even national economy.[75]

Automobile making was precocious in Lyon. The Rochet Schneider automobile shops were opened in 1894. In 1899, Marius Berliet opened the doors to the shops of what later became the city's biggest employer of metalworkers and one of France's leading automobile producers. Berliet began as a small-time, self-taught mechanic who had served a brief apprenticeship in a silk-weaving firm before being smitten with automobile fever in the early 1890s. By 1905, no less than five well-known automobile manufacturers were located in Lyon. They were accompanied by numerous small-time producers of motorized scooters and the like. By that date, annual automobile production reached 900, representing a business of 12,000,000 francs in contrast to only 100,000 francs in 1896.[76]

Early automobile manufacturing in Lyon was favored by

> [...] a broad foundation of metalworking shops and skilled labor (which) had developed out of the textile machinery, railway equipment, and river transport businesses. This complex and highly specialized industrial context made it possible for a firm with little capital to assemble cars from components picked up here and there in the city.[77]

At its the height, Lyon's prewar metal industry employed up to 12,000

75. See Lequin, *Les ouvriers*, vol. 1; and Michel Lafferrère, *Lyon, ville industrielle* (Paris, 1960), p. 216.
76. James M. Laux, *In First Gear: The French Automobile Industry to 1914* (Liverpool, 1976), p. 179.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

workers.[78] By 1914, the Chamber of Commerce calculated that one-third of the city's workers were employed in the modern metallurgy and chemical factories.[79] Although the majority of metalworkers in Lyon still worked in small shops, the trend was clearly in the direction of the large factory. According to Shorter and Tilly, the percentage of metalworkers in establishments employing more than 100 on the national level increased from 39 per cent to 50 per cent between 1906 and 1926, while those working in smaller establishments decreased from 42 per cent to 28 per cent, "a rate of concentration more rapid than any other sector".[80] Business historian James Laux estimates that by 1911 "the automobile industry had become the largest single element in the French metalworking trades which in 1911 employed 621,592 men".[81]

In spite of its rapid development, this industry continued to bear many of the marks of artisanal production. In the prewar years, the majority of metalworking shops still employed less than 50 workers. Medium-sized factories employed between 50 and 500 workers. Several large factories had workforces of over 500 including the 3,500 employed by Berliet in 1913.[82]

The metal trades in these years were predominantly a male affair. The exclusively female personnel of 54 women working at a factory producing parts for mechanical looms in Villeurbanne at the turn of the century was a notable exception, although women were occasionally hired as unskilled or semiskilled workers in other metal plants.[83] The rarity of female labor in prewar metallurgy in Lyon differentiates this industry from both the silk industry where female labor was common, and metallurgy plants in the war years when women were hired in large numbers to produce for the war effort.[84]

Up to the turn of the century, metalworking – to a greater extent than silk manufacturing – was dominated by skilled male workers who enjoyed a large measure of control over the labor process through the technical capabilities they possessed and the control over access to their trade flowing from their control over supply networks. French employers sought to wrest control over the labor process from skilled workers not only through reorganizing production on the shop floor, but also through

78. Florence Gautier, "Les Grèves à Lyon, 1895–1914", (unpublished *mémoire*, University of Lyon, 1966), p. 10.

79. Lyon, Office Municipal du Travail, *Statistiques et renseignements* (1913–1914).

80. Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830–1968* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 211–212.

81. Laux, *In First Gear*, p. 179.

82. Bayard and Cayez, *Histoire de Lyon*, p. 331.

83. ADR, 10/Mp/C23.

84. Women metalworkers in wartime Britain and France have been carefully studied by Laura Lee Downs in her *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, NY, 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

a wider dismantling of craft labor markets and the establishment of capitalist ones. The aggressive use of scientific management rationalizing techniques on the eve of the war put skilled workers on the defensive. In these transitional years before the First World War, the immediate effects of industrial change involving both the introduction of new technology and the reorganization of the labor process using existing or slightly modified machinery, as well as attempts to control supply networks, forced metalworkers into a long series of defensive strikes. They struck against piecework, subcontracting, and the use of poorly paid apprentices to perform the labor traditionally reserved for better-paid skilled workers. The outcome of these struggles was quite uneven. In some cases, employers were able to go very far in dismantling craft labor markets and the high degree of shopfloor autonomy this entailed, while in others, workers were able to maintain a large measure of control over the labor process.

