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A significant shift in emphasis on issues of concern to working class historians was notable at the April, 1984, meeting of the French Historical Studies. In contrast to past years when social historians dominated the session on the history of the working class, this year's panels, while utilizing some of the methodology and conceptual work of the social historians, stressed the importance of the connections between working class life and organizations with national politics.

In the session on "Labor and the Popular Front," in addition to the analysis of working class political consciousness and activity, there was also an expansion of the study and analysis of a new area of twentieth century labor history, the tertiary sector; the office, service and government workers, male and female, who have come to constitute the largest group of workers in the twentieth century economy. Joel Colton of Duke University chaired the session. The first paper, "Labor Militancy and Industrial Politics in the Aircraft Industry, 1936–1939" was given by Herrick Chapman (Stanford University). In May 1936, several days after the electoral victory of the Popular Front, the aircraft workers of France began a series of strikes which quickly developed into the great strike wave of May-June 1936, a strike movement which eventually involved over one million workers in all sectors of the economy and which brought approximately four million new workers into the recently unified labor federation, the CGT. The aircraft workers began their strike movement for a number of reasons—they were threatened with cutbacks; their moderately strong union guaranteed them effective leadership while allowing local initiative; and as highly skilled workers struggling against the authoritarian practices of the industry, they fought for greater control over their working conditions and their right to unionize. Most critically, said Chapman, because of the state's interest in the defense industry, aircraft workers were more aware of the connections between the worklife and state policy; they understood what the electoral victory of the Popular Front could mean for them as workers.

The strike victory and the ensuing struggle over the nationalization of the aircraft industry indicated even more strongly how important the government had become in their industry, how life on the shop floor was linked to national politics. The strikes of 1936 were thus the beginning of a longer struggle to make nationalization, collectivization and union influence on the shop floor the basis for a new managerial regime. That explains why aircraft workers were among the major participants in the failed general strike of 1938, the strike provoked by the Daladier government to destroy the CGT and the labor reforms initiated by the Popular Front government. Rejecting the view held by Michael Seidman, that the great strikes of 1936 were above all, a revolt against work, Chapman maintained that while the forty hour week and paid vacations were important to daily life, they were also an indication of the political strength of the working class movement. The chief conflicts were not over the legitimacy of work, but over authority and control. Chapman concluded that the Popular Front transformed working class militancy in two crucial respects; it schooled communist militants in the art of bureaucratic advocacy, making trade union concepts of the reformed workplace more acceptable to workers, and most critically, it drew rank-and-file workers into conflicts where shop floor issues and national politics became tightly intertwined—it "politicized" workers.

In her paper, "Women's Culture and Labor Solidarity: Parisian Sit-Down Strikes (1936)," Theresa McBride (Holy Cross University), saw the 1936 strike wave as a period when women's political involvement and union membership assumed new forms. For women, the occupation of the shops and factories went far beyond the issues of low wages and high unemployment; it reflected the intersection of class and gender attitudes. Women had long worked in factories and ateliers as the lowest paid workers, and this pattern of exploitation continued in the twentieth century as women increasingly found jobs as employees in offices, banks, department stores and government services where "feminization" of employment translated as lower wages. The expansion of the low price *prix unique* stores created yet another category of young, poorly paid women who, without organization, were forced to tolerate poor working conditions. It was these conditions, low wages, no pay for overtime, long hours, which became the catalyst for the women's strike action in 1936. When the strike erupted, women in all industries and services joined the movement. For three weeks, after other strikes had been settled, 32,000 department store clerks captured the nation's attention as they held out for their demands. Finally, they won raises and overtime pay. But despite these impressive work-place victories, McBride contended that the success of the strikes was not complete. Although the occupation of the factories and shops nurtured a sense of solidarity among the women and with male workers, the recognition of women's place in the labor force and in the union movement, was only minimally achieved.

A final paper returned to the period before the Popular Front and to the study of yet another new category of twentieth century workers, the civil service workers, the *fonctionnaires* of France, and their role in politicizing the CGT and helping to galvanize worker support for the victory of the Popular Front. Judith Wishnia (SUNY at Stony Brook), in her paper "French *Fonctionnaires:* Unions and Politics in the Interwar Years" said that when state workers entered the CGT in the mid-twenties, they brought to the stagnating, weak and divided blue collar federation, a highly organized and politically active bloc of workers strongly committed to reformist politics, which was, until the strikes of 1936, to constitute over one-third of the membership of the CGT. Although the CGT continued to be dominated by the leaders of the old blue collar unions, within a few years, the newcomers began to play a pivotal role within the confederation.

