From Schism to Unity:
Anti-Fascism in France’s General Confederation of Labor between 1922 and 1935

by

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Class of 2018

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2018
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Abbreviations:
CA - Administrative Comission
CCN - National Confederal Committee
CGT – General Confederation of Labor
CGTU - Unified General Confederation of Labor
ILO – International Labor Organization
IFTU- International Federation of Trade Unions
ISR - Internationale Syndicale Rouge, also called the Red International of Labor Unions
PCF - French Communist Party
SFIO - French Section of the Workers International, (Section Française de l’International Ouvriere) the French Socialist Party
Acknowledgements
This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of Professor Nathanael Greene. Indeed, it was Professor Greene’s course on fascism that first introduced me to the world of political affiliations in interwar France. In his capacity as my thesis adviser, his input has been incredibly valuable. His wealth of knowledge of both my topic and the related literature made him able to provide the best advice and criticism that I could imagine.

Of my other instructors, several stand out as particular influences on this thesis. Wendy Rayack, who introduced me to college-level writing and helped me learn how to understand complex and subtle arguments in texts. Professor Victoria Smolkin, across two courses in the College of Social Studies, taught me the essentials of formulating historical arguments. Professor Erik Grimmer-Solem’s historiography course effectively helped me understand the way theories underlying history influence the product of research and criticism.

I would also like to thank the Davenport Committee. Its generous funding permitted me to conduct primary source research that provided me not only with material important to this project, but also with experience in archival research that inspired me to continue to study history after I graduate. My research would have been impossible without the assistance of people working in the archives I visited, particularly Auréline Mazet at the CGT’s Institut d’Histoire Sociale who oriented me to the Confederation’s archives and introduced me to many of the sources I employ in this thesis.

Beyond that academic help, I owe my ability to complete this thesis to my family, particularly my parents, to whom I owe any success I have been able to earn.
**Introduction**

The C.G.T (Confederation General du Travail), France’s largest national trade-union organization, remains a powerful and present force in French society. Throughout its long history, it has been variously characterized as a dangerous group of revolutionary anarchists, an anti-Communist reactionary group and an extension of France’s Communist Party. At different points, each of these characterizations has been a fair description of the Confederation’s role and outlook. The CGT’s politically tumultuous history has made it a difficult subject in historical examinations. It has played profoundly different roles and fostered wildly different political and social identities during the various period of its history.

This thesis looks at the CGT’s outlook towards one issue, the rise of fascism, during a specific period of the organization’s history, the years between the division of the Confederation in 1922 between supporters and opponents of Communism and its decision to reunify in 1935. This account aims to be as comprehensive as possible, but certainly does not exhaust the topic. In addition to the simple observation of change over time, I hope that this thesis sheds some light on alternate ways that the history of the CGT, and a given period of French history, can be understood. Because it is a labor organization, it can be tempting to focus on the Confederation mainly through the workplace struggles of its affiliated workers. Similarly, the broad importance and presence of electoral politics in interwar French life can make electoral, or at least party-political, organizations seem like the most important associational or political subjects in the study of the period. I believe that the CGT cannot be fit cleanly into either category. Interwar politics provided the CGT with deep political relevance and presence, but ideological and organizational limits made
direct electoral or industrial action a more difficult weapon to wield. In light of these changed circumstances, the Confederation outlined for itself a new way of existing. It dropped the radicalism of the general strike and the hope for a violent revolution in favor of a willingness to defend the political form of the French Republic and a belief that its interests could be best protected through participation in non-electoral governmental bodies and boards.

That new form of political ideology was unique to the interwar period, and has only rarely been thoroughly considered by historians. That the Confederation’s new vision of its role with regard to electoral politics and the state was a profound transformation of its goals and ends is a historiographical claim that undergirds my investigation of the specific area that this thesis explores, the CGT’s attitude towards the emergence of fascism as an international and French phenomenon.

The CGT, during the inter-war period was not, as some have portrayed it, a continuation of its pre-war predecessor hobbled by numerical obstacles. Nor was it, as some partisan accounts, like the official history of the CGT written in the 1960’s, would have it, a mere footnote on the way towards the organization that emerged after the end of the Second World War. The political nature of the interwar CGT cannot be treated as a footnote in any way if one wishes to understand either the history of French labor or French politics. The political tradition of the interwar CGT has connections to vital questions in French history, and indeed in society at large, like the widespread nature of collaboration during the German occupation, the development of ideological justifications for colonialism and the political realities of postwar France. The CGT’s structure and ideology were vitally linked symptoms of a
particular historical period, but they have had impacts that extend well beyond it. This thesis aims to define how the new kind of organization that was born after the First World War understood the emergence and development of fascism.

The CGT never sympathized with Fascism, whether it was Italian, German or French, but the specific politics of the Confederation’s opposition expose both the unique structure and purpose of the interwar CGT as well as its specific approach to a perceived threat of fascism in France. In general, the vision of fascism that developed within the organization during the interwar period was one that aligned with a meaningful shift in how the CGT saw itself as functioning in French society. Where once the Confederation was synonymous with the strike and the threat of revolution, it became a strong defender of legality and reform. My thesis tracks the impacts of this transition on the vision it developed of fascism and how anti-fascism manifested itself as an ideological and organizational priority within the CGT. The Confederation’s vision of fascism, and its opposition to it, provide an insight into an often forgotten period of its history. The CGT developed a reformist, participatory vision of itself and defined fascism in relation to that image.

In addition to a reconceptualized vision of politics, the interwar period saw the steady development of centralized authority within the CGT and the establishment of organs of propaganda, like a daily newspaper and an internal educational apparatus, that the CGT had never seen before. This centralization, along with its rejection of party politics and emphasis on its independence from them, helped to create a new political identity and label: “Confederal,” which was attached to individuals or ideas associated with the CGT. This label contrasted itself with other labels, which were...
similarly armed with daily newspapers and political organizations like “Socialist” or “Communist.”

The CGT, which after the First World War emphasized its willingness to participate in government and its commitment to legal means and democracy, understood fascism to be a revolutionary negation of those values that drew its appeal and power from economic misery and the illegal use of force. This analysis superseded a perception of fascism as a subject of Marxist class analysis, and focused instead on its structural political role and interactions with state institutions. During and after Mussolini’s seizure of power in Italy, the Confederation’s opposition to his rule based itself largely in terms that fit its broad political outlook. In the Confederation’s eyes, fascism presented an example of a revolutionary reactionary movement, as objectionable for its adherence to illegal tactics as the ultimate ends it applied them towards. This applied both to the Italian Fascism and any imitators in France. The Confederation’s response to fascism was a recommitment to its support for the legitimacy of the parliamentary state, as well as its support for international bodies like League of Nations, that it believed could be used to fight fascism’s warlike influence. This idea prevailed from the emergence of Fascism in Italy in 1922 through the famous far-right riots of February 1934 that the CGT believed threatened the existence of the French Republic. The emergence of what was believed to be a profound fascist threat to the French Republic in February of 1934 provided a new landscape for Confederal anti-fascism. The Confederation continued to portray its vision of economic planning and collaboration as a counterweight to the influence and appeal of the far-right, further codifying and endorsing it after February 1934. It
also, though, found itself swept up in a popular movement that it itself had helped to create. The rallying of forces from across the French left in 1934 and 1935, inspired largely by rhetoric of anti-fascism, proved to be a primary engine of the CGT’s decision to reunify itself with the Communist cousin it had expelled in 1922.

**Sources and Translations**

This thesis chooses specifically to examine a relatively narrow range of sources. The historiographical framework I employ when I approach my topic, which understands the interwar CGT as an organization that altered not only its political orientation, but its structural modes of transmitting the political convictions it had developed to the audience it worked hard to develop, naturally focuses on certain central sources of Confederal ideology and policy. This thesis draws from many deeply useful secondary sources, some of which provide essential background on issues like France’s economy and the relationship of the CGT to other organizations on France’s left. In my examination of primary sources, I have to rely on a limited number of available archived materials. The source most frequently cited in this essay is the newspaper the CGT established for itself in the early 1920’s *Le Peuple*. The very existence of this paper, as much as the messages it conveyed, symbolizes the organizational transformation the Confederation underwent. It is written in the style of other French daily newspapers representing political parties. I did not choose the paper as a source randomly, but because It was founded explicitly to serve as the main propaganda outlet for the CGT at the very beginning of the period I discuss. As a source, its usefulness comes not only from its status as a favored Confederal organ, but also from its frequency. As a daily newspaper, it commented on relevant issues frequently. The paper’s status as an official organ means that I tend not to provide
thorough analysis of each individual author’s contributions. The CGT was not a politically monolithic entity during the interwar period and its daily paper reflected its range of political attitudes. Considering its status as a direct organ of the organization, though, I believe it fair to, barring any significant departure from observed patterns, treat the paper as stating the views of the CGT, as its leadership was directly selected by biannual CGT congresses.

Beyond the Confederation’s daily newspaper, my research looks at a variety of primary sources within the CGT. Among these are archival documents from the CGT’s *Institut d’Histoire Sociale* that demonstrate how the Confederation immediately responded to the riots on February 6th 1934 and *La Voix du Peuple*, which served as a (roughly) monthly official journal that provided summaries of the meetings of governing bodies and copies of circulars sent to different bodies within the organization as well as publishing articles analyzing individual issues. These sources provide an insight into the central functioning of the organization. The CGT was a confederal organization that was present throughout France and within different industries. Bodies subsidiary to the center of the organization exercised power over their members and expressed political opinions in their own right. These views were often variations on those put forward by the center of the CGT. Unfortunately, issues of time and available archival resources prevented me from presenting a full survey of internal tendencies within the CGT. I have therefore limited my focus to the propaganda put out by the Confederal center and its organs. because, the center of the organization was the site of most of the structural changes I intend to discuss and itself became increasingly powerful during the interwar period. I could not, though,
do justice to the political organizing of every local and industrial organization and their subtler interpretations of Confederal politics. My thesis, moreover, seeks to newly analyze the politics of the CGT as it came into itself as a centralized force in national politics rather than through its engagement in other political and social organizing. This decision tracks the CGT’s own development. The period I examine saw an unprecedent centralization and focus on propaganda within the CGT. It represents a transformation of how a powerful organization in French political and social life understood itself, and therefore warrants an in-depth analysis.

In addition to the Confederation’s daily newspaper, this thesis will take advantage of *La Voix du Peuple*, the Confederation’s monthly journal. Rather than opinion or outward-facing propaganda, *La Voix du Peuple* catalogued important events and statistics as well as providing minutes of the meetings of the organizations that ran the CGT.

The CGT’s congresses, after its 1922 split, tended to have value as much as expressions of Confederal propaganda as sites of debate, though they did occasionally see argument over individual issues. These constitutions set the priorities of the organization, and saw it express through voted motions the priorities that it held to be most important. They serve as a vital source of internal debate as well as publicized opinion.

This thesis makes its arguments based largely on primary and secondary sources written in French. I have elected to translate any quotations from these sources myself. I believe that my translations have accurately portrayed the content of the cited excerpts. For the sake of brevity, newspaper citations do not include the full
archival link for every cited article. Citations for the referenced archives can be found in the bibliography. Documents I reference that are held in the CGT’s Institut d’Histoire Sociale are referenced using their codes in that archive’s system.

Existing Literature: Historical Perspectives on the Interwar CGT

Currently, no single account has been written that describes Confederal anti-fascism specifically as its focus, but many historians have examined the CGT broadly and a smaller number have more thoroughly considered the organization’s history during the interwar period. These accounts often apply a framework of decline to the CGT before February 1934 and the slow return to a more militant trade-unionism. In general, aside from accounts that were either contemporary or published during the beginning of the Cold War, most histories interpret as decline what I will describe as an organizational and ideological transformation towards an embrace of reform and participation in governmental policy-making through non-electoral means. None of the major histories of the CGT during the interwar years focus specifically on anti-fascism within the CGT as a topic in and of itself, and few even mention the Confederation’s opposition to fascism before February 1934.

French historian Michel Dreyfus is the author of the most current survey of the entire history of the CGT. His Histoire de la C.G.T: Cent Ans de Syndicalisme en France, provides an overview of the Confederation’s entire history. Though a useful work, its adherence to a broad historical framework and its emphasis, thereby, on continuity, leaves it somewhat confused about the ideological transformations of the CGT during the interwar period. In general, Dreyfus treats the period as one significant for the Confederation’s decline, emphasizing that its new political strategy
only produced one notable result, the introduction of social insurance legislation.\textsuperscript{1} He emphasizes the Confederation’s lack of strike action as a sign of fundamental decline. This judgement is more or less shared by an official history that the CGT published of itself in 1967 titled *Esquisse d'une histoire de la C. G. T: 1895-1965*. This account, which was written when the Confederation had come under Communist control, emphasized the weakness of the CGT between division and reunification and instead chooses to discuss the activities of the CGTU, the Confederation’s Communist cousin, as the bearer of continuity with the post-war organization.

Those historical accounts that have taken most seriously the political changes within the CGT during the interwar period tend to be those that either contemporaneously defended that political attitude or had political reason to approach the Communist character of the CGT that emerged after the Second World War as fundamentally objectionable. Leon A. Dale’s *Marxism and French Labor* is dedicated to “the gallant men and women fighting totalitarianism everywhere.”\textsuperscript{2} What follows the dedication is a book that catalogues opposition to Communism within the French labor movement. As such, it is particularly interested in the CGT as it existed between 1922 and 1935, when it had expelled its Communist members. Dale praises the Confederation’s economic vision for France as universal, rather than narrowly limited to the interests of labor and laments the eventual Communist takeover of the CGT. Val Lorwin’s *The French Labor Movement*, though less directly anti-Communist, has a similar perspective on the interwar period, and seriously engages with the reality of

\textsuperscript{1} Michel Dreyfus, *Histoire de La C.G.T: Cent Ans de Syndicalisme En France*, Questions Au XXe Siècle (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1995), 142.

the Confederation’s new way of thinking during the interwar years. The memoirs of former CGT Secretary René Belin provide a similar perspective, though they begin in 1933. Belin, who had served as the Vichy government’s Minister for Labor, used his memoirs to attack former political foes and friends alike. His vituperative attitude, though, does not change the fact that his recollections are useful for their reflection of the mindset of an echelon of Confederal leadership who were loath to abandon the vision of economic reform and to accept Communist pressure on the CGT. They provide a unique insight into the relationship between anti-fascism and reunification within the CGT.

Between the alternate poles of anti-Communism and concern with traditional labor tactics like the strike, some accounts of the interwar period provide a more balanced perspective. The two that I cite most extensively are Leon Jouhaux’s biography, written by Bernard Georges and Denise Tintant, and a book recently published by Morgan Poggioi titled *La CGT du Front Populaire à Vichy*. While its specificities are not their main focus, these accounts, by virtue of their specific subjects, must deal with the reality of interwar Confederal politics and do so in a balanced manner. The biography of Jouhaux is particularly useful.

This introduction aims to provide a brief summary of the existing efforts to examine the CGT during the interwar period. The fact that most accounts do not provide a specific examination of anti-fascism that is continuous beyond the emergence of the Popular Front leaves a gap in current historical scholarship that my thesis hopes to begin to address. This list has not provided all of the secondary sources I will cite, only those that I think provide a broad outline of how most
historians have imagined the history of the CGT during the interwar period. I seek to build on these narratives and to demonstrate first that the Confederation did have a reformist and cooperative attitude towards politics and secondly that its vision of fascism, during the period of fascism’s emergence in Europe, shaped itself in accordance with that specific ideological conception. While other accounts have catalogued the Confederation’s anti-fascist actions after 1934, I believe mine provides a unique insight into how the CGT’s vision of fascism developed in conjunction with its own political development before 1934.

1. Syndical Division and the Alignment of the New CGT

Introduction:

The divisions that emerged in the CGT during the First World War and the Russian Revolution would culminate in a split in the organization and the creation of a new labor confederation affiliated with the also newborn Parti Communiste Francais (French Communist Party), or PCF, the Confederation General du Travail Unitaire (“CGTU”). This split serves as a useful tool for understanding the general associational structure of the CGT and the political relevance of different organizational associations and official press organs. The split had existed at an ideological level since the beginning of the war and was finally consecrated by a series of political maneuvers that resulted in a complete, formal organizational schism in 1922. While this formal split created the nominally new CGTU and left the CGT with its title, it acted as well as the founding event of a new CGT, which included both old internal organizations and newly created ones. Looking at the organizational roots and implications of the CGT’s split in 1922 contextualizes the new political alignments that would come to define the CGT in the interwar period and highlights
the utility of a methodology that looks to view the organization in the context of its structures and their role as amplifiers and originators of Confederal ideology and political engagement.

Examining the split in the CGT provides insight into some of the most important factors of the Confederation’s political alignment. In 1922, the CGT’s politics were reformulated by a structural division and resulting political conflicts. This chapter explores the origin of the Confederal politics that interacted with an increasing perception of fascist threat. The Confederal identity, which constituted a force on the French left on par with those identities associated with the Communist and Socialist parties, owed much of its nature to debates that were carried out during the years leading up to and immediately after the division of the CGT.

**Reform, Revolution and War: Syndical Politics Before The First World War**

The First World War transformed political debates that had existed in the CGT since its foundation by decisively reformist tendencies within the organization and rallying it to the French Republic’s cause in its war against Germany. The war also founded a powerful opposition within the CGT, one that, after 1917, could plausibly claim to possess the charisma of history. The CGT had been founded in 1895 and as the war approached, it became the largest organization of trade unions in France. The pre-war political disputes within the CGT mirrored the distinctions that existed in many left-wing political movements across Europe in the pre-war period. There were reformist and revolutionary factions within the Confederation, the latter tending to anarcho-syndicalism, an ideology that sought to create a social revolution through organized union organizations. Prior to the war, the CGT had a troubled relationship with France’s splintered left-wing political parties. In 1906, the *Charte*
D’Amiens, a resolution reached at the CGT’s congress that year, established an official line on Confederal independence from political parties. It affirmed the independence of the CGT as well as its members’ right to participate in the existing political parties. The position laid down at Amiens was not overtly hostile to electoral politics, but saw it as fundamentally separate from the work of the CGT. The resolution stated that “As far as organizations are concerned, the Congress declares that in order for syndicalism to be most effective, economic action must be exercised directly against the patronat\(^3\), because confederal organizations, as syndical groups, do not preoccupy themselves with parties and sects which, externally and alongside them, can pursue, totally freely, social transformation.”\(^4\)

After its founding, revolutionary syndicalists had dominated the CGT. This began to change in the period leading up to 1914. During this time, the idea of a completely politically independent syndicalism, as an ideology and world of political organization all its own, had an unstable political identity, and was not distinctly bound to any faction within the CGT. By 1909, insistence on syndical independence from political parties was an idea frequently deployed by reformist leaders as well as revolutionaries.\(^5\) In the second volume of his *History of the French Working Class*, Roger Magraw identifies the distinction between electorally engaged, even if ideologically revolutionary, socialism and an emerging syndicalist idea. He described the syndicalists of the pre-war CGT thus: “During its brief apogee, in the 1900s, it

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3 A French term referring to organized management and capital
scorned socialist parties – denounced as sectarian, reformist and impotent – and pursued a strategy of industrial militancy designed to raise workers consciousness in preparation for a revolutionary general strike.”  

Val Lorwin, in his book, *The French Labor Movement*, notes that the prevalence of Syndicalism as an ideological or political identification of its own was also linked the class composition of the different movements of the French left. He noted that “The socialist leaders were conspicuously middle class intellectuals and professional people … there was something wrong, workers felt, when more than a generation of socialist party activity produced only one national leader who was a worker.” Revolutionary syndicalism, after 1909, could not describe most of the organization or political action of the CGT, but it remained an important part of the organization’s legacy, in both rhetoric and action; the idea of the general strike was never completely eliminated, nor was the relentless focus on building an organization that was of workers in its composition.

Léon Jouhaux, who served as Secretary General of the CGT from 1909 to 1940, had a career within the organization that demonstrated the significance of the history of ideas of reform, revolution and independence. Elected in 1909 during a contentious battle between revolutionaries and reformists, he was seen as a compromise candidate, though he had a history as a revolutionary anarchist. His leadership would be marked by the combination of revolutionary rhetoric and evocations of the legacy of independence established at Amiens and reformist

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political engagement with governments outside of solely electoral means. His career, as later sections will demonstrate, also included a significant expansion of his role in CGT propaganda and campaign material. Jouhaux was deeply committed to the rhetoric of internationalism, but retained a strong belief in the significance of the French nation. The outbreak of the First World War and the period that led up to it would demonstrate the contradictions between those two aspects of his politics.

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the CGT had been engaged in a vigorous campaign of protest and agitation against mobilization and war. This campaign was waged at both the national and international level, but its failure, demonstrated by the CGT’s embrace of the war when it occurred, is notable insofar as it represents a profound failure for the organization’s revolutionary wing and an entry into new and undefined territory for an organization that had pledged to prevent the situation in which it found itself. Internationally, Jouhaux had been a voice within the trade union movement pushing for greater organizational unity and militancy. His agitation took place in an organization called the *International Syndical Secretariat*.9 The Secretariat was not a governing body, and hosted conferences irregularly. Within it, Jouhaux pursued a strategy that would permit the federation, like the CGT, to allow for the coexistence of reformist and revolutionary currents within the international labor movement, fighting, for example, for the admittance of both the radical IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) and the more moderate AFL (American Federation of Labor) as representatives of the American labor movement.10 He also struggled for the coordination of anti-war efforts and political

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9Ibid., 107.
10Ibid., 113.
action generally. Within the International Secretariat, the CGT agitated for the holding of international congresses at which labor movements from different countries would consider common potential actions against the outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{11}

This agitation, and a strong belief in the necessity of international cooperation against militarism set the CGT apart from many other labor movements, which worked to prevent the discussion of international anti-war cooperation.\textsuperscript{12} Susan Milner, in \textit{The Dilemmas of Internationalism: French Syndicalism and the International Labor Movement 1900-1914}, makes clear that the CGT overestimated the degree to which other national labor movements would be willing to coordinate in anti-war efforts. She wrote that “The CGT’s determination to prevent war had become part of the elaborate bluff which had been building up since 1900. Central to this bluff was the pretence … that the CGT was acting in complete harmony with the organized international proletariat.”\textsuperscript{13} The breakdown of attempts at anti-militarist unity across the Franco-German border in the summer of 1914 represented the limits of the International Secretariat. Milner describes Carl Legien, a German trade-unionist, as rebuffing French efforts to coordinate anti-war efforts, “In fact, the German unions had already made their decision to support the war effort. When Legien returned from Brussels on 30 July, mobilization was already underway in Germany. At the next meeting of the General Commission, Legien is said to have argued for the trade unions to support the military call-up.”\textsuperscript{14} In 1914 the organization

\textsuperscript{12} Milner, 173.
\textsuperscript{13} Milner, 205.
\textsuperscript{14} Milner, 203.
retitled itself the International Syndical Federation. The steps towards greater international cooperation that had been taken up to 1914 would be reversed that same year with the outbreak of the First World War and the CGT’s decision to support the war effort. Despite that reversal, Jouhaux doggedly pursued, even during the war, the re-creation of a trade-union international that would culminate in the re-formation of the Syndical International in 1919.

Failure to secure an international anti-war alliance among the trade-unions of the world did not blunt anti-war rhetoric or organization in France. During weeks and months that immediately preceded the outbreak of war in 1914, the CGT still deployed fiercely anti-militarist rhetoric and implied that the organization would strongly resist a national war effort. It was an implication that the CGT would not meet with concrete action. Jouhaux, writing in *La Bataille Syndicaliste*, then the main daily newspaper affiliated with the CGT, on July 26th 1914, around a week before France would declare war on Germany, threatened a general strike and an “accord of the working classes of every country.”[^15] It was the kind of language that appeared across the CGT’s affiliated press and propaganda output. This position had changed completely within a two week period.