The most concerted attempt to increase capitalist profits and reduce worker control over the labor process was of course the methods of scientific management pioneered by the American, Frederick Winslow Taylor, which began to be widely applied in French automobile plants around 1910, after an initial period of hesitation on the part of French industrialists.[85] The introduction in 1912 of stopwatch monitoring in the auto industry was resisted by auto workers in Lyon as well as in more well-known auto plants like Renault in the Parisian region. In Lyon, it provoked a strike of the 100 mechanics, 100 fitters, 60 turners and 30 laborers employed at the Auto-Buire plant that lasted from 20 February to 12 March 1914.[86] Even before the introduction of the stopwatch, speed-up campaigns inspired by Taylor's time-motion studies had provoked strikes in the auto industry. As early as May 1905, 1,025 auto workers working in 7 different factories struck against the firing of a worker at the Berliet plant accused of taking 10 minutes to finish a task that Berliet claimed should have only taken 6.[87] Likewise the system of *pointillage* or punching the time clock, was greatly resented. The local socialist weekly *L'Avenir socialiste* published a bitter complaint about this practice in a series of articles it ran on abuses at the Berliet plants in late 1910 and early 1911. The same series also attacked the system of production bonuses instituted by Berliet as well as the forced overtime which extended the workday from ten to twelve hours. Other strike demands reflecting resistance to these employer-inspired innovations demonstrate the intensity of the struggle for control over the labor process and in defense of craft labor markets.

In several of these strikes participants demanded that a foreman be

85. Aimée Moutet, "Les origines du système de Taylor en France: le point de vue patronal, (1907–1914)", *Le mouvement social*, 58 (1965), pp. 15–49.
86. Office du travail, *Statistique des Grèves* (1914).
87. ADR, 10/Mp/C34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

dismissed; more rarely they objected to the dismissal of a sympathetic foreman. Demands for the dismissal of a foreman figured in twenty strikes in metalworking establishments in Lyon between 1900 and 1914; in two strikes workers demanded the rehiring of a foreman.[88] While police reports and other sources rarely gave details concerning this demand, Michael Hanagan has argued that they were often indirect protests against work discipline.[89] In Lyon, the demand to dismiss a foreman was particularly frequent in auto strikes in 1913 and 1914 – a period when Taylorist methods were beginning to be introduced. The links between Taylorism and demands for the dismissal of a foreman were unmistakable in the 1914 Auto-Buire strike discussed above. The strikers demanded the dismissal of the foreman considered responsible for introducing the stopwatch.[90]

The introduction of piecework was also typical of the drive towards reducing skilled-worker autonomy. Though widespread in the nineteenth century piecework was also an integral part of Taylor's scientific management methods. Bonuses were tied to production norms which were established through the use of stopwatches. Demands for the elimination of piecework figured prominently in no less than seventeen metal strikes in Lyon between 1902 and 1913. Turners and valve makers, copper workers, fitters, engine mounters, drillers, smiths in all metals, blacksmiths, slag removers, pig iron, iron, copper, and aluminum molders, metal polishers, capstan lathe workers, locksmiths, and hammermen – all struck to demand the suppression of piecework.[91]

Subcontracting was a classic method for employers to avoid the concentrated and organized power of industrial workers to advance their claims around wages, hours, and working conditions. Strike demands against the introduction of piecework in metallurgy often included demands to end this practice. In Lyon, 7 metalworking shops employing 200 workers struck unsuccessfully for 3 weeks in the strike-ridden month of May 1906 for the 8-hour day, but also for the suppression of piecework and subcontracting.[92] Automobile workers successfully struck against

