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Memory, influence and leadership: resilience and resistance of workers in Le Havre 1936 - 1944

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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Abstract

Existing work on French factory workers during the German occupation has so far revealed striking variations between how workers behaved, depending on their town or region and even on their workplace. The same themes appear - hardship, wages, trade unions, protest - and yet they are configured completely differently depending on geography, local history and local populations. This thesis looks at the specific example of Le Havre where, in contrast to most other areas, the workers voiced their discontent from the very start of the Occupation. However, their discontent was not transformed into organised resistance in 1943 and 1944 to the same extent as elsewhere in France. This thesis therefore identifies three themes - memory, influence and leadership – in order to explain why the Le Havre workers behaved as they did. In particular, it is the focus on leadership – or lack of it – which provides its significant contribution to the understanding of French labour history during this period.

Using archival sources, it traces the history of port and factory workers in Le Havre from the factory occupations that accompanied the Popular Front election victory in 1936, through to the end of the German occupation. The 1936 strikes gave workers a taste of victory and a memory of what they could achieve, which they took with them into the Occupation. These strikes ensured that trade unionism was the greatest influence on Le Havre’s workers, providing workers with a resilience which they exhibited after the Germans had arrived. The town’s trade union leaders had been present for many years, gaining the workers’ trust and respect through many successful disputes. However, these leaders disappeared during the Occupation, in some cases virtually, because they co-operated with the authorities, in others, literally because they were deported. Without leadership, the workers were unable to turn their discontent into real and sustained action.
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I should first of all like to thank my excellent supervisor, Chris Warne, for his encouragement, support and invaluable feedback throughout the six years of my PhD. My thanks also go to Rod Kedward for sharing his unique knowledge and library with me and for prompting new ways for me to look at my subject. I am indebted to Paul McCue, who provided me with the debriefing reports by SOE agent, Philippe Liewer, which I would never have found otherwise.

In Le Havre I was fortunate to find and receive support from three leading local historians. John Barzman at the University of Le Havre was my first port of call when deciding on my subject and his response encouraged me to think that I had found a good topic to research. When we later met in person he provided me with useful insights into what I had discovered. Claude Malon, whose work on the collaboration of Havrais employers mirrors my own, has been a constant source of support and answerer of questions. Jean-Paul Nicolas has also been very generous with his knowledge about the local oil refineries, lending me his rare copy of André Augeray’s memoir and crediting me with his entry on Louis Le Flem on the new Maitron site devoted to those who were executed during the Occupation.

I am grateful to Olivier Feiertag at the University of Rouen for his feedback on the paper I gave at a conference on local resistance at his university.

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Abbreviations

CEM: Compagnie Electro-Mécanique
COSI: Comité ouvrier de secours immédiat
FTP: Franc-Tireurs et Partisans
RNP: Rassemblement national populaire
PPF: Parti populaire français
SFIO: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (precursor of the French Socialist Party)
SIA: Solidarité internationale antifasciste
SNCAN: Société Nationale de Constructions Aéronautiques du Nord (formerly known as the Breguet factory)
STO: Service du Travail Obligatoire
TO: Todt Organisation
UD: union départementale
UL: union locale
USOH: Union des syndicats ouvriers du Havre et de la région
Seine-Inférieure now Seine-Maritime

Introduction

In the 1930s Le Havre was France’s second largest port and an important industrial area. It was a working class town known for its solidarity and trade union militancy. This was a town where a general strike meant everyone on strike; where the first factory occupation in the whole of France in 1936 had taken place; where a May Day march could easily attract 40 000 people; and where the dockers’ union collected over a million francs for the Spanish Republican cause.

It was this militancy that led me to my original research question: ‘how did workers in this traditionally militant town respond to being occupied by the German army?’ My assumption was that because they had been combative before the war, this attitude would continue during the Occupation. Once I started my archival research though, I realised that my assumption was wrong; although Havrais workers did express their discontent from the start of the Occupation, it was rarely transformed into organised action, until 1943. When strikes and protests did take place in 1943 - 1944, they were much smaller than action taken by workers at that time elsewhere in France. However, I did find that, whilst Havrais workers did not carry out large strikes or demonstrations, they did display resilience to the adverse circumstances, evidenced by a range of behaviours that clearly alarmed the authorities.

Denis Peschanski provided me with the term ‘resilience’ to describe the behaviour that workers displayed during the Occupation. In his article: ‘Résistance, résilience et opinion publique dans la France des années noires’ he defines ‘resilience’ as: ‘all the behaviours of refusal, distance, protest which point to the desire to resist the blows inflicted by the Occupation and the defeat, and the desire to reconstruct an individual and collective identity.’ Peschanski does not, however, explain where such resilience came from. It is interesting that his article was published in a psychiatry journal as those working in the

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1 Denis Peschanski, ‘Résistance, résilience et opinion publique dans la France des années noires’, *Psychiatrie française*, vol. XXXVI (2006). This and all subsequent quotes where the original language is French are translated into English by the author.
2 Ibid, 6
fields of psychiatry and psychology are interested not only in defining what resilience is but also in which people are resilient and why.

It was my archival research that supplied the reasons - sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly - for the Havrais workers’ resilience and these reasons became my three themes: memory, influence and leadership. It was the police themselves who highlighted the importance of memory – in their reports on the workers’ state of mind. Several times they noted that the Havrais workers were motivated to take action during the Occupation because they remembered the success of the action they took in 1936, during the Popular Front. This observation led me to my second research question: ‘could the circumstances that existed in Le Havre in the pre-war period explain the behaviour of workers during the Occupation?’

It was in 1936 that many factory workers discovered the advantages of trade union membership. Their attachment to the concept of trade unionism, fostered during the heady days of that year, was also noted in the official reports written during the Occupation. Sometimes this attachment was noted directly, but often it was implicit in the action described. My theme of ‘influence’ was used to incorporate trade unionism, as this was the concept that most influenced workers.

My third theme, ‘leadership’, did not come directly from the archives. Instead, the importance of the trade union leaders to the popularity of trade unionism in Le Havre was something I inferred from the longevity of the leaders who were prominent in the town and the successful strikes that they led.

The resilience evidenced by Havrais workers during the Occupation, I argue, had its roots in the sense of solidarity created by this strong and successful trade union movement which was shaped by its confident and creative leaders in the pre-war years.

However, a third research question was emerging: ‘Why did these resilient workers not take the same level of action found in some other parts of France, either at the start of the Occupation, like the miners in the Nord, or later on, like
the rail workers in Lyons?’ The answer to this was to be found also in my themes of ‘influence’ and ‘leadership’.

Whilst ordinary workers were influenced by trade unionism, their leaders, were influenced by two other concepts: for the factory union’s leader it was communism, for the port workers’ leaders, anarcho-syndicalism. The increasing differences between these two political beliefs emerged from the newsletters and papers both sides produced in the years leading up to the war. I used these written sources to try and understand what had influenced the very different choices made by the trade union leaders during the Occupation, specifically: the port workers’ leaders’ decision to work with the authorities; the factory workers’ leader’s choice to resist.

It was the choice of the port workers’ leaders to co-operate that, I argue, is key to understanding why the Havrais workers did not take the same level of action as workers in some other parts of France. When they decided to work with the authorities, they absolved themselves from any obligation to voice workers’ concerns and lead their discontent into action. When they decided to inform the authorities that the factory workers’ leader was a Communist, a decision that led to his arrest and deportation, they deprived the workers of someone who had been prepared to continue his leadership role. With their leaders’ abrupt absence workers were unable to transform their discontent into organised action.

The existence of leadership is crucial for understanding when workers took action. Action is rarely spontaneous, even when it appears so from outside. A desire for action must be present for anything to happen but it takes someone to actually say “let’s do it”, suggest a day and time and then make sure that people will take part. Much of this can be delegated but, again, someone needs to do the delegating and then check that the organisation has taken place. This person has to be respected and trusted for their leadership to be followed. This confidence can be inspired by their official position or having led successfully before or simply from some aspect of their personality.

It is the concept of leadership and its importance that provides my contribution to the understanding of workers’ behaviour during the Occupation. Whilst the
heavy occupation of the town by German troops might appear to be the obvious explanation for a lack of organised action by Havrais workers, the workers displayed a resilience that showed that they were not overly intimidated by the occupier. Indeed, the primary sources rarely if ever mention that workers were cowed by the presence of thousands of German troops in their town.

I argue that the key element needed for workers to move from resilience to more sustained organised action was tried and trusted leadership. When this disappeared, either virtually, in the case of the port workers’ leaders or literally, in the case of the factory workers’ leader, the workers were unable to organise any sustained action. When new leaders did emerge later on in the Occupation, the punishment for any sign of resistance had become lethal and these individuals were harshly dealt with.

My focus on leadership highlights my belief that, in the end, it is not simply concepts, ideology or public opinion that make things happen, it is individual people who decide to take action. In doing so they make themselves a target, both for admiration but also for censure, and in the case of the Occupation, arrest, firing squad or deportation. Some of the people who led protest in Le Havre can be traced and named; others are simply a shadowy presence in a police report. All contributed to trying to create a better world for the Havrais workers. Their courage therefore should be highlighted and remembered.

Le Havre

Le Havre is situated on the Channel coast in the département of Seine-Maritime (called Seine-Inférieure before 1955), one of the two départements which comprise Upper Normandy. Le Havre differentiates itself from the rest of the mainly rural region by its industry. In the 1930s this took two forms: its port and its factories. Whilst Marseille, on the south coast, was France’s largest port, enabling trade with its colonies in Asia and Africa; Le Havre, at the other end of the country, was France’s second largest port, through which imports flowed from the Americas, Africa and northern Europe. Such a huge enterprise required a raft of other industries to support it: ship builders and repairers, rope-
makers and factories producing rivets, boilers and cannons. Hundreds of other factories also existed in Le Havre processing the raw materials which arrived through the port. Some were well-established by the 1930s but others represented new industries, namely oil refineries and a sea-plane factory.

Just over 180 000 people lived in Le Havre in 1936; the vast majority of whom were French.\(^3\) Despite being a port it was not a town where foreign sailors and traders made their home; Paris – only two hours away by train - was a more attractive option for immigrants. Moreover, there were enough indigenous Havrais to fill the jobs required. As a result, Le Havre had significantly fewer foreign inhabitants than the French average. The 3000 foreigners who did live in Le Havre were mainly Belgians, Spaniards, Poles and Italians. A small Jewish community of around 200 people lived in the town and were well integrated. The 150 North Africans, on the other hand were treated with hostility by the population.\(^4\)

This was a working class town known for its militancy. The port workers’ union won the right to a closed shop in 1928 and the union locale,\(^5\) the Union des syndicats ouvriers du Havre et de la région (USOH), was dominated by the unions that represented those who worked in the port. These unions, and therefore the USOH, were run by anarcho-syndicalists. From 1923 to 1940 the general secretary of both the USOH and the port workers’ union was Jean Le Gall. The length of time in these two posts was down to his popularity and success as a leader, not only ensuring that his members won the closed shop but a collective agreement which granted significant wage increases.

Le Gall was not the only significant local personality to be present in Le Havre’s political culture during much of the inter-war period. The mayor and député, Léon Meyer, was also in post for most of this time. Meyer was a coffee trader and member of the Jewish community. He was an astute politician, a member of the Radical Party, who built up a political base founded on speaking up for the working class and being a friend to the trade unions, in particular the port

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\(^3\) Jean Legoy, Le peuple du Havre et son Histoire 1914-1940: Croissance et crises (Fécamp: Éditions de l’Estuaire, 2002), 175

\(^4\) Ibid, 176

\(^5\) Local union confederation.
unions and the USOH. Indeed, his election as mayor in 1919 represented a victory for Havrais trade unionists and socialists in sharp contrast with the rest of the country where the left received disappointing election results and a fall in their number of députés. However, Meyer’s politics moved to the centre as the Communist Party gained members and influence and he refused to support his party’s decision to take part in the Popular Front government in 1936.

Meyer and Le Gall were both alarmed at the growth of the Communist Party which finally created a presence in the town in 1936. The metalworkers’ union, which represented the majority of factory workers, differed from the port workers’ unions in that its membership rose and fell depending on whether its members were in dispute. In 1936, its membership surged on the back of the strikes and occupations of that year and this time its members did not leave once their industrial action was over. The USOH’s membership reached 55 000 in that year and a fifth of that number (11 000) were members of the metalworkers’ union. Its general secretary was Louis Eudier, a popular and intelligent man who, although not then a Communist Party member was certainly a fellow-traveller. Although prominent for less time that Le Gall and Meyer, he was a significant local personality in the town from 1936 until the Occupation.