The reasons the CGT had for accepting the war were complex, and demonstrated the unique appeal of nationalism on the French left. In addition to ideological support for war, there was a pragmatic concern about possible state suppression while the country was at war. Many trade-unionists believed that a government document called *Carnet B*, which listed 3000 political opponents who

could be arrested in the event of war, showed that their organizations could be rapidly destroyed at the outbreak of hostilities.\textsuperscript{16} Jouhaux’s shift towards support for the national war effort became clear during his famous speech at Jean Jaurès’ funeral in Paris August 4\textsuperscript{th} 1914. In that speech, Jouhaux made clear that he associated the cause of the workers movement with French victory during the First World War.\textsuperscript{17} This idea, defense of the nation, often with allusions to the French Revolution or the Paris Commune, would become the central ideological justification for the CGT’s support for the war effort. The war-effort itself multiplied the patriotic trend in CGT propaganda and self-presentation. Jennings summarizes the mobilization around patriotism in the CGT thus: “France, as Jouhaux repeatedly made clear during the first weeks of the war, was fighting not a war of conquest but a war of defence against German imperialism and despotism; it was a war for civilisation, progress and liberty and against barbarism, ‘a war of revolution and not reaction, truly in the tradition of 1792.’”\textsuperscript{18} The language of liberty, rather than of revolution, would come to be a fundamental part of how the CGT described its political alignment. The decision to support the war also made the internal divisions in the CGT clearer and more severe, but it was not enough to split the organization immediately. It took the impact of the entire course of the war on the CGT’s politics, combined with the shock of the Russian Revolution, to provoke the split.

In many left-wing political groups that split during the First World War, the objection was to the organization’s willingness to endorse the war effort in the first

\textsuperscript{17} Georges and Tintant, \textit{Léon Jouhaux}, 143.
\textsuperscript{18} Jennings, \textit{Syndicalism in France}, 162.
place. Within the CGT, support for, or at least tacit acceptance of, the war was not solely the policy of established reformists. Kathryn Amdur’s * Syndicalist Legacy*, which ably describes labor politics in the cities of Saint-Etienne and Limoges during and immediately following the outbreak of the First World War, shows just how rare explicit anti-war protest was within the CGT at both the local and national level. “In both cities, the mobilization proceeded calmly with no public incitements to protest the troops’ departures, the Socialist press did take note of tearful soldiers and weeping women and acknowledged the ‘sadness’ and even ‘consternation of the crowd’.”19

She also notes that even devoted Communist trade-unionist Benoit Frachon later believed that a general strike in 1914 would not have been a practical possibility.20

There were exceptions to the general support for the war effort. Syndicalists like Pierre Monatte, who had long been a central figure in the Revolutionary wing of the organization for many years, and others in agreement with him resisted the war effort. Significantly, they also began to forge links with the anti-war minorities in the syndicalist and socialist movements of other countries. The organizations founded by dissenting voices within the CGT were initially very small, and had little influence either internationally or within the Confédération, but they would end up establishing an organizational basis for the division of the CGT. These organizations became powerful late in the war, and beyond their anti-war political orientation, rapidly became explicitly pro-Bolshevik as well. Born as formations of the officially non-

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20 Amdur, 58.
partisan Syndicalist left, they transitioned to a desire to take party politics more seriously.

Just as political alignments shifted dramatically in the CGT’s internal opposition during the war, the majority faction, centered on Jouhaux, also embraced a new political alignment. The actions taken by the organization, in combination with its rhetoric, were far from revolutionary, and even went so far as seeming to embrace a vision of class compromise in the name of national interest. The first years of war saw remarkably little strike activity. It was not until 1917 that a significant number of strikes began to break out. Data collected by Kathryn Amdur shows that the total number of strikes in France dipped to below 500 after 1914 from around 1000 in 1912 and 1913, and began to slowly rise over 1915 and 1916. The war also gave Jouhaux his first official governmental role in the form of a seat on the Secours National, an organization designed to distribute aid to victims of the war. He also took on the title of “delegate of the nation,” which encompassed supporting the war effort and serving on various governmental committees. The CGT also got its first taste of integration with state authority. In Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements: The Politics of Labor in the French Third Republic, Christopher K. Ansell argues that the war produced a support for labor-management cooperation and planning that would be central to the politics of the CGT later. He wrote:

In September 1914, union and party leaders joined the government, removed to Bordeaux, and formed a joint action committee (Comité d’Action). For the CGT, the greatest symbolic and ideological departure of the new war corporatism was represented by a speech made by Jouhaux to the Fédération

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22 Amdur, Syndicalist Legacy, 295.
23 Jennings, Syndicalism in France, 161.
des Industriels et Commerçants (roughly a combination of America’s Association of Manufacturers and Chambers of Commerce) at which he spoke about the ‘Economic Reorganization of Tomorrow.’ Jouhaux used this speech not only to justify the cooperation of the CGT in the war effort but also to reframe revolutionary syndicalism in a more corporatist light.24

The changes in political identity engendered by the war would contribute significantly to the attitude of a majority of the CGT’s leadership and a significant part of its membership when the split finally occurred in 1922. In many ways, even before splitting, the postwar CGT was a transformed institution, but this transformation occurred in a contradictory fashion; while the CGT’s politics and leadership had become linked with the state apparatus and the war effort, the image of the Russian Revolution was transforming socialist politics in France and providing new energy to forces opposed to participation in the War. The previous section has attempted to provide background information on the political alignment of the CGT and a brief summary of its history and the relevant political trends. The legacies of the old reformist and revolutionary blocs in the organization would be important to the disputes that would ultimately divide the Confederation, but the war and the Russian Revolution also thoroughly transformed those blocs themselves. The successes that the organization had achieved through membership in state entities would prove to be a vital part of its self-definition in the period that followed the war. Importantly, the political convictions born out of the crisis of war and the Union Sacrée would end up serving as the foundational principles of the C.G.T when it rebuilt itself in 1923 in opposition to its Communist counterpart. Significant to the subject of this thesis, the

experience of the First World War provided the CGT with a tradition of involvement in state bodies and made concrete patriotic visions of France that would be vital to its understanding of itself and its political role throughout the interwar period. This involvement, even if it had begun as a practical necessity, became integral to the Confederation’s conception of itself and its presentation of itself to the public.

The Organizational Road to Division

Establishing an understanding of the process of syndical division in France requires first an understanding of how the CGT organized and governed itself. During the era of the Popular Front, the CGT’s Centre Confederal d’Éducation Ouvrier (Confederal Center of Workers Education) published a pamphlet titled “Unionized, be a Unionist!,” which, although certainly propagandistic, provides a useful outline of the organic structure of the CGT. It described the relationship workers had with the CGT thus:

You are part of a union for a profession and for a locality. But your action will be stronger if it is related to those of your comrades in other professions and other localities. The Local Union of your city (if this does not exist, you must work to create it) groups together all of the workers of your locality. The Departmental Union unites all of the workers’ unions of a Department. Local and Departmental unions permit all of the unionized workers of a region and of a department to assure an effective solidarity amongst themselves … The Federation to which each union is affiliated groups all of the unions in the same corporation or industry across all of France … Above the Unions and Federations, there is the General Confederation of Labor, the CGT, the strongest organization in this country. For it, as with all of the Unions and Federations, its directives for actions to be taken are decided by a Congress where all unions have the right to represent themselves directly.26

25 The document is undated, but must have been written between 1935 and 1939 as it is marked as having been published by the CCEO, which was not founded until 1935. It was likely published before the election of Leon Blum’s government, as it makes no reference to the large wave of strikes in 1936.
26 “Syndiqué, sois un syndicaliste!” (Editions de Centre Confederal D’Education Ouvrier, Unkown), 8–9, Fonds CGT Avant 1940, Boite 18, IHS-CGT. “Syndiqué, sois un syndicaliste!” (Editions de Centre Confederal D’Education Ouvrier, Unkown), 8–9, Fonds CGT Avant 1940, Boite 18, IHS-CGT.
The pamphlet does a good job of providing an organic description of the CGT’s constitutional structure. In literal terms, the CGT was Confederal in that its members were, simply by virtue of membership, enrolled in multiple different federal bodies. The Confederation was organized on both a local and industrial basis, so that members were affiliated both with a Federation that grouped together workers in their industry and local and departmental union covering the areas they worked in. The pamphlet also emphasizes that the Confederal structure is also meant to be democratic. At the level of the CGT itself, power was formally vested in the Comité Confederal National (National Confederal Committee), which vested immediate decision-making in the Bureau Confederal and the Secrétaire Générale, a single individual who served as the organization’s main spokesperson and political leader. Julian Jackson notes that the specific structure of the CGT’s convention allowed smaller unions representation exceeding their numerical position in the confederation. The increasing division in the organization during the second part of the war and the years immediately following can be observed both within the established organizations of the CGT and new alliances created outside of them. The period can also be understood through other organizational transformations, like the addition of new members, federations, and unions which affected the politics of the organization. At a fundamental level, the division of the CGT in 1922 can be used to understand both the organizational structure of the Confederation as it remade itself after division and the political alignments that informed its subsequent actions.

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Though the decision to support the war met limited initial resistance at both the level of the Confederation and in most regions, anti-war forces slowly organized themselves as a political force within the CGT, eventually establishing majorities in some unions and regions. The shape of this organizing effort and the response to it highlight various important properties of syndical organization. Ultimately, the same organizations that had opposed the war became part of a broad-based, multi-organization effort to support the Russian Revolution and Soviet Union and their political lines. Though the immediate cause of the split was a convention vote over whether or not to join a new trade-union international, the associational structure of the split had been established long before 1922. In addition to those factors of internal organizational structure, massive growth and structural realignment played a central role. In 1922, the split in the CGT took the form of a question about which international association of trade-unions the confederation should be affiliated with, but the immediate cause of the split was the result of a wide-ranging ideological cleavage that was developing within the organization.

The anti-war minority within the CGT, despite its initial marginalization and inability to mobilize significant anti-war protest or organization, rapidly began, soon after the outbreak of war, to construct organizations and alternative international alignments. Though these steps were unprecedented in CGT history, the exigencies of the war were significant. As previously noted, the reformist faction within the Confederation, which had authoritative control of the CCN, was fully committed to the war effort and left little room for the actualization of internal dissent. Despite the organization’s strong commitment to the war effort, dissent against it did not take the
form of an immediate split. The confederal structure of the CGT, as well as the longstanding existence of a corresponding political culture that had long included groups with radically different political views, resulted in an opposition that felt as though it was able to constitute itself effectively within the CGT, rather than as a separate confederation. The leadership of the anti-war groupings came from the old revolutionary wing of the CGT, but the movement it represented became increasingly ideologically separate from its anarcho-syndicalist roots and more strongly tied to a political party, or a faction in a political party, that it had once rejected. In 1916, the minority organized itself into the Comités de Défense Syndicalistes.28 These committees, which formed the basis of the organization of the anti-war section of the CGT, also formed the center of agitation in favor of the Russian Revolution within the Confederation, eagerly embracing Lenin rather than Kerensky in their analysis of the situation in Russia.29

The anti-war minority in the CGT had demanded that the organization hold a congress throughout the war. The Congress, which normally met every two years, had been suspended for the duration of the war.30 Minority factions, deeply frustrated with the lack of political development in the CGT over the course of the war, hosted their own convention in 1918.31 That congress called for a revolutionary general strike and declared its solidarity with revolutionaries in Russia.32 The period of increased activity by the minority also saw serious increases in strike action and widespread

28 Georges and Tintant, Léon Jouhaux, 2:300.
29 Georges and Tintant, 2:302.
30 Maurice Labi, La Grande Division Des Travailleurs (Éditions Ouvrières, 1964), 91.
31 Labi, 93.
32 Labi, 93.
appeals for a revolutionary general strike with the aim of recreating the Russian Revolution in France.

The first steps towards organic separation from the CGT, in the form of a separate congress, were concurrent with a significant increase in both strike activity by affiliated unions of the CGT and growth in the CGT’s membership. The organization of strike and demonstration activity by the confederal minority without majority support represented a departure from precedent and another basis for organizational disunity. Strike activity in 1917 and 1918 was matched with attempts at revolutionary general strikes in 1919 and 1920. While these strikes were grounded in the pre-war distinction between revolutionary and reformist factions, those traditional alignments were increasingly refracted through the Russian Revolution. The strikes in 1920, for example, were begun by the union of railroad workers (Cheminots). Kathry Amdur notes that the politics of the federation of rail workers were radical, but far closer to those of the Communist International than previous radical syndicalists like Dumoulin, writing “The railroad federation was now in the vanguard of the left-wing labor movement, but its militancy was closer to communism than to the anarcho-syndicalism that had flourished among metalworkers before and during the war.” The railroad federation grew rapidly, and would continue to play a central role in the CGT’s left-wing until division. The wave of strikes it precipitated in 1920, though, were met with disapproval by the majority in the CGT and did not amount to the revolutionary event that their planners had hoped for. Ultimately, under pressure from the railroad workers, the CGT supported a plan

34 Amdur, *Syndicalist Legacy*, 137.
for successive waves of strikes, but these instructions were ignored by workers in the local unions who staged strikes outside of the approved framework. Strike action, however, was unable to seize public attention in France or spread much further than unionized workers in key industries.” By May 29, 1920, nearly a month after the strikes had begun, the Federation of Railway Workers finally called off its strike. In the end, around 20,000 railroad workers were fired.

The increase in attempts at revolutionary strikes occurred during a period of significant growth in the number of workers affiliated with the CGT. In *La Croissance de la CGT*, Annie Kriegel documents this growth in detail, showing which Federations and Departmental Unions grew most during the period as well as showing how the growth affected the relative sizes of the majority and minority within the CGT. Compared with its size in 1911 (the most recent date for which records were available), by 1920 the CGT had grown by 53%, taking on 365,769 new members.

The growing dissociation of the majority and minority, and the increasing relevance of the question of international affiliation were vital to the process of division and the creation of two rival organizations. In 1919, The International Federation of Trade Unions reconstituted itself in Amsterdam. Its reconstruction was a central political focus of Jouhaux’s and became an integral part of the minority’s vision of the future of the CGT. The new politics of the majority were also codified in

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35 Amdur, 142–43.
the “Minimum Program” adopted by the Comité Confederal National, which called for the adoption of a Wilsonian vision of international relations, the restoration of constitutional rights like freedom of speech, and the gradual nationalization of French industry.  

The document’s emphasis on rights, particularly civil liberties, provides a preview of how the CGT’s majority would orient itself politically when it took control of the CGT in 1922. This set of legislative and political priorities, with its focus on political liberties and state-driven economic policy that aimed to improve the living conditions of workers, expressed the central political priorities of Jouhaux’s majority faction within the CGT. The rhetoric of public liberties would become central to the non-Communist CGT after the Confederation’s division.

The CGT’s congress in July of 1921 was the site of the most serious demonstration of the disunity that would result in a split at the beginning of the next year. It was also the point at which it became clear that much of the growth within the Confederation had been to the benefit of the revolutionary minority. The organized minority drew its support from those parts of the CGT that grew most during the years that immediately followed the war. At the 1918 Congress of the CGT, at which every regional and craft organization had a vote, there were 1190 total votes, of which 240 (20.1%) voted against the Rapport Moral, the opening statement of the congress, which set out the Confederation’s political and organizational positions. In 1920, out of 2338 total votes, 656 votes (29.3%) were cast against the majority motion. By 1921, out of 2942 votes, 1321 (44.8%) sided with the minority.  

The growth of the minority, and the prospect that it threatened to control the CCN itself,

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40 Georges and Tintant, 2:323.
41 Kriegel, La Croissance De La C. G. T., 1918-1921, 163–64.
was all the more serious to the minority because of the question of international affiliation. Within the CGT, the groups supporting adherence to the International in Moscow formed groups known as the *Comités Syndicalistes Révolutionnaires* (CSR’s). These groups would provide the organizational basis for the division of the CGT. Rather than serving as a forum across different regional and industrial unions, the CSR’s were meant to be constituted as a separate organization within the CGT.42

The language supported by the minority at the 1921 congress included a claim that the CGT “Could adhere to the Trade-Union International in Moscow … on the express condition that its statues respect the autonomy of the syndical movement.” The idea that this claim hid the true intentions of the minority faction would be a central part of the majority’s campaign against the minority. After the congress, which saw vigorous debate between the Confederation’s tendencies, the majority saw itself as fundamentally threatened by the revolutionaries, who seemed to have a strong chance of establishing themselves as the new majority in the CGT.

In the weeks after the meeting of the CGT Congress in 1921, the Majority became determined to expel those organizations that had formed the CSR’s and continued to agitate for adherence to the International in Moscow. In November of 1921, after several contentious congresses and a steady growth of the revolutionary minority, the CCN of the CGT voted to “give a mandate to the *Bureau Confederal* and the Administrative Commission to require rigorous respect for the for Lillle motion by all affiliated organizations through its power to exercise legitimate sanctions in cases of recognized indifference.”43

The decision by the Confederal majority was angrily received by the minority, which immediately began organizing to separate itself from an organization that was intent on expelling it. The split took place across different regional and industrial unions. Supporters of the minority refused to heed calls from CGT leadership demanding that they disaffiliate from the CSR’s. Supporters of the minority organized a congress of their own in December of 1921. This event marked the foundation of the CGTU, (Unified General Confederation of Labor) which would, at its first Congress in 1922, vote to affiliate itself with Moscow’s Federation of Trade Unions. At this point, the division of the French syndical movement was complete. The division of the CGT did not just create one new organization, but two, for the rump CGT was itself remade by the departure of the unions that formed the CGTU. The separation itself was carried out not by the syndical minority, but by the majority, which expelled the organized CSR’s after the contentious vote at the 1922 Congress. The expulsion of the minority would lead to the creation of a new rival confederation, and a dramatic shift in the political priorities, structures and internal organizations of the CGT.

The organization made up of the majority faction of the CGT maintained the name of the organization that had existed before the First World War, but it was a fundamentally changed entity. The ideological balance of the Confederation had shifted, most of the revolutionary syndicalists were no longer members. The structure of the organization had also been dramatically transformed. The organizational base of the CGT changed as some unions left to join the CGTU. The process and political

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44 Georges and Tintant, 2:438.
nature of the division of the French labor movement would be the central factor in
determining the political orientation of the new organization. Among the key features
of this political alignment were a strong partisan anti-Communism, a commitment to
the kind of reform outlined in 1918’s Minimum Program, and a commitment to the
kind of republican nationalism that Jouhaux had championed during the outbreak of
the First World War. This organization would remake itself as a political organization
of the French socialist left, with its own unique synthesis of republican citizenship
and working class politics, internationalism, and national economic organization.

It was this new organization, with its own press organs and public social
presence, that would react to the emergence of fascism in Italy and consider whether
or not France was fertile soil for a similar brand of politics. In doing so, and across its
internal politics, many of the positions the CGT adopted reflected the struggles that
had taken place during the period leading up to the organization’s split. The trauma of
the split, combined with the new, Communist-influenced, French left, led the CGT to
establish a more robust identity for its members, one that embraced many of the
trends that had characterized the Confederation’s behavior during the First World
War.

The New CGT

The split in the CGT created not only a new minority offshoot of an old
organization, but also dramatically transformed what remained of the former
confederal majority. As much as any events that had taken place before or during the
First World War, the experience of the split, and the period that immediately
followed, set the new CGT’s identity. After its split, the CGT had to both redefine
itself politically and come to terms with its altered position in French politics.
The reorganization of the CGT was both structural and political. The early 1920’s saw a diminished number of unionized workers generally in France and a loss of some of the Confederation’s largest internal organizations to the CGTU. The period also saw the creation of a more centralized political apparatus within the CGT. Under Leon Jouhaux, the Confederation established a political identity for itself on the landscape of a French left split by the old conflict between reform and revolution and the emergence of the Soviet Union. The identity of the Confederal worker, politically speaking, drew itself largely from the ideologies that the organization had embraced for the first time during the First World War. Jouhaux’s new organization embraced policies based on the Minimum Program and advocated for them in a generally political manner. This new vision of participation in the administration of state policy was combined with an increased ideological commitment to the security of the French republic. The CGT that was born after syndical division defined itself both in opposition to its former Communist comrades and French nationalists. Along with changes in its structure and membership, these led to staunch defenses of representative government and administrative, rather than revolutionary, solutions to problems facing workers. Anti-Communist and deeply republican, Confederal politics straddled the line between embracing a reformist socialism, and attempting to maintain independence from electoral politics.

The newly founded Communist party was widely organized, and threatened to establish itself as the primary left-wing force in France. At the Congress of Tours in 1920, it had been created out of the former majority of the unified SFIO. It had a powerful daily newspaper with a long history, *L’Humanité*, which had been founded...
by Jean Jaures and had been the main outlet for the SFIO in the period before and
during the First World War. Having divided the SFIO, Communism seemed as
though it might be able to establish itself as the main force in the French labor
movement as well through the CGTU, which it controlled.

The 1923 Congress: Anti-Communism, Centralized Propaganda and Confederal
Identity

At the CGT’s 1923 Congress, its first after the 1922 split, the CGT began to
reckon with many of the questions that would define its policy towards the
Communists and their affiliated unions throughout the 1920s. At the congress, the
Confederation considered and responded to a letter sent by the leadership of the
CGTU about reunifying the rival organizations. Having criticized the former
confederal minority for abandoning their organization, an offer of reunification or
common action had to be taken seriously by the congress. The response to it, and the
debate surrounding it, demonstrated the emerging variety of anti-Communist ideology
that was developing within the CGT. The letter from the CGTU requested the
convocation of a unified congress that would redefine the two organizations and vote
on its political line, including the question of which international federation it would
adhere to.\textsuperscript{45} The CGT’s congress nominated a commission to write a response. That
response, and the debate that surrounded it at the congress, provides a framework for
understanding how the CGT defined itself in opposition to Communist forces on
France’s left.

\textsuperscript{45} “XXIle Congrès National Corporatif (XVIIe de La CGT) Paris, 30 Janvier- 2 Février 1923” (Édition de
_Congres_Paris.pdf.
The statement put out by the CGT, which was written by a commission of delegates, expressed a desire for syndical unity in general, but strongly condemned the terms proposed by the CGTU. Referring to the CGTU’s demand for a “united front,” in line with contemporary Comintern policy, the declaration said that the congress “Is not fooled by the formula of the ‘united front’ which obscures a party’s will to pursue, by other means, the placement of the workers movement into guardianship.” Addressing the idea of reunification directly, it declared that “The congress notes that the reconstitution of organic unity is currently impossible because of the fact that the administrative organizations of the CGTU have adhered to an International of which an essential principle is to direct, to subordinate the syndical movement to decisions taken outside of its own organizations.”

The rhetoric of the response was mirrored by the debate at the congress, which prefigured much of the anti-Communist rhetoric of the period leading up to 1934. In his speeches, Léon Digat, who served on the commission that wrote the response to the CGT’s letter, tempered his condemnations of the Communist leadership with some openness towards workers affiliated with the Communist Party. In a speech describing the letter he had helped to draft, Digat said that the CGT had “nothing in common with those who have forgotten the essential principle of pre-war syndicalism, a principle aimed at direct action, because we maintained before the war that action was direct only when it was decided on by syndical organizations themselves… nothing in common with those who say that the Red Army is the rampart of the proletariat.” Along with anti-Communist rhetoric, though, was a

stated desire for cooperation with workers affiliated with the PCF and CGTU. Digat, while vigorously attacking Communist politics, struck a more conciliatory tone when he described workers affiliated with the CGTU. He said “Workers who have a red card are men who may have perhaps heard certain propaganda and who have a legitimate impatience … There are some men who, in good faith, believe that we do not move quickly enough, that we are reformists; I believe that workers who have committed no other crime than having a red card cannot be considered enemies.”

Digat’s sentiments would end up reflecting the attitude of the CGT through the period between syndical division and reunification. Appeals to unity tempered by disapproval of Communist politics, mainly through attacks on the CGTU’s failure to adequately safeguard its independence, were the predominant means by which the CGT interacted with its Communist rival during the 1920’s.