88. Office du travail, *Statistique des Grèves* (1900–1914).
89. Michael P. Hanagan, *The Logic of Solidarity* (Urbana, IL, 1980), p. 68.
90. ADR, 10/Mp/C31.
91. 13 May–11 July 1901, ADR, 10/Mp/C28; 17 April–23 May 1902, ADR, 10/Mp/C 30; 18 May–19 June 1905, ADR, 10Mp/C34; 13 June 1905, ADR, 10Mp/C34; 18 May–19 June 1905, ADR, 10Mp/C35; 7 May–11 June, ADR, 10Mp/C40; 1906; 2 May–19 May 1906, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 1 May–25 May 1906, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 2 May–22 May 1906, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 24 February–26 May 1906, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 2 May–23 May 1906, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 2 May–1 June 1906, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 7 May–14 May 1906, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 4 May–14 May?, ADR, 10Mp/C 40; 4 April–22 April 1910, ADR, 10Mp/C 44; 6 June–16 June 1911, ADR, 10Mp/C 50; 2 March–29 March 191,. ADR, 10/Mp/C; ADR, 10Mp/C 51.
92. Office du travail, *Statistique des Grèves* (1910); ADR, 10Mp/C34, C35.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

these practices in January 1910, as did 500 locksmiths working in 270 different industrial establishments in June 1911.[93]

As was the case in the silk industry, the decline of craft labor markets in the metallurgy sector in the opening years of the twentieth century was reflected in part in changing patterns of apprenticeship. The 1913–1914 Chamber of Commerce report offered information on several of the most important metal trades. While some metalworkers, like sheet metalworkers (*töliers-poeliers*), still received a traditional apprenticeship, this institution was clearly in decline in many other trades such as zinc-working.[94]

The increasing simplification of skilled labor through mechanization and division of labor in some sectors – which is both the cause and effect of the decline of craft labor markets – made it more and more technically possible for employers to use poorly paid apprentices to do the same jobs as fully qualified workers who had gone through traditional apprenticeship programs. Employers sought to do this in order to lower labor costs, but especially to circumvent the shopfloor power of skilled workers. As such, it was bitterly resisted. The molders' union complained specifically of this practice in their trade publication, *La Fonderie*.[95] An examination of strike demands in the metal trades in Lyon between 1900–1914 reveals the full extent of this practice. In May of the industrial-strife-ridden year of 1906, 250 striking workers in 15 shops demanded a 10 per cent cap on the employment of apprentices. A general strike of bronze workers including molders, turners, and burnishers that occurred at the same time also demanded a 10 per cent limitation of the number of apprentices employed in that industry.

As we have seen, silk worker strikes were marked by a lack of unity across skill categories. In contrast, metalworker strikes in Lyon reflected a high degree of coordination across skill and occupational divisions. In 40, or approximately half of all metallurgy strikes recorded in Lyon in this period, 100 per cent of the workforce participated.

This unity was especially noteworthy in small shops employing under 50 workers where the workforce consisted of one craft and a few aides or unskilled workers. Workers in these shops struck 10 times in this period. Three medium-sized metalworking shops employing workers of one trade and their aides also saw all the workers down their tools. The high rate of organization amongst metalworkers contributed to unanimous strike participation in 11 strikes where workers of one craft were spread across several shops. This included such impressive examples of coordination and organization as the 500 metalsmiths working in 270 different shops who struck in June 1911, and the 150 blacksmiths working in 16 different shops

93. ADR, 10/MP/C/44.

94. Lyon, Office municipal du Travail, *Statistiques et renseignements* (1913–1914).

95. *La Fonderie* (March 1904).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

who struck during the strike wave of May 1906.[96] But perhaps the most impressive display of metalworker solidarity across skill and craft was represented by the 18 strikes which saw workers of several categories strike together. Strikes of this nature were distributed throughout the entire prewar period, from the strike at the Alioth machine building factory in 1902 in which 80 mechanical fitters, 60 turners, 60 mechanics, and 50 unskilled workers all struck together, to the Auto-Buire strike in early 1914 when mechanics, fitters, turners, and unskilled workers struck in unison.[97] This remarkable unity was largely due to the fact that the pace of industrial change was slow enough to allow skilled metalworkers to remain in the workforce in significant numbers and provide leadership to other skill groups.

We have seen that industrial change provoked resistance that was carried out on the shopfloor. While many strikes were defensive, the highly capitalized nature of these firms, the continued control over access to at least some metal trades through worker-controlled apprenticeships, and the slow pace of change (as compared to silk weaving, dyeing and finishing) meant that strikes were easier to conduct and stood a greater chance of victory than those of workers facing industrial structures and relations like those in the silk trades.