Le Havre’s importance as a port and industrial hub did not diminish once the Germans arrived in 1940. Intent on using the Channel coast as their base for invading England, the French ports, in particular Cherbourg and Le Havre became important strategic bases for the German army and navy. Le Havre was occupied by thousands of German troops who remained in the town for the duration of the Occupation. Not only did the Germans need the port for their invasion plans, they also instructed the town’s factories to start working for the German war effort. When the English invasion proved unworkable, the Germans realised that if the Allies landed in France, Le Havre would be

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6 John Barzman, Dockers, metallos, menagères: mouvements sociaux et cultures militantes au Havre 1912-1923 (Rouen: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 1997), 216
7 Legoy, Le peuple, 336
8 Ibid, 339
invaluable to them. It therefore needed to be protected and thus it became a centre for the construction of the Atlantic Wall.10

Definitions of Resistance and Collaboration

Post-war, the memory of resistance was fought over by the Gaullists and the Communists. At the Liberation the Gaullists claimed resistance had been carried out by the whole of the French population with the help of the Free French. The definition of resistance, however, soon narrowed to minimise civilian resistance and to focus on only those who had taken part in 'combat actions.'11 Despite the Communists’ commitment to the armed struggle, the Gaullist narrative was designed to marginalise Communists within the history of the Resistance and to focus on the exploits of de Gaulle’s Free French.

Squeezed out of history by the Gaullists, the Communists claimed their own version of events. In this, it was the working class, led by the Communists, who had formed the core of the resistance. For them, workers’ strikes and demonstrations were as much resistance activity as combat actions. As reductive a version as the Gaullists, it was the Communist narrative that faced the fiercest criticism, in particular as the Cold War took hold.12

The post-war wrangles between adherents of the Gaullist version of the Resistance and supporters of the Communist version complicates any analysis of what happened in France during the Occupation. In particular, in a study such as this one, which examines workers’ attitudes and behaviour during the Occupation, it is all too easy to analyse events through the prism of the Communist narrative. Post-war accounts written by Communists exude an anger that is difficult to ignore, in particular and relevant to this thesis: the local metalworkers’ leader, Louis Eudier’s memoir *Notre combat de classe et de*

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patriotes (1934-1945)\textsuperscript{13} and the first book to document trade unionists’ involvement in the Resistance, \textit{Le mouvement syndical dans la résistance}.\textsuperscript{14} This anger is arguably the result of a constant attempt throughout the Cold War to denigrate both the Communist participation in the Resistance and the numbers of Communists killed for their resistance activity.\textsuperscript{15} In the general mocking of their claim to be the ‘parti des 75 000 fusillés,’ it is forgotten quite how many Communists did lose their lives during the Occupation either by being shot, deported or killed in action. Whilst the figure of 75 000 is factually an exaggeration, to those working in an individual town, like Le Havre, and seeing their comrades killed and deported, the figure must have had an emotional truth.

The anger at the lack of acknowledgment of this loss of lives is accompanied, in the two books cited above, by bitter accusations that trade union leaders who did not join the Resistance had ‘collaborated.’ Louis Eudier uses this word to describe the actions of trade union leaders in Le Havre.\textsuperscript{16} The absence of any refutation of this charge has made its validity difficult to challenge. Indeed, there has been a striking absence of historical accounts of trade unionists and their leaders in Le Havre during the Occupation. This has been due to hostility from the local Syndicat des Dockers to any attempt by historians to write their history. The antagonism towards historians, in itself, suggests that the union did not cover itself in glory during the war.

It has therefore been important, in the writing of this thesis, to resist viewing the actions of workers and their trade union leaders through the post-war narrative crafted by the Communist Party. On the one hand, I have not classified all workers’ actions during the Occupation as acts of resistance, as the Communists would have it. Instead I have analysed each act to assess whether it was a resistance act or one focussed on local and specific grievances. On the other hand, I have tried to withstand the emotional pull of Louis Eudier’s fury at his fellow trade union leaders and not to dub them simply

\textsuperscript{13} Louis Eudier, \textit{Notre combat de classe et de patriotes (1934-1945)} (Le Havre: Imprimerie Duboc, 1982a)
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Le mouvement syndical dans la résistance} (Paris: Éditions de la Courtille, 1975)
\textsuperscript{15} Roger Bourderon and Avakoumovitch, Yvan, \textit{Détruire le PCF} (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1988), 245
\textsuperscript{16} Eudier, \textit{Notre combat}, 126
as ‘collaborators.’ Instead I have tried to put their choices into context and to see why they would have chosen to co-operate with the authorities. Seen from their point of view at that particular point of time, preserving the organisation and structures that they represented meant working with the authorities. At what point this co-operation slid into ‘acts of collaboration’ could only, arguably, be discerned with hindsight.

**Charte du Travail**

Vichy published the Charte du Travail in October 1941. This was a major piece of legislation which articulated Pétain’s desire to eradicate conflict between workers and employers.

The Charte abolished all independent trade unions, removed legal status from the *union locales* (UL) and *union départementales* (UD) and banned strikes and lock-outs (which had already been prohibited by the Germans in May 1940). In their place new trade unions would be established, one for each type of work and each rank of job. This new system removed the co-operation between unions that had been the feature of the ULs, UDJs and, indeed, the national confederations, like the CGT, that had lost their legal status in August 1940. Vichy saw this cooperation as having been the main instigator of class struggle by its ability to generalise demands and grievances.\(^1^8\)

The main vehicle for the new way of working, which would remove the combative style of pre-war labour relations i.e. workers versus management, was the *comité social*. These committees were to be made up of representatives from management, technicians and foremen, and workers. These committees would exist in the workplace, at a local and at a national level. Nationally they would fix wages and terms and conditions; locally they would solve workplace disputes.

\(^{17}\) Departmental union confederation.

In Le Havre, the authorities noted that the workers were uninterested in the Charte. Instead they were concerned only with having official representation and in obtaining higher wages. In other words, whatever the government might wish for in terms of abolishing traditional forms of trade unionism, the workers were still very attached to a form of organisation that had served them well in recent years.

Whilst the Charte de Travail was a very comprehensive piece of legislation, it appears that it was almost impossible to put in place. By 1943 none of it had yet been widely implemented, except for the *comités sociaux d’entreprises*, or workplace committees. The workplace committees were for companies with more than a hundred employees. In Le Havre, most factories of this size had one by 1943 and they were instrumental in providing services to the workforce. These services included the provision of canteens and allotments, the setting-up of hardship funds and providing aid to employees who were currently prisoners-of-war in Germany. Whilst the services these *comités* provided were valuable, they did not satisfy the desire of factory workers to have their trade unions back. Management could veto the representatives that workers chose to have on the *comités* and the issue of wages could not be discussed at the meetings of the *comités sociaux*.

In December 1943, the worker delegates to the workplace committees in Le Havre had an opportunity to voice their concerns at a study day run by the Office des Comités Sociaux. In a report on this event written by the police, it was clear that the workers there did not want charity, which is how they viewed the services provided by the *comités sociaux*, but higher wages so they could themselves provide for their families.  

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19 Report by Insp Castebert to the *Commissaire principal* of the RG, 6 Dec 1943, 51W70, DA
Indeed, although the anarcho-syndicalist leaders succeeded in preserving the USOH despite the Charte abolishing ULs, their decision to co-operate with the authorities meant that they virtually stopped doing any of the trade union work that workers were so attached to. There were some long drawn-out correspondence between the USOH leaders and various employers over issues of non-payment of holiday pay (which were never resolved) but only one attempt to represent workers’ pressing demands. This was a claim for higher wages on behalf of the Union of Tramway Workers which took the form of a very polite correspondence between them and the sub-prefect which started in September 1941 and was still unresolved in February 1944.

The irony is that whilst the leaders of the USOH attempted to preserve trade union organisation by co-operating with Vichy’s representatives, running a charity and writing letters, factory workers in Le Havre endeavoured to re-create the essence of trade unionism i.e. workers’ representation and the ability to negotiate wages. In particular, workers at the Breguet seaplane factory attempted to turn their comité social into a quasi-trade union by using their comité social representatives to take demands for higher wages to the factory director and by continuing to vote overwhelmingly for an individual despite his being vetoed three times by management.

**Literature Review**

**Local Histories**

The history of workers in Le Havre during the Occupation is one that has not yet been told in its entirety. In 1960 Fernand Legagneux, then president of the UD of the CGT in Seine-Maritime, wrote a short history of workers’ struggle in Rouen and Le Havre to be used on a course training CGT activists. Whilst he discusses local workers’ history up to 1936, he does not mention the war years. He outlines the anarcho-syndicalist influence in Le Havre but, whilst admitting that ‘the differing ideological currents within the organisations have clashed
quite sharply, he is keen to find common ground. Despite having been a militant Communist since 1925, Legagneux’s aim is clearly to show how effective a well-organised trade union movement can be, rather than to rake over past quarrels, however bitter at the time. And for Legagneux, the trade unions in Le Havre had been consistently impressive, as he writes: ‘What characterises the Havrais movement is the organisation which can be found nowhere else… its excellent solidarity… its vigilance… its energy, spirit, enthusiasm.’ As a result, he notes that it is no surprise that the wages in Le Havre had always been higher than elsewhere in the département. And if in the past, Havrais trade unionists believed that trade unionism was enough and politics should be shunned, Legagneux was happy to report that this was becoming less and less the case; the message being that the Communists had won the argument.

Fernand Legagneux clearly had a specific motive in writing his account of local history: to inspire and instruct local trade union militants. Local historians of Le Havre writing for a wider public, and without a similar agenda, have also told parts of the story but not in detail. Jean Legoy, local schoolteacher turned historian particularly interested in workers’ lives, has written several books about Le Havre including a four volume history of the town which ends in 1940. A history of the Communists in Le Havre 1930 - 1983, written by Marie-Paule Dhaille-Hervieu, details the activities of Communists during 1936 to 1944 but provides only intriguing glimpses of the actions of the rest of the trade union movement during these years. John Barzman, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Le Havre, has written several books about the history of workers in Le Havre throughout the twentieth century but none that focus solely on the years of the Popular Front and the Occupation. Claude Malon has come the closest, with his book, Occupation, épuration, reconstruction: Le monde de l’entreprise au Havre (1940 - 1950), in which he

20 Fernand Legagneux, Le Mouvement ouvrier en Seine-Maritime (Rouen: Union départementale des syndicats CGT de Seine-Maritime, 1960), 17
21 Ibid, 14.
details how local companies made huge profits by working for the Germans during the war. Within this history Malon devotes a chapter to the choices made by employers, workers and trade unionists faced with the Vichy regime in which he does not shy away from outlining the activities of the anarcho-syndicalist leaders.

It is these activities that make the story of Le Havre difficult for local historians to tackle. Whilst carrying out my research in Le Havre I was told more than once that the local Syndicat des Dockers was very protective of its own history and hostile to anyone who tried to write it. It would not open its archives up for historians to examine and had apparently issued threats to those who had had the temerity to write about them. This is easier to understand when one knows that dockers in Le Havre can usually still only be considered for employment if they have a family member who is a docker. Thus the history of the Havrais dockers is very much a family history and therefore jealously guarded.

I was also told, however, that in recent years there had been a softening amongst the union’s leadership and a more open attitude towards local historians. Certainly, Malon received no hostile reaction from the union, neither when his book was published in 2012 nor when he wrote an article in 2014 about the trade union leaders for Le Fil Rouge, the journal of the Institut CGT d’histoire sociale de Seine-Maritime.24 Therefore it may be time for this particularly fraught period of history to be told and perhaps it is easier for someone unconnected personally to the locality to tell it.

The History of Workers and Trade Unions during the Occupation

The choices made by trade unionists to co-operate with the authorities rather than resist are not often covered in the literature, other than the most notable example of the former secretary of the CGT, René Belin, taking up the position of Minister of Labour in the Vichy government. Jean-Pierre Le Crom has written the most thoroughly on this subject in his book, Syndicats nous voilà! Vichy et le

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corporatisme. In addition, there is: *Le Syndicalisme dans la France occupée,* an edited collection bringing together historians of management, workers and the civil service, with the Institut d'histoire social de la CGT. The Institut enabled the use of recently opened archives to look at the trade union federations, finding that many of them co-operated with the authorities during the Occupation.