The varieties of anti-Communism expressed by delegates, and by the official statement, would continue to be expressed by the CGT throughout the 1920’s. Digat’s emphasis on “Unity at the base” rather than at the organizational level would prove to be an essential feature of Confederal rhetoric on the topic. From division to reunification, the CGT and CGTU both claimed that they wished to reunify, but they never came close to even seriously negotiating reunification. In addition to these specific political lines, propounding a specific vision of the Communists as traitors to the cause of syndical independence was part of a broader trend that began at the 1923 congress, the reconstitution of syndical identity and political organization through the

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creation of more central outlets for the organization’s political message.49 This new vision of centralized propaganda fit Jouhaux’s vision of how the CGT could fight for the interests of French workers very well. Rather than embracing the concept of the revolutionary general strike, the kinds of political goals that the CGT embraced were meant to be agitated for at the level of national politics in France through interaction with and presence in government bodies. This idea was generally called the Politique de Présence (policy of presence).

The strident anti-Communism expressed during the 1923 Congress was partnered with an embrace of the political and economic policies that the Confederation had adopted during the First World War. A commission designated by the Congress endorsed Confederational political action at the national level that would fight for social insurance programs. Instead of citing battles within any particular workplace or organization of direct industrial action, the Commission emphasized the degree to which social insurance programs would have to be won through political activism, with an aim of influencing government action. The commission (made up of close political allies of Jouhaux) wrote that “Propaganda must, in effect, address itself to the masses of workers and to public opinion to intensify the current that will make the passage of the law unstoppable.”50 The vision of the political role expressed by this report can be easily contrasted with the idea of a revolutionary general strike of the kind that had been attempted in 1920. Jouhaux’s vision of the CGT acting as an

49 Interestingly, opposition to the French Communist Party did not indicate an overall hostility towards the Russian Revolution. At the 1923 Congress, Jouhaux argued with a delegate who characterized the Soviet government as dictatorial and unjust and Confederational publications usually opposed international sanctions against the USSR. The subtleties of reformist anti-Communism in interwar France, though it cannot be dealt with at length here, provide a worthy subject for future historical analysis.

interlocutor to the state on behalf of French workers would be the organization’s predominant vision during the interwar period. In addition to representing a definite embrace of a certain wing of the old organization, this also required changes to how the CGT structured itself and sought to publicize its activity. Essentially, without widespread politicized industrial action, the CGT sought to become a sort of non-electoral political party, replete with the features of contemporary political parties.

The political stances taken by the Congress were concurrent with efforts to centralize the Confederation’s propaganda operation and extend the reach of its daily newspaper, *Le Peuple*. The discussions on propaganda often explicitly invoked the need for a centralized political message as a kind of counterweight to Communist propaganda. *Le Peuple* had been founded in 1921 to express the views of the Confederal majority, and it maintained its role until the Second World War as the daily expression of Confederal propaganda. The existence of a daily newspaper within the CGT was also evidence that the organization that existed throughout the interwar period was intent on playing a different role from the Confederation that had existed prior to the First World War. At its re-founding Congress in 1923, the CGT put forward a new vision of how the organization should present itself politically, embracing positions that had been first taken in the climate of the *Union Sacrée* and the outbreak of the First World War. The Confederation also found itself with a different base of workers and a new focus on propaganda. That focus was deployed to the benefit of the ideas expressed in the Minimum Program. The following sections will describe the interplay between the Confederal Identity forged through battles with the Communists and the CGT’s conception of a fascist risk in France.
In official terms, the reduced numbers and altered politics of the CGT were expressed through embrace of the Politique de Présence and the glorification of Confederal participation in government bodies. The general political alignments of the confederation during this period had their origins in the political compromises brought on by participation in the Union Sacrée. The Minimum Program of 1918 had embraced a program of reform. Building on that notion, the period immediately following the split in the CGT was characterized by embrace of the Politique de Présence in the CGT. Ideologically, the policy entailed organic cooperation with governmental bodies and attempts to manage labor in cooperation with the government. Practically, though, the CGT often had to struggle for the establishment of such bodies. Bernard Georges and Denise Tintant, Jouhaux’s biographers, attribute this orientation to the failure of the strike in 1920 and the numerical weakness of the labor movement throughout the 1920’s. During 1927’s CGT congress, Jouhaux summed up the Politique de Présence thus, “We have a policy: it is a policy that whenever the interests of workers are discussed, we will be there.”

The policy included a significant personal role for Jouhaux in state bodies like the National Economic Council, which was created as an advisory body by Poincaré in 1926, as well as frequent meetings between Jouhaux and governmental leaders. Crucially, it also included an acceptance by the CGT of some degree of economic rationalization, in the form of concentration of industry and the acceleration of production, in the name of the national interest. These policies formed the ideological

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side of the *Politique de Présence*. Organizationally, it meant that the CGT began to emphasize political affairs and to translate its priorities into legislative and administrative terms in its messages to the public. Though propaganda still highlighted strikes and industrial action, legislative and electoral questions began to receive greater emphasis. During this period, as it was first encountering fascism, the CGT was also embracing tendencies towards direct engagement with political structures that had been solidified during the First World War.

In their evaluations of the CGT during the period between its split and the beginning of the Popular Front period in 1934, historians have faced a confusing historical subject that, for much of the twentieth century, also had significant political relevance. During this period, the CGT cannot be understood fully if the framework applied views labor through strikes, but neither did it establish itself directly as an electoral party. The CGT rather built for itself a political and social infrastructure that it leveraged to political ends, while avoiding direct involvement with electoral politics. Rejection of electoral methods, though, did not indicate a lack of willingness to cooperate with government entities, it rather indicated that the CGT interested itself in state power through administrative and corporative structures. This structural change in method was matched with its own style of propaganda and ideological expression. Anti-fascism developed within the CGT concurrent with the development of a Confederal political point of view that focused on cooperative action with state structures and a loud endorsement of republican government, along with a basic anti-Communism. Opposition to fascism was framed in these terms as often as it was set
on strictly anti-capitalist grounds mirroring the political line put forward by the Communists.

The *Politique de Présence* was not merely an ideological transition, or interim tactic to preserve the CGT until some future return to mass revolutionary syndicalism, though it certainly had elements of both an ideological change and a stopgap measure. In sum, though, it amounted to a reshaping of the CGT, from an organization mainly focused on industrial action, to one aimed at participation in governmental policymaking and national political life. The Confederation essentially formed itself into a non-electoral political party, with a political program and practical organization that mirrored those of the electoral parties. This transition, and the specificities of Confederal ideology, played a significant part in how the CGT chose to oppose Fascism during the interwar period. Though this new kind of organization achieved few of what could be considered direct successes, the numerical decline of the CGT did not continue after its split. In 1930, it had rebuilt itself to the number of members that it had had in 1921, 490,000. The fact that the membership rebounded shows that the *Politique de Présence*, even in the absence of any definite victories, did not accelerate the Confederation’s decline. The fact that new members could be attracted at all during this period shows that the vision of political engagement put forward by the CGT had some level of support within the ranks of French workers.

The 1923 Congress is an excellent insight into the battles the CGT fought throughout the 1920s, and the mindset of its political leaders. From the expressed

53 Dreyfus, *Histoire de La C.G.T*, 139.
anti-Communism of the speakers to the creation of a more centralized internal political apparatus within the organization, the Congress, and the politics of the split that had preceded it, were important factors in the shaping of the interwar CGT. The trends that had been codified during the Congress were carried on throughout the 1920’s. When the CGT first considered the threat of fascism, it did so in the context of its avowed anti-Communism. The Confederation’s views were expressed through an apparatus of centralized propaganda that was created at the Congress, one that mirrored those present in France’s contemporary political parties. The following section will delve into the way the conclusions of the Congress were put into practice across the CGT in relation to the rise of Italian and German fascism, and its political impacts in France. The trauma of syndical division was, more than any other event or phenomenon, the foundation of Confederal politics during the interwar period. The organization that would end up encountering fascism had developed for itself a form of reformist syndicalism that expressly rejected the idea of revolution but continued to tout its working class ideology and organization. This new CGT was defined by both ideological and structural distinctions from both its historical predecessor and newborn Communist twin. These differences were fundamental to the CGT’s distinct vision of the risks fascism did and did not pose to French society.
2. First Impressions, Developing Confederal Anti-Fascism in the 1920’s

Introduction

The CGT’s first discussions of fascism occurred strictly in an international context. This is not to say that the topic was ignored; international relations were immensely important to the interwar confederation and proved to be an important part of its political self-definition in comparison to the other forces on France’s left. The first mentions of fascism in CGT propaganda focused on its attacks on Italy’s labor movement and Socialist party before it arrived in power. The conception of fascism that developed in the early 1920’s within the CGT emphasized its status as a foreign development, with potential significance in French politics through analogy, but hardly as a profound and immediate threat to the French Republic. Confederal descriptions of early Italian fascism conceived of it definitively as a right-wing movement and emphasized its suppression of the kind of democratic rights, like freedom of speech, that the CGT had endorsed since the First World War. Moreover, the CGT objected to Italian fascism for its revolutionary character and rejection of parliamentary government, traits that allowed it to be readily analogized to Communism and readily contrasted with the CGT.

This vision of fascism was formed during a period of profound political redefinition for the CGT. Transformed after the loss of its Communist sympathizers, the Confederation sought to establish a unique identity for itself in the world of French politics. For structural and practical reasons, this meant that the CGT began acting less like a mainly industrial union and more like a political party. The Confederation, armed with local groups, a daily newspaper, monthly publications of its own, and a powerful internal organization, created a social world in parallel with
those provided by political parties like the SFIO or PCF. The vision that the CGT would develop of the threat posed by fascism was uniquely linked to the specific politics of reformist, working-class syndicalism. This vision was rooted in the contradictions and conflicts of the organization’s division, and the conflicts that had led to its creation.

Though industrial action was still mentioned by the Confederation during this period, it was now superseded as a Confederal priority with parliamentary-focused left-wing political appeals. The CGT, operating in the landscape of national politics, continued to carve out a political identity of its own. This identity paired the revolutionary nature and class identity of the Confederation’s history with a patriotic embrace of political rights, the French Republic and a vision of non-Communist labor internationalism. This redefined and reorganized CGT, born of the contradictory legacies of reformism and revolution, radicalism and anti-Communism, would come to establish its own vision of fascism during the 1920s that fit well with the organization’s own political structure and priorities. Mainly concerned with political events in Italy and their results in France, the CGT’s vision of fascism described it as a threat to France internationally and an opponent of the kind of freedoms it endorsed. Battling fascism became an international watchword of the CGT and featured regularly in Confederal propaganda, but it hardly reached the status of a main organizational principle of confederal propaganda or activity.

Local organizing against the encroachment of Italian fascism into France was centrally endorsed, but hardly ever mandated or highlighted. The Confederation’s international engagement against fascism was serious, but it did not penetrate local
organizing nearly as much as other issues at a centralized level. The anti-fascism of
the CGT was comparable to that of other groups on France’s left in organization, but
the Confederation was slower to construct a vision of a fascist threat within France
than both the SFIO and PCF, each of which began in the mid 1920’s to construct its
own vision of the threat fascism posed to France.

The low priority placed on opposition to fascism in the 1920’s dramatically
contrasts the vision of the threat that would develop after February 6th 1934. The
CGT’s reticence to focus on a fascist threat can be attributed both to its style of
politics and to the specific policies it endorsed. Under Jouhaux’s \textit{Politique de
Presence}, which aimed towards the recognition of the CGT as a representative of the
interests of workers in mixed industrial-governmental bodies, the CGT maintained a
political structure, but consciously separated itself from politics constituted through
political parties. In the 1920’s, fascism was seen as a sensational and dangerous, if
fundamentally foreign, phenomenon. The Confederation’s portrayal of fascism was
comparable to the portrayal advanced by its relatives of the French left. The CGT
processed the idea of fascism through political lenses inherited from its split, and this
processing occurred across all of the levels of the CGT organization, from national
organizations and propaganda to local organizations.

In the 1920’s, particularly the first half of the 1920’s, the CGT, on grounds of
defense of parliamentary government and the status of labor in politics, the
Confederation expressed strong opposition to fascism, but did not see the battle
against fascism as an exceptional area of political and social action. This dynamic
developed in the context of organizational changes in the way the CGT operated and
its political priorities towards cooperation with governments and established authorities. Though the CGT embraced anti-fascist rhetoric and developed anti-fascist ideology, it did not identify fascism as a sufficiently immediate threat to merit serious changes in the priorities or ideology of the Confederation.

**Building Confederal Identity, Historical Perspectives**

The period between syndical division and February 1934 has been a difficult subject for those studying the history of the CGT. During this period, the organization transformed not only its ideology, but its whole relationship with its own political and social role in French society. Some historians have more or less ignored the new political lines of the CGT between the wars, while others have put them in essentially partisan terms. These accounts have provided an outline of how the CGT constructed a distinct political identity for itself, but have tended not to treat exploration of that identity as worthwhile in itself. The perspectives of these historians have perhaps been shaped more by contemporary political alignments and historiographical trends than by a sympathetic re-creation of the CGT’s response to the issues it faced. These accounts provide valuable context and background for my attempt to define how the CGT changed its political and social objectives in the interwar period, even if they have not directly addressed the connections between the ideological and structural changes in the Confederation. My work aims to use historians’ research into political identity, structural organization, and coordinated action to discern exactly how the CGT operated during the interwar period and relate the Confederation’s vision of itself to the ideas it developed of fascism and anti-fascism.

This overall historical confusion at the politics of the interwar CGT reflects potential limits of the respective historical approaches of the historians looking at the
organization during that period. Labor historians, for example, tend to view strikes as a sort of fundamental unit in their discussions of the history of labor organizations. Such an analysis would argue that the CGT was fundamentally weakened during the period. Michel Dreyfus puts forward such an argument in his history of the CGT, focusing on the reduction of local industrial action during the interwar period as a marker of the Confederation’s failures. While this might be true if the CGT is imagined to have continuous goals or visions of politics, it underestimates the depth of the Confederation’s commitment to methods other than industrial action during the interwar years.

In 1965, when the CGT had established deep organizational links to the French Communist Party, its official *Esquisse d'Une Histoire de la C.G.T*, described the interwar period as one characterized by a powerful offensive by organizations representing business owners. Focusing on reductions in the number of strikes, it barely discusses the remnants of the former confederal majority, and instead highlights the supposed leadership of the CGTU in movements of strikers and unemployed workers. In this case, the focus on strikes had a clear political significance, emphasizing the CGTU as the real predecessor of the postwar organization. Such an account would naturally, and indeed does, fail to emphasize any significant political changes to the CGT during the interwar period.

In contrast to those accounts that condemn or are ambivalent to the *Politique de Présence*, there are some that seek to thoroughly support it. Most of these were written in the context of battles over Communist influence in French trade-unionism that took place after the Second World War. Leon A. Dale’s *Marxism and French
Labor, written in 1956 begins by asking “Why has French Labor become so dangerously infected with Communism?” In seeking to answer this question, the book is something of an homage to Leon Jouhaux, who was the object of a good deal of attention in the United States for his split from the then Communist-led leadership of the CGT. Jouhaux’s status as a celebrated opponent of Communist influence no doubt underlies the book’s positive portrayal of his leadership, considering its clear anti-Communist bent. The book discusses the reforms embraced during the 1920’s in a positive light, and emphasizes Jouhaux’s status as a fighter against Communist influence. Describing the Economic Council of Labor, Dale wrote “The idea for this council was concrete evidence again of a noteworthy change in trade union policy … no longer was the individual syndicat considered the only active entity in the economy. There was now consideration of the general public.” A similar positive vision of the interwar period’s economic program is provided by Georges Lefranc, who wrote his Histoire du Mouvement Syndical Français in 1937. This account, written by an academic closely allied with Jouhaux and his faction of the CGT, focuses largely in its description of the interwar period on the Confederation’s embrace of a “constructive” non-revolutionary politics.

Bernard Georges and Denise Tintant, in their two-volume biography of Jouhaux, do not strike the same anti-Communist posture as Dale, but they have a similar investment in Jouhaux’s legacy. Georges was a devout non-Communist trade-unionist and Tintant a social historian. Their text chooses to portray the CGT as

54 Dale, Marxism and French Labor, 1.
55 Ibid, pg. 86
essentially continuous and Jouhaux as devoted to holding it together during a difficult period. The two biographers see the Politique de Présence as a response to the strike wave of the early 1920’s and portray it as a rational political choice to assure the survival of the CGT. They wrote “Jouhaux understood that it was impossible to reject all state intervention as had been done before 1914, we can of course have reservations about this contact, this systematic search for compromise, though the trade-union situation should always be placed in the context of an overall situation less conducive to organization by workers.”\textsuperscript{57} Sympathetic accounts of CGT policy during the interwar period provide at least an understanding that the CGT was engaging with politics differently from the way it had before or would after, but their tendency to focus on this policy as an aberration in need of explanation and justification makes a more in-depth analysis of its political and organizational significance more difficult, as they view the steps that proceeded from it as products of necessity.

More recently, histories of the CGT have begun to examine the structural elements of the Confederation. This work has not exclusively focused on the interwar period, but has sought to provide a more in-depth understanding of structural and organizational ideas put forward by earlier scholars. Researchers like Morgan Poggioli have provided a more complex picture of the internal political and social dynamics of the interwar CGT. In a paper titled “Entre éducation populaire et propagande syndicale : les cours radiophoniques de la CGT sous le Front Populaire,” Morgan Poggioli described the CGT’s propaganda apparatus’ transitions during the

\textsuperscript{57} Georges and Tintant, \textit{Léon Jouhaux}, 2:43.
interwar period, and explores how the CGT’s leadership used propaganda to
reconstruct the organization and establish widespread social influence. Poggioli has
also published a paper titled “Le planisme à la CGT : Les origines d’une refonte
syndicale au tournant du Front populaire,” which attempts to address the political
ideologies within the CGT that led to the Confederation’s embrace of state-based
economic planning.

Most of the aforementioned historians have produced valuable descriptions of
aspects of the way in which the CGT functioned during the period between its
division and the outbreak of the Second World War. None of their accounts, though,
have been able fully to encompass the change that was the organization’s embrace of
Jouhaux’s *Politique de Présence*. This vision of working-class politics also carried
with it a mode of organization which was based on national propaganda and dialogue
with elected officials. In that sense, this chapter, in addition to showing how the CGT
opposed fascism, will argue that the ideological judgments that undergirded this
opposition and the vision of the perils of fascism portrayed by Confederal propaganda
were products of the organization that had been born in the interwar period. The
*Politique de Présence* and the “Constructive” attitude of the CGT were vital to its
political convictions, like support for parliamentary government and liberties, that
were central to the Confederation’s condemnations of fascism.

**Italy and Internationalism, the First Mentions of Fascism**

That international relations had been the immediate ground upon which the
CGT divided itself shows the significance of international relations to the way the
organization presented itself both to its members and to the public at large.

Immediately after the end of the First World War, Jouhaux set out to reconstruc
International Trade Union Federation, an organization he had worked to centralize and strengthen before it disappeared during the outbreak of World War 1. The first references to fascism to appear in Confederal propaganda arrived through the statements made by the IFTU and its political positioning towards the situation in Italy. Jouhaux’s close relationship with other union leaders, his loyalty to the IFTU, as well as the CGT’s loud commitments to an ordered international relationship between labor organizations and governments, meant that the first references the CGT made to fascism came through statements of solidarity with Italian labor organizations in direct conflict with Mussolini’s ascendant Fascist movement. These statements emphasized fascism’s role as an opponent of the kind of democratic rights that the CGT had endorsed in 1918 as well as its violent, non-parliamentary, and revolutionary character. Indeed, these characteristics were essential to how the Confederation came to understand fascism as a political phenomenon. The issue also prompted organizing within France, but the CGT was slow to adopt opposition to fascism as a fundamental part of the identity it constructed for itself, rather seeing it as a kind of ancillary international commitment.

The CGT was not an organization that defined itself ideologically through definitive and singular ideological declarations laying out its theoretical understanding of given issues. Ideologically, it had a broad history, and tended to present its political positions in terms that were more practical than theoretical. This, of course, contrasts with the other established organizations of the French left, the SFIO and the PCF, each of which devoted significant propagandizing simply to the publicization of their own views on individual issues. The CGT developed for itself
an understanding of fascism that had clear connections to the organization’s other political priorities and concerns over time and through disparate expressions. Though no long-form investigations of the theoretical nature of fascism were published until after 1934, it is still possible to discern how the Confederation understood ascendant Italian and German fascisms, and how it applied this understanding to the political situation in France.

The CGT understood fascism as a revolutionary movement of the reactionary right and as such as an opponent both for its revolutionary and reactionary character. The Confederation, in an era during which it was in direct and vigorous competition with its Communists opponents, understood fascism’s revolutionary character as an explanation of its success and a source of violence and illegality that ought to be condemned. Fascism’s reactionary character was mainly used as an explanation for the conduct of far-right governments and organizations. Drawing on the CGT’s opposition to war-time suppression of civil liberties in France and the organization’s embrace of the idea of republican citizenship, the most important reactionary attributes of fascism in the Confederation’s eyes were its rejection of parliamentary representative government and its suppression of civil liberties. Having charted a course towards state participation and reform both during the First World War and after its split, the CGT remained an organization of the left and firmly rejected fascism, rarely missing an opportunity to condemn it. Most often, it is these condemnations, for various crimes, that serve to outline the Confederation’s ideological and theoretical understanding of fascism.
The first clear ideological definitions of fascism made by the CGT began to emerge as Mussolini was taking power in Italy. They tended to portray fascism’s success as explicable mainly through its reliance on revolutionary and violent means. Treating fascism as a revolutionary reactionary movement, the CGT was able to easily use it as a slur in arguments with both nationalist enemies on the right and Communist enemies on the left.

The first references to fascism, in the CGT’s daily and monthly journals, focused on the statements made by the IFTU with regard to violence between Fascists and Italian trade unionists. In La Voix du Peuple’s description of the 1921 Congress, it described the greeting the IFTU sent to the Confederal Congress. Included among a list of IFTU priorities, it listed “Support given to Italians against Fascism, as Dugoni described.” Dugoni was a representative of Italy’s General Confederation of Labor. At the 1921 Congress, he argued against affiliation with the trade-union international in Moscow. His speech, which was among several speeches by representative of union organizations from different countries, emphasized the actual aid that the IFTU provided to Italian workers, specifically evoking the rise of fascism in Italy as an area in which the IFTU provided effective aid. In his speech to delegates, Dugoni described fascism as a “means of the Italian Bourgeoisie.” He went on to praise the IFTU for its “material solidarity” with Italian workers. Echoing Dugoni, Edo Fimmen, a Dutch union leader who was the Secretary of the re-founded IFTU appealed to the delegates with stories of the International’s action against Italian

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58 “Le Salut de La Federation Syndicale Internationale,” La Voix Du Peuple, August 1921.
fascism. He said “And you heard comrade Dugoni. He told you that only the International Federation of Trade Unions in Amsterdam came to the aid of Italian comrades at the moment that the fascist movement endangered them.” These mentions of fascism, as a movement understood to be dangerous and yet a kind of political football at the same time, were reflected in ongoing coverage of the far-right in Italy throughout the early 1920’s. For the most part, though, international coverage of Italy before the March on Rome remained off of the front pages of Confederal publications and in the sections detailing international affairs on the paper’s third page.

The language used by the CGT to oppose fascist forces before their ascension to power mirrored the language deployed by other groups on the French left, in what seems to have been a consensus about the nature of the Italian far-right movement. In an interesting contrast, left-wing forces in France seemed to have a unified attitude of opposition towards Italian fascism when their own politics were at their most combative and disparate. Before the March on Rome in October 1922, most accounts of the Fascists focused on their dictatorial and undemocratic behavior as well as their battles with Italian socialists and trade-unionists. An article in Le Peuple, published in October of 1921 described Fascist violence against strikers as having the support of the Italian government, claiming that “If the reign of fascism is not yet ‘de jure,’ it is clearly, and essentially, ‘de facto.’” The article goes on to claim that fascist gangs engaged in political violence regularly across Italy, superseding the authority of the elected government with the support of wealthy Italians. The line taken by CGT

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60 XXIIe congrès national corporatif (XVIe de la C. G. T.), 309.
61 “La Dictature Des Fascistes,” Le Peuple, August 22, 1921.
organs about these initial fascist activities, which strongly opposed fascist activity in Italy and saw it as the project of the Italian bourgeoisie, was very similar to the line taken in other left-wing outlets. *Le Populaire*, the SFIO’s daily newspaper, carried similarly worded stories about the rise of Italy’s fascists. In both of these outlets, references to French politics were minimal and they tended to present themselves as straightforward accounts of foreign events.