As employees of the state, *fonctionnaires* had always been aware of the connections between political activity and the workplace demands of their unions; they had frequently participated through their unions in electoral politics. The months of struggle between the *fonctionnaires* and the state over fiscal policy, reinforced the politicization of the state workers, convincing them that only a change in government could save their jobs and their salaries. *Fonctionnaires* were also politicized by the struggles against the fascist leagues. The full participation of state workers was a crucial factor in the success of the great anti-fascist strike of February 12, 1934. For the first time, blue collar workers and state workers marched side by side. Operating with the power of their numerical strength and their political expertise, the *fonctionnaires* were instrumental in bringing about the unification of the labor movement, ensuring in the process that the victorious faction would be the reformist CGT rather than the communist-dominated CGTU. Finally, it was the *functionnaires* who helped to turn the CGT away from its traditional syndicalist position of independence from political parties and toward open support of the Popular Front. Wishnia concluded that while it would be incorrect to overemphasize the role of the *fonctionnaires* in these important developments of 1935–6—many blue collar workers supported the unification move and the Popular Front—it was the *fonctionnaires* who emerged as the crucial voice for labor unity and for political involvement within the CGT.

The three papers were all strongly criticized by Michael Seidman of Rutgers University who maintained, as he has in a previously published article, that workers were not politically supportive of the Popular Front, that their participation in the 1936 strikes and their interest in labor legislation emanated not from their desire to improve and control the workplace, but from the desire to avoid it as much as possible, indeed to avoid work.

The panel on "Forging Social Peace in the Third Republic" also evidenced the concern with connecting working class history both to that of business enterprise and of the social policies of the state. Herman Lebovics's (SUNY at Stony Brook) paper assessed the impact of the emergence of a new republican conservatism in the years of the Great Depression of 1873-1896. It proposed modifying the Hoffman thesis on the origins of the immobilism of Third Republic France to place the Social Question in a more central position in the explanation of the origins of republican conservatism. Lebovics argued that a new conservative alliance of industrialists and growers, which would impart a legacy of social conservatism to the Third Republic, sprang from the tariff negotiations and the subsequent collaborations they made possible. That conservative alliance coalesced in response, on the one hand, to the dangers of longterm, deep, and troubling economic depression in the years 1880–1896, and on the other, to restiveness on the land and a growing militancy—expressed in strikes, riots, and new forms of organization—of the industrialists' own workers. The depression intensified the foreign competition facing both growers and industrialists. Poor industrial wages and a collapse of peasant purchasing power offered them little hope of improving sales in the home market. They lacked a well-developed colonial market. Thus they despaired of ending the business depression through expansion of sales. Domestically, efforts to increase worker productivity (they believed wages their principal cost) by means of capital investment, speed ups, increased labor discipline, paternalism, and sending for the army too often foundered on the rocks of workers' resistance. Tariffs, they believed, promised to stabilize existing industries and farming activities, increase prices and profits, and permit concessions to pacify the growing militancy of the new class of industrial workers. Having no social reforms to offer, the industrialists offered their workers safe jobs and steady pay. Large growers held up to the peasants the illusion of protection and their moral leadership.

Judith Stone's (Reed College) paper explored the central political debate surrounding the Social Question in the decades prior to WW I. The growth and militancy of trade unions and socialist organization during the 1890s transformed the realities of working class insecurity into the national issue which politicians could not ignore. A protracted and sometimes bitter debate occurred among republicans representing a variety of bourgeois responses to the Social Question. Stone argued that radical deputies and academics were the key proponents of a republican social reform program. They confronted conservatives, reluctant members of their own parties, and critical working class organizations in an effort to develop a legislative program of reform. The debate of the 1890s, whereby the Social Question was politicized, was a first important step toward the general recognition of the reformist proposition that the state had a responsibility to ameliorate working class conditions.

Sanford Elwitt (Rochester) treated the Social Question as it was understood in bourgeois politics and ideology in the years 1889–1910. He argued that French political alignments did not reproduce clear cut social divisions until the last decade of the nineteenth century. At that time, cutting across old boundaries between left and right, a genuine bourgeois "party of order" took shape. Driven by powerful forces—transformations in production, depression, and the revival of militant labor—ruling class elements formed a conservative consensus in defense of republican order. Politics became dominated by the Social Question, now related to problems of the organization of production and the tensions between modern labor and capital.

The crystallization of the conservative consensus did not occur initially on the level of electoral politics or that of the state. Rather, it appeared first in the network of bourgeois reformist parapolitical associations. Within these organizations the pillars of the big bourgeoisie along with industrial managers, high state officials, and social scientists collaborated in the design and operation of what some of them termed France's "social machinery." The strategy hit upon involved both defensive tactics and reformist politics. Representatives of big business and solidarist social liberals made common cause in pursuit of social peace through the corporate association of labor and capital. They brought French bourgeois politics into the age of social management at the time of a great advance of the French labor movement.

Donald Reid (NC, Chapel Hill), the commentator, while generally agreeing with the papers, proposed carrying the inquiries one step further. He urged analysis of the social discourse in which the societal problems under scrutiny were embedded. He wished to see more done with the "language of fear," only tangentially treated in the papers. He suggested as well that historians of socioeconomic relations of late nineteenth century France pay more attention to the "language of solidarity."