When it comes to telling the wider story of French workers during the Occupation, the historiography is not extensive. The first major book to tackle the subject was *Le mouvement syndical dans la résistance,* published in 1975. This book was based on a conference organised in 1972 by the CGT and a group wanting to set up the Resistance museum in Ivry-sur-Seine. It gathered together historians, trade union activists and former résistants to discuss the actions of workers and trade unions during the Occupation. The timing of this conference is significant in that it took place during a period when, as Henry Rousso says, ‘the Resistance had lost… its coherence.’ Rouso writes that this was the era of the ‘mode retro’, when a number of books and films appeared, most notably *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* and *Lacombe Lucien,* which questioned the choices made by the French during the Occupation and downplayed the role of the Resistance and the Communists within it. The conference and the book aimed to correct this impression by giving an opportunity for militants who resisted to talk with pride about what they and their comrades had done and to highlight the essential role played by the working class within the Resistance. Indeed, the book stresses that it was not only workers’ participation within the organised Resistance that was key but that the making of demands within the workplace was also an act of resistance. There is a fury in this book, not just at those who would downplay the role of workers and Communists in resisting Vichy and the German occupier but also at those

29 Ibid, 145
31 *Lacombe Lucien* (dir. Louis Malle, 1974).
anti-Communist trade unionists who worked with the regime. The book’s contributors argue that these anti-Communists were, at least in part, responsible for the arrests, deportations and deaths of trade union militants during the war.

However, as with the Fernand Legagneux text cited above, the conference and book were not solely looking at the past but were keen to provide a contemporary lesson for workers; in this case for those workers active in the strikes and protests that were widespread during the first half of the 1970s. The book is an un-nuanced portrayal of working class heroism designed to inspire workers in the present and to face down those who would deny the vital role played by workers in the resistance.

The four publications that form the core of French labour history for this period are all collections of articles; three based on conferences and one a special journal issue. In 1992, the most referred-to book about the subject was published: *Les ouvriers en France pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*. That same year an issue of *Le Mouvement ouvrier*, with the title: ‘Syndicalismes sous Vichy’ was also published. Fifteen years later came *Travailler dans les entreprises sous l’Occupation* and the following year, *Le Syndicalisme dans la France occupée*, mentioned above. For my purposes, the last book is only tangentially relevant in that it focusses on the national trade union federations rather than on local trade unions. In addition, there is Ludivine Broch’s recent book, *Ordinary Workers, Vichy and the Holocaust: French Railwaymen and the Second World War*. This, whilst being a fascinating exploration of the lives and actions of railway workers during the Occupation, is, again, not directly relevant to my own work. This is because, firstly, it is about a group of workers I do not discuss in this thesis - Le Havre not being an important centre for rail workers - and secondly, because this was not a group of workers with a strong

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32 Denis Peschanski, and Jean-Louis Robert (eds.), *Les ouvriers en France pendant la seconde guerre mondiale* (St-Just-La-Pendue: L’Imprimerie Chirat, 1992)
33 ‘Syndicalismes sous Vichy’, *Le Mouvement social*, no. 158 (Jan-Mar 1992)
34 Christian Chevandier and Jean-Claude Daumas (eds.), *Travailler dans les entreprises sous l’Occupation*, (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007)
35 Margairaz and Tartakowsky, *Le syndicalisme*
37 The important ‘railway town’ in Seine-Inférieure was Sotteville-lès-Rouen.
attachment to trade unions until, curiously, during the war. Broch discusses how this ‘generally professionally conscious and politically moderate group,’ who had played no part in the strikes of 1936, flocked to join a trade union in 1943 and then started taking the industrial action for which they have become known ever since. However, Broch’s underlying focus on the everyday experience of her group of workers, the ways those workers showed their discontent during the Occupation, and the blurred edges around resistance and collaboration, are all preoccupations that I also share.

The four collections of articles mentioned above speak more directly to my thesis because they deal mainly with a particular town, department or region of France. As one reads these articles it becomes very clear how the history of workers differs from town to town and region to region; each locality and industry had its own history and set of circumstances that contributed to very specific differences. The majority of articles are about areas in the north and east of France which were the most industrialised parts of the country. However, a few articles focus on regions that are mainly rural but have an area of industrialisation, for example Brittany and the Var. Normandy fits this description but there is only one article about one department in the region: Calvados; certainly nothing about Le Havre or even Seine-Maritime. My thesis therefore fills some of this gap.

The same themes recur throughout these articles: hardship, wages, trade unions, protest and yet these are configured completely differently depending on geography, local history and local people. As one reads about other towns and regions, Le Havre emerges in its own singularity. Like Toulon and Brest, Le Havre was in a mainly rural department. Its food shortages were severe but not as severe as those experienced by those in the Unoccupied Zone. There was a little food but there was bombing, experienced elsewhere on the Channel coast but not further south until much later in the war. Unlike practically all the other areas studied, the Havrais workers expressed their discontent from the very start of the Occupation. For example, in the department of Isère in the

38 Broch, Ordinary, 39
Unoccupied Zone workers were described as very passive until the Germans invaded in 1942;\textsuperscript{40} and in Toulon this apathy lasted until mid-1943.\textsuperscript{41} Whilst workers’ discontent rumbled all through the Occupation in Le Havre, it never exploded as dramatically as it did amongst miners in the Nord in May-June 1941,\textsuperscript{42} nor the workers at the arms manufacturers in Tulle in 1943.\textsuperscript{43} Although workers’ participation in the strikes and occupations of 1936 appear to have contributed to theHAVRAIS workers’ militancy during the Occupation, it had no influence on workers in various other towns and departments. In Calvados, there was no continuity within workforces between 1936 and the period 1940 - 1944 which meant that the solidarity built up in 1936 was no longer present during the Occupation.\textsuperscript{44} The strikes in the arms manufacturers in Tulle were much more significant than any action that these same workers had taken in 1936. Since they worked in a state-run industry, they refused to take action against the Popular Front government and viewed the disputes of that year as between workers in the private sector and their employers.\textsuperscript{45}

The composition of trade unions was different too in different areas. Some places had large memberships of the Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (CFTC) as well as of the CGT. The socialist party, the SFIO, also had an influence amongst trade union members in some areas. On the other hand, Le Havre had no significant CFTC presence nor SFIO influence. The dominance of anarcho-syndicalism with an up-and-coming Communist party is similar to only one other place discussed in the articles: Saint-Etienne.\textsuperscript{46} However, whilst the situation is ostensibly the same, the actual situation was quite different and this difference reveals what happened in Le Havre all the more starkly. In Saint-Etienne the prominent labour organisation was the

\textsuperscript{40} Hubert Desvages, ‘Les ouvriers d’Isère’, in Peschanski and Robert, \textit{Les ouvriers}, 201-208
\textsuperscript{42} Olivier Kourchid, ‘Répressions et résistances: les ouvriers des mines du Nord/Pas de Calais’, in Peschanski, and Robert, \textit{Les ouvriers}, 209-220
\textsuperscript{44} Quellien, ‘Les ouvriers’
\textsuperscript{45} Mortal, ‘La vie ouvrière’
Syndicat des Métaux, run by an anarcho-syndicalist, Jean Seigne. Although he was a proponent of the Charte du Travail, he was also determined to keep his union active and was responsible for it continuing to make demands during the Occupation. Although the majority of his union’s militants were Communists and involved in the Resistance he did not betray them to the authorities. Equally, the Communists tolerated him because he kept the union active. For the Communists of Saint-Etienne, the argument with the anarcho-syndicalists was an ongoing dispute, unchanged by the Occupation. As the article’s author writes: Seigne was ‘only one of the “others”, the opponents of old within the trade union movement, at the same time brothers and enemies, close and faraway, with whom even the most serious violence and threats remained always a family affair.’47 This attitude contrasts dramatically with the situation in Le Havre where the bitterness between opposing sides had destroyed any sense of being all in the same family. It also points to the comparative docility of the Havrais anarcho-syndicalists in contrast with Seigne. Whilst Seigne continued to fight for his members, his counterparts in Le Havre carried out very little trade union activity during the Occupation. Of course, their situation was different in that the individual unions they represented had lost their members with the closure of the port. However, their role in running the USOH meant that they could have helped the former members of the Syndicat des Métaux make demands, help which was never offered.

The three themes that I identified above as being crucial in forming the Havrais workers’ resilience: memory, influence and leadership, appear to a greater or lesser extent within this secondary literature.

Christian Chevandier notes how the memory of events in recent history in the particular workplace he focusses on, two factories on the outskirts of Lyon, affected workers’ activity during the Occupation. However, in this case it was not 1936 but earlier in the 1930s and back to 1920.48 On the other hand, Ludivine Broch shows how it was the memory of the failure of earlier strikes, carried out in 1898, 1910 and 1920, that made railway workers reluctant to take

47 Ibid, 194
strike action until everything changed in 1943.\textsuperscript{49} Again, these examples show how specific the history is of individual workplaces, towns and regions.

Memory of events during the Occupation also had their impact. The events of the \textit{exode} for the \textit{Havrais} were particularly harrowing and became the touchstone of all that could be feared about evacuation. This became an ongoing theme throughout the Occupation with local people unwilling to leave their town whether it was to search for work or to find safety. This phenomenon is also commented on by one other author, Jean-Marie Guillon, about the population of the Var. However, in this case it had nothing to do with the \textit{exode}, this department being in the South, but simply a feeling that anywhere outside the region was 'unknown and dangerous.'\textsuperscript{50}

The influence of trade unionism is discussed in ‘Le syndicalisme ouvrier varois de l’effondrement à l’apogée (1939 - 1944),’ where Jean-Marie Guillon writes that whilst workers were very passive in the Var until the summer of 1943, when they did subsequently take action it was through their trade unions. This revealed a deep attachment to a type of militancy that the authorities had thought was long-buried and forgotten. Equally, Christian Bougeard comments about Brittany in ‘Le syndicalisme ouvrier en Bretagne du Front populaire à la Seconde Guerre mondiale,’ that: ‘despite the defeat and the Occupation, the trade union culture acquired in 1936 could not be erased by the text of a new law’ [the Charte du Travail].\textsuperscript{51}

Leadership, however, is not mentioned specifically in any of the articles referred to above although its significance is apparent. Jean-Marie Guillon, in his article on the Var, explains how Communists worked to create what looked from the outside like a sudden surge in trade unionism in 1943.\textsuperscript{52} Their methods of organising imply that each person involved was acting as a leader. In other articles it is clear that an individual was responsible for enabling the action that took place. In her article, ‘Action syndical et résistance ouvrière dans

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} Broch, \textit{Ordinary}, 35-6
\item \textsuperscript{50} Guillon, ‘Y-a-t-il’, 472
\item \textsuperscript{51} Christian Bougeard, ‘Le syndicalisme ouvrier en Bretagne du Front populaire à la Seconde Guerre mondiale,’ \textit{Le Mouvement social}, no. 158 (Jan-Mar 1992), 75
\item \textsuperscript{52} Jean-Marie Guillon, ‘Le syndicalisme ouvrier varois de l’effondrement à l’apogée (1939-1944),’ \textit{Le Mouvement social}, no. 158 (Jan-Mar 1992), 52-3
\end{itemize}
l’aéronautique toulousaine,’ Yvette Lucas describes how the local leader of the Syndicat des Métaux, Jean Baduel, organised his members to resist, using his legal trade union as a cover for resistance activity. 53 In Christophe Capuano’s article, ‘Travailler chez Schneider sous l’Occupation. Le cas des Usines du Creusot,’ 54 it is clearly the director, Henri-Charles Stroh, whose involvement in the resistance encouraged his workers to work slowly and commit sabotage in those factories forced to work for the German army. It was their director’s leadership that made these actions possible in a workplace where strikes were historically rare, even in 1936.

**Organisation of thesis**

Although my thesis is based around the themes of memory, influence and leadership, I have not organised my thesis purely thematically. Maybe this would have been possible if the story I had to tell was better known, but to understand the themes one must understand what happened in Le Havre and that means, as with all good stories, starting at the beginning. And yet where is the beginning? My title indicates that I am covering the years 1936 - 1944, but my thesis is organised within a chronology that extends beyond my key dates: from 1910 in Chapter One, to the post war period in the Epilogue. This is because before 1936 there had been two fatal tragedies involving local strikers. Annual ceremonies marking their deaths kept these events in the minds of local workers and were important in shaping the militants who would come to the fore in 1936.