While stories of Italian fascism deplored its rise in language common among left-wing publications in France, few stories made the front page of *Le Peuple* unless they were immediately relevant to France or endorsed the vigorous anti-Communist ideology that dominated the majority perspective of the CGT before the organizations split and became a foundational principle of the new Confederation after syndical division. When the March on Rome occurred, the coverage in central Confederal publications combined condemnations of the Fascists with continued loud condemnations of Communist and Communist politicians. This condemnation was not reserved for coverage of fascism, but was a central part of nearly all CGT publications aimed at the general public. Throughout the 1920’s both Communist and non-Communist political newspapers devoted articles to attacking one another nearly every day. The coverage was vituperative, harsh and amply answered specific charges in ongoing debates. Echoing earlier language, the CGT frequently referred to Communist ideology as dictatorial and portrayed PCF leaders as opponents of democracy, charlatans, and liars. The tone served as a foundational part of how the CGT portrayed itself to the public through propaganda both in its newspaper and in pamphlets.
In October of 1922, when Mussolini’s forces carried out their rehearsed seizure of power, reaction in France’s left-wing press was universally negative. In the midst of its outrage, though, the CGT continued to prioritize its battle with the Communists, going so far as to analogize fascist Italy to the Soviet Union and to portray the two as equivalents. This analogy was based on a set of political understandings that underlay the entirety of interwar Confederal politics. The CGT, concerned with the progressive struggle for “liberties,” embraced the democratic, parliamentary regime. Fascism and Communism were equally opposed by the CGT for their rejection of it.

On October 28th, before Mussolini, had completed his seizure of power, Le Peuple provided a straightforward account of the Facta government’s resignation and the role of the Fascists in engineering it.62 The article did not make the front page. The next day’s account, though, which was written when the Fascist seizure of power had been assured, was placed on the front page and contained vigorous attacks on international Communism. The article described the Fascist demonstrations in Rome and the King’s nomination of Mussolini as Prime Minister. Taking a jaundiced, cynical tone, the story, titled “Will Fascism Govern say Italy,” declared of fascism that “Its apologists say that it is animated by a social spirit. Its origins do not permit this kind of pretention; its acts up to this point contradict it. Italian Workers had to protest to the Syndical International against fascist wrongdoing.” The article, not content to simply attack the fascists, also attempted to associate fascist violence with Communism. It called fascism “a dictatorship … that can only be compared to

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Bolshevist tyranny. We are told that that fascism is born out of communist excesses and that it borrows from communism its methods of struggle … to us, that is one more reason to abhor it."63 Coverage in the following days struck a similar tone. The emphasis on the dictatorial character of Italian fascism evokes the kind of objections that had been raised against the Soviet Union during the period of syndical division. As an organization that had committed itself to working within legal political structures, the CGT viewed illegality, and particularly opposition to parliamentary government, as essentially objectionable and dangerous positions.

It was articles analyzing the rise of Mussolini that would bring the CGT closest to developing an ideological and theoretical definition of fascism, one that would emphasize the areas found most objectionable and which were most useful in the political polemics in which it itself engaged. These definitions of fascism tended to focus on its revolutionary and illegal character. In November of 1922, soon after Mussolini had seized power, *Le Peuple* published an article titled “Bolshevism, Fascism and Syndicalism,” which, during an attack on Communist Party leader Marcel Cachin for advocating that workers seize power, specified its understanding of fascism as a revolutionary movement. It said that “when we speak of revolution, we do not limit ourselves to the dangerous solution of the coup, in which our nation is so practiced as to teach, and which it has practiced quite different from the situation we are presently in.” It further claimed that support for revolution “supposes a proletariat detached from romantic prejudices … If a dictator is of a Roman or Muscovite strain, the dignified and free proletariat will repudiate it with the same contempt.”64

December of 1922, Alphonse Aulard, a professor of history, wrote an article attempting to historically and socially situate fascism. Like many later accounts, Aulard ascribed fascism’s victory to weaknesses in the democratic and parliamentary system. Of parliamentary government, the article said “The success of fascism in Italy shows us that we cannot delay improving it.” The article went on to claim that “despotism, in the dark ignorance in which it is obliged to hide, can only get worse … [while] democracy, in the light of liberty, can evolve, improve, repair its flaws.”

The idea that fascism was born out of weak democracy would prove to have two roles in the CGT’s descriptions of the idea of a fascist menace. The first was that it allowed the Confederation, in the middle and late 1920’s, to argue that the strength of French democracy made a fascist takeover unlikely. Second, it allowed the CGT to use the idea of a fascist threat caused by an impotent state to push its economic program in the early 1930’s.

*Le Peuple*, in the early 1920’s, carried frequent stories cataloguing Mussolini’s government’s offenses against the Italian labor and socialist movement, to the point that the topic became a stalwart of Confederal propaganda. In re-establishing the meaning of CGT membership and politics, adherence to republican standards of democratic rights became a central point of emphasis in the construction of the identity of the Confederal worker. While the ideal Confederal member would be an opponent of fascism, his opposition to fascism would have to come not only through the ideological structure of democratic politics, but also, increasingly, through participation directly in French politics.

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Having established Fascism as an Italian political movement that was opposed by CGT-associated organizations for its dictatorship and violence, the Confederation continued to view Fascism as a fundamentally foreign threat throughout the 1920’s. In so doing, it was able to delineate anti-fascist action as an issue that did not merit deviation from the strict anti-Communist line the Confederation had taken. The CGT’s leadership was quick to condemn fascist politics and Confederal propaganda decried the idea of Italian fascists working in France, but there was little indication of any vision of a transnational far-right threat. The term “fascist” was reserved for use as a descriptive term in discussions of Italy and as a pejorative to be used against right-wing groups in France. That vision of fascism was, throughout the 1920’s, paired with broader trends in CGT propaganda that emphasized the centrality of the French nation to the Confederation’s identity and the degree to which Italian Fascism set Italy against the French Republic. This vision was in line with some of the views expressed in the politically diverse SFIO. As the 1920’s ended, it became a point of fundamental distinction between the CGT and the increasingly radical French Communist Party.

Observing and Organizing Against Italian Fascism

After the fascist seizure of power and the re-creation and centralization of the CGT, the consistently negative Confederal attitude towards fascism began to take on a new political significance. Italy’s role as a potential foreign adversary began to overshadow descriptions of fascism as an internal political movement. In contrast with other organizations on France’s left, the CGT was reluctant to apply the label of “fascist” to French far-right organizations. This reluctance to address fascism as a primary political concern in France was, at least as much as the Confederation’s
initial response to Mussolini’s seizure of power, driven by opposition to the views expressed by the PCF and the Comintern. Anti-fascist political activity undertaken by the CGT tended to restrict itself to protests surrounding foreign affairs or foreign workers in France and the idea of anti-fascism as a specific realm of political action was tainted in the eyes of Confederal leadership due to its close association with the PCF. Overall, the period between the rise of Italian Fascism and the beginning of France’s financial crisis during the Great Depression was marked in the CGT by an overall organizational transformation towards a new form of organization, one that mirrored the “Minimum Program” of 1918 and the understanding of cooperation with state authorities that characterized the Confederation during the era of the Politique de Présence.

After Mussolini’s seizure of power, Le Peuple regularly reported on abuses by the Italian government through its coverage of foreign affairs. As Mussolini killed and banned his political opponents, the CGT addressed his actions, often with direct reference to the IFTU’s condemnations. Condemnations of early fascist actions were frequent in Le Peuple’s sections on foreign affairs. A 1923 article described Mussolini as a “dictator” and made reference to fascism’s “terroristic violence.”66 Reporting on the 1924 Congress of the IFTU, the paper emphasized that the Congress “Expressed its sympathy to all victims of reaction … particularly to the Italian proletariat, which has its activity for the increase of salaries and better labor conditions limited by fascist reaction and its regime of violence.”67 Generally, coverage of events in Mussolini’s Italy focused on violations of democratic order and

violence against opponents and always expressed disapproval of Mussolini’s violence against his opponents, particularly his suppression of trade unions. Particular emphasis was placed on the capitalist nature of fascism and the illegal methods it was willing to use against left-wing opponents. Throughout the 1920’s most central Confederal coverage of Italy deplored Mussolini’s actions mainly for the illegality and the damage they did to the CGT’s affiliated organizations in Italy. Much of this coverage understood the main internal consequence of fascist government to be the abrogation of democratic rights. For the CGT, this meant

Opposition to the dictatorial nature of Italian fascism was present beyond the Confederation’s outward-facing propaganda. After the March on Rome, opposition to fascism became a part of the standard list of political convictions avowed within the CGT. From 1923 onwards, each Congress of the CGT would be addressed by a representative of Italian labor organizations, who would make a short speech describing the struggle against the Fascist government and commend the CGT for its solidarity. These speeches, combined with *Le Peuple’s* coverage of politics in Italy, demonstrate that opposition to fascism was a political position the CGT was willing to embrace in its statements. Embracing anti-fascism in general, though, did not mean that the organization was willing to compromise other priorities to its benefit or envision an immediate fascist threat to France. At every Confederal Congress after 1923, a delegate representing Italian labor organizations would give a statement of solidarity with the CGT. These speeches often mirrored CGT claims about the undemocratic and dangerous nature of Italian Fascism and commended the CGT for its opposition. The tone of these speeches mirrored the reports carried in *Le Peuple*
in the horror they expressed at the destruction of democratic government and suppression of left-wing and trade-union organizations in Italy.

While the central Confederal daily was generally deploring Italian fascism in their propaganda, at the level of individual Unions and Confederations, expression of opposition to fascism became a standard part of general declarations of attitude issued both by the CGT’s constituent organizations. La Voix du Peuple carried accounts of the results of the congresses of Departmental Unions and national Confederations. By 1923, these reports had begun to make specific mention of fascism as a political subject unto itself. The Report voted on by the Congress of the Ille-et-Vilaine Departmental Union was recorded by La Voix du Peuple thus: “[the report] enumerated all the actions and gestures of the union during the year: the struggle for wages; meetings for amnesty, against fascism; propaganda for the eight hours; social insurance.”68 As the 1920’s continued, expression of horror towards fascism and solidarity with the Italian working class would become a standard part of the catechism of priorities expressed by the CGT at all of its organizational levels. These condemnations made by local organizations and industrial federations of the CGT as part of a standard series of declarations of political alignment during their congresses, generally limited themselves to stating solidarity with victims of fascism and were mainly concerned with Fascism in Italy, rarely specifically proposing a Fascist danger in France.

After the Comintern’s 1922 adoption of the United Front policy, which aimed at rapprochement with the social-democratic forces that had been abandoned with the

foundation of the Third International, opposition to fascism became a primary rhetorical tool used by the PCF and the CGTU as they begin a push for the reunification of France’s labor movement. In France’s labor movement, the United Front manifested through active attempts to reunify the CGT. The same issue of *La Voix du Peuple* that carried a report of the Ille-et-Villaine’s Departmental Union’s activity also contained a series of documents related to the question of reunification and the United Front policy. The issue contained correspondence between some of the CGT’s industrial federations and their CGTU counterparts, which were appealing for reunification. In general, the CGT federations responded to these requests with acceptance of the general principle of unity, but continued to argue that reunification could only be realized through the submission of the Communist organizations to the authority of the CGT, the same position that had been expressed during the 1923 Congress. One response by the CGTU, though, to letters reaffirming Confederal doctrine, evoked fascism as a potential inspiration for syndical reunification, citing the need for a broad from of left-wing organizations to fight it. The letter, the last in an exchange between the CGT Employees Federation and the CGTU’s was sent by CGTU representative Charles Pietri, who listed as his first bullet-point in favor of reunification “The urgent necessity of syndical unity to struggle against the *patronat*, to prevent fascism and the danger of war.” Proposals for a unified front had been specifically and decisively rejected by the CGT’s 1923 Congress, Pietri’s account, though, is among the first such appeals to specifically make reference to a potential threat of fascism in France.

Though clearly opposed to fascism in its own propaganda and political action, the CGT tended to present the evocation of fascism as a justification for a Unified Front with Communists as little more than a trick. There is some evidence of tentative acceptance of the idea of the Unified Front, at least below the Confederal level. On August 16th, _Le Peuple_ carried an update from the Departmental Union in Finistère, which noted that it had joined with other groups, including the local Communist party in the creation of “a Committee of Vigilance and Action against the fascist actions _Action Française_ and other reactionary groups want to carry out.” The article also noted, though, that “The Committee of Vigilance and Action will not have any goals other than struggle against fascism and its barbarous, murderous methods.”70 That announcement, only a few sentences long, which came from a departmental union that elected representatives more favorable to syndical unity than most speakers at the 1923 Congress, was followed only four days later by a declaration explicitly condemning the idea of cooperating with Communists on anti-fascist grounds. The August 20th edition of _Le Peuple_ featured an article titled “Bolshevism and Fascism: Same Methods, Same Spirit,” which claimed that Communists:

> Use it [fascism] partially to show the necessity of their own existence, Communism would call itself the sole force capable of combatting the fascist danger. Fascism is also, for them, a pretext to discredit their socialist and syndicalist adversaries.

The article also claimed that German Communists had collaborated with fascists by providing them space in Communist newspapers. It ended by claiming that “Fascism will not be definitively vanquished except by the true unification of the forces of organized labor and the disappearance of the poisoned psychology of war. Yet, it is

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not quite that Muscovite bolshevism and its pupil the Comintern work towards.”

This article, which was one of many that equated Communism and Fascism, makes clear the degree to which support for democratic government became central to the CGT’s differentiation from other political groups. Revolution, embodied by the Russian revolution, was understood to be deadly, warlike, and illegal, and was therefore abhorrent to the CGT.

The attitude established during 1923 would be confirmed by one of the first tests of how Fascist violence could alter the political concerns of the CGT. The murder of Giacomo Matteotti, an Italian Socialist well-known for his condemnations of Fascism, shocked the French press and drew international attention. In response to the killing, the PCF sharpened its “Unified Front” line and issued clear calls for cooperative action with the CGT and SFIO. The initial response in the CGT was centralized condemnation of the murder. The Bureau Administrative even sent an exemplary declaration to the secretaries of Departmental Unions and Industrial federations with a form statement of solidarity they could sign after Matteotti’s funeral. It included lines like “[the members] address the Italian proletariat which, vigorously, stands against Mussolini and his partisans and assures them of their most cordial sympathy and of their total devotion to helping them succeed.” That circular, sent on August 20th, was issued a month after the CGT had loudly refused direct cooperation with the PCF over the killing.

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72 “Circulaires,” La Voix Du Peuple, December 1924, 544.
Le Peuple expressed its outrage over the assassination of Matteotti in terms similar to those that were used to routinely condemn the actions of the Italian government, writing shortly after Matteotti’s murder that “The horrible crime committed with the complicity of the government cannot be explained by the specious arguments put forward by the Fascist press.” The same article praised demonstrations against the murder thus: “Nearly everywhere, demonstrations have been called to protest against the assassination of Matteotti,”73 going on to describe demonstrations by the SFIO in France and by other socialist parties internationally. The same issue of Le Peuple carried a statement from the Bureau Confederal responding to an invitation to a joint demonstration sent by the leadership of the PCF.

The General Confederation of Labor will not respond to the appeal made by the Communist Party regarding a demonstration it wishes to organize on Sunday. The CGT refuses to subject itself to the maneuvers of the Communist Party; it wishes to remain master of its attitude and its decisions. It has sufficiently affirmed its sentiments with regard to the Mussolinian regime … The CGT signifies once more that it does not intend to obey when its habitual detractors appeal to it. It will examine the facts in total independence and subordinate its actions to its own decisions.74

La Voix du Peuple described the Bureau Confederal’s statement as having “fixed the position of the CGT” and noted that it was approved by the Comission Administrative during its meeting on July 6 1924.75 Indeed, the position towards cooperation that was taken by the CGT in 1924 was essentially fixed in a specific position towards cooperation with Communists and their affiliated organizations. The idea that the United Front policy was little more than ruse aimed at harming the French labor movement was deployed both against requests for common action on the international

74 “La Manifestation Communiste,” Le Peuple, June 21, 1924
75 “Séance Du 6 Juillet 1924,” La Voix Du Peuple, August 1924.
front throughout the 1920’s and against requests for common action within France. The structure and frequency of those refusals, and CGT ridicule of the idea of a United Front, indicate that though the Confederation opposed Italian Fascism, it was hardly willing to subordinate other political goals, like opposition to Communism, to joint action with political enemies. The same kinds of tension that emerged with Matteotti’s death between opposing Fascism and working with Communists were continued in the Confederation’s treatment of Italy as well as in its treatment of far-right groups that emerged in France.

**The Domestic Far-Right: Opposing Fascism and Communism**

In its descriptions of groups on own France’s far-right, the CGT eventually used the term “fascist” or referred to groups having fascist sympathies. In general, the term was used as an insult against those organizations and individuals, from actual far-right leagues to parliamentary conservatives, that the CGT viewed as opponents of civil liberties. These characterizations became prevalent only after the March on Rome, and were a standard part of how groups like *Action Française*, a political league of the Catholic right that embraced political violence, were described by 1923. Though the language used to refer to these groups was similar to the language employed by the SFIO and the Communist Party, the CGT placed a comparatively small emphasis on the risks posed by French fascists. The Confederal press was perfectly willing to condemn France’s far-right, but it could hardly be said to have presented them as an existential threat to the Republic. As often as condemnation, the CGT chose mockery in its statements directed towards France’s domestic far-right. This choice was often paired with ridicule of Communist efforts to organize directly against groups like *Action Française* and the *Faisceau*, France’s first self-described
“fascist” organization. The CGT, which rooted itself in a left-wing political tradition, strongly opposed France’s domestic right-wing. In its attacks on them, it was willing to accuse them of fascism or sympathy towards it, mainly for their positions on the “liberties” that the Confederation had embraced since the First World War. The spectrum of political organizations called “fascist” by the CGT was a broad one, and the term often had the appearance of an epithet used to describe any organization accused of being insufficiently favorable to republicanism or respectful to the rights of workers.

Opponents, whether they were in parliament or outside of it, who were viewed as opponents of the kind of political rights the CGT defended, were labelled “fascists” in the Confederation’s propaganda. These accusations, though, fit more in the category of political insult than sincere concern about the safety of the state, as evidenced by the organization’s opposition to the idea of any immediate fascist danger, which rested on confidence in the popularity of republicanism in France as well as an unwillingness to cooperate with the Communists. Over all, the CGT did oppose the activities of far-right groups in France like the *Faisceau* and *Action Française*, but this concern was always tempered by a strong opposition to Communism. These two priorities were combined by a number of different means, ranging from direct claims of equivalence to claims that Communist efforts provided provocation, and therefore accidental support, that fascists used to support their own organizations.

The specific position that the CGT staked out towards Italian Fascism, characterized by legalistic, rather than class-based condemnation and by an
unwillingness to consider common action with political enemies was mirrored in its position towards France’s own far-right, which it was willing to ridicule and attack, but unwilling to treat as an urgent political threat. The specific refusal demonstrated in the case of Matteoti was matched with a general opposition to any kind of participation in the Communist movement’s Unified Front tactic, which called on Communist parties to coordinate with non-Communist organizations of the left. In the leadership of the CGT, this new tactic failed to blunt the vigor of the organization’s anti-Communism. As the 1920’s continued, the Communist Party began to more frequently apply its idea of the *Front Unique* to demonstrations targeting the French far-right and Fascist Italy. Through opposition to Communist efforts, the CGT developed a vision of the Fascist threat to France that rested mainly within the realm of foreign affairs and placed a comparatively small emphasis on the actions of France’s domestic far-right.

The period following the 1924 election saw a large increase in activity by right-wing leagues, some of which regularly trained their members in military arms and tactics. These leagues often had complicated relationships with Italian fascism, but their political opponents were quick to describe them as “fascist.” The CGT was no exception to this pattern and treated right-wing leagues with contempt.

The CGT’s first propagandistic uses of the term “fascism” applied it to the coalition of right-wing parties that had made up the right-wing *Bloc National*, which had governed from 1919 to 1924. In general, the Confederation’s propaganda did not hesitate to call France’s right-wing party sympathizers or emulators of Italian fascism. This charge generally referred to claims that they opposed democratic and
parliamentary government. Though *Le Peuple* rarely described the *Bloc* in stark terms as fascist, it often claimed that figures associated with the *Bloc* had sympathy for Italian fascism or were cut from similar ideological cloth. The defeat of the *Bloc* in 1924’s elections inspired a surge in the popularity and strength of right-wing organizations embittered by the victory of a coalition that included Socialists. This surge in organization inspired reaction across the left-wing press. In discussing the official political right-wing, *Le Peuple* often implied that its supporters and politics at least strengthened fascism in France. In an article on January 3rd 1925, the newspaper published an article under the pseudonym “Civis,” which evoked Roman citizenship, arguing that the *Bloc National*, and daily newspapers associated with it, were fascist in their politics. The article argued that support for “liberty” by representatives of the right-wing press was hypocritical. It said “If the *Bloc National*, which you supported, had not sunk into national disgust, what would remain of press freedom? We would be under the fascist boot.” It also claimed that the election of the *Cartel Des Gauches* in 1924 had resulted in policies that “even if they do not correspond entirely to the opinions published here, have at least brought the country out of its imperialist rut, close to the pits of fascism.”

The CGT’s opposition to far-right organizations in France was stated with the same sort of republican language that characterized its treatment of Mussolini’s dictatorship in Italy, which it often evoked as evidence against. In November 1925, Georges Valois, a former member of *Action Française*, founded a group called the

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Faisceau which was explicitly inspired by Italian Fascism.\textsuperscript{77} The CGT’s response to the Faisceau underlined how integral opposition to Communism was to the organization’s vision of Fascism in France. Rarely was any reference made to the organization without a comparison of its anti-parliamentary and revolutionary attitude to that of the Communists. Valois’ movement was small compared to the far-right leagues that would emerge after it, but its presence in France provided the first opportunity for left-wing organizations to organize against a political formation that expressly described itself as “fascist.” The Faisceau first rallied publicly in November of 1925, and the group immediately attracted the attention of the Confederal Press.\textsuperscript{78} An article in Le Peuple printed on November 17\textsuperscript{th} 1925 deplored the rise of Valois’ organization, but also claimed that “Despite the recent flashy exhibitions by the ‘blue-shirts,’ the latest creation of Mr. Georges Valois, fascism does not constitute, at the current moment, a serious danger to our country.” The article, like many Confederal publications dealing with fascism, argued that France’s republican system and organizations like the CGT “are ready to break any fascist movement that attempts to throttle public liberties.” In terms of causes, the article blamed the parliamentary system’s failure to deal with issues like rising prices for the rise of Valois’ organization.\textsuperscript{79} The article could not be said to portray a fascist revolution in France as an urgent danger, and instead treated the organizations of the far-right as contemptible and violent, if often ridiculous, political foes.\textsuperscript{80} The article

\textsuperscript{78} Soucy, 90.
\textsuperscript{79} Francis Million, “La Responsabilité Du Parlement,” Le Peuple, November 17, 1925, 1.
\textsuperscript{80} Robert Soucy’s book, as well as Samuel Kalman’s The Extreme Right in Interwar France: The Faisceau and the Croix de Feu provide an excellent overview of the ideology and organization of the Faisceau of the kind that this thesis cannot.
reflected an attitude, common in *Le Peuple*, that the responsibility for the rise of extra-parliamentary leagues lay with incompetent politicians who failed to address vital economic questions.