This brings us to the appeal of revolutionary syndicalism. As seen above, revolutionary syndicalism called for economic struggles at the point of production. Our review of industrial change and conflict in metallurgy during this period indicates that the totality of industrial social relations both provoked and favored strikes. There was therefore, a close match between the economic realities facing metalworkers and the strategy for worker resistance promoted by this current.

Further, revolutionary syndicalist denunciations of electoral politics and politicans found a greater echo among metalworkers than silk workers. Unlike the silk workers, the organizations of metalworkers were not part of the reigning governmental coalition. And while silk employers were outside of the governing coalition and therefore powerless to block municipal concessions to their workers, metallurgy employers enjoyed powerful influence at City Hall. This helps explain why municipal efforts on behalf of silk workers were not extended to metalworkers.

The *bourse-du-travail* affair clearly demonstrated how labor activists who agreed not to compromise the Radical Party were awarded with the material benefits of meeting space, while unions under revolutionary syndicalist control, such as metalworker unions, found themselves excluded from these benefits and isolated from other workers.

The political and social environment nationally and locally thus played

96. ADR, 10/Mp/C29, C31.
97. ADR, 10/Mp/C27, C34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

a big role in the appeal of different political programs and practices to workers. The increasingly repressive actions of radical-led governments exercised a contradictory effect on the success of the political currents appealing to workers. Government repression, especially when administered by supposedly worker-friendly radical governments, confirmed revolutionary syndicalist propaganda about the inevitable hostility of "bourgeois politicians" to workers.

In the early years of the twentieth century when relatively worker-friendly governments were turning to the right and betraying their worker allies, the force of governmental repression fell unevenly. Revolutionary workers were the target of greater state repression while reformist unions were treated less harshly. This could only confirm the propaganda of revolutionary syndicalists in the eyes of metalworkers, so many of whom had been attracted to the program, strategy, and organizations of this current.

In their preference for political independence French metalworkers were like skilled workers in other countries. However, metalworkers in the British Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) and the US International Association of Machinists (IAM) did not follow their French counterparts down the road to revolutionary syndicalism, opting instead for a reformist pure and simple trade unionism. Jeffrey Haydu, in his study of British metalworkers, and Gerald Freidman, in his work on the French CGT, offer compelling explanations for the particular paths taken by skilled workers in different national contexts. Haydu stresses the importance of institutional frameworks. The early domination of the CGT by conscious revolutionary syndicalists left a stamp that cast a long shadow over its development. Friedman points to the character of the French state as liberal and responsive to strikes, as opposed to a stronger, more repressive US state which helped push US workers down a different path.[98]

CONCLUSION

Divisions amongst French workers have often been explained implicitly as reflecting ideological struggles between deeply rooted political currents. The focus here on industrial structure and political opportunity structure suggests an alternative interpretation of those divisions. We have seen that the particular set of political and social relationships in a given industry influences the types of political strategies that might attract support. In French labor politics it meant that the two most prominent political

98. Jeffrey Haydu, *Between Class and Craft* (Berkeley, CA, 1988); Gerald Friedman, "Revolutionary Unions and French Labor: The Rebels behind the Cause; or, Why Did Revolutionary Syndicalism Fail?", *French Historical Studies*, 20 (1997), pp. 155–181.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press

currents in the labor movement, the reformist socialism of the POF and SFIO, and the revolutionary syndicalism of the CGT, held special appeal to silk and metalworkers respectively.

More generally, this analysis suggests that the success or failure of any given political current to attract a given constituency involves at least in part, the match between program and strategy on one side, and the interaction between social and political structures on the other. This applies especially to attempts to unite broad layers of workers under a united banner. One-size-fits-all programs aimed at the working class as a whole often miss their intended target because they fail to match the industrial and political structures of different types of workers. In the context of turn-of-the-century French labor politics it suggests that working-class unity was never achieved because the strategies proposed by competing currents were not geared to the broad variations in industrial structure faced by different workers.

Wageworkers share general interests amongst themselves and opposed to their employers, but efficacious strategies to defend those interests are those which are best calibrated to the industrial and political structures faced by workers in a given industrial sector. The history of the modern labor movement and industrial society in general has shown repeatedly that social relations and material interest alone cannot explain political consciousness, identity, or behavior. But the political is not an autonomous sphere obeying its own logic. Political identities are formed against the backdrop of the *interaction* of industrial, social, and political opportunity structures.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900200069X Published online by Cambridge University Press