Within the chronology my themes develop and sometimes overlap. I begin, in Chapter One, ‘Le Havre – setting the scene,’ with a description of Le Havre, its ports and factories, the living and working conditions of its workers, and the strikes of 1910 and 1922. Chapter Two, ‘The factory occupations and their aftermath’ discusses the strikes and factory occupations of 1936, the struggle to have promised wage increases implemented and the strike of 1938. Chapter

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Three, ‘Anarcho-syndicalists versus Communists’, goes back to 1936 but this time in order to detail the breakdown in relations between the anarcho-syndicalists and the Communists: the different strategies for supporting the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War; the fight against fascism in France; the growing threat of war; and reactions to the Hitler-Stalin Pact. In Chapter Four, ‘The German occupation of Le Havre 1940 - 1’, I look at the exode; the issues of bombing and food shortages; and the growing unrest of the workers and in Chapter Five, ‘Resistance and collaboration by trade unionists in Le Havre,’ we see the different strategies employed by the trade union movement to deal with these new conditions. In Chapter Six, ‘Being forced to leave home - the consequences of occupation,’ evacuation, the relève, and the STO are discussed. The final chapter, Chapter Seven, ‘Workers’ action in Le Havre 1941 – 1944’ looks at the issue of low wages, and how workers reacted to and made use of the provisions in the Charte du Travail. I finish with an Epilogue, which outlines what happened to Le Havre’s most prominent trade unionists during and after the war.

**Sources**

I have used a variety of written primary sources: memoirs, newspapers, and letters and reports found in the trade union, prefectorial and police archives.

**Memoirs**

There are three memoirs written by workers who were in Le Havre at the start of the Occupation. All were written some decades after the war was over. Their usefulness is limited for a variety of reasons. Two of the authors - Louis Eudier and André Augeray - were arrested in 1941 and subsequently deported to concentration camps for the duration of the war. Although both were trade union militants, they were not in Le Havre for most of the Occupation and could offer no first-hand commentary on the activities of workers after their arrests. Moreover, despite Eudier writing his memoir 37 years after his liberation, it is still written with a strength of emotion that makes his writing unclear at times.
The sections which cover his experience in Auschwitz are written with calmness and clarity. However, those devoted to the period between the Hitler-Stalin Pact and his arrest and the period following his return from Auschwitz are charged with fury towards the anarcho-syndicalist leaders. The sequence of events in these sections is difficult to follow as if the emotion which fuelled their writing prevented the author from clearly articulating his testimony. Whilst the lack of coherence is frustrating, the anger it conveys has its own powerful message.

The third memoir author, Max Bengtsson, was a boy at the outbreak of war who started work for the first time during the Occupation was not a trade union militant. Although he discusses factory work, Bengtsson was not privy to discussions of workers’ action or resistance.

There is a fourth memoir by a man who lived in Le Havre throughout the Occupation, *L’enfer du Havre 1940 - 1944*. Its author, Julien Guillemard, was not a blue-collar worker or trade unionist but a senior employee who worked for a coffee importer. He was also known as a poet, novelist and supporter of the arts. Whilst he was therefore not privy to workers’ activity or state of mind, his account of living in Le Havre during the Occupation gives a good sense of daily life during those years.

Other than consulting memoirs, the scope for oral history of this period is limited as many of Le Havre’s workers who resisted were arrested and either shot or deported to concentration camps. Workers who survived the camps or those who escaped arrest often died early, often because of the trauma they had experienced and because the life of a manual worker was damaging to their health. However, there are a small number of recorded interviews with former *résistants* in Seine-Maritime, carried out in the 1980s by local archivists, which can be accessed in the departmental archives in Rouen. Whilst it is of interest to be able to hear their voices, the interviews are frustrating in that they are limited by the questions the archivists at the time chose to ask. For example, although there is an interview with Louis Eudier, it dwells for the most part on

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the facts of the town’s general strike in 1922 and does not cover his relationship with the anarcho-syndicalist leaders.

Newspapers and newsletters

For the pre-war period, two paper sources were particularly fruitful in terms of my subject: the local Communist newspaper, *L’Avenir du Havre*, and the monthly newsletter published by the USOH, *Vérités*. The former appeared every fortnight from October 1935 until October 1936 and then weekly until the PCF was banned in 1939. It was a broadsheet-sized paper with both national and local news, stories and sport and a whole page devoted to ‘La Vie syndicale’ with news from individual workplaces. These reports were invaluable in documenting the strikes and occupations that took place in 1936. The copies in the Le Havre archives are in too fragile a state to be read, so I consulted them at the Bibliothèque National de France (BNF) in Paris.

The monthly newsletter published by the USOH, *Vérités*, can be read on microfiche in the municipal archives in Le Havre. This publication appeared from 1907 until August 1939 and again after the war. I consulted it for the dates 1936 to 1939 during which time it was a four page printed newsletter. Its front page was usually about something major happening locally, for example a May Day rally coming up, or a report on how it had gone, or a national communication from the CGT. Inside there were reports from local disputes and, from time to time, an editorial. Very few articles were signed. The exceptions were those written by Léon Jouhaux, the general secretary of the CGT, or quotes from people no longer alive like Jean Jaurès. Sometimes, there was a name affixed to an opinion piece but this was when the author was prominent nationally and not a local figure. More often an article was simply signed ‘Union des syndicats’ but usually there was nothing. Although mostly anonymous, these opinion pieces and editorials all give voice to the non-Communist leaders of the USOH. They were therefore very useful in providing an insight into the philosophy and mind-set of the Havrais anarcho-syndicalists.
A clandestine press existed during the Occupation in Seine-Maritime and in Le Havre. There is a comprehensive archive on Gallica, the BNF online digital library, of newspapers belonging to two local non-Communist resistance groups: *Heure H* and *Le Patriote*.\(^{56}\) *Heure H*, however, concentrates on national issues and not local stories and whilst *Le Patriote* provided a mixture of national and local news, it was not concerned with the actions of workers, in fact, on two occasions it specifically instructed them not to take action. The Communist newspapers produced by local militants did cover workers’ issues and activity in Le Havre, but very few editions have survived. The local newspaper *Le Petit Havre*, was the only local newspaper allowed to be published in Le Havre during the Occupation and it held a consistent pro-Vichy line throughout. Despite this, it did give a voice, of sorts, to workers’ concern such as food shortages. This paper and *Havre-Éclair*, a local newspaper forced to close during the Occupation but which reappeared after the Liberation, are kept in the municipal archives in Le Havre.

### Letters and reports

Trade union archives from this period are kept in the municipal archives in Le Havre. Unfortunately they are incomplete. Minutes of meeting of the USOH have not survived, although some details were mentioned in Eudier’s memoir. No material exists in the archive of the Syndicat des Métaux from the start of the Occupation until it was disbanded in July 1941. We do not know for certain the reasons for these gaps in the archives. They may have been destroyed in the RAF bombing that accompanied the Liberation or they may never have existed given the danger implicit in any written material discussing illegal industrial action falling into the hands of the authorities or the occupier.

Le Havre’s town hall was destroyed in the bombing of September 1944 leaving no mayoral or council archives for the period of the Occupation. However, letters and reports written by and for the sub-prefect, including copious reports by the police, are kept in the departmental archives held in Rouen. In the

\(^{56}\) *Heure H* was the paper of the resistance group of that name and *Le Patriote* was the paper of the group Vagabond Bien Aimé.
absence of much oral testimony and the scarcity of existing Communist papers and tracts, this paperwork supplied the bulk of my information on workers’ lives and activity during the Occupation.

The sub-prefect for Le Havre wrote a report every one or two months addressed to the prefect, who was based in Rouen. This was divided into chapters covering subjects such as public opinion, employment, activity of Communists and collaborationists.

There were seven different sub-prefects for Le Havre during the Occupation but the reports we have are written by just three of them, between March 1941 and December 1943. Despite the fact they have three different authors the reports all read as if they are by the same person except when occasionally the first report of a new sub-prefect might mention what he has done to familiarise himself with his new posting. The reports are written in the same style and with the same commitment to the Vichy regime. This is in contrast with the other sub-prefect based in Seine-Inférieure, in Dieppe, from October 1940 to November 1942, Michel Sassier, whose writing style reveals something of his personality, especially when he becomes frustrated and angry with the actions of his German counterpart.57

The sub-prefect’s reports were based, in turn, on reports and letters sent to him by local officials. The most relevant to my thesis were those written by the Office Départementale de la Main d’oeuvre and by the police. The former was one of the country’s departmental and regional offices set up by Vichy in October 1940 to find work for the unemployed. These reports were very useful in establishing how the behaviour of the Havrais unemployed was different to elsewhere in the department, as described in Chapter Four.

The reports and letters from two different sections of the police make up the bulk of the departmental archives that I used: the municipal police force and the Renseignements Généraux. The former was made up of two sections: the Sûreté and the Commissariats d’arrondissement. The Sûreté was ‘concerned with the repression of minor crimes and offences [and] also had sections

concerned with public morality policing, gambling and drugs and even a brigade engaging in political policing. It was run locally by a Commissaire Principal who addressed letters and reports to his immediate superior, the Commissaire Divisionnaire.

The Commissariats d’arrondissement were police stations in different parts of the town, each presided over by commissaires de police who sent letters and reports to their superior, the commissaire central. Each arrondissement had responsibility for dealing with the public at its police station and for maintaining public order.

The commissaire central wrote letters and reports to his immediate superior, the Commissaire Divisionnaire de Police. He also wrote a monthly report to the sub-prefect. This report was written with the same chapter headings as the sub-prefect’s report. He also sent letters to the prefect and sub-prefect, informing them of arrests carried out by the Germans, specific incidents of anti-German feeling and activities carried out by local collaborationist groups.

The Renseignements Généraux (RG) was set up in 1941. Its work of observing public opinion and monitoring certain individuals and groups considered to be suspect had previously been done by the Police Spéciale. The RG carried out its tasks by infiltrating meetings and political parties and using informers based in neighbourhoods, workplaces, etc. The head of the RG in Le Havre had the title: Commissaire principal, Chef du service des Renseignements Généraux. He wrote a monthly report to the sub-prefect written with the same chapter headings as those of the sub-prefect and commissaire central. In addition, he wrote a separate weekly report to his immediate superior, the Intendant Régional de Police, Services de RG. This report was organised differently to the one sent to the sub-prefect but covered the same topics. The RG were particularly interested in the mood of workers and the likelihood of their taking action. To this end a number of reports were written by commissaires in the RG about specific workplaces in Le Havre, seemingly with the help of informers as

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58 S. Kitson, ‘The Marseille Police in their Context, from the Popular Front to Liberation’ (DPhil dissertation, University of Sussex, 1996), 22
59 Ibid
60 Ibid, 19
a number of their reports also appear in the departmental archives. In addition, in 1943 the RG produced a work of reference about the town which included details of the make-up of the population, political parties, trade unions, and the history of local strikes.

Relying on police reports to assess the mood and motivations of workers is problematic, especially those that are based on information supplied by anonymous informers, as were those by the RG. This is apparent when we contrast two diverging assessments of the workers’ mood to resist. The first assessment is from the British SOE agent, Philippe Liewer, who worked in Le Havre and Rouen and who said, in his debriefing report, regarding the situation in the area from April 1943:

> The local population in Rouen were very different to those of Le Havre. In Rouen the population is extremely bourgeois, very catholic and not at all inclined to active resistance…

> In Le Havre, the informant states, that had he wished, he could easily have built up an organisation 10,000 strong. He had great difficulty in keeping it small.\(^{61}\)

Liewer may well have used the figure of 10,000 to denote a large number of people rather than as a scientifically proven number. Nonetheless, it is a compelling image of a population eager to resist. His assessment of the people of Le Havre is in direct contrast to that of the Commissaire principal of the RG. In May 1943, the Commissaire produced a major report on Le Havre which covered facts and figures and descriptions of, amongst other topics: the population make-up of the town, the political parties, newspapers, and welfare organisations. A large section was devoted to the workers, their trade unions, details of their workplaces, their activity in 1936 and their current state of mind. On this latter subject he wrote:

> [The workers] believe themselves then to be society’s pariahs but they appear convinced that they will have their hour and their revenge…

> The end of the war and the departure of the Germans are fervently wished for but, a curious thing, as much as one can trust a work of investigation such as this one, the workers are not disposed to fight to help this departure along.

\(^{61}\) Interview with Cdt Liewer 2-3 Jan 1945, 3, HS9/923/4, NA, London
“Let the English come deliver us: they will be much welcomed. They will drive the Germans away, deal with them, but us, we don’t want to do that.”

The RG had been gathering information on Communists and other political agitators before and during the Occupation - and they benefited both from a network of informers and access to information revealed under torture. So why did the Commissaire principal come to such different conclusions to the SOE agent? It is possible that the police informers were not privy to everything the workers talked about amongst themselves. The police may also have been hampered by the employers, who wanted to protect their skilled and valued workers. And there is a further explanation: that the Commissaire principal was trying to hide the actions of the Le Havre workers from his superiors.