Beyond these initial reactions in the form of political commentary which, though it was carried prominently in *Le Peuple*, could only claim to be the expressed opinions of its authors, who for their part only represented a portion of the political spectrum of the CGT, the majority that governed the *Comité Confederal*, an official announcement from the *Commission Administrative* appeared on the front page of *Le Peuple* on November 26th 1925. The announcement declared that:

> During its last meeting, the Administrative Commission of the CGT, having taken account of information received on the development of the fascist movement: Noting as well the pro-fascist campaign of the major dailies: Calls the attention of workers to these maneuvers, the development of which could constitute a serious danger for public and workers’ liberties … The C.A (*Commission Administrative*) considers that, without exaggerating the present danger it is important that workers guard themselves and are able to react strongly against any forceful acts that the troubled political situation could encourage.81

Beyond simple objections to the policies and practices of groups like Valois’, discussions of the domestic far-right tended to specifically attack the French Communist party as a moral equivalent of, or even a driving force behind, France’s own far-right movements. Coverage of the *Faisceau* and Valois rarely failed to make some claim of equivalence between those movements and French Communism. Indeed, any stories about fascism that did not specifically focus on individual events in Italy in *Le Peuple* were bound to include some kind of statement of equivalence between fascism and Communism as political movements. These varied from claims

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that Communists aided fascism indirectly through their provocations to direct claims that Communist politicians were themselves “red fascists.”

Beyond mere equivalences, though, the subject of anti-fascism became vital to attacks on Communism through claims in CGT media that the French Communist Party was either only cynically anti-fascist or that Communists exaggerated the threat of fascism in order to attract workers to their party. On January 6th 1925, *Le Peuple’s* front page carried an epigraph above its headline (as was standard for the paper) which read “It’s curious! It is only the followers of fascism that fear communism, and only the students of communism that fear fascism.”82 This attitude, that fear of fascism was a mainly Communist viewpoint was one widely reflected in propaganda produced by the majority-controlled organs of the CGT. In April of 1925, a fight broke out between armed Communist Party members and supporters of Pierre Tattinger’s *Jeunesses Patriotes*, a right-wing league affiliated with factions of the parliamentary right. In the combat, several members of Tattinger’s organization were killed.83 In *Le Peuple*, the response was one of stark condemnation of Communist activity. An article titled “The Game of Arms,” the paper condemned the killings and, addressing itself to the leaders of the Communist Party declared that “your tactics, your methods, your bolshevization facilitates the provocative game of arms and aggravates the current peril. Your organized catastrophism is, in truth, the best auxiliary of fascism.”84

82 *Le Peuple*, January 6, 1925
83 Soucy, *French Fascism*, 55.
84 René De Marmande, “Propos de Dimanche,” *Le Peuple*, April 26, 1925.
As 1925 ended and 1926 began, the *Faisceau* continued to demonstrate and grow, and *Le Peuple* continued to cover Valois’ organization. This coverage presented the organization as dangerous, but often specifically denied that it posed a serious threat to the existence of the French Republic. These denials took on a much more specific and pointed nature when the issue was posed counter to Communist claims about the nature of a supposed fascist threat to France. In February of 1926, Léon Émery wrote a column on the front page of *Le Peuple* condemning Italian fascism in standard Confederal language, but warning against cooperation with or sympathy towards Communist anti-fascist projects. He wrote the article justifying the fact that he “said that reaction does not need to be denounced, especially in the carnivalesque form it tries to take in imitation of Italian fascism.” Though the article compared Clemançeau’s government to fascism in its methods and ideology, over all it claimed that the imposition of the CGT’s political program was the only adequate opposition to reactionary ideology. He wrote “Be well assured that the settlement of these question will condemn forever our fascist agitators to the inoffensive mediocrity that is their lot.” It concluded by claiming that “the best safeguard against it does not reside in the creation of committees whose workings are not known but in the development of a syndicalism conscious of its goals and capable of rallying to itself the masses of workers and freethinking intellectuals.”

Émery’s column reflected a view of anti-fascist organization as a specifically Communist pursuit. If it was indeed understood as a Communist pursuit, the CGT would naturally view it as an error or a trick.

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The March 13th 1925 issue of Le Peuple carried a prime example of the way the Confederal press evaluated Communist reactions to Fascism in general and appeals for unity with other left-wing organizations. In an article titled “Contre le Fascisme,” the paper wrote that “every day, the Communist press and its subsidiaries, the self declared Unitaires, cry loudly ‘death to fascism.’” The article argued that Communists were “red fascists,” for their acceptance of violence and belief in revolution, and that they had to be opposed as vigorously as actual fascist organizations.\(^8^6\) This kind of declaration was common in coverage of the Faisceau and the term “fascist” itself became a popular description of the activities of Communists and their affiliated organizations.

Beyond merely using the term “fascist” as an insult, the CGT also attacked Communist efforts to fight fascism as farcical. In June of 1926, the Faisceau staged a large demonstration in Reims. The event was counter-protested by the PCF. In its coverage, Le Peuple attacked Valois, but its coverage portrayed the rally as farcical rather than dangerous. An article titled “Dans Le Lac” said that “Mr. George Valois mobilized his troops last Sunday in Reims. The large champenoise city, which has known other misfortunes, was not bothered a bit.” Opposition to the rally was described thus: “Some Communists, who seem to have the destiny of taking everything seriously, strove to organize a counter-demonstration …The only thing worth remembering is the failure of the pompous and ridiculous Valoisian demonstration.”\(^8^7\) The description in Le Peuple was starkly different from the one published in L’Humanité, which described in an article titled, “The Faisceau’s Failure

\(^{8^7}\) “Dans Le Lac,” Le Peuple, June 29, 1926.
in Reims: Socialists and Communists, Unitaires and Confédérés, have built the United Front,” a speech by a CGTU official and claimed that he "showed that reformists and Unitaires decided to bar the route of murderous fascism." The gap in characterization demonstrated by these two articles was the norm in coverage of demonstrations of France’s far-right, though rallies by the Faisceau were rarely the topic of front-page coverage in either papers. L’Humanité did characterize different aspects of French society as “fascist,” but tended to apply the term as often to actions of the republican government as to actions undertaken by independent far-right organizations. The CGT’s association of anti-Fascism with its political adversary was not complete. It was limited to a national context.

The CGT’s response to the demonstrations in Reims was standard fare for the Confederation in its treatment of Communist opposition to fascism. Opposition to street demonstrations against fascism and Communist efforts to reunite under the pretext of an immediate fascist threat did not indicate a general willingness to accept or accommodate fascism. It rather indicated that the CGT’s vision of appropriate anti-fascist politics, and indeed of the fascist threat facing it and France, lay outside of immediate electoral questions or the presence of armed groups on French streets. Instead, the CGT developed a vision of anti-fascism that was consistent with the new vision of political engagement that had become prominent in the Confederation after the 1922 split. Rather than seeking to confront the French far-right in the streets, the CGT instead mounted campaigns to exclude Italian delegates from the international organizations it participated in. The Confederation tended to approach fascism from a

88 “Le Fascisme En Échec a Reims,” L’Humanité, June 29, 1926, 1.
synthesis of national and international perspectives. Though it rarely portrayed a fear of authentically French fascism, it was deeply concerned with demonstrating that international fascism posed a threat to France. In doing so, the Confederation was able to continue to repudiate the Communist Party and provide a vision of anti-fascism that was in line the specific conception it developed of itself during the interwar period.

Ultimately, the organizations that the CGT had identified as fascist or fascist-sympathizers rose and fell quickly in the 1920’s. By 1927, most of them had disappeared from national relevance. These leagues had never risen to the level of a national crisis in the eyes of the CGT, but they were certainly identified as political enemies. Their collapse in 1927 began a general decrease in the degree to which the Confederation invoked fascism in its propaganda. In *French Fascism: The First Wave*, Robert Soucy attributes the decline of the far-right leagues to several factors, including the election of a conservative government in 1927 and the association opponents were able to make between the French far-right and Italian fascism. What the CGT deemed objectionable in the political activities of the leagues, indeed what it used as cause to declare them (and other right-wing groups or individuals) “fascist,” was their rejection of legal means and the republican state.

**Confederal Anti-Fascism on the Global Stage**

The era of the *Politique de Présence* was characterized not only by a Confederal realignment towards the achievement of its political goals through participation in state organs at the national level, but also towards participation in

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89 Soucy, *French Fascism*, 217.
90 Soucy, 224.
international bodies, both political and administrative. This shift had its precedent in Léon Jouhaux’s frenzied efforts to build unity among international trade-union organizations in the run-up to the First World War. Jouhaux was a partisan of international cooperation and governance, and the CGT actively participated in organizations like the International Trade-Union Federation and the International Labor Organization. The CGT established its credentials as both an opponent of fascism and a voice for French workers through propaganda focusing on its opposition to the recognition of Fascist delegates as representatives of Italian workers and support for labor organizations as representative bodies within democratic states. This activity, more than the street demonstrations that it disdained, was indicative of exactly what kind of organization the interwar CGT was. International legalistic action within established institutions was presented as an important means by which fascism could be combatted and was given as evidence of the seriousness and credibility of the CGT in comparison to a Communist party that embraced a political line that only heightened tensions between itself and other political organizations. Meanwhile, while continuing to mix anti-Communism and anti-Fascism, the CGT proposed that the Confederal program of political and economic action was an alternative to the militant right and left.

As soon as Mussolini seized power in Italy, he began suppressing trade-union and socialist organizations. The kinds of protests against this suppression that the CGT made were discussed in previous sections. It is important to note, though, that these protests, as often as they were expressed as the will of the CGT, were phrased as complaints by the IFTU. Identification with the international organization was
clear in *Le Peuple*, where congresses of the IFTU received similar coverage to the CGT’s. Léon Jouhaux’s biographers emphasize that during the interwar period, he worked hard to build the IFTU. In their view, this work was largely based on Jouhaux’s desire to avoid another World War and his belief that international organizations could help assure international peace.\(^9\) In addition, though, Jouhaux was a believer in international economic organization as a means of staving off economic crisis and assuring global labor standards. His participation in the organizations like the ILO and IFTU received constant coverage from the *Le Peuple* and *La Voix du Peuple* and served as an essential part of the institutional identity the CGT established for itself. The CGT was, during the latter half of the 1920’s and first years of the 1930’s, proud to demonstrate its opposition to fascism, but it did so in ways that were clearly separate from the means of its Communist opponents.

Opposition to the French right was, as shown previously, an important context in which the CGT discussed fascism during the interwar period. Internationally, the CGT was able to leverage the tradition of patriotism it had established during the First World War. *Le Peuple* reported in outraged tones on instances of supposed Italian aggression against France and other countries. The organization’s commitment to international peace led to a strong opposition to the warlike character of Italian fascism. Increasingly, the specifically anti-French aspects of Italian fascism were emphasized in Confederal propaganda. This specific synthesis of French nationalism and opposition to fascism gave the CGT a chance to attack not only Italian fascists, but also those in France who proclaimed sympathy for them. Most of these articles,

rather than being front-page opinion columns, were carried on the third page of *Le Peuple* in the sections covering foreign affairs.

An early example of how the CGT described Italian attacks on France appeared in the November 7th 1925 issue of *Le Peuple*, which featured an article titled “letter from Italy,”92 which described the degree to which Mussolini’s government expressed opposition to France as a manifestation of aggression and imperialism.

“One cannot but make brief allusion to the armament and military preparation conducted methodically and with perseverance against the French and Austrian borders.” It further claimed that “‘imperial’ fascism proclaims that it wants Tunisia” and that fascism posed a threat to French control of Corsica. The idea of Italian aggression against France continued to be a serious problem in the eyes of the CGT’s daily newspaper. From 1925 onward, this idea became a central means by which Italian fascism was attacked in the French press.

Articles describing Italian misdeeds naturally focused on the suppression of Italian trade-union organizations and tended to portray fascism as suppressor of political liberties, which was directly linked to the anti-parliamentary and dictatorial character of Mussolini’s government. That criticism formed the backbone of CGT efforts to exclude organizations associated with Italy’s fascist government from any international bodies. The original split in the CGT was over the question of international affiliations and affiliation with the IFTU was important to how the organization described itself. Jouhaux was a strong believer in cooperation through the League of Nations, and according to his biographers, “Jouhaux strove to use the

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strength of the IFTU to make governments take account of the views of international syndicalism … during the 1922 Geneva Conference, at the head of the IFTU delegation, he protested against the lack of representation of the workers’ movement.”

Jouhaux’s belief in international cooperation was reflected in the pages of Le Peuple, which frequently called for international economic cooperation and planning. The first was its campaign against the representation of Italian workers by the fascist government in bodies like the International Labor Organization.

During the last few years of the 1920’s The CGT continued to portray itself as speaking on behalf of French workers, and indeed international workers, in its condemnations of fascist attacks on the Italian labor movement. This campaign focused on the idea that as a state that repressed trade-union organizations, Italy did not deserve to represent itself at the International Labor Organization as the representative of Italian workers. In 1927, the CGT raised the issue of fascist representation in international bodies purporting to represent laborers across several different forums, including the IFTU, the League of Nations’ International Economic Crisis and the International Labour Office’s annual meeting in Geneva.

In 1924, at the IFTU’s Congress in Vienna, the first after the advent of Italian fascism, Raoul Lenoir, who was a close associate of Léon Jouhaux and who represented the Confederation at several international conferences, mentioned rejection of fascist syndical organizations during a debate on whether the Federation should recognize Soviet trade-unions. In his speech, Lenoir said “We do not confuse

93 Georges and Tintant, Léon Jouhaux, 2:58.
relationships between governments and the position of workers’ movement. No one
dreams of asking for a rupture with fascist Italy, but no one could imagine bowing to
the injunctions of fascist labor organizations.”95 The same Conference was covered
extensively in *Le Peuple*, which portrayed the CGT as leading an international charge
against the inclusion of Italian fascist organizations in the ILO. The coverage in *Le
Peuple* emphasized Jouhaux’s speech to the meeting of the ILO and claimed that
“The applause that had welcomed each orator doubled when Jouhaux appeared.” In
his speech, Jouhaux attacked supposed Swiss sympathy for fascism and loudly
declared his support for Italian socialists and trade-unionists.96 This comment was
made during the commencement of a longer campaign against the representation of
fascist labor organizations in international bodies. The International Labor
organization, as a direct subsidiary of the League of Nations and one that specifically
offered representation to labor organizations like the CGT was a specific target for
the CGT in its campaign against fascist representation. Like most Confederal press
coverage, these appeals relied on the republican political ideas that had developed
within the Confederation during the interwar period.

The campaign was renewed during each annual International Labour
Conference. In 1925, an article in *Le Peuple* proudly noted that representatives of
fascist labor organizations were “Excluded from all commissions by the unanimity of
the workers’ group, across tendencies, without the need for a prior agreement. The
representatives of the so-called fascist ‘unions,’ failed without saying a word.” The

95 “Le Congrès International de Vienne,” *La Voix Du Peuple*, August 1924, sec. Deuxieme Journée,
267.
96 Maurice Harmel, “Une Protestation International Contre Les Crimes Fascistes,” *Le Peuple*, June 24,
1924, 2.
article went on to note that “This is the third year that Italy has sent a delegation of fascist workers to Geneva. The leaders of the *Confederazione del Lavoro*, defeated in their own country, appealed to their foreign ‘companions’ to contest the right to represent Italian workers in Geneva.” The article also celebrated objections to the attacks on fascist delegated in the Italian press.\(^9^7\) Another article the next day reiterated the CGT’s objections and emphasized Jouhaux’s role. It noted that during the meeting of the Credentials Committee, “The representative of governments and the representative of owners supported the validation of Rossoni’s credentials, Jouhaux stood up against it and presented a minority report. The conference will therefore have to discuss the issue.” Opposition to Fascist union organizations in the Confederational press had been present since Mussolini’s government created them, but the meetings of the ILO provided a unique opportunity to voice concerns about Italian fascism within the kinds of institutions that Léon Jouhaux and the organization he led had championed since the end of the First World War.

Protests against fascist representation were made at every meeting of the International Labour Conference. In its coverage of the international conferences, the CGT often sought to advance its own political agenda, corresponding to the Minimum Program that had been put forward in 1918. The allegations against fascist organizations tended to focus on two main objections. The first was that unionism was suppressed violently in Italy, the second was that the organizations purporting to represent Italian workers were in fact representing Italian industry. In 1926, describing Italian labor law that subjected labor organizations to state control, *Le


\(^{98}\) A representative of Fascist labor organizations
Peuple declared that “Mussolini himself celebrated this ‘reform’ with his delirious lyricism. We can be sure that the reactions in Geneva will not echo the dictator’s phraseology. The fascists are aware of this and are beginning to take rhetorical precautions in their press. They announce that if they are put into the spotlight, they will leave and slam the doors.”99 This account, like others discussing the CGT’s activity in the ILO, emphasizes the reaction that attacks by international trade-union organizations inspired in Italy. This served to demonstrate that the actions of the CGT were at least recognized by its Italian opponent, even if it was unable to inspire a rejection of Italy within the ILO or the League of Nations.100

In 1927, the annual protest against fascist participation in the ILO was described in advance by La Voix du Peuple thus:

We must indicate on this subject the attitude of the entire workers' group, under the direction of the IFTU and through the voice of the secretary of the CGT, has not been modified with regard to fascism and its so called 'unions.' Once again this year, we can say in advance, our opposition will be forcefully demonstrated and the debate that we have succeeded in enlarging over the general principle of syndical unite will be, for us, a chance to demand the imprescriptible rights of all workers and to denounce the abominable abuses inflicted on our Italian comrades.101

The tone of the article, and its promise of representation as a goal in and of itself was typical of the statements made by Confederal organs in support of their action within bodies like the ILO. These kinds of complaints were made annually, and the CGT continually opposed the recognition of government-backed Italian labor organizations. This opposition was reiterated annually and presented as an important

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100 Italy would, of course, reject the League itself in 1937.
demonstration of international action in *Le Peuple*. In this way, opposition to Italian recognition within international bodies was a form of anti-fascism that fit well into the organizational framework that the CGT had established for itself. In addition, unlike street protests, which could draw large numbers of different groups, Jouhaux’s status as a known quantity guaranteed the Confederation a unique platform in which it did not risk mixing its opposition to fascism with any serious cooperation with Communist organizations.

Beyond opposition to Italian Fascism in international institutions, the CGT’s unique vision of anti-fascism also included the maintenance of another tradition that had been solidified during the First World War, support for France against perceived foreign aggression. In its discussions of Italy, and indeed in its discussions of France’s domestic far-right organizations, the CGT would often position itself as a truer supporter of the French nation than opponents on the right. The CGT’s press emphasized the hypocrisy of those who supported Italian Fascism but professed to be French nationalists and more broadly objected to Italian militarism on grounds of pacifism and support for international law. Like participation in international bodies, patriotism was a source that was especial to the anti-fascist vision of the CGT due its strong commitment to the cause of France during the First World War and its claim to representation of the majority of French society, a version of French society that was linked to the defense of liberties that the Confederation had declared during the First World War.

In addition to committing itself to international opposition to fascism, the CGT was deeply committed to the idea of international pacifism. Its commitment to
international organizations included not only participation in the ILO, but full-throated support for international arms control and peace treaties. Attempts at arms control treaties in 1927 and 1930 in Geneva and London respectively were given daily coverage and the articles clearly favored the signature of treaties. Though both the 1930 and 1927 treaties were called inadequate, the Confederation made clear its support for international systems of treaties.

In its initial ridicule of groups like Valois’, *Le Peuple* emphasized their relationship to Italian fascism. Over the same period, the paper continued to publish attacks on Italian militarism and international aggression. As the 1920’s continued, this particular attack increased in its intensity and specifically. After Matteotti’s assassination, attacks on the French far-right often included references to it. This line of attack was first introduced during the wave of panic surrounding the emergence of the *Faisceau* in late 1925. In an article written on November 6th 1925, Léon Jouhaux himself purported to introduce documents from within Valois’ organization. The article introduced the documents, which described the creation of a militarized political apparatus in France as anathema to the popular support supposedly enjoyed by France’s republican system. Jouhaux began to introduce the documents by writing that “We do not think that the French people are ripe for ‘dictatorship’ … we know from the unfortunate experiences of other countries that we proletarians would lose dignity, liberty and well-being in the establishment of such a regime.”

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102 Léon Jouhaux, “Comment on Cherche à Creer Le Fascisme En France Par La Constitution de Légions,” *Le Peuple*, November 6, 1925, 1.
wrote about Valois’ movement in literary terms and emphasized its lack of connection to France’s history. Davenay wrote “Fascism, last Sunday, crossed borders. Mussolini’s thought has incarnated itself on French soil.” Of a demonstration in front of the Arc de Triomphe, he wrote “One must admit that the Arc erased them, they were too small to rival it.” The same column evoked the legacy of the French Revolution as evidence that French fascism could not succeed and evoked French empire as territory unconquerable by Italy. He wrote that French fascists “do not know that France is more politically evolved than Italy and that the March on Rome, would not be welcomed by kneeling masses, but by outbreaks of laughter ‘Oh! The fascist army, and Morocco. And Syria? If you have the muscle, the chance is there. What are you waiting for?’”\textsuperscript{103} This appeal to French national greatness formed a vital part both of the CGT’s broad political vision and its attitude towards fascism specifically.

Davenay’s patriotic tone was reiterated after 1925. When Le Peuple attacked the far-right during the late 1920’s and early 1930’s during the decline of France’s far-right leagues. In 1928, an article in Le Peuple directly asked “Why do our nationalists celebrate Mussolini at the moment that fascism menaces and insults France.” Describing French sympathizers of Mussolini, the article said “They so love France, they are so jealous with its dignity that they joyfully put up with the insults hurled by the Mussolinians … Patriotism, for them, identifies itself only with reaction and with the hope of a good white terror.”\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{103} René Davenay, “Les Chemises Bleues Ont Leur Drapeau, Mais Des Chefs?,” Le Peuple, November 19, 1925, 1.
\textsuperscript{104} Maurice Harmel, “Patriotisme à La Coblentz,” Le Peuple, February 28, 1928, 1.
The patterns that were established in Confederal anti-fascism in the late 1920’s were continued in the first years of the 1930’s. Much of what has been discussed in this chapter consists of demonstrating that tendencies, like the conflation of Communism and fascism, came into being within Confederal propaganda as the emergence of the new Italian state became a question of national and international importance. In sum, the CGT did pay attention to the rise of Italian fascism and the upsurge of far-right groups in France during the 1920’s, but it did so strictly from a political perspective that matched the other political delineations that the Confederation had chosen to use to define itself. Though not immune to participation in demonstrations against fascism, it was loathe to make them a central political talking point. Though willing to condemn France’s far-right, it was hardly willing to consider cooperation with bitter political rivals over it. When the CGT did choose to make a statement with its opposition to fascism, it did so through avenues like its attachment to the French nation or its support for international institutions like the League of Nations or the ILO. The anti-fascism of the 1920’s and early 1930’s was well matched to the structure and ideology of the organization during the same period and each aids in the understanding of the other. The CGT portrayed fascism and the French far-right as violent, foreign and illegal. Ideologically, the origin of movements of the far-right was said to be the weakness of democracy. In Confederal eyes, then, it was difficult to accept the idea of a serious fascist threat to France, as such a threat would undermine the Confederation’s confidence in the republic. As an organization that emphasized legality and participation, as well as international peace, the Confederation’s understanding of fascism emphasized its revolutionary, bellicose and
dictatorial character, understanding it as a reactionary dictatorship, worthy of opposition both for its right-wing positions like its opposition to trade-unions and left-wing groups and its dictatorial methods, which ran directly counter to the vision of politics that the CGT endorsed. Charting its course of reformist, participative syndicalism, the CGT’s initial reactions to fascism would generally be carried through in its evaluations of later evolutions of the French far-right, though some adaptations were necessary. In contrast to other political tendencies, especially to the French Communist Party, the CGT did not present centralized action against fascism in France as a central organizational goal during the 1920’s, but it made its opposition to the far-right clear in other ways. Though the CGT only rarely repudiated anti-fascist organizing by its subsidiary bodies, its vision of anti-fascism relied on ideas of patriotism and participation in government institutions that it had developed during the First World War and it therefore emphasized actions like complaining to ILO rather than individual demonstrations against groups like the *Faisceau*. This vision of political action through legal, non-electoral bodies, was the essential fact of Confederal politics in the 1920s and shaped the Confederation’s vision of its own political role and those of its opponents.
3. From Economic Crisis to Popular Front: Anti-Fascism as a Confederal Identity

The CGT that had been constructed after 1923 had some continuities with the organization that existed before the First World War. Those continuities were important in defining the shape of confederal political priorities. The post-1923 emphasis on workers as an identity group was a longstanding point of Confederal identity, as was the invocation of an amalgam of democratic rights and the history of the French nation. A neglected, though equally important, set of influences on the CGT’s politics can be found in organization’s unique circumstances during the interwar period.