This idea is based on a comment in Liewer’s debriefing report, under the section ‘Enemy Counter-Intelligence’, which states the following: ‘In Le Havre the Informant had approximately 28 police members working for him. The Gendarmerie were also very helpful.’ Is it therefore possible that the Commissaire principal of the RG was one of these police members? Unfortunately we do not know who these police were, neither their rank nor their division. Whilst Liewer was directly involved in the Rouen branch of his circuit, the Le Havre section was very self-contained. Liewer’s debriefing report contains no details of who they were nor what they did, except for this intriguing snippet of information. If the Commissaire principal were a member it would explain why he made the statement above. In the light of the knowledge that there were a number of police members of a resistance network, his statement reads as someone saying in effect: “there’s nothing to worry about here, the Le Havre workers are unhappy but they won’t resist, so no need to look too closely at what’s happening here.” It is a fascinating idea but unfortunately one we are unable to prove.

Nonetheless, the discrepancy between the two assessments of the mood of resistance in Le Havre should cause us to question whether we can trust the accuracy of the Commissaire principal’s regular reports. It was the

62 ‘Fichier départemental des Renseignements généraux, arrondissement du Havre 1943’, 79, 40W173, Departmental Archives, Rouen (DA)
Commissaire’s subordinates who reported on individual workplaces and on which the official RG reports to the sub-prefect are based. It is these detailed reports that indicate that workers in the larger factories were ready for action, thus corroborating what Liewer had said. I therefore argue that we can take the RG’s assessment of the workers’ mood as broadly accurate. However, whilst the RG describes the workers as being angry, they also often state in their reports that they believe that the workers were saving their action until after the war was over. I believe this assessment to be suspect, in the light of what Liewer discovered and the fact that the RG itself describes action that the workers took from 1943, contradicting their own analysis. Whatever the cause, there is a failure of the RG to predict when workers might take action. It is also likely that workers in Le Havre carried out some actions that do not appear in the RG reports and for which there is no other surviving documentary record. As a result, these actions remain unknown.

My thesis ends in January 1944 because the official reports in the archives end in February 1944 and then pick up again in October 1944. I was not able to discover from any other source what happened involving workers between January and September 1944 when the town was both bombed and liberated. I did, however, consult one further archive to find out what happened to Jean Le Gall during the Occupation. This was the archive of the Commission nationale de reconstitution des organisations syndicales, the post-war organisation aimed at removing collaborators from the trade union movement, held at the national CGT offices in Montreuil.

This Introduction has looked at the historiographical context of my research and the structure and sources I have used. We now need to understand the environments in which Le Havre’s workers existed. Therefore, in Chapter One, we move to an exploration of the town of Le Havre, its geographical position, its port and factories and the work that was done therein. This is followed by a discussion of the political and trade union situation existing in the town, and the
events of 1910 and 1922 that so marked the memory of the *Havrais* working class.
Chapter 1

Le Havre – setting the scene

Look at a map of France and follow the Channel coast from the swell of land that brings Calais into touching distance with Dover, westwards to the finger of land that takes Cherbourg out into the Channel to face Portsmouth. Between these two is a bulge which overhangs the mouth of the Seine. At the tip of the bulge is Le Havre, France’s second largest port. It appears more connected to water than it is to the land, facing the river and the sea as it does. And indeed, once in the town you realise that it is built on two levels, half of it flat and half of it on a cliff which overlooks the centre, giving the impression that it is self-enclosed. A train will take you out of town, east to Rouen and then south-east to Paris, roads will take you the same way or further east, and two bridges will take you across the Seine to continue your journey westwards. But these bridges were only opened in 1959 and 1995. In the 1930s and 1940s the town really was more connected to water than to land. There was still the train and the roads but cars were rarer in those days. Goods were transported by barge along the Canal de Tancarville and down the Seine. People crossed the river by ferry. And, of course, there was, and still is, the vast port which lined the Seine as it empties into the Channel. Even if Le Havre was poorly connected to the rest of France, its position between the sea and the river connected it to the rest of the world. Cotton was shipped in from Egypt and the US, coffee from Brazil, timber from Africa. Leaving Le Havre were the great cruise liners taking thousands of people across the Atlantic to the Americas.

Le Havre became notorious for being the most damaged town in France during the Second World War, when the RAF bombed it for a week in September 1944, destroying four fifths of the town. The modernist architect, Auguste Perrin, was hired to rebuild the town, which he did in reinforced concrete. Although the road layout is the same, with roughly the same names, the buildings are no longer narrow brick edifices but huge white concrete blocks. Contemporary films, articles and books, however, provide a sense of what the town looked like before the war.
Marcel Carné’s 1938 film, *Le Quai des Brumes*,\(^{63}\) was shot in Le Havre.\(^{64}\) In the opening scenes of the film we see Jean Gabin walking around the port. Everything is on a grand scale: wide quaysides and roads, lined with cafés and vast brick warehouses. Ships are docked, one after the other; cranes reach over to pluck four crates at a time and then lower them onto the quay where men reach up to grab them and steady them onto a trolley. Other men dressed in flat caps, trousers and loose jackets walk up and down gangplanks carrying big sacks over their shoulders. Long lines of hefty barrels are rolled and stacked on the quayside. When a ship is ready to leave, smoke pours out of its smokestack, a sharp whistle blows, and men pull the gangplank back on to the wharf. Although this is a dark film, both metaphorically and literally - the opening scene and the scenes in the bar on the edge of town take place during a foggy night - the port is portrayed as a bright, industrious place. It seems to offer the film’s protagonist a bright, industrious future if only he can take a ship and escape his current life.

In 1932, the eminent politician and future résistant, Édouard Herriot, wrote *La Porte Océane*, a paean to the size and grandeur of Le Havre. He was impressed by the extent of the work achieved in this vast place: passenger transport, ship repairs, trade and industry. The former was served by great cruise liners, some of which had in fact been built by Le Havre’s own shipbuilders. Their passengers were treated to the largest passenger terminal in France, and in Herriot’s view: ‘no port offers a similar luxury [with its] waiting rooms furnished in red, lit with a blue light.’\(^{65}\)

It was not just the ocean liners that impressed with their size. Herriot wrote that Le Havre did not want to be just a transit port like Dunkirk but to have merchants trading in situ, for which purpose vast hangars had been built all along the Eure basin, to store the goods that arrived in the port.\(^{66}\) The warehouses had to be huge because Le Havre was the number one port in

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\(^{63}\) *Le Quai des Brumes* (dir. Marcel Carné, 1938)
\(^{64}\) Christian Chevandier, ‘Le Havre, décor et acteur du cinéma’, *Vingtième Siècle*, no.116 (Oct-Dec 2012), 154
\(^{66}\) Herriot, *La Porte*, 23
France for coffee, cotton and tropical timber. Not only did Le Havre have the largest passenger terminal in France, before which the largest liner in the world docked, the biggest hangar in Europe, at one kilometre in length, was also here. As were the largest pontoon crane and the longest deep water quays in France.

Another film to portray the enormity of the port was *Un homme marche dans la ville*. This was filmed in Le Havre in 1949 by Marcello Pagliero, an Italian actor turned director, who had learned his craft in the world of Italian neorealism. Despite it being filmed whilst much of the town was still rubble, the port appears intact. The film begins with the camera panning the whole length of the port in which the viewer sees only sea, ships and dock buildings. The filmmaker is immediately announcing with this choice of shot that “here we are, in the huge port of Le Havre”. However, Pagliero, unlike Marcel Carné with *Le Quai des Brumes*, does not use the port’s size to indicate a bright busy future for his leading man, but rather to show the port’s indifference to human suffering. In the opening shot there are no people. When we first see two men, they are walking beside a long high pile of enormous logs, some of which reach several feet in width. The men seem dwarfed by the huge size of this pile. The size of the port, in comparison with the men within it, is further emphasised when, after a fight, a man is pushed down into a dry dock. His cry as he falls is prolonged, indicating that it is a long drop. The camera then looks down into the dock, showing a small crowd of ant-sized men gathered round the dead body. The emphasis is on the size of the place in comparison with the men who work there. The port is seen as solid and vast when compared with the precariousness of the small lives of the men within it, subject in the film to the unpredictability of unemployment, illness and violence.

On 11 October 1949, *Un homme marche dans la ville* was previewed at a special event at the Le Havre cinema, the Eden, to raise money for a solidarity fund for elderly dockers, run by the port workers’ union. The film was greeted

67 Armand Frémont, *La Mémoire d’un Port* (Paris: Arléa, 2009), 17
69 *Un homme marche dans la ville* (dir. Marcello Pagliero, 1949)
with a standing ovation by an audience, as a French film magazine put it: ‘who came to recognise themselves on the screen and their town.’

However, the local Communist Party attacked it for portraying those who worked at the port as alcoholic thugs. This view spread and political parties and trade unions opposed its release in Paris in March 1950. The film was removed and was even forbidden from ever being shown in Le Havre by a decree signed by the deputy mayor the following month. The film was not shown in Le Havre until 1987.

It is true that the film portrays the port workers more as drinkers and fighters than industrial militants (although there are instances of workers’ solidarity) but that is not to say that drinking and fighting were not important aspects of dockers’ lives. According to Jean-Pierre Castelain, author of a book about the use of alcohol in the port, Le Havre had the highest consumption of alcohol and the highest number of deaths from alcohol in the whole of France during the 1930s; this in a country already with the highest level of alcohol consumption in the world. The port was full of bars which were full of dockers who came to drink spirits (beer and wine were drunk at home). A favourite drink was a petit sou, a coffee mixed with cheap spirits which cost a sou (five centimes), and was drunk before work and then all through the day. We see such a bar in Un homme marche dans la ville; a small room with a jukebox in one corner and a horseshoe shaped bar in the middle. There are no tables and chairs; men (and a very few women) stand at the bar and toss back numerous glasses of cognac.

According to Castelain there were many reasons for the heavy drinking. It was partly cultural: cider, beer and wine were seen more as soft drinks which children and women drank at home. Not only were children raised on these drinks but it was common practice in Normandy for mothers to give their babies calvados to prevent and to treat worms. It was also partly for comfort, as he

70 L’Écran français, no. 224 (17 Oct 1949), quoted in Dhaille-Hervieu. Communistes, 265
72 Castelain. Manières, 53
73 Ibid, 21-26
says: ‘Living in conditions of extreme precariousness, insufficiently fed but carrying out dangerous work often in dusty conditions, in rain and strong winds, the dockers found in alcohol and at the music hall a substitute and a comfort, a refuge, and a place for conversation.’

Perhaps bars were such a refuge and place for socialising because the houses workers lived in were so tiny and unhygienic. In *Un homme marche dans la ville*, we see inside a home. Made up of just one small room with a bed in one corner, a kitchen in the other, and a table and chairs in the middle, it is home to a couple and their young son. Although the appearance of the rumpled bed is useful to the plot, in that it suggests the marital relations that the wife would prefer to be having with her visitor rather than her husband, conditions really were that cramped for most working class families in Le Havre. In 1936, according to the *Havrais* historian, Jean Legoy, Le Havre had the third worst housing in France (after Saint-Etienne and Nantes) in terms of overcrowding and poor conditions. *Un homme marche dans la ville* was filmed in the Saint François neighbourhood of the town. This and the Notre-Dame neighbourhood were side-by-side at the western end of the port. In the film there is a row of old buildings left amongst the rubble but before the war this was an area, according to the local Communist newspaper, *L’Avenir du Havre*, with: ‘dark streets… smelly back alleys… black houses, some threatening to collapse’. These houses mostly dated back to the founding of Le Havre in the sixteenth century; some were constructed in the nineteenth century but none had been built since then. The result was that the houses were unhygienic and on the point of collapse. Indeed, some did collapse. An article in the local paper, *Havre-Éclair*, in 1930, reported: ‘Yesterday morning, an old house in rue Michel-Yvon, suddenly buckled over and a dozen people had to flee to avoid being pulled down by the part of the building that had collapsed.’ In 1937, the same paper reported: ‘An accident, whose consequences could have been more serious, occurred yesterday morning, in an old building in poor repair, at 33 rue Bazan.

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74 Ibid, 23
75 Legoy, *Le peuple*, 117
Most of a staircase collapsed. Eighteen people had to be evacuated… Seventeen people remained stuck in their rooms unable to come down.\textsuperscript{78}

It was not just in these neighbourhoods by the port, but in other working class areas within the town, that housing was so poor. Run-down crowded buildings were located on cobblestoned streets, with poor plumbing and insufficient toilets. A report by a police informer during the Occupation gives a picture of the Neiges neighbourhood in the east of the town:

The look of the neighbourhood is that of all industrial suburbs: a large body of dwellings, houses made of brick that have been blackened from the smoke and fumes… At a crossroads the homes of the [factory] managers and the Hôtel des Ingénieurs look impressive, then there is a line of workers’ shacks, as they always look…. A single road presents a line of brick houses; everywhere else it’s the triumph of shacks made of tarmacked wood.\textsuperscript{79}

The Neiges was in a part of Le Havre in which there were many factories, large and small, for Le Havre was not just its port, but a major industrial centre as well. There were the industries and services that were necessary for the port to run: dry docks, floating docks, factories producing rivets, boilers and barrels, ship builders and repairers. Of these, the two biggest employers were two shipbuilders: the Chantiers Augustin-Normand and the Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée. The former was situated in the outer harbour by the neighbourhoods of Notre-Dame and Saint François. This enormous plant, employing between six hundred and a thousand workers, built trawlers, tugs, war ships and submarines plus ships’ boilers and engines. The latter had two factories: one in the eastern suburb of Graville, the Chantier de Graville, which built boats; and the other, the Mazeline factory, nearer the train station, which built ships’ engines and propellers. This building is still being used as a factory; now it is by the train tracks but in the 1930s it was on the side of the canal Vauban which no longer exists. These factories employed up to 1800 workers when times were good.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid
\textsuperscript{79} Unsigned report dated 1 Sept 1943 enclosed with letter from the head of the RG in Le Havre to the director of the RG in Vichy, 10 Sept 1943, 51W69, (DA)
The raw materials that were imported into Le Havre made it an attractive place to build factories. For example the Corderies de la Seine, just south of the Mazeline factory took the sisal from Mexico and Sub-Saharan Africa, hemp from Manila and China, and the jute from India and turned them into rope, string and baler twine. This factory employed over a thousand people, many of whom were women. It was one of the three factories owned by the Tréfileries et Laminoirs, a metalworking factory which was the biggest employer in the region between the First and Second World Wars, having between 3000 and 3500 employees. They turned imported metals into wire (which the Corderies turned into metal cables), nails, grilles, and household appliances. Oil was another big import. To the east of the town, along the canal de Tancarville at Gonfreville-l'Orcher, an industrial complex was built in the early 1930s where the Compagnie Française de Raffinage built an oil refinery. At the same time, further along the canal at Port-Jérôme near Notre-Dame-de-Gravenchon, Standard Oil and Vacuum Oil each built a refinery. These three refineries produced most of the petrol in France at this time.\(^\text{81}\) The two American oil companies built two *cités* of houses for their workers with running water, electricity and individual gardens. This accommodation made a job at the refineries very attractive in the 1930s.

Other factories existed in Le Havre simply because it was such a major industrial centre. For example, the Compagnie Électro-Mécanique (CEM), which had three factories around town employing 1700 workers in total, built everything needed for the electrical industry. Other factories were attracted by the space available. Schneider opened a factory making artillery material because the marshland around the Seine provided an ideal place for shooting ranges. They also repaired trains and built rolling stock. This factory employed around 2200 people. The Société Breguet Aviation created a seaplane factory near Pont VII where there was a lot of space and two canals in which to test their planes.\(^\text{82}\)

\(^\text{81}\) Legoy, *Le Peuple*, 221
\(^\text{82}\) Ibid, 219-224
Employment

There were therefore two main areas of work in Le Havre: in the port and in the factories. These attracted different kinds of workers, both in terms of skills and mentality. Dockers had an image of being strong, violent, quick to strike, a close community – even a race apart – where people *tutoient* each other and used nicknames. The historian Michel Pigenet, who has written much on dockers, explains that after a victorious dockers’ strike in Le Havre in the 1920s the ‘allegorical representation’ of the docker was fixed for a long time as ‘“club in one hand, the bottle in the other, rebellious, violent and anarchist.”’

Pigenet writes that the physicality of the job meant that they were often involved in sport – and in fights. They had an antipathy towards the forces of order and a propensity for getting into brawls with the police. These fights came both from a self-image of being courageous and from drinking too much. Courage was needed because the work was dangerous: dockers had the highest number of accidents of all the professions. The job took a physical toll on the body and many dockers died before they could retire.

Despite the danger, men were attracted to this job because, as Jean Legoy writes: ‘the docker was full of his independence and his freedom.’ Dockers had no fixed employer and work was organised on a casual basis: the hundred employers at the port hired dockers as and when they needed them. There were three places in Le Havre where men would gather to find work: near Pont III, the Quai d’Orléans and near the Pont de la Barre. Workers were taken on twice a day for half day shifts, once at 6am and once at 1pm. Dockers rarely worked full-time. Legoy quotes an assistant secretary of the Fédération des Ports et Docks who noted in 1938 that: “a docker only works on average three days a week.”

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84 Michel Pigenet, ‘À propos des représentations et des rapports sociaux sexués: identité professionnelle et masculinité chez les dockers français (XIXe-XXe siècles)’, *Le Mouvement social*, no 198 (Jan-March 2002), 60
85 Pigenet, ‘À propos’, 65
86 Legoy, *Le peuple*, 233
87 Ibid, 233
88 Ibid, 233-4
There was a variety of jobs on the port: there were men who operated the 150 cranes which moved crates on and off the ships and those who helped guide them; men who supervised the loading of the biggest ships to make sure they were well-balanced; and those who operated the electric winches which loaded and unloaded goods. There were workers who marked the goods’ parcels and checked them, those who counted them, those who put them in the warehouses and those who drove them away. After 1931 this was done more and more by lorries but the use of horses and dray carts continued until 1939 with some transport companies owning up to 100 horses.89

An insight into what it was actually like to carry out this work comes from an anonymous Havrais docker who wrote a series of articles in 1936 for *L’Avenir du Havre*. His descriptions give a real sense of what this job involved, the physicality; the relentless nature of it. Here he is describing what it is like to unload a ship:

Since this morning we have been carrying sacks and we are very tired. These are big sacks made of rough canvas full of corn or rice. They arrive on eight lanyards. The crane takes them onto a platform where two comrades place them, “subdue” them on the edge so that we can take them easily. This crane doesn’t stop; hardly has it brought the eight sacks that it goes back and returns in the same movement. My head buzzes, my shoulders are in pain and my kidneys broken. My throat is on fire and sweat mixed with dust bites into my skin. That is to say, we don’t feel like laughing.

- It’s your turn to drink.

Don’t be mistaken, my friend is telling me it’s my turn to take a sack. Misery! I’ve just taken the other and now it’s already my turn. Yet there are nine of us who are porters, but this cursed crane has decided to kill us today. My feet hurt.

It’s now rice. The sacks are a little heavier and harder…

Only this morning it was ok. Our muscles were fresh and it was less warm. Then we put the sacks in six. Now we must put them in ten and climb the path (trestle and two long planks).

It keeps going.90

Despite the hard work involved, the docker can still comment: ‘Deep down we prefer this work to working in a factory. We are freer and also it is our

89 Ibid, 234
profession. On the quayside we are at home.’ This attitude to work is explained by the French novelist, Edouard Lavergne, who, in a description of Le Havre that he wrote in 1927, stated:

The mind of the docker is easy to understand. A man without a fixed job, without a specialism; he prefers to put in a painful amount of effort for a few days and then rest rather than go to the factory with the view to beginning again, the following day, carrying out an identical task for the same number of hours.\(^{91}\)

Unfortunately no Havrais factory worker wrote a column similar to that of the docker in L’Avenir du Havre. In order to get a sense of what factory work was like at the time we need to look at accounts published by factory workers elsewhere in France. They all confirm what the Havrais docker and Lavergne say, however: the factory did not feel like home to its workers and the work was painfully repetitive.

For Maurice Alline, who worked as a turner at the Renault factory in Boulogne-Billancourt in the 1930s and Georges Navel, who worked as a fitter in a factory in Lyon during the 1920s and then at Citroën in the 1930s, the factory resembled a prison. Alline recalls in his book, *Quand j’étais ouvrier…: 1930 - 1948*, what it was like to approach the factory: ‘The factory was not very welcoming, that’s the least that could be said. To enter, you had to go through heavy iron doors topped with metal railings. We passed guards in uniform as friendly as screws.’\(^{92}\) In his book, *Travaux*, Georges Navel describes the foremen constantly timing their work and making them go ever quicker:

That’s what gave the factory the reputation for being a prison, plus the excessive number of guards in caps who continuously patrolled round the factory, even pushing open the toilet doors or looking over the top of the cubicle to check that the squatting workers were not smoking. This was absolutely forbidden, even where there was no risk of fire.\(^{93}\)

The philosopher Simone Weil worked for a year, 1934-35, in three Parisian metalworking factories. She does not describe these factories as prisons but confirms how unwelcoming they were. In her essay, ‘La vie et la grève des

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\(^{93}\) Georges Navel, *Travaux* (Paris, Folio, 1994), 65
ouvrières métallos (sur le tas), they describe the workers waiting outside the factory in the pouring rain to be let in: ‘What is more natural than to shelter when it rains and the door to a home is open? But this action, so natural, cannot even be considered at this factory because it is forbidden. There is no home so strange as this factory where daily one expends all one’s energy.’

From the 1920s onwards new systems of working were introduced into French industry aimed at increasing productivity. Often called ‘the rationalisation of labour’ these systems used unskilled workers to carry out repetitive tasks within an allotted time. Here is Simone Weil’s account: ‘Here I am at a machine. Count fifty pieces… place them one by one on the machine, on one side, not on the other… each time work a lever… remove the piece… put down another… and another… count again.’ Unlike the dockers’ work it is carried out neither with help from a workmate nor with any initiative of one’s own: ‘Never do, even in the detail, anything on your own initiative. Every movement is simply the carrying out of an order…. At a machine for a series of pieces, five or six simple movements are required which have to be repeated at top speed.’

Not only was work painfully repetitive it was also dangerous. Here is one account, from L’Avenir du Havre, of the conditions in the Havrais plywood manufacturing factory, Multiplex:

the young Multiplex factory already has a dirty reputation. Seven accidents have bloodied the machines; fingers have remained at the factory. To cite only one case, a woman worker had four fingers cut off in one blow. The cause of all this is easy to find: there is no protection on the machines.

A 3m paper cutter with a guillotine blade 10cm wide is operated by foot with no equipment to protect the hands. Do you want to know how Multiplex fights tuberculosis? Quite simply by installing suction pumps which cover an area of 1.10m for the sanding machines working with sheets that are 2.20m. The dust not breathed in an area of 1.10m is no doubt sufficient for the workers? The gluing is vile.

94 Simone Weil, ‘La vie et la grève des ouvrières métallos (sur le tas)’, La condition ouvrière (Paris: Gallimard, 1951)
95 Weil, La condition, 222
96 Rod Kedward, La Vie en Bleu : France and the French since 1900 (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 121
97 Weil, La condition, 220. Dots in the original.
98 Ibid, 227
And the rest is the same. One can see two men having to lift seven 3m beams.\textsuperscript{99}

The Multiplex was not unique in Le Havre. Articles in \textit{L’Avenir du Havre} about other factories show similar problems: workers regularly expected to move heavy items without the appropriate lifting machinery;\textsuperscript{100} dusty conditions and masks not provided; machinery without safety mechanisms.\textsuperscript{101} In the case of accident or illness there was often no nurse or infirmary on the premises.\textsuperscript{102}

And whilst Weil, Navel and Alline all mention leaving their clothes in a locker in a cloakroom, washing their hands before leaving (even if the water was cold) and having toilets (even if they were checked by the guards), in the Breguet factory in Le Havre this was the situation:

\begin{quote}
It should be known that there are only twenty toilets for the whole factory [for a workforce of 850] and that, every morning, the workers queue for them. Let’s also add that the sinks and cloakroom are only 17 x 7m. Clothes lie on the ground and at home time the workers cannot wash their hands, it’s a scrum.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

Whilst many port workers considered their jobs superior, working conditions were poor for both factory and port workers. However, workers were not completely on their own when it came to dealing with the adverse circumstances of their working lives; they had their trade unions, whose role was to negotiate improvements in conditions and pay.

**Trade unions in Le Havre**

To understand the trade unions in Le Havre, the ideology and structure of both the national and local trade union movement needs to be understood. France’s main trade union confederation, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT)

\textsuperscript{101} ‘Chez Mazeline’, \textit{L’Avenir du Havre}, 7 March 1936, BNF
\textsuperscript{103} ‘Chez Breguet’, \textit{L’Avenir du Havre}, 25 April 1936, BNF
was founded in 1895 on anarcho-syndicalist principles. Anarcho-syndicalism was committed to developing a revolutionary movement that believed that capitalism could be overthrown by workers’ direct action rather than through the intervention of political parties or organisations. Important to French anarcho-syndicalists was the concept that trade unions should be kept separate from political parties and, whilst members could have their own political beliefs, they could not impose them on their unions. Trade unions were conceived as looking after their members, fighting for their claims and eschewing involvement in party politics. Fighting for improvements in workers’ lives would lead to revolution.