This chapter addresses how the CGT’s vision of fascism changed during the 1930’s. This period was marked by the CGT’s increasing concern that political movements like fascism were being driven by international economic crisis as well as an increasing association, between fascism and Germany, attributable to Hitler’s political success. These external factors were matched by transitions internal to France, including a resurgence in the right-wing leagues that culminated in deadly anti-government riots on February 6th 1934. These events transformed the way the CGT portrayed fascism. What had initially been either a national nuisance or a problem of international diplomacy became an urgent crisis in the eyes of the Confederation’s leadership. The CGT placed anti-fascism, once part of a laundry list of political concerns avowed by the central organization and its subsidiary bodies, in a central position in nearly all of its propaganda. For much of the CGT, the crisis of February 1934 also saw the dissociation of anti-fascism from its inherent link to anti-Communism in Confederal propaganda.
This chapter ends with the reunification of the CGT and CGTU. The fierceness of the rhetoric between them described in previous sections provides a measure of the powerful forces that drove them to reunification. In some historical accounts, this change is attributed mainly to Communist embrace of the Popular Front policy. This was indeed important, but the CGT’s anti-Communism was not merely a response to changes in Comintern strategy. It was a foundational political principle that proved to be a serious obstacle to reunification and cooperation. The process of reunification provides a compelling example of precisely how important anti-fascism became to the CGT during the 1930’s, to the point of becoming a central phrase the Confederation used to describe itself by 1935. This change was not only ideological, but structural as well. Where once the Confederation had strongly opposed popular demonstrations with anti-fascist themes, it now embraced them and prided itself on its capacity to organize them. During the 1930’s, the CGT came to believe that fascism was a profound threat to France. This was indeed a massive shift, but it did not mean that the CGT abandoned all of its previous understandings. The Confederation, while newly embracing mass demonstrations and political strikes, maintained its confidence in international cooperation and coordination, as well as its emphasis on the importance of French patriotism.

The Early 1930’s: Economic Crisis, the Plan, and the New Leagues

The trend in Confederation anti-fascism that had begun during the 1920’s continued through the early 1930’s, although the collapse of organizations like Valois’ Faisceau led to a less frenzied tone in discussions of domestic organizations of the far-right. The decline of these organizations was concurrent with the height of reformism within the CGT and the deepening of the Confederation’s active
participation in government systems. The period can be understood as the height of the *Politique de Présence*, as it saw the CGT embrace, in ideology as well as practice, its role as a partner of the government. Although these efforts were explicitly separated from Fascist visions of state corporatism, the Confederation spent the beginning of the 1930’s focusing far more on its institutional socio-political role than positioning itself against small far-right organizations. The height of support for planning and cooperation with government within the CGT coincided with the height of vituperative polemic with the Communist Party, which had attached itself to a political line that completely rejected cooperation with less radical organizations and referred to them as “social-fascists.”

During the development of the economic crisis in France in the early 1930s, Italian fascism was mainly discussed as a foreign threat through the familiar evocation of Italian designs on French territory. In discussions of its own reformist programs, which it was given an opportunity to help administer when a series of social insurance laws were passed under center-right Prime Minister André Tardieu, the CGT evoked the Confederal model of social insurance and collaboration between workers and governments as a supposedly superior alternative to the programs put into place by the Italian fascist government. The period, which overlapped with a reduction in the size and prominence of the far-right leagues that had concerned the CGT in the 1920’s, saw an overall reduction in the organization’s focus on fascism as a political question within France, though the word “fascism” was still liberally applied in domestic political disputes, particularly

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in the increasingly vicious rhetoric exchanged between Communists and their opponents.

In addition to the discussion of fascism’s social role as a contrast to the CGT’s ambitions for social reform, the first years of the 1930’s saw an increasing belief within the CGT that fascism was spreading in Europe. *Le Peuple* applied the term to governments in Hungary and Poland. The Nazi seizure of power in 1933, however, contributed most significantly to a belief that democratic government was being swept aside by economic crisis. Although this idea did not lead to a sea-change in the CGT’s views on the extent of a native fascist threat in France, it contributed to a further development of the idea that France was menaced internationally by fascism, now represented by several foreign countries. This threat was expressed in the same terminology that had been popular during the 1920’s: Italy’s claims to French territory were evoked and protested in patriotic terms.

Throughout the 1920’s, the CGT committed itself to the Minimum Program that had been put forward in 1918.. It advocated for social insurance programs and a 40 hour work week. As previously discussed, it also pushed for delegates of the CGT to be present in government bodies in order to represent French workers as a class within the state by non-electoral means. In 1929, André Tardieu, a politician of the right, ironically, gave this model for political activity the most significant political success it would win until the election of the Popular Front in 1936. Michel Dreyfus, a historian who views the interwar period before the Popular Front as one of decline and crisis for the CGT, describes the introduction of social insurance laws under
Tardieu as “the only important reform that the CGT could celebrate during this decade [the 1920’s].”\textsuperscript{106}

Such laws had been voted on throughout the 1920’s, and social insurance programs had been a main demand of the French left for the entirety of the decade.\textsuperscript{107} Even before being put into practice, however, they were the object of political controversy between the CGT and the CGTU. The battle between Communists and the CGT over the social insurance policy frequently saw the word “fascist” hurled by both sides, frequently in exchanges in their respective daily newspapers. Communists accused the CGT of a policy of class collaboration in their embrace of unemployment insurance and old-age pensions administered in cooperation with the government. This accusation was in line with Communist policy during the so-called “third period,” which began in 1928 and saw strong condemnation of the reformist organizations that Communist parties had been trying to enact the United Front policy with. In general, though, the period saw a reduction in the frequency with which the CGT evoked the idea of fascism. As the right-wing leagues that emerged in the 1920’s disappeared relatively quickly, fascism became even further associated in Confederal polemic with Communists and was significantly reduced in status as a domestic concern.

In France, this policy resulted in the Communists directing more insults towards Socialist and CGT leaders. It also meant the end of any electoral cooperation between the PCF and the SFIO.\textsuperscript{108} The emergence of the term “social-fascist” in

\textsuperscript{106}Dreyfus, \textit{Histoire de La C.G.T}, 142.
Communist vocabulary was met with a strong response within the CGT, which accused the Communists of weakening any political efforts by the working class. An article in the May 18 issue of *Le Peuple* was titled “The Communists, Agents of Conservatives.” It claimed that “if the Communists had been given the task of everywhere weakening working class struggle against the bourgeoisie, it must be admitted that they would have zealously fulfilled the mission assigned to them.”

The article specifically cited social insurance legislation as an area in which Communist opposition supposedly made a difference in the living standards of French workers. Other articles specifically cited social insurance as a potential bulwark against the emergence of fascism. One, published on May 29th 1929, said “A blindly installed regime of plutocracy installed on the cult of money and force cannot but make the bed for fascism. A democracy can survive sustainably only when it stands on proletarian shoulders and plants its roots deeply in the milieu of the people.”

Confederal policy stressed the importance of democracy and “liberties,” of the kind that the CGT had embraced since the First World War.

The CGT and its Communist opponent were in agreement that programs like social insurance helped to safeguard the French state, but the Communists saw protection of a “bourgeois” state as a crime against the working class. In its reporting on the CGT’s 1929 Congress, *L’Humanité* ran an article titled “Jouhaux Develops his Counter-Revolutionary Conception of Class Collaboration,” which claimed that “We have said before that the reformist leaders understand independence as placing themselves in service to bosses and governments by acting in their defense, against

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the interests of the working class.” The article further criticized Jouhaux for endorsing a non-revolutionary program, chastising him thus: “Paid vacations with reduced train prices, compulsory education, school reform etc. This kind of program of ‘action,’ only seeks to have capitalism behave itself.”

Similar articles began applying the word “traitor” to Jouhaux and the leadership of the CGT.

The CGT’s responses to this kind of attack were just as fierce. In an article published in 1930 titled “the real traitors,” the CGT specifically invoked social insurance legislation as an area in which Communist opposition harmed the working class. It claimed that “Our duty is to avert the workers who push for a strike for striking’s sake under the pretext of Russian nonsense … example: social insurance, which they fought as furiously and stupidly as all of the bourgeoisie, enemies of all material amelioration and improvement of the fate of the working class.”

At the Confederation’s 1929 Congress, an appointed rapporteur for social insurance accused the Communists of complicity with fascism in their opposition to social insurance legislation. Such language was central to the CGT’s descriptions of itself during the final years of the 1920’s and first years of the 1930’s.

The Confederation was explicitly political, but also explicitly anti-partisan. The doctrine introduced by the Amiens Charter became a vital feature of how the CGT described its own ideology and activity in contrast to that of other political organizations. Opposition to political parties, however, did not indicate an opposition

to democratic government, which the CGT still saw as a vital background for its activities within state bodies. Beyond their ideological descriptions, the laws that were applied in 1930 under Tardieu inspired a structural change in the CGT, which gained the opportunity to begin administering parts of the program of social insurance for which it had pushed. This role was heavily advertised in the Confederal press, and members were urged to enroll themselves in social insurance funds administered by the CGT.

This change, and the new administrative responsibility of the CGT, represented the height of political reformism. As Paul V. Dutton argues in his book, *The Origins of the French Welfare State*, support for a state-run social insurance system was not only formulated out of opposition to Communists, but also out of opposition to a system of welfare organized around institutions organized directly by employers. Whatever the roots of Confederal confidence in national social-insurance laws, identification with the program of social insurance became a keystone of the CGT’s political self-description during the 1920’s and 30’s. Before 1933, the idea of a fascist threat was only occasionally discussed in relation to this new political alignment. When it was, Social Insurance programs were invoked as an example of a potential bulwark for republicanism and democracy against the backdrop of internationally ascendant dictatorship. Michel Dreyfus’ summary of the CGT’s methods in its campaign for social insurance helps to demonstrate exactly how

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seriously the *Politique de Présence* affected the structure and purpose of the CGT’s activity. “This appeal worked through legal, parliamentary methods and in the absence of a serious mobilizations of the masses … All was done for a campaign of national explanation on that question … the CGT constituted a pressure group.”

The enthusiasm for economic reform that developed within the CGT during the late 1920’s and early 1930’s would continue through the era of the Popular Front and gradually be condensed into support for a wide-ranging system of state planning and expanded union rights.

This political alignment was the product of a development that had begun before social insurance legislation was enacted. It fit well into the political framework that had been established during the political battles and controversies of the 1920’s. The period also saw a continuation of the organizational trends that had begun at the 1923 Congress. The foundation of a daily newspaper and more robust propaganda apparatus was followed up in the early 30’s by a consolidation of the organization’s propaganda apparatus. In his paper, “Entre éducation populaire et propagande syndicale : les cours radiophoniques de la CGT sous le Front Populaire,” Morgan Poggioli details the foundation of a more complex system of training for individual union activists within the CGT, which included the creation of frequent Confederal radio broadcasts and the establishment of an academic apparatus aimed at educating workers affiliated with the CGT. In historical evaluation of the CGT, these organizational shifts are important if one wishes to understand how the “pressure

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116 Dreyfus, Histoire de La C.G.T, 143.
group” described by Michel Dreyfus structured itself politically. When fascism rapidly acquired its status as an imminent domestic threat in Confederal understanding in 1934, the mechanisms that were created during the structural and political transformation in the interwar period were essential to distributing and amplifying the Confederation’s specific vision.

Many of the mentions of fascism that did occur in the late 20’s and early 30’s put the development of fascism in other countries in the context of international economic crisis, blaming the rise of fascist organizations on unemployment and a lack of confidence in the mechanisms of the democratic state, largely attributing it to a failure to organize the economy in a productive and efficient way along the lines proposed by the CGT. The crisis also increased the vigor with which the CGT endorsed its own specific model of economic reform, which it portrayed as economically productive as well as useful for the working class.

The final years of the 1920’s and first years of the 1930’s saw domestic fascism reduced as a threat in the eyes of the central Confederal political apparatus. When fascism was discussed, however, the CGT’s opposition to it remained undiminished, and the threat of fascism was still used to promote the Confederation’s specific political conceptions. During this period, fascism did not have a central position in CGT propaganda, but the same political lines that had been previously used to oppose it were maintained, if domestically employed to a lesser degree. They informed the specific nature of the Confederation’s reaction to fascism as a threat to the French Republic and also presaged the degree to which the CGT’s economic
vision of planning and presence would undergird its later discussion of how the supposed fascist threat to France could be combatted.

**Before February 1934: Economic Crisis, Germany and the Leagues**

While fascism had decreased in status and urgency as a domestic concern for the CGT, it remained a serious concern on the international stage. The same concern about Italian aggression that were expressed earlier in the 1920’s continued to be central to the CGT’s discussion of that country and the role of international institutions. The Confederation maintained its confidence in intergovernmental institutions and continued to push for deeper commitment to them, while fighting the influence of those governments with which it disagreed. The CGT continued to describe fascism as a mainly foreign concern, a threat to France’s borders and to democracy around the world. Although France was, to a degree, spared from economic crisis while the rest of the world was experiencing the Great Depression. The global downturn did hit France in 1931, resulting in growing unemployment.\[^{118}\]\[^{119}\] CGT’s vision of international fascism was, like much of France’s left, seriously altered by the Nazi seizure of power. The ascent of fascism in a former war enemy with clearly bellicose intentions towards the rest of the world provided new urgency to discussions of fascism, both foreign and domestic. In the CGT, the rise of Nazism led both to more direct anti-fascist propaganda, and, indeed, to closer explicit identification of the CGT and “anti-fascism” in that propaganda. Events in Germany brought on another propaganda trend, the revival of frequent


\[^{119}\] In *The Politics of Depression in France*, Jackson describes France’s initial immunity to the global crisis as somewhat mysterious. His book provides an excellent overview of how the depression played out in France when it did arrive.
direct comparisons between fascists and Communists, along with more specific
charges that the newly adopted “class against class” strategy aided movements of the
far-right. The example of Germany proved to be a fundamental argument in both
Communist and anti-Communist discussions of politics and strategy.

The first descriptions of the Nazis that appeared in the Confederal press were
published during the Le Peuple’s coverage of the Beer Hall Putsch in November of
1923. The article published after the arrest of Hitler referred to him as “nationalist,”
“reactionary,” “Francophobic,” and “fascist.” More generally, it emphasized the
bellicose and anti-democratic platform of the Nazis. Such coverage was typical of
the intermittent coverage the Nazis received during the 1920’s in the Confederal
press; generally, it did not cover the group seriously beyond reporting on specific
instances of violence or individual elections. Even during elections, before 1930, the
National Socialists tended to only be mentioned in passing, overshadowed even in
expressed concern by other German nationalists. In 1930, the CGT’s election
coverage focused on the Nazis mainly as a potential risk to Franco-German relations.
One issue of Le Peuple, published four days after Germany’s 1930 elections, carried
an image of marching Nazi party members with a caption that read “The German
Fascists Campaigning.” The sarcastic description below the image read “If the
etiquette of Hitler’s troops could trick a layperson—National Socialists—their
costume does not allow any doubt as to their mentality … It appears, from their
appearance, that they could see nothing to envy in Italian Fascism.”

Other coverage of the election emphasized the threat of war presented by an increase in German

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121 “Les Fascistes Allemands En Tenue de Campagne,” Le Peuple, November 18, 1930.
nationalism, reiterating established themes conflating an increase in far-right power with a threat to France and international peace.

*Le Peuple* reserved particular concern for the Nazi threats to disrupt the system of treaties that the CGT saw as vital to preserving peace in Europe. An article published shortly after the 1930 elections stated that “The progress made by a group of German racists will probably serve as a pretext for a nationalist campaign that will unleash itself in France in the next few months … It’s a rule, nationalisms contribute to one another to serve the cause of militarism above all else, and war follows.” The article concluded by asserting that “we must work more than ever towards a Franco-German reconciliation, an essential condition for global peace.”

In 1931, *Le Peuple* reported on the rise of the Nazis in a manner that was indicative of how they would be covered later in the decade. In an article written in the style of a lamenting titled “Aux Fous,” André Fevrier wrote “Adolf Hitler approaches power … The German center resists with a resignation that anticipates defeat … Bolshevism plays its infernal role.” The article is notable both for its tone of resignation and its claim of Communist responsibility for the rise of the Nazis. This would be an essential theme of Confederal coverage of Germany during the period, and would further elaborate on the connections *Le Peuple* alleged between Communism and fascism. The two were presented not only as similar in their contempt for democracy, but as actually connected in their attacks on the Weimar Republic and German Social Democrats.

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After 1930, German electoral politics became front-page news in *Le Peuple*, which covered the days leading up to 1932’s Presidential and Parliamentary elections in a way that it had not reported on previous German elections. This coverage makes clear that Hitler’s political rise drove the increased attention. The threat Hitler was said to present during the electoral campaign mirrored the previous complaints made about him, as well as the language *Le Peuple* used to describe Italian fascism. In line with the CGT’s embrace of the democratic state and international order, *Le Peuple* devoted particular attention to violence committed by Nazis and their threats of international aggression. An article written two days before the election expressed those concerns, claiming that the election was taking place “in an atmosphere of civil war.” As with Italian fascism, the article was especially concerned with Nazi threats to replace other political parties and to begin remilitarization.\(^{124}\)

After the 1932 German Presidential election, *Le Peuple* provided the same kind of comprehensive coverage, complete with articles being published nearly every day in the weeks before the election condemning Hitler and the Nazis, to the general election for the Weimar Reichstag elicited the same kind of. The language of these articles was by now familiar. They evoked the undemocratic nature of Nazi politics and made reference to street violence carried out by the Nazis, combined with attacks on the German Communist Party for its opposition to electoral alliance with Germany’s Social Democrats. For example, shortly after Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, in one of his “Ripostes” columns, which provided a new attack on the French Communist Party virtually every day, Eugene Morel argued that the Communists had

aided the Nazis. The column was titled “Their Good Friends.” This pre-election coverage took the Nazis seriously, and portrayed them as a threat to European peace and to France specifically. The CGT’s response to the Germany’s elections in the early 1930’s reflected its commitment to international cooperation, whether political or governmental.

In the Confederal press, the immediate reaction to the July 1932 German elections, which did not give the Nazis a majority in parliament, but saw them make significant gains, focused on potential impacts for European diplomacy and peace, a project in which the CGT was deeply interested, as well as on illegal attacks undertaken by supporters of Hitler. A few days after the August elections, *Le Peuple* carried an article commemorating the outbreak of the First World war that specified the risks it believed Nazism posed to the program of European peace that the Confederation endorsed. The article stated that “The German elections, which just took place Sunday, naturally arouse uncertainty about the future of peace,” but also expressed hopes that Hitler’s electoral success might blunt the effectiveness of the Nazi Party. The view that Hitler’s early electoral results would not end German democracy was widespread in France (and indeed internationally) and an understanding of the degree of Nazi success in Germany was not clear until 1933, when Hitler finally became Chancellor and began consolidating his authority over Germany.

It was after the election in November of 1932, and Hitler’s subsequent appointment as Chancellor in January of 1933 that *Le Peuple* began to treat his movement as one in control of the German state. During that period, from January
1933 to February 1934, coverage of Germany mirrored previous coverage of the early
days of Mussolini’s rule, with a focus on abuses against German left-wing
organizations and a general attitude of lamentation and distress about the situation in
Germany, while occasionally indicating that the Nazi government would be
moderated by the practical realities of government. Very quickly, however, this
attitude gave way to a belief that Germany had ceased to be a democratic state. A
few days after Hitler’s ascension to the Chancellorship in 1933, *Le Peuple* declared
that “Germany is now subject to an open dictatorship” and portrayed him as likely to
eliminate political opponents by extra-legal means.125 Another article on February 5th
cited the banning of an SPD newspaper as evidence that “Hitler and his associated
have not lost any time in establishing their dictatorship and preparing for the March
elections.”126 After the Reichstag fire, *Le Peuple* similarly lamented the loss of public
liberties and the threat to international peace.

In sum, *Le Peuple*’s coverage of Hitler’s rise to power was unflaggingly
negative. It emphasized the illegal and violent nature of Nazi activity, as well as Nazi
opposition to parliamentarianism and international peace agreements. *Le Peuple* used
language that it had honed during Mussolini’s time in power. In Nazi Germany, the
CGT saw a state that was opposed to the public liberties it viewed as essential, and
that was determined to break with the international order the CGT cherished. This
was more than enough to merit opposition in the Confederale press. Despite this
expressed horror in its coverage, however, the CGT did not commit itself to any kind
of campaign of anti-fascist activity. Germany was certainly front-page news, but the

CGT did not endorse demonstrations. Although articles sometimes made passing references to Communist responsibility, most of the daily “Ripostes” columns focused on internal French questions rather than international affairs. The rise of fascism in Germany became mainly another talking point in arguments that continued to push for the economic program of the CGT. In February 1933, *La Voix du Peuple* published a statement co-signed by the CGT and the SFIO.127 Despite the lack of immediate anti-fascist organizing, there was a clearly increasing understanding that the far-right politics, not yet embodied by any single organization in France, especially opposition to parliamentarianism, was an increasingly powerful and ascendant political force around the world.

Although evidence of immediate organizing is difficult to find, the CGT clearly understood that it might soon be necessary. In June of 1933, the CGT began publishing a bi-monthly informational bulletin. In the statement of purpose for the bulletin, the CGT emphasized the administrative role it had been playing within state bodies and its economic program, but also linked that program more explicitly to a perceived fascist threat. The message announcing the creation of the bulletin read: “It will call together a rally of the good-willed, in hopes of economic reestablishment, defense of liberty and the safeguarding of peace …Liberty? In what places does it still exist? Beyond the economy, the crisis has become social. Fascism extends its dark work across the world. In France as well, the troublemakers are agitating.”128 The task of centralization of propaganda and education was one that had begun well before the emergence of German fascism, but the fact that it incorporated the idea of an

international fascist threat demonstrated that the issue was becoming increasingly
important within the CGT.

The CGT’s 1933 Congress saw the most direct discussion of fascism of any
that had taken place up to that point. A report presented by the editors of *Le Peuple*
specifically invoked the paper’s role as a daily propagandist against fascism as a vital
part of its role within the Confederation. The editors said that “*Le Peuple* is
perfectible, but as it is, it represents for the CGT a guarantee of independence because
it permits the workers’ movement to make its voice heard, daily, in all circumstances.
Faced with a fascist menace which could come into being tomorrow, workers’
organizations must strive to develop powerful means of propaganda.”129 The
development of a more centralized mechanism of propaganda, and therefore a more
centralized Confederal political line, was longstanding, but the introduction of
fascism to the discussion highlighted the great concern with which the CGT now
viewed fascism. Indeed, the fact that different constituent parts of the CGT used the
struggle against fascism as means of justifying their existences and supporting their
activity provides evidence of the degree to which opposition to fascism was becoming
a central means by which the Confederation described and understood itself.

The vision of anti-fascism expressed during the congress was not
fundamentally different from the vision that had been expressed previously. It relied
on the invocation of democratic rights and institutional conceptions of international
peace, but the Congress did imbue the topic with an increased urgency and a greater

129 *Compte Rendu Sténographié Des Débats Du XXVI• Congrès National Corporatif (XXII• de La
Confederation General du Travail, 1934), 31.
understanding of a national political crisis. Gradually, throughout 1933, the word “fascism” began to appear with greater frequency in the CGT’s descriptions of itself. In advertisements for upcoming political rallies, “Against fascism” became a standard refrain along with “For the 40 hours” and “For peace.” *La Voix du Peuple*, in November of 1933, carried a joint declaration of different political groups asking for donations to German workers. These steps, which symbolized a growing understanding of the political importance of fascism, laid the groundwork for a later organizational pivot towards anti-fascism.