The early leaders of the CGT were anarcho-syndicalists and Léon Jouhaux’s candidacy as general secretary of the CGT in 1909 was supported by them. He was very clear on the separation of political parties from trade unionism but he was less radical than many of his initial supporters and drew much criticism from them for joining the union sacrée during the First World War.\textsuperscript{104} The union sacrée was the term given to an agreement by all political parties, religious groups and trade unions to support the government during the war; specifically for the unions this meant taking no strike action.

Jouhaux would remain the general secretary of the CGT until 1947. In 1922 the CGT split over the question of adherence to the Third International and the Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (CGTU) was formed, initially run by anarcho-syndicalists and then by Communists from the newly-founded Parti Communiste Français (PCF). The two confederations reunited in 1936.

In France, the confederal structure of the trade union movement extends down from national level to the local and departmental level as well. At a local level these confederations are structured as unions locales (UL) and at a departmental level as unions départementales (UD). After the founding of the PCF, the Communists soon came to dominate the ULS and UDs in many industrial centres in France. Le Havre, however, was known as a continuing bastion of anarcho-syndicalism. Here the UL was called the Union des syndicats ouvriers du Havre et de la région (USOH) and was run by a majority

of anarcho-syndicalists until after the Second World War. In contrast the UD for Seine-Maritime was dominated by Communists. In 1922 the UL split into two: the UL *confédéré*, i.e. the group loyal to the CGT and the Second International; and the UL *unitaire*, the group loyal to the new CGTU. When the Communists started to dominate the CGTU nationally, the UL *unitaire* split again and added a third UL, this time the UL *autonome*, which by 1929 had become the largest of the three.\(^{105}\) It took over the original UL’s bank account and its assets, including, perhaps most importantly, its printing press on which was produced the UL’s newsletter, *Vérités*.\(^{106}\) The UL *autonome* was the home of the port unions, which provided the main base for the anarcho-syndicalists. In contrast, the largest groups in the UL *confédéré* were sailors, council workers and tram workers; whilst the UL *unitaire* was dominated by metalworkers, road workers and train workers.\(^{107}\)

Le Havre’s mayor from 1919 - 1940 was Léon Meyer, a Jewish coffee broker born in the town in 1868.\(^{108}\) In 1923 he became the town’s député and kept this post until 1940. Meyer was an astute politician, a member of the Radical Party, who had built up a political base founded on speaking up for the working class and being a friend to the trade unions. He won the mayoral election in December 1919 with the tacit support of the USOH. In recognition of their support he granted them various concessions and gave them first the lease, and then helped them to buy, Franklin, a large red brick building on the Cours de la République which continues to be the home of the USOH in the present day.\(^{109}\)

This section has outlined the structure and political context for Le Havre’s trade union movement. To understand the culture of this movement we need to consider two local tragedies which marked the collective working class memory

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\(^{105}\) Legoy, *Le peuple*, 301
\(^{107}\) Legoy, *Le peuple*, 301
\(^{108}\) Ibid, 315
up until 1936. The first was the case of Jules Durand.\textsuperscript{110} Durand was a well-known trade union activist in Le Havre and a leading member of the Syndicat des Charbonniers du Port (the union of people who loaded and unloaded colliers, boats that carried coal). In August 1910 the union went on indefinite strike against the rising cost of living, the increase in mechanisation and for a rise in pay. The French shipping company, the Compagnie générale transatlantique, hired strike-breakers at three times the going rate. On 9 September 1910, one of them, Dongé – who had been drinking after working for 48 hours without a break – threatened, with a revolver, four other charbonniers, non-union members, who were as drunk as he was. A fight broke out and Dongé died of his injuries.

The Compagnie générale transatlantique, with the help of the local press, saw this as an opportunity to remove Jules Durand from Le Havre. They paid charbonniers to say that the union, prompted by Durand, had voted to have Dongé killed. Durand was arrested along with two other leading members of the union. At their trial these two were acquitted, while the four men involved in the fight that had killed Dongé were given fifteen years hard labour, and Durand was sentenced to death.

A general strike broke out in Le Havre to protest against this miscarriage of justice. The cause was soon taken up by the CGT nationally and by the International Federation of Ports and Docks, which led to solidarity campaigns in Britain and the US. The sentence was reduced first to seven years in prison and then in 1911 Durand was released. He was fully exonerated in 1918. However, the damage was done. Durand had had a nervous breakdown on being sentenced to death and had spent 40 days in a straitjacket whilst in prison; an ordeal from which he never recovered. After being released from prison he was sent to a mental asylum where he died in 1926. As will be made clear below, this miscarriage of justice was not forgotten in Le Havre.

The second tragedy occurred in 1922 at the time of another general strike in Le Havre. Not only was this case an important event in understanding local

memory but it also created the political foundations locally which would last through to 1936 and beyond.

In June 1922 several metalworking employers in Le Havre, led by Schneider and the Tréfileries et Laminoirs, announced that they were going to implement a cut in wages and extend the working day. Between 20 and 24 June a strike spread to all the metalworking factories in the town. Except for the employers, the strike had the support of the whole town, including the mayor, Léon Meyer; shopkeepers donated goods, a collection was made after every performance of the Folies Bergères, and even the municipal police had a collection for the strikers. Donations of food were given by shopkeepers, and soup kitchens were organised. The mayor allowed the school canteens to feed the children of strikers.

The metalworkers' leader and secretary of the UL unitaire, Henri Quesnel, was aligned with the anarcho-syndicalists in the newly-founded CGTU. He was keen to keep the strike peaceful and for it not to spread. He wanted the strike to be seen as a struggle between all the people of Le Havre and the factory owners in Paris, but not to involve politics: specifically he wanted no Communist activity. In fact, although Communists were busy on the ground, dealing with the day-to-day issues of the strike and in so doing gaining the respect of the strikers, neither the PCF nor the CGTU had a clear idea of how the strike should be run.

The strike became a national cause célèbre with the Communist press drumming up support and the national mainstream press campaigning for a crackdown by the police and army. The government urged an end to the strike, which led to a polarisation in opinion: the working class and left supporting the Havrais strikers. The prefect decided to take over the running of the local police and banned all meetings, marches and demonstrations in the town. The town's trade union movement was furious at the prefect’s actions and they called a general strike. From 22 August 1922 the whole town was completely shut down. Gendarmes started to patrol the streets, the port and outside the factories, brutally dispersing groups of workers and stoking up local anger.

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111 The account of this strike and its aftermath is taken from Barzman, Dockers, 317-346.
Finally, the prefect decided to land a decisive blow. He ordered the cavalry to charge a crowd that had gathered in the centre of town. Three strikers were shot dead and a fourth died later from his wounds. The prefect ordered the arrest of a long list of strike leaders and by that evening fifty were in prison waiting to hear the charges against them. These actions only further inflamed the town’s working class and the general strike continued despite the arrest of its leaders.

The conflict moved to the national level. There was universal condemnation in the workers’ and left-wing press of the police attacks and the suspension of trade union rights in Le Havre. However, the organised response was made difficult because of the factionalism which divided the anarchists, PCF, CGT and CGTU. The anarcho-syndicalists in the CGTU called for a national general strike in support of the Le Havre general strike, to take place two days later. The Communists argued that it was too short a deadline; they needed time in which to organise and to involve the CGT. They were ignored and the strike went ahead on the 27 August but was poorly supported. On 31 August the general strike in Le Havre ended but the metalworkers stayed out until 10 October. The metalworkers’ strike remained strong even after the general strike was over because the atmosphere in the town continued to be explosive with unrest breaking out in other industries. However, eventually, the metalworkers acknowledged defeat and went back to work.

The four strikers who were killed were subsequently remembered every year by the local trade union movement on the anniversary of their deaths, 26 August. Every union belonging to the UL was asked to send representatives to join a delegation made up of any trade unionist who wished to attend, and to lay flowers on the strikers’ graves. During this ceremony flowers were also laid on the grave of Jules Durand.112

In Le Havre, the defeat of the strike allowed the factory owners to recover their control after five years of agitation. However, it also introduced a climate of bitterness into relations between management and workers, and created a new

112 Vérités, August 1937, Municipal Archives, Le Havre, (MA)
generation of trade unionists who would lead a prolonged struggle all the way to the occupation of the factories in 1936.

After the strike, the membership of the UL _autonome_ shot up and it became the voice of the Le Havre working class. The strike ensured that the anarcho-syndicalists became the main political force in the town, their support coming from the unions in the ports and the building trade. A new generation which had been shaped by the experience of the post First World War years came to the fore. This included Jean Le Gall, a lorry driver at the port and militant trade unionist, who in 1923 became the general secretary of both the Syndicat général des ouvriers du port du Havre (the union of Le Havre port workers) and the UL _autonome_. He remained in this post after the three ULs reunited in 1935 and then until 1940 when he became the secretary of the Fédération des Ports et Docks.\(^\text{113}\) In 1928, the port workers’ union signed a collective agreement with the employers. This guaranteed a fixed salary with overtime added on top, an allowance for dirty work, and an agreement that all workers employed at the port had to belong to a trade union. This agreement made Le Gall very popular within his union and entrenched his prominent position within the _Havrais_ trade union movement.\(^\text{114}\)

Whilst the anarcho-syndicalists kept their position however, Communist influence also increased, especially amongst the metalworkers and the workers in the petrol refineries. The Syndicat des Métaux soon lost its anarcho-syndicalist leadership in favour of Communist supporters. The team of young militants who had been ‘trained up’ during the strike would be active in the town all the way through the 1920s and 1930s and into the Occupation. The most significant of these for the local trade union movement was Louis Eudier, who would eventually become leader of the Syndicat des Métaux. However, immediately after the 1922 strike most of the union’s members left and the metalworking sector remained largely un-unionised throughout the rest of the 1920s and early 1930s. This was due to the harsh conditions in the factories and the lack of legal protection.

\(^\text{114}\) Legoy, _Le peuple_, 297
In this chapter we have seen how the themes of geography, leadership and memory are so important to Le Havre. The town’s location on the Channel coast and at the mouth of the Seine makes it an important port for trade with much of the world, and yet it also makes it somewhat isolated from the rest of France. The port, and the factories it attracted, turned Le Havre into a working class town which stayed united when groups of workers were in dispute or in hardship. Trade unions were strong in Le Havre and even the mayor knew that to retain power he had to negotiate with them and not antagonise the working class. This was a town where trade union leaders remained in post for long periods of time because they were able to provide real improvements for their members. Most notable of these was Jean Le Gall, leader of the port workers and the USOH. But the workers’ movement was not always successful; it had had members who had died as a result of their militancy and these ‘martyrs’ and the events that surrounded them were kept in the collective memory of the Havrais working class.

Collective memories do not remain static, however; new memories are created and reinterpret or supplant the old. So whilst those who had died continued to be remembered every year, new, more positive, memories were to be created during the wave of strikes and factory occupations that swept France in 1936. These actions would also bring new leaders to the fore. This is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 2
The factory occupations and their aftermath: 1936 - 1939

In this chapter we shall see how the memory of defeat for factory workers in 1922 was replaced by joyful victory in 1936. The election of the Popular Front government brought with it a wave of factory occupations throughout the country, the first of which took place at the Breguet factory in Le Havre. This was followed by occupations of practically all the factories in the town. An important contributory factor to this militancy was Louis Eudier, leader of the Syndicat des Métaux, who rose to prominence at this time. A new relationship between factory workers and their place of work was created with workers bringing in activities that up to then had been reserved for the café and the streets: games, songs and parades. The strikes were successful but the workers had to continue to fight to have the concessions they had won actually implemented. The lessons learned during these strikes and, subsequently, during the actions that followed, engendered a sense of militancy amongst factory workers - hitherto only present amongst port workers - which would continue into the Occupation.

The election of the Popular Front government in 1936, and the wave of strikes and factory occupations which followed, came in part as a reaction to the far-right demonstration that took place in Paris on 6 February 1934. This event was not only significant for Paris, as Julian Jackson explains:

> It cannot be stressed enough that the impact of 6 February was not restricted to Paris alone. Indeed the further one was from the capital, the more lurid the rumours could become: at Valence it was believed that bands of Camelots de Roi were planning to converge on the town and take control of the local arms depot.\(^\text{115}\)

In Le Havre, much nearer to Paris than Valence, rumours were unnecessary since the violence could be seen close at hand. On 6 February, members of the far-right group, Croix-de-Feu, gathered at Place Gambetta (now called

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Place Général de Gaulle) and attempted to march on the town hall but were stopped by police barricades. Two hundred trade unionists occupied Franklin to prevent any attack on the building. In the days that followed, according to the police: ‘political activists… sought to ‘keep their members on tenterhooks, maintaining their fighting spirit’. The result was a ‘heavy atmosphere’ of ‘worry’ and ‘tension’.