Overlapping with the emergence of Hitler’s government in Germany, France saw the re-emergence of the far-right leagues that had largely disappeared at the end of the 1920’s. Across his two books cataloguing French fascism, Robert Soucy divides the nation’s far-right into two main “waves.” The second wave, which began in 1933, saw both the re-emergence of groups that had declined in size and prominence after 1927 and the rise of new groups that condemned France’s republican system of government. In general, before February 1934, these groups received some coverage in the Confederal press, but were rarely discussed by name. Some, like the *Solidarité Française*, had only been recently founded. Others, like *Action Française*, were re-emerging, rather than newly coming into being. These groups were certainly opposed in the Confederal press, but they continued to be deplored and ridiculed, rather than portrayed as a threat to the French republic. The language used to refer to them closely mirrored the language that had been used the language that had been used during the first wave. In light of events in Germany,
though, threats of violence were taken seriously, and the Confederal press continued
to describe violence as a key characteristic of the far-right leagues.

Generally, aside from *Action Française*, the leagues were not discussed in
specific terms, and were indeed rarely separated from an amalgamated vision of
French reactionary politics in general. As with analyses made before the rise of the
Nazis, many of these accounts understood France to have a natural immunity to
fascist revolution. On February 7th 1933, for example, an article in *Le Peuple*
described the increasingly frequent demonstrations by organizations of the right thus:

“It appears that, in the course of several demonstrations, the language used by
different orators, who pretended to speak in the name of taxpayers, made clear a
political orientation directed towards aspirations of dictatorship” Further, the article
recognized that far-right organizations were growing in strength, claiming that: “We
know that France provides poor terrain for the followers of fascism and Hitlerism.
Until now, their aspirations were considered shameful political maladies, they would
not confess to them.”\(^{130}\)

One of the organizations described in the article, the *Ligue des Contribuables* (League of Taxpayers), continued to be a focus of *Le Peuple’s*
coverage. A protest group against taxation, the League managed to draw significant
Confederal attention in 1933 with demonstrations by shop owners and right-wing
groups.\(^{131}\)

Before a rally by the League at the end of May, *Le Peuple* carried an
advertisement for a counter-demonstration which accused the organization of
supporting various social measures, such as “the pitiless and endless reduction of

\(^{131}\) Robert O. Paxton, *French Peasant Fascism: Henry Dorgères’ Greenshirts and the Crises of French
Agriculture, 1929-1939* (Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59,
salaries” and “the destruction of social insurance.” Calling on workers to oppose the demonstration, it said that these measures were meant to “panic public opinion to drive the country to fascism because they need to stifle the voice of workers, paralyze democracy and abolish our liberties.”132 In July 1933, an article titled “Be On Guard Against the Fascist Contagion” specifically condemned the League. The article criticized the League for its anti-parliamentary attitudes and contrasted those attitudes with the position of the CGT. Specifically cited as well was the League’s stated opposition to social insurance legislation. In addition to these points, though, it the article expressed doubt about the idea of successful fascism in France. Its author wrote, “Fascism, let alone Hitlerism, will not find in France, favorable terrain to implant its methods of violence and dictatorship. The pretexts invoked currently to disguise a movement which boasts that it is economical … will not trick the popular masses.”133 This kind of statement emphasized that France’s uniqueness lay in the depth of its republican tradition, as well as the degree to which economic concerns had become central to the CGT’s understanding of fascism’s appeal.

The Confederation’s focus in 1933 on an organization that has only been rarely recognized in historical characterizations of French fascism demonstrates that, while the CGT opposed organizations like the Croix de Feu, the Solidarité Française, and Action Française it failed to perceive them as threats equivalent to Mussolini’s blackshirts or the Nazis. The French far-right was portrayed as a menace, and it was said to have its origins in social and political forces similar to those that existed in Italy and Germany, but it was not embodied by any specific paramilitary organization.

133 François Million, “Prenons Gards à La Contagion Du Fascisme,” Le Peuple, May 29, 1933, 1.
in Confederal propaganda. The CGT tended to mention far-right groups that have become well-known in retrospect only in passing, rather than devoting extensive contemporaneous coverage to them.

Ideologically, the international and domestic political situation with regard to fascism led to an intensification of the CGT’s promotion of its specific political and economic program. German and Italian fascism was presented as running counter to the Confederation’s support for a combination of state planning and democratic institutions. Emphasis on economic reform and concern about the potential success of fascism in France went hand-in-hand. One article by Raoul Lenoir published in September of 1933 emphasized the CGT’s proposed methods for preventing the rise of fascism in France. In the article, titled “Social Prophylaxis,” Lenoir asked: “To struggle against fascism, what must be done?” He compared fascism to a virus spreading across Europe. Like other articles, Lenoir’s proposed that France was especially hearty in its response to this infection, writing that “Politically mature nations no doubt resist the influence of this madness more effectively.” while accepting that a dangerous level of economic discontent did exist in France. In response to the fascist infection, Lenoir emphasized the need for “economic reorganization,” mirroring Confederal rhetoric about planning and economic organization.134 Sometimes, Confederal accounts of successful fascism in other countries reflected the Confederation’s disdain for party politics, emphasizing the degree to which parliamentary incapacity had been responsible for the success of far-right organizations in places like Italy and Germany. The reference Lenoir made to

“political maturity” was joined with the idea that French politicians were incapable of the kind of economic transformation that was needed to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis.

In 1933, the CGT had not yet produced a specific economic plan described as such, but, as has already been discussed, it championed a series of preferred policies that it adhered to and supported, like social insurance legislation and nationalization of industry. These measures were at the heart of the Confederation’s publicization of its own activity, and they explicitly appealed to the vision of syndical activity that the CGT had begun to develop during the First World War. These semi-corporatist means were placed explicitly in contrast with the economic policies of fascist governments. The economic program of the CGT was portrayed as a better alternative to chaotic capitalism, which was said to have given rise to successful fascist seizures of power in other countries. These claims did not limit themselves to Confederal analyses of France. Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal was frequently praised in Le Peuple and it bore a strong resemblance to the kind of economic policy supported by the CGT. In October of 1933, Jouhaux wrote a column asking, “What the Working Class Must Learn from Roosevelt,” with a subtitle claiming that Roosevelt’s administration proved that “The economic structure of the state can be modified without touching the political liberties of people and organizations.” Roosevelt’s reforms, Jouhaux wrote, “Are the demonstration that there is no need to resort to Hitlerian or fascist methods to deal with the problems of the crisis.”

If fascism was presented as the right’s reaction to economic crisis, the CGT’s reformist syndicalism was presented as

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a non-revolutionary alternative to a form of government that would suppress the kinds of freedoms within a democratic state that the Confederation had embraced since the outbreak of the First World War. In Confederal propaganda, the CGT was linked decisively to support for European democracy, an affinity that tended to have its roots in the Confederation’s attachment to the republic. The attachment to democratic government, though, was not rooted in direct political participation and the anti-partisan line within the CGT was not blunted by opposition to fascism.

After the emergence of a fascist government in Germany, the CGT was forced to bring opposition to fascism to the fore of its political vision after a period in which it had been only rarely emphasized. During 1933, the Confederation’s descriptions of fascisms roots remained broadly similar to those that had existed before, but fascism achieved the status of an international peril, rather than a phenomenon limited to a few countries. The idea of French fascism was present in Confederal propaganda, and individual figures and organizations that were said to oppose democratic government were labeled as fascist, even if they have escaped that characterization in the analyses of historians. The Confederation’s attitude towards fascism during the period just before February 1934 was largely a continuation of its previous attitudes. With both an enhanced propaganda apparatus and an increasingly fierce and specific commitment to its economic program, the Confederation, continued to understand fascism primarily as reactionary revolutionism, and to condemn it as such. Particular emphasis was placed on the illegality and violence of far-right movements, providing an explicit contrast to the non-revolutionary and deeply legalistic attitude of the CGT and a convenient analogue to Communism, which continued to be the most frequently
attacked of the Confederation’s political opponents. Before the crisis of February 1934, the CGT remained committed to its “constructive” policies and portrayed fascism as a threat to the kind of democratic framework that it believed vital to the advancement of the groups it purported to represent.

The CGT in the February Crisis

In February 1934, the CGT was confronted, it believed, with the threat of a fascist seizure of power like those seen in Italy and Germany. The form and urgency of this supposed threat, right-wing riots led by leagues like the Action Française and the Croix de Feu, provided the Confederation with a set of embodied and specific French fascist opponents. The ultimate result of the February crisis would be the reunification of the French trade-union movement and the slow construction of a mass movement behind what would come to be called the Popular Front. During this period, the CGT attempted to meld its vision of economic organization as a bar against crisis with a growing left-wing mass movement opposed specifically to fascism.

Other accounts have focused on the specifics of the riots of February 6th 1934 in far more depth than is appropriate here, providing as much background, detail, and debate as any reader might wish. For the purposes of this thesis, February 1934 will be explored through the activity of the CGT, and the consequences of the riots and counter-protests. Historians have devoted a good deal of time and effort to the question of whether the events of February 6th constituted an actual fascist threat to the French republic. Most have concluded that it was not. I will not attempt to analyze this question; indeed, I believe it has occupied an oversized role in historical analyses of France in the 1930’s. In any event, and even assuming that there could be a “fact of
the matter” separate from actors’ perceptions, the CGT (certainly not alone in this judgment), understood the right-wing demonstrations to be a failed fascist coup, as did a significant portion of French political opinion. This understanding shaped confederal policy and indeed French politics generally. This thesis will attempt to analyze how the riots of February 1934 altered Confederal attitudes and actions towards fascism rather than provide a qualitative analysis of the beliefs that lay beneath them.

The CGT’s reached instantly and severely to the far-right riots of February 6\textsuperscript{th} 1934. The organization of counterdemonstrations became an immediate priority for the organization at nearly all of its levels. The Confederation had no qualms about understanding the demonstrations as fascist. It did so because of their anti-parliamentary character and the deployment of organized demonstrators by established right-wing leagues. The Confederation’s response emphasized the degree to which support for democratic government had become central to its political propaganda, and highlighted the extent to which it, as an organization, had centralized itself. The form of political activity proposed to remedy the riots, a general strike, was evocative of the period of activity that the CGT had left behind with its split in 1922. Rather than an embrace of former radicalism and revolution, however, the call for a strike was a reflection of how threatened the CGT believed democratic government to be in France. Immediately, the Confederation began emphasizing its support for parliamentary government and its preferred measures of economic reform as vital countermeasures to what the CGT believed to be a profound threat to the French republic.
A scandal caused by the suicide of Alexandre Stavisky, who was closely linked to a number of prominent members of France’s national assembly, became a focus of right-wing outrage with the Republic at the beginning of 1934. The firing of Paris Police Chief Jean Chiappe was the immediate cause of the demonstrations that would become known in the left-wing press as the Émuete Fasciste (fascist riot), a protest on February 6th that left several right-wing protestors dead, and that was understood by many on France’s left as an attempt at a French equivalent to Mussolini’s march on Rome. Georges Lefranc, who wrote his history of the French labor movement in 1937 summarized his view of the impacts of the February 1934 protests thus: “When February 6th 1934 brutally revealed to the French public and the world that public liberties were in peril in France as well, it was towards the CGT that they turned their hopes.” Lefranc’s propagandistic account provides a good example of how the CGT would come to view its own participation in the events of February 1934 in the years of the Popular Front. Lefranc’s reference to public liberties also emphasizes the degree to which the defense of liberties was central to the CGT’s response to the riots. In its immediate coverage, the Confederation echoed its vision of the problems of fascism, but finally viewed the leagues as a danger capable of introducing the “virus” to France. The CGT portrayed its proposed solution of a general strike in terms of political liberties and democratic rights, rather than on the class grounds that had been vital to the attempts at revolutionary strikes earlier in the 1920’s. The CGT’s conception of fascism was not altered, but rather confirmed in the events of February 1934.

On February 6th, *Le Peuple* warned its readers about demonstrations planned for the day by right-wing organizations, addressing an appeal to the people of Paris that read: “Each day the demonstrations by proponents of dictatorship and the king strengthen themselves. Beyond politics, in which it does not want to interfere, the CGT calls on workers, on the Parisian people, to defend their threatened public liberties.” Other articles published on the 6th (written before the main demonstrations for which the day would become known) emphasized the anti-republican nature of the demonstrations. In an editorial signed by the CGT titled “We Have Had Enough,” *Le Peuple* said of the right-wing demonstrators: “In reality, these people find their inspiration in fascism and Hitler. They dream of installing in France a regime identical to those of Hitler or Mussolini.” The same article claimed that the demonstrators chanted “down with the Republic” and urged Parisian workers to counter demonstrations by the far-right. The invocation of public liberties, reminiscent of the appeals that the Confederation had been making since the First World War, emphasizes the degree of continuity between these initial responses to the events of February 1934 and the general understanding of fascism that the Confederation had developed throughout its post-war history.

On February 7th, *Le Peuple* described the deadly riots of the previous night and emphasized again their anti-republican nature, writing:

It is not the time to discuss whether the current regime is sufficient or not, whether it corresponds to our sentiments or what it must do … It must be simply observed that the regime, as it is, with its faults and its virtues, finds itself menaced, attacked, by the forces of reaction that want to replace it with what? A regime of dictatorship that would

signify an immense defeat for the forces of social progress, which it would destroy from top to bottom.\(^{139}\)

The description of a potential fascist regime in France is brief, but such a scenario had not been conceived of before. The features of this potential dictatorship, including its resistance to legal means and its suppression of opposition organizations are representative of those features that the CGT found definitional in foreign fascism, namely, its rejection of parliamentary government and suppression of its left-wing opponents.

As its newspaper was expressing horror at the events of February 6\(^{th}\), the *Commission Administrative*, which had decided to sit permanently, sent a telegram to the Departmental Unions reading: “Alert. Be ready for all action at the Confederation’s word.”\(^{140}\) The same day, Daladier’s Radical government resigned in light of the protests. In response to this development, and the potential installation of a government of the right, the *Commission Administrative* sent out another telegram reading: “Government resigned, public liberties threatened, organize demonstrations without delay with all groups of the left.”\(^{141}\) The fact that violent, extra-parliamentary demonstrations had forced the resignation of a government was especially disturbing for the CGT, which feared that such an outcome might itself be a fascist victory in France. The order for a general strike was issued the same day.\(^{142}\) In an editorial, published alongside an announcement in large text of the decision to strike, *Le Peuple* wrote:

\(^{139}\) “Paris et Province,” *Le Peuple*, February 7, 1934, 1.
\(^{140}\) “Telegram from Jouhaux to Departmental Unions,” February 7, 1934, 97 CFD 22/2/11, IHS-CGT.
\(^{142}\) “Une Démocratie En Péril,” 96.
At the hour that we are hastily writing these lines, the presidency of the Republic is beginning consultations without knowing exactly what their political outcome will be. In any case, all outcomes must be considered, because any outcome is possible. It is, in effect, the fascist riot that has principally determined the collapse of the cabinet … Our demonstration, limited in time, will affirm the existence of a mass of workers in this country who wish to defend the democratic and republican regime, on which their hopes for a new step on the path towards total emancipation and liberation are based … French workers will not cave in like workers in Germany, Italy and elsewhere. They wish to live freely and work. Their first battle will be opened on Monday. That night, we will entrust the destiny of French liberties into the rough hands of the French workers. They will save them.143

This editorial provides an interesting example of the Confederation’s perceptions of the risks posed by the riots of February 6th. The emphasis placed on the protection of liberties is consistent with the general Confederal line towards fascism, as is the invocation of the idea that French workers have a particular attachment to freedom. The references made both to the character of French workers and the question of “liberties” emphasize the degree to which patriotism and support for established political institutions had become a vital part of Confederal rhetoric during the interwar period.

The events of February 6th presented to the CGT a crisis that it interpreted as the emergence of a powerful, openly fascist force in French politics. Immediately, it began comparing the situation in France to the situations that had existed in Germany and Italy. The crisis did not provide an ideological sea-change in the Confederation’s characterization of fascism, but it turned what had been a basically international question into an area of immediate organization and led the CGT to identify anti-fascism as a fundamental and essential part of its identity. This anti-fascism, though,

143 “Pour Sauver Les Libertés,” *Le Peuple*, February 8, 1934, 1.
was not generic and the propaganda that publicized and supported it reflected the political alignment and outlook of the interwar CGT.

The use of a general strike on February 12th demonstrates how serious the Confederation believed the issue of fascism to be. It was a tool that had rarely even been mentioned since the split.\textsuperscript{144} The emphasis on the limited nature of the strike, and the discipline exercised by French workers separated the CGT’s activity in 1934 from older visions of a revolutionary general strike. Indeed, it was the lawfulness and order of the strike that CGT propaganda most clearly emphasized. The contrast with fascism was not meant to be a solely political or class-based one, but to reflect a stylistic difference as well. The CGT sought not only to portray its strike as representative of French workers or workers in general, but as a representation of the republic itself, a regime based on legality and individual rights. An editorial, titled “A Victory for Liberty,” published on February 13th, the day after the general strike, drew a direct contrast between the demonstrations on the 6th and the 13th, claiming that “The first was a protest of armed rioters for murder. The second unfolded in impressive order. If, here or there, some disorder did occur, it is our great hope that no blood was spilled.”\textsuperscript{145}

Over time, Confederal publications began to establish a narrative explaining the precise causes of the far-right demonstrations. On February 16th, \textit{Le Peuple} reflected on the far-right protests and the general strike that followed, and put the riots into the context of economic and social crisis. An editorial stated: “Having seen


\textsuperscript{145} “Une Victorie de La Liberté,” \textit{Le Peuple}, February 13, 1934, 1.
that, in all of the great crises that have shaken the world, crowds, blinded by misery and directed by the profiteers, have turned towards a myth. As Caporali said the other day ‘at the current time, that myth is dictatorship’” The article equated Mussolini’s Italy, Hitler’s Germany, and the Soviet Union as examples of victorious dictatorship. The general strike did succeed at turning out a significant number of workers, shutting down the city of Paris, and engendering significant demonstrations across all of France.\textsuperscript{146}

In the days after the general strike, new themes began to emerge in Confederal coverage of the riots of February 6\textsuperscript{th}. Eugene Morel’s \textit{Ripostes} column had spent the days after the 6\textsuperscript{th} attacking the right and the main daily newspapers for their supposed sympathy to fascism rather than attacking the Communists, his traditional subjects. On February 16\textsuperscript{th}, he began attacking the Communists again, this time for inadequate confidence in a general strike and their attacks on Confederal leaders. Morel wrote that “The leaders of the CGTU and the Communist Party are, internally, furious that the credit for the initiative of a common action by workers against fascist conduct originated with the activists that they are in the custom of calling ‘reformist traitors.’”\textsuperscript{147} Over the following weeks, Morel’s column returned to regular attacks on the Communists.

The immediate responses that had emerged in Confederal action and in the CGT’s associated press confirmed the organization’s belief that the events of February 1934 constituted a potential fascist revolution in France. It reflected a

\textsuperscript{146} Poggioli, \textit{La CGT du Front populaire à Vichy: De la Réunification à la Dissolution (1934-1940)}, 34.
\textsuperscript{147} Eugène Morel, “Trois Jours Après,” \textit{Le Peuple}, February 16, 1934, 1.
general belief that the crisis that created the riots was a result both of governmental incompetence and economic immiseration. In the February riots, what the CGT identified as unacceptable was the rejection of parliamentary government and the use of violence that was displayed by the right-wing leagues. It portrayed its immediate organizational response as a defense of “liberties” against potential attacks on them by either extra-parliamentary organizations or a hypothetical future dictatorship. The reaction to the events of February 1934 were not a rejection of or re-writing of previous Confederal anti-fascist positions, but rather sought to apply the established Confederal vision of anti-fascism to events in France. As an organization increasingly committed to cooperation with state bodies, the CGT emphasized its set of economic and social reforms as an essential tool for economic renaissance, and through it, renewal of the French state.

**National Renovation and Active Organizing: After February 1934**

The period that followed the 1934 riots saw further reflection on the potential problems that had led to the riots of February 1934 and the success of fascist governments in other countries. This reflection led to both further efforts at centralization and mass propaganda within the CGT, as well as a recommitment, and indeed renewal, of the general political-economic vision that had animated the Confederation since the introduction of the Minimum Program in 1918. The period following the riots of February 1934 saw a deepening of the CGT’s embrace of state-based economic reform and a further attempt to position the Confederation as a representative of all French workers. The threat that the CGT believed had emerged in 1934 did not subside in the following months and *Le Peuple* now provided close coverage.
of supposed fascist organizations in France, with an emphasis on the illegal nature of their activity and their opposition to parliamentarianism. The Confederation, emphasizing its own central role in the protests of February 1934, presented itself as a non-electoral representative of the republic. The aftermath of the crisis presented an opportunity for the deployment and expansion of the CGT’s central propaganda apparatuses, with their emphasis on providing political education and propaganda to its membership.

What followed February 1934 was a period of massive political mobilization and engagement across France. This paper cannot provide a full account of it, and will seek to address events mainly as they directly concern the political line pursued by the CGT.

The February 1934 issue of *La Voix du Peuple* provided an account of the Confederation’s role in the crisis that catalogued the various communications that the center had sent and that emphasized its role in organizing the general strike of February 12th. The issue began with a declaration that “faced with the economic crisis, the CGT proclaims the urgency of assuring social justice through the sovereignty of labor.” It emphasized the urgency of economic reform and described the unfolding of the crisis thus: “The economic cataclysm had necessarily engendered a budgetary and social crisis. The budgetary and social crisis caused a political crisis, that translated itself into the powerlessness of political organizations. Finally, the political crisis, with demoralization, scandals and corruption following it, opened the way for a crisis of the regime.” The article then
presented the CGT’s proposed solutions to the crisis, which consisted of economic measures like “Employment of the unemployed through a reduction in the length of the workday, stimulation of industrial activity through the organization of public works, institution of minimum wages by industry … Introduction through constitutional mechanisms of an economic body with the power to coordinate production and consumption and control different economic activities.” Beyond these policy steps, the declaration outlined the Confederation’s attitude towards the republican government in light of the February crisis, declaring that “Democracy cannot accept the reign of a plutocratic oligarchy. It must not anymore serve or be threatened by great special interests. Its reason for being is social justice.”148 The same issue of La Voix du Peuple carried a day-by-day account of the events of the month, emphasizing the Confederation’s role as a defender of the Republic.

In the following months, La Voix du Peuple and Le Peuple loudly endorsed the CGT’s vision of economic reforms specifically as a safeguard against the development of fascism in France and used the events of February as an example of how dangerous a failure to confront the economic situation could be. In addition to advertising its economic program and describing perceived fascist threats to the Republic, Le Peuple began including in its descriptions of itself references to its status as an organ opposed to fascism.

Along with this economic analysis, the CGT began to pay close attention to the far-right leagues it had mostly ignored in 1933. In the pages of Le Peuple, the size

and strength of the leagues became a topic of constant discussion. The March issue of *La Voix du Peuple* in 1934 carried an article titled “The Fascist Forces in France,” which quoted the testimony of a police official before a parliamentary enquiry concerning the February riot estimating the size of different far-right organizations in France, focusing on the leagues that had been at the center of the February riots. In the weeks and months following February 6\(^{th}\), stories about far-right organizations often received front-page coverage in *Le Peuple*. The organizations most frequently cited were *Action Française*, the *Croix de Feu*, and the *Françistes*, all of which had played prominent roles on February 6\(^{th}\). In Confederal coverage, particular attention was paid to their military style. An article on March 12\(^{th}\) 1934 condemned those organizations by name for wishing to act politically “[n]ot through legal or constitutional channels, but by practical compulsion, by threats, by riots, by the defenestration of representatives of the people.”\(^{149}\) As a parliamentary commission investigated the events of February, *Le Peuple* followed it closely and emphasized the exposure of supposed fascist plots to destroy the French state. Particular emphasis was placed on supposed fascist plans for a civil war or *coup d’état* in France. Other stories described police investigations that uncovered far-right organizations storing weapons or violent rallies by organizations of the right.

The February crisis led not only to the continued publication and emphasis of Confederal positions on anti-fascism, but the further expansion of propaganda, protest and investigation into fascism as a phenomenon. This entailed the development of an internal educational apparatus within the CGT and the convocation of demonstrations

and meetings specifically devoted to the question of international fascism and the
CGT’s proposed means for avoiding it in France. The meeting of the Comité
Confédéral in late February of 1934 ordered the organization of demonstrations
across France in favor of the CGT’s economic program and against fascism. Anti-
fascist actions by the CGT in the past had often consisted of routine condemnation,
both at the local and national level, but a centralized directive towards manifestations
specifically opposing fascism was a completely new Confédéral commitment to
incorporating targeted opposition to the far-right into its political action. The
culmination of the demonstrations planned in February was meant to be the General
Estates of Labor (États-Generaux du Travail), which was essentially a national
congress held mainly for the purpose of confirming the Confederation’s support for a
plan of national economic renovation.150 The event itself saw further direct
connection of the CGT’s economic program and the prevention of fascism in France
and represented a large mobilization by the Confederation. The event’s manifesto
cited supposed economic successes in the battle against unemployment in countries
like the United States and United Kingdom and attributed them to successful attempts
at state planning in those countries. It argued that a comprehensive economic plan
must “be an emergency program which above all seeks to remedy the crisis with the
goal of pursuing the profound transformations that it requires.” Contrasting its
program with fascism, it said that “Fascism pretends to create economic order

150 Morgan Poggioli, “Le planisme à la CGT : Les origines d’une refonte syndicale au tournant du
through political dictatorship, we wish to create economic order through political liberty.”¹⁵¹

The fact that the events of February drove the CGT towards even more enthusiastic embrace of its program of economic reform brought stark condemnation from the leadership of the French Communist Party, which was contemporaneously developing its own way of dealing with the aftermath of the events of February 6ᵗʰ. The organization of the general strike on February 12ᵗʰ had not been a joint effort, and anti-Communism quickly reasserted its central role in Confederal propaganda.¹⁵² At the same time, though, all organizations of the left were faced with increasing pressure for unity at least in opposition to fascism, and sometimes unity more generally. During the events of February, the French Communist Party rejected an appeal for unified action with Socialists and members of the CGT, but it planned demonstrations of its own that ended up protesting in conjunction with those organized by other political groups.¹⁵³

In March of 1934, CGT official René Belin wrote an article condemning cooperation with Communists and their affiliated organizations. The article accused them of attacking the CGT rather than addressing the threat of fascism. Belin wrote “Faced with a fascist menace, do the Communists not have anything better to do than continue in their efforts to destroy Confederal organizations … Will Soviet Russia be better protected against the fascist madness when the last bastions of democracy have been destroyed.”¹⁵⁴ Belin’s attack was one of many before and after it. Before the

¹⁵¹ “La Réorganisation Économique Dans La Liberté,” La Voix Du Peuple, April 1934, 239.
¹⁵² Georges and Tintant, Léon Jouhaux, 2:127.
¹⁵³ Brower, The New Jacobins; the French Communist Party and the Popular Front, 39.
États-Generaux du Travail, the CGT accused the Communists, by opposing it, of sabotaging the anti-fascist movement. This complaint, along with others, indicated a general departure from the direct equivocation of Communists and fascists towards an argument that Communist efforts were a roadblock in a broader battle against it. On the day of the États-Generaux du Travail, April 7th 1934, Le Peuple published an article explicitly calling the Communists “Accomplices of fascism” for their opposition to the États-Generaux and accused them of urging their members to sabotage the event. After the meeting, Le Peuple published an editorial titled “Communism and antifascist action,” which claimed that Communists had been seen putting up flyers denouncing the event in Paris and argued that “The Communist Party and its subsidiary the CGTU” were “possessed by a blind and ferocious hatred.” The article concluded by saying “[i]t was this megalomaniacal and absurd policy that prevented, in recent years, the forces of German labor grouping themselves for an effective struggle against Hitlerism. The same foolishness has begun in France.”

Whereas attacks of previous years had criticized the goals of the French Communists, many of 1934’s attacks tended to attack their methods. This rhymed with the longstanding objection that the Communists would subject the CGT to the political will of a party. In early 1934, this attack was buttressed with the idea that slow decision making in Moscow was harming the overall effort for unity against fascism. Both the CGT and CGTU has long stated their desire for unity, but continued to contrast their different ideas of how it might be achieved. In April of 1934, Belin criticized the Communists for insufficient commitment to the anti-fascist cause.

“Against rising French fascism, which is recruiting and establishing a doctrine and platform, the Communist Party can, alone, do nothing … Through its constant attitude of obstruction against all alliances, the Communist movement was set the stage for European dictatorships. Will we, in France, let it freely play this criminal game?”

While it was using fascism as a rhetorical tool in political conflicts, the CGT was also devoting resources towards publicizing its specific understanding of the roots of fascism to its members and the general public through forms of propaganda and training other than the Confederation’s daily newspaper. The new organs of Confederal opinion, like the internal education apparatus that had been set up in 1933, were used to transmit the Confederation’s ideological understanding of fascism. The Confederal Center for Workers’ Education (Centre Confédéral d’Éducation Ouvriere), had been set up in 1933 as part of the push towards centralization, propaganda, and education that was underway in the era of the plan. The Center distributed correspondence courses and organized informational meetings for CGT members. The CCEO After the events of February, the May issue of La Voix du Peuple published a report on the organization that emphasized its growth. It also noted that the CCEO had accelerated its study of fascism and published a study of Italian Fascism. During the Popular Front period, the CCEO would publish several documents on fascism and it continued to expand between 1934 and 1936. The growing Confederal propaganda operation, which had begun before 1934, continued

156 René Belin, “Impérialisme Communiste,” Le Peuple, April 11, 1934, 1.
159 Poggioli, “Entre Éducation Populaire et Propagande Syndicale,” 40.
after it. Meetings of the Bureau Confédéral in the months after the February riots emphasized the priority Confederal leadership placed on education and outreach and La Voix du Peuple emphasized the need for broad diffusion of the CGT’s economic and political program.

The tension between the economic and political ideology of the CGT and the political priorities of the French Communist Party was profound, as the previously cited articles in Le Peuple show. The fact that Confederal attacks often focused on Communist failure to participate in, or attempts to sabotage, activities by the CGT left the Confederation’s anti-Communism rootless beyond the party’s behavior towards it. If this were to change, the Confederation would find itself facing a dilemma over whether or not its years of calling for reunification, and blaming the Communists for splitting away from an organization that claimed to group workers of all political affiliations together, would require commitment to common action against what it believed to be a serious fascist threat to France. In general, the CGT substituted its vision of “organic unity” for “unity of action” and made clear that it would not accept cooperation with the Communists other than through reunification. Ultimately, though, this would prove just as problematic as any other policy.

During 1934, Communist policy would change and embrace joint action with the groups it had formerly denounced, but the transition was slow and the response from the leadership of the CGT ranged from hostile to ambivalent. Despite their previous attacks on Communist leadership for insufficiently zealous pursuit of the anti-fascist struggle, the CGT found itself in a difficult position. The change in Communist policy occurred during June of 1934 and signaled the beginning of the
slow construction of the coalition that would become the popular front, as well as
renewed effort by the Communists for the reunification of the CGT and CGTU. This
effort, which was ultimately successful, saw anti-fascism effectively used as a
rhetorical tool *within* the CGT against some of the more anti-Communist leaders of
the organization. During the period approaching the ultimate reunification of the
CGT, anti-fascism was expressed as a political value throughout the organization, and
served as a stated purpose for nearly every action undertaken by the CGT. Anti-
fascism, though, when placed at the center of Confederal organizing, exacerbated
some of the contradictions within the organization, particularly between anti-
Communism and claims of affinity for a policy of joint action against a fascist threat.
It would, against the will of some CGT officials, come to be the primary engine of
syndical reunification.

**Anti-Fascism and Reunification: Embracing Unified Action in 1935**

In ideological terms, the vision of fascism that the CGT developed was a
product both of the organization’s pre-war history and the specific political synthesis
it arrived at after division. This reformist syndicalism, which emphasized political
independence alongside more traditional reformist goals like nationalization and
social insurance, defined itself largely in contrast to its Communist rivals. As such, it
strongly opposed violent revolution. Revolution and illegality were central to the
Confederal understanding of fascist movements. The Confederation’s emphasis on
legality and economic reform without revolutionary change had previously put it at
odds with its Communist counterpart. 1935 and 1936 saw the adaptation of anti-
fascism as a meaningful driver of reunification between the CGT and the CGTU. In
the CGT’s propaganda, reunification was hailed as the reconstitution of the old
organization that had been divided in 1922. The process of reunification was long and bureaucratic, but anti-fascism formed a major part of its ideological justification. In reuniting with the Communists, the CGT again redefined itself, this time as a broader church defined by a series of political convictions that included staunch opposition to fascism and as an institution that was willing, for the first time since 1922, to consider constituting a joint effort with members of a party they had long despised. This section and this chapter will end in the summer of 1935, before the CGT and CGTU reunified, but after reunification was a fait accompli. Reunification was the result of pressure on the leadership of the CGT, which it resisted, to join in a national alliance opposing the far-right, an alliance which would eventually become the Popular Front. That shift had both a practical origin in changes in the Communist party’s willingness to cooperate and a theoretical one, in the perceived need for unity in face of a fascist threat to the French Republic. During this period, anti-fascism established itself as a vital watchword in French politics, particularly in the politics of the left. The CGT, by virtue of its commitment to opposing fascism, was to an extent forced to accept a reunification with its estranged Communist sibling. During this period, anti-fascism was still routinely deployed in Confederal propaganda. Arrests of league members or supposed league plots were routinely covered in Confederal publication and public liberties were still vigorously defended. This section, though, will focus on the degree to which the rhetoric of anti-fascism was able to compel the CGT to overcome its longstanding anti-Communism and accept unity with the CGTU.

During 1934, the French Communist Party’s maintenance of the “class against class” line provoked tension within the party and suffered in the eyes of the public for
its failure to align itself with other organizations of the left against fascism.\textsuperscript{160} When
Jacques Doriot, Deputy Mayor of the deeply Communist suburb of Saint-Denis,
publicly opposed the Communist Party’s attitude towards common action against
fascism and found himself the subject of a campaign of criticism within the party that
would ultimately lead to his expulsion, \textit{Le Peuple} mocked the party for its internal
problems.\textsuperscript{161} While the CGT continued to express its opposition to the positions of the
Communist Party, some local organizations within it were beginning to cooperate
directly with the Confederation’s stated enemy and constituted local anti-fascist
committees with all organizations of the left, including the PCF and SFIO.\textsuperscript{162} At the
end of May and beginning of June 1934, a change in Communist policy became clear.

On June 8\textsuperscript{th}, the CGT received a letter from the leadership of the CGTU
requesting cooperation and common action and stopping short of supporting the
reconstitution of the old CGT.\textsuperscript{163} In response, the CGT affirmed its support for
ultimately reuniting the two organizations. These message began the long back-and-
forth that would ultimately lead to the reunification of the CGT and outlined the basic
terms that future negotiations over reunification would follow.\textsuperscript{164} The two
organizations exchanged letters in June. In the June 30\textsuperscript{th} 1934’s issue of \textit{Le Peuple},
the \textit{Commission Administrative} of the CGT reiterated the Confederation’s general
attitude towards reunification and emphasized that any reunified organization “Would

\textsuperscript{160} Brower, \textit{The New Jacobins; the French Communist Party and the Popular Front}, 46.
\textsuperscript{161} Eugène Morel, “La Nouvelle Querelle,” \textit{Le Peuple}, April 17, 1934, 1.
\textsuperscript{162} Poggioli, \textit{La CGT du Front populaire à Vichy: De la Réunification à la Dissolution (1934-1940)}, 47.
\textsuperscript{163} René Belin, \textit{Du Secrétariat de La C.G.T. Au Gouvernement de Vichy : Mémoires, 1933-1942}
(Éditions Albatros, 1978), 54.
\textsuperscript{164} An exact account of the messages sent back and forth by the CGT and CGTU can be found in the
June 1934 issue of \textit{La Voix du Peuple}. 
have to be realized on the basis of … complete independence.” The statement claimed that unity could only be realized through the defection of CGTU organizations to the CGT. The concrete result of this exchange was an invitation extended by the CGT to the leadership of the CGTU to a meeting in October to discuss the reunification of the two organizations. The months between June and October 1934 saw several of the rival Industrial Federations of the CGT take steps towards reunifying at the level of their industries. One hundred organizations within the CGT also signed a letter requesting that a joint congress for reunification be convened.

The Meetings on October 9th were the most serious step towards reunification since the two CGT’s had split in 1922. According to René Belin and his own biographers, Léon Jouhaux did not sincerely wish for reunification, but was rather pressured by both fellow leaders of the CGT and a general popular pressure. Belin cites the appointment of François Million, a staunch anti-Communist, as evidence that Jouhaux hoped that the negotiations begun in October of 1934 would not bear the result that they ultimately did. Two main factors precipitated reunification’s capacity to override the CGT’s internal opposition to reconstructing their Confederation with Communist aid. The first was the CGTU’s flexibility. Operating in line with party policy, it rarely hesitated in proposing joint action with the CGT and did not stop when these offers were rebuffed. The CGT’s enthusiasm for anti-fascism and longstanding demands for unity had put leaders of the organization in a difficult

165 Poggioli, *La CGT du Front populaire à Vichy: De la Réunification à la Dissolution (1934-1940)*, 51.
166 Poggioli, 55.
168 Georges and Tintant, 2:138.
position and their former political enemies did not give them any room to refuse negotiations on the grounds of Communist intransigence.

The negotiations that had begun in October of 1934 ended in declared failure during February of 1935, but would restart during the summer of that year in midst of growing popular support of, and political organization for, joint actions on the part of the French left against fascism. Increasingly, the disdain that the CGT expressed towards the Communist party became exceptional among its political allies. On May 8th, the SFIO and the PCF agreed to stand aside for one another during the year’s municipal elections. Jouhaux’s biographers note that May 1935 also saw the signing of the Franco-Soviet pact. In June 1935, the CGTU requested the re-opening of negotiations over unity, an offer that the Commission Administrative of the CGT accepted on the 12th. The negotiations in June consisted of the representatives of the CGTU fulfilling every term requested by the CGT. According to Belin, the fact that the negotiations were taking place was enough to convince him that reunification was imminent. The same was apparently true of François Million, the main Confederal negotiator in the previous meeting, who Jouhaux replaced when he refused to participate in the July conferences. During the same month that it was negotiating over reunification, the CGT had agreed to help organize joint demonstrations of the left on July 14th 1935. These demonstrations, which the CGT helped to organize, filled the streets of Paris and saw direct cooperation between the CGT, CGTU, SFIO and PCF. The rallies were primarily anti-fascist and pro-

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169 Poggioli, *La CGT du Front populaire à Vichy: De la Réunification à la Dissolution (1934-1940)*, 64.
171 Georges and Tintant, 2:139.
republican. *Le Peuple* estimated that 500,000 people had demonstrated in what it called “A grandiose day for liberty against fascism.” The demonstration was one that glorified France’s republican heritage and democratic government. Shortly afterwards, in what Jouhaux’s biographers call a “decisive moment,” the negotiators for the CGT and the CGTU issued a joint statement agreeing to continue negotiations towards reunification. This declaration amounted to a turning point, and saw the beginning of continuous meetings between the leaderships of the CGT and the CGTU that would culminate in the reunification of the two organizations. For both René Belin and Jouhaux’s biography, this shift represented a turning point at which reunification became a practical certainty. In the following months, the leadership of the CGT decided to submit the question of unity to the September 1935 Confederal Congress. By the time the Congress arrived, *Le Peuple* treated reunification like a certainty, presenting a reflective, rather than explicitly partisan, attitude towards the idea of reunification. On the day that the Congress voted for a resolution that, in the words of *Le Peuple* assured that “[S]yndical Unity has virtually been realized.”

**Conclusion**

Belin’s characterization would prove to be correct. The discussions begun in 1934 and continued in 1935 finally resulted in the complete reunification of the CGT over the course of 1935 and 1936, culminating in a special Congress in Toulouse in March of 1936. In a vote that followed CGTU/CGT lines, the Congress voted to remain in the IFTU rather than join the Moscow-affiliated *International Syndicale*

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The re-entry of Communists in the CGT did not immediately change the political alignment of the Confederation, indeed it occurred at the height of Communist willingness to compromise with political opponents on the left. The former members of the CGTU entered an organization that continued to vigorously endorse the kind of economic ideology that had been introduced with 1918’s Minimum Program. They also entered the leadership of the CGT as a minority, with only 2 seats out of 8 on the new Bureau Confédéral. As a unified organization, anti-fascism continued to play the central role in Confederal rhetoric that it had established for itself after 1934. The CGT, as part of a national movement including political parties like the PCF and SFIO, defined itself as a defender of public liberties against a proposed fascist menace to them. He anti-fascism of the Popular Front era, even after reunification maintained its essential support for democratic, republican government, and viewed fascism largely through its role as an enemy of democracy. This pro-democracy attitude led the CGT to welcome the election of Léon Blum’s Popular Front government in April and May of 1936. Anti-fascism, as a national political movement, had proven capable of reuniting two organization that were hostile to one another.

1936, in addition to the election of a Popular Front Government, also saw massive sit-down strikes that paralyzed French industry. The strike of May and June 1936 attracted millions of workers who occupied their workplaces without direction from Confederal leadership. The strikes resulted in the Matignon Accords,

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175 Poggioli, *La CGT du Front populaire à Vichy: De la Réunification à la Dissolution (1934-1940)*, 86.
176 Poggioli, 82.
negotiated under the supervision of the government by the CGT and representatives of French industry. The accords provided workers with a guaranteed right to collective bargaining, as well as an overall increase in wages. Blum’s government also passed legislation guaranteeing French workers a 40 hour workweek and providing them with paid vacations.178 The accords, along with Blum’s program of economic reform, represented a victory for the Confederation’s 1918 Minimum program and the broader economic program of the CGT. The strike and the election of the Popular Front led the CGT to grow massively, jumping from 800,000 members in 1935 to nearly 4 million in 1937.179 The election of a government of the left made a direct fascist danger within the French Republic seem far less likely. The CGT continued to view fascism as a source of international aggression and disorder, and attacked it as such. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, the Confederation opposed French neutrality and engaged in clandestine support for the Spanish Republic.180 Anti-fascism, at least on the international scale, remained a major Confederation priority through the outbreak of the Second World War.

The reunification that had been brought about by anti-fascism ultimately did have some of the consequences that its opponents, like René Belin, were most frightened of. Throughout the second half of the 1930’s Communist influence within the CGT grew, and the leadership of the Confederation was riven by factionalism. The faction most strongly opposed to Communism, led by Belin, grouped itself

178 Lorwin, 74.
180 Poggioli, La CGT du Front populaire à Vichy: De la Réunification à la Dissolution (1934-1940), 162.
around a weekly magazine called *Syndicats*, which endorsed “reformism, pacifism and independence.”\(^{181}\) The former CGTU leadership coalesced around *La Vie Ouvriere*, which had been the Communist Confederation’s equivalent to *La Voix du Peuple*.\(^{182}\) The former *Unitaires* managed to gain control of several Industrial Federations after 1936, and continued to grow as the Second World War approached.\(^{183}\)

When the Second World War began, the CGT again committed itself to the support of the French nation against foreign invasion. Just after the outbreak of war, the leadership of the Confederation expelled the former leaders of the CGTU for supporting the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.\(^{184}\) Having brought the Communists in as part of a popular mobilization against fascism, they were then expelled for inadequate opposition to it.

The most profound political change in the interwar CGT, its readmission of expelled Communists, was a direct result of the Confederation’s attitudes towards fascism as well as a national political climate that emphasized anti-fascism as an immediate national priority. In this sense, anti-fascism dramatically changed the course of Confederal history, helping to create the organization that would emerge after the war and continue through the present day. Having once been a partner to anti-Communism, it became an alternative to it instead.

\(^{181}\) Poggioli, 186.
\(^{182}\) Poggioli, 186.
\(^{184}\) Poggioli, “Le planisme à la CGT,” 216.
Conclusion

In exploring the history of anti-fascism within the CGT, this thesis has emphasized a few points that I believe to be key to the Confederation’s understanding of itself, and therefore its understanding of fascism, during the interwar period. These include the CGT’s relentless emphasis on opposition to dictatorship, its loyalty to the French nation and its tendency to reject direct cooperation with political parties. In anti-fascism, these principles of the interwar Confederation found both a source of support and contradiction.

The trauma of its split and the political necessities of organizing in the early interwar years led the Confederation to understand fascism through both its attacks on affiliated organizations in Italy and its use of tactics that the CGT had thoroughly rejected. In these years, a basic ideological framework for the Confederation’s opposition to fascism emerged. This framework reveals both how the Confederation viewed fascism, and how it sought to define itself. Its commitment to international peace led it to condemn Italian aggression, but its patriotism and confidence in the French republic led it to reject the idea that there was any direct fascist threat to France. Its generic objection to dictatorship allowed it to use fascism as an anti-Communist weapons. In the Confederation’s eyes, fascism was a dangerous product of unhealthy, immature democratic systems, and therefore only likely to be popular abroad.

The emergence of German fascism in the midst of economic crisis and the events of February 1934 gave the CGT an opportunity to see France as the kind of country that could potentially see itself governed by a fascist dictator. This threat, which was apprehended across French society, propelled anti-fascism to the center of
Confederal politics and created conditions that allowed the CGT and its former bitter rival to reunify themselves.

This basic sketch of the trajectory of anti-fascism in the CGT from 1922 to 1935 provides a framework not only for understanding the Confederation’s reaction to one specific issue, but a framework for understanding how the CGT, during the interwar years, developed a unique and independent political vision that it, through propaganda and its widespread organization, was able to manifest across France. The vision of fascism that developed alongside this political vision, emphasized democracy and “liberties” against a form of government that was believed to totally negate them.

The specific nature of this political vision and the way it shaped its conception of anti-fascism can provide a jumping-off point for further investigations of different, previously barely discussed, aspects of the CGT’s social existence during the interwar period. For example, the Confederation’s opposition to French Communism but ambiguous attitude towards the Soviet Union is likely the product of the kinds of beliefs about aggression and international cooperation that were unique to the CGT in the interwar years. The specter of fascism played a role in Confederation’s opposition to immigration in the 1920’s. Beyond these examples the specificities of Confederal anti-fascism are applicable to the investigation not of the uniqueness of any given period of the Confederation’s history, but of the continuities between them. For example, the post-war CGT continued to portray itself as a defender of “liberties.” Inheriting, despite its Communist character, a feature of the reformist CGT.
A number of the Confederal figures cited in this thesis, and indeed a fair number of the CGT’s interwar leaders, like René Belin and Francis Million, ended up as collaborators under the Vichy government. Their justifications for their actions were spoken in the language of the interwar CGT, evoking the Amiens Charter and fear of a Communist takeover of the labor movement. Other leaders, like Léon Jouhaux, Maurice Harmel and Raoul Lenoir opposed the Vichy government, themselves invoking themes like political liberty and the independence of the union movement from governmental influence that had been popular during the interwar period. In truth, both categories of Confederal leader had some claim to the legacy of the interwar Confederation, which mixed militant anti-Communism and patriotism with a traditionally socialist concern for the welfare of the working class. Both those within the CGT who collaborated with Vichy and those that opposed had been shaped by the political conflicts and contradictions of the interwar Confederation.

Collaboration by Confederal leaders, and the way they shaped Vichy policy, is a worthy target of future investigation. Such an investigation specifically, because of the relevance of fascism the entire existence of Vichy, would benefit from an understanding of the development of anti-fascism within the CGT.

This thesis’ investigation of Confederal anti-fascism is meant to provide not only an introduction to its specific subject, but also an impression of the history of France during the interwar period and the political organizations and debates that helped to define it. Anti-fascism was a dynamic and evolving political value within the CGT of the interwar period, one that it used to define itself in contrast to other organizations. Understanding the CGT’s version of opposing fascism provides a
greater understanding of both the Confederation itself and the political climate in which it operated. The Confederation’s vision of Fascism, which it applied at various points to various ends, shaped both its own activity and ideology, and French history.
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