The PCF called a demonstration in Paris for 9 February to protest against the events of the 6th. The demonstration was attacked by the police and there were clashes between demonstrators and police until the early hours. That evening in Le Havre, several thousand workers came straight from their workplaces to a mass meeting to hear reports on the day’s events in the capital.

The CGT called a strike and demonstration for 12 February in Paris. Although not invited to the planning meetings for the 12th, the PCF decided that they too would demonstrate on that day. The thousands of people who joined the CGT and the CGTU marches spontaneously amalgamated their two demonstrations. The path towards a unified trade union movement was started that day, as was a decision for the parties on the Left to work together. Whilst the Paris demonstration was hailed a triumph, the demonstrations in the provinces were also a great success. In Le Havre there was a general strike and more than 10 000 people marched through the town.

The unity that was forged on 12 February 1934 in response to the fascist threat developed first into a unity pact between the PCF and SFIO later that year, and then into a Popular Front. The notion of such an alliance was very welcome to the working class as it brought together a defence against fascism with a rising anger against unemployment, and the repressive and dangerous working conditions described in Chapter One.

The Depression started by the 1926 Wall Street crash hit France in 1931. Jackson writes of its effects:

116 Legoy, Le peuple, 332
118 Legoy, Le peuple, 332
119 Ibid
Although the slump hit France later than the rest of the world, it lasted much longer… While most of the industrialised world was on the road to recovery by mid-1935, France was only just entering the trough of the Depression… The Depression affected France not as a cataclysmic social collapse but rather as a slow paralysis.\textsuperscript{120}

An example he gives for this is that unemployment was much lower than it was in Germany or Britain, reaching one million people at its worst. However, whilst the figure may have seemed low compared to some countries, the effects were dramatic in the industrial parts of France. Some large factories in Le Havre had laid off between 40 and 50\% of their workforce and, in the port, there was only work for 1500 dockers out of the 4000 who were registered.\textsuperscript{121} Rod Kedward writes: ‘The political activists of 6, 9 and 12 February 1934 did not give primacy to the depression, but by the middle of the year unemployment and hardship… increasingly framed all political statements and action.’\textsuperscript{122} In the election campaign of 1936 the parties of the Popular Front produced a common programme which promised measures that would alleviate the suffering of workers, as well as dissolving the far-right groups.

The Popular Front government won the election on 3 May 1936 and on 11 May the first factory occupation took place heralding a wave of strikes and occupations in France during May and June. That first occupation was at the Breguet factory in Le Havre.

### The Breguet factory occupation

In 1931, the aviation pioneer Louis Breguet opened a factory in Le Havre to build seaplanes under the management of Robert Lechenet. Breguet was attracted to the area next to Pont VII at the eastern end of the port because there was a large area of land next to two canals, perfect for testing prototypes. The factory started with a workforce of 350 and by 1936 it had grown to 850.\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{120} Jackson, \textit{The Popular}, 20
\item\textsuperscript{121} 1936 ils ont osé, ils ont gagné: histoire des grèves en Seine-Inférieure (Rouen: Institut CGT d’histoire sociale de Seine-Maritime, 2006), 16
\item\textsuperscript{122} Kedward, \textit{La Vie}, 170
\item\textsuperscript{123} Legoy, \textit{Le peuple}, 224
\end{itemize}
This figure was made up of 600 skilled workers including a significant number of women, and 250 white collar workers, foremen, technicians and engineers.\textsuperscript{124}

May Day was always an important day for workers but in 1936 it was particularly significant. Just two months earlier, the CGT and the CGTU had reunited as one force and 1 May occurred between the two rounds of the parliamentary elections. Moreover, it was at a time when another war was looming and workers were anxious to demonstrate their desire for peace. Many factories in Le Havre were involved in making equipment for the French armed forces, including the Breguet factory whose seaplanes were destined for the French air force: the Armée de l’air.

Leaflets were distributed to all the factories in Le Havre in the days before 1 May encouraging workers to come out on strike and join the May Day rally at Franklin.\textsuperscript{125} The morning of 1 May militants from the Syndicat des Métaux formed strike pickets outside the town’s metalworking factories. Louis Eudier, the general secretary of the union, went with other militants to the Breguet factory to form a picket line at the factory’s entrance. Without much trouble they succeeded in getting the whole workforce out and together they marched to the meeting at Franklin where they joined 10 000 other Havrais workers.

A few days later, however, the Breguet management sacked two workers, ostensibly because there was no work for them, but they also happened to be known militants within the workforce. Moreover, one of them had incurred the displeasure of the head of personnel, a member of the Croix-de-Feu, after refusing the offer of a far-right newspaper. After several meetings with the union, the decision was taken on 9 May to go on strike and occupy the factory in order to win the reinstatement of the two workers. The workers decided that, if the police arrived, they would threaten to occupy the prototype of a new plane that was at the time sitting in the main hall; the plane was likely to break under their combined weight. This prototype was not only important for future work at

\textsuperscript{124} 1936 ils ont osé, 16
the factory, but also full of petrol, and therefore a potential fire risk. On 11 May the occupation began and the factory was occupied for three days, during which time the director, Robert Lechenet, was held a virtual prisoner in his office. There were threats from within the factory from members of the workforce who were fascists, who tried to violently disrupt the strike. And there were threats from outside the factory, from the police who wanted to enter the factory and force the end of the occupation. The fascists were dealt with by the rest of the workforce and the police were dealt with by a contingent of 300 dockers who came from the port armed with clubs, and stood in front of the factory to protect it from the police.

As in 1922, the strike and occupation had widespread support within the town. Collections of food were made and the local shopkeepers donated provisions to keep the workers fed whilst they were inside the factory. Finally, after lengthy negotiations between Louis Eudier for the Syndicat des Métaux, Jean Le Gall for the USOH, the mayor, the prefect, and the chief executive of the Breguet factories, the strike was won. The strikers not only won back the jobs of the two sacked workers plus back pay for them, but also the removal of the head of personnel and pay for the strike days for all the staff. This last achievement was the first time this had been won in France and, according to Eudier, ‘had the effect of a bomb going off amongst the working class.’

When the workers knew they had won, they left the factory and headed for Franklin where a meeting had been organised. According to L’Avenir du Havre: ‘All along the route, the brave strikers were cheered by the working class who greeted them with clenched fists. At their arrival at Franklin, there was a genuine ovation: two thousand workers who had come to demonstrate their solidarity with the strikers, excitedly clapped their victory.’

This strike and occupation was the first of what would become a wave of workplace occupations throughout France during May and June of that year. But why did the first one take place in Le Havre and in this particular factory? According to Herrick Chapman, it was because it was, precisely, an aircraft

126 Eudier, ‘Souvenirs’, 70
127 ‘Après deux jours de lutte, les ouvriers de Breguet arrachent la victoire’, L’Avenir du Havre, 16 May 1936, BNF
manufacturer. Indeed, the first five factory occupations in France in 1936 were all at companies that built aircraft. The first two, in Le Havre and then in Toulouse, were defensive, demanding the reinstatement of sacked workers; the next three were offensive, making demands for higher wages, union recognition and a shorter working week. Crucially, these three factories were in the Paris region, bringing the tactic of workplace occupation to the capital.

Chapman argues that it may have been the way aircraft factories were organised that gave them the potential for militancy. This was not because they were unionised. Indeed, most French aircraft factories in the 1930s were not unionised. In general, such factories were owned by famous aeroplane inventors who were very involved in their factories and much admired and respected by their employees. This led to a very strict management style. Louis Eudier described the situation in the Breguet factory thus: 'The repression was very harsh in this factory. You had to ask for permission to go to the toilet and the worker who whistled as they worked could be sacked for lack of diligence in their work.'128 As Chapman writes: ‘aircraft manufacturers disciplined their wayward workers harshly: troublemaking, union organizing, and laziness could all lead to abrupt dismissal.’129

At the same time, however, there was also a sense of camaraderie amongst the workforce. The workers on the shop floor were proud of their work; they were mainly skilled workers who worked in an interesting, cutting-edge, glamorous industry very different to other factory work at the time. They worked in teams managed by a team leader, rather than on a long assembly line as in other metalworking factories. As Chapman writes: ‘It was a looser form of work organization than the assembly line, allowing for a sense of companionship on the shop floor. “What camaraderie there was!” one worker recalled. “Everyone knew one another. We loved this work.”’130 The white collar workers in these factories – those involved in the design and testing of new aircraft – although highly skilled and middle-class, had more in common with the shop-floor workers than with management. Chapman writes: ‘they lacked the high salaries,
prestige, and authority that gave top engineers and managers such privileged status in the companies.\textsuperscript{131} Workplaces developed where there was a tension between a harsh management on the one hand, and a workforce with a strong sense of solidarity on the other. Up until 1936 it had been the management at the Breguet factory which had had the upper hand but, with the growing sense of confidence amongst workers engendered by the growth of the Popular Front in 1935 - 36, it was the workforce which started to feel stronger.

Whilst this may explain why the first occupations were in aircraft factories, what is the explanation for the first occupation being in Le Havre? It could be argued that it was just chance. However, I would like to suggest that it was due to the presence of a particularly talented and intelligent trade union leader: Louis Eudier.

Born in Le Havre in 1903, Eudier became a ship’s carpenter and was nineteen when the 1922 metalworkers’ strike began. He took part and was present when the cavalry shot into the crowd of strikers. His involvement was a formative experience for his later life as a union militant. Eudier lost his job after the strike and remained unemployed for many months before finding work first at the metalworking factory, Tréfileries et Laminoirs, and then as a carpenter with the Compagnie générale transatlantique where he formed a union section. He was known as an excellent speaker and became one of the group of young militants within the UL \textit{unitaire} who had been active in the 1922 strike. In 1930 he became the general secretary of the Syndicat CGTU des Métaux du Havre and in 1936, after the CGT and CGTU re-amalgamated, the secretary of the unified Syndicat des Métaux du Havre.\textsuperscript{132}

It is not clear who had the idea to occupy the factory, rather than simply strike to demand the reinstatement of the two sacked workers. However, in Eudier’s account of the occupation of the Breguet factory he demonstrates his knowledge of other factory occupations which had taken place that year in Poland and Bulgaria. He writes that:

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid
Knowing the treachery of the forces of repression and of management and knowing of the difficulties encountered by the occupations of the Polish textile factories in Lodz and during the occupation of the train station in Sofia by Bulgarian train workers, we planned what to do in case the factory was evacuated by police violence.\footnote{Eudier, ‘Souvenirs’, 68}

And what they planned to do was sit in the prototype seaplane and risk its safety.

Eudier writes that it was the meeting as a whole that decided to occupy the factory and threaten the prototype. However, since he does not give credit to any individual there for suggesting an occupation nor for outlining the lessons learned from the factory occupations in Poland and Bulgaria, it does not seem improbable that it was Eudier himself who proposed this strategy. Jackson writes: ‘The phenomenon [of factory occupations] was not completely unknown in France: there had been a sit-in at Citroën in 1933. The best known foreign examples had occurred in various Polish coalmines from 1931; indeed occupations had come to be known as ‘Polish strikes’.\footnote{Jackson, The Popular, 101} The textile strike in Lodz that Eudier refers to had been enormous, involving 150 factories and 125 000 strikers, included occupations of a dozen factories, and was brutally attacked by the police and factory guards.\footnote{L’Humanité, 20 March 1936, Gallica, BNF} It took place during the first three weeks of March 1936 so only a couple of months before the Breguet occupation. As we shall see further on when Eudier’s union is threatened with dissolution in 1939, Eudier was a man capable of finding imaginative solutions to threats to both his members and his union. I would like to suggest that having been a union militant for fourteen years and a union leader for six years, he had followed the strikes in Poland and learned about the tactic of factory occupations. In 1936 when unemployment was high, factory occupation would have been a good strategy for preserving workers’ jobs in that it prevented employers from implementing a lockout during a dispute. Using the threat to the prototype seaplane as a bargaining tool was an imaginative addition to the occupation strategy and one that Eudier appears capable of devising.
The strikes and occupations spread

After the first five factory occupations in France, which were all at aircraft manufacturers, the first occupation in a different industry in France also occurred in the Le Havre region: at the oil refinery in Gonfreville-l’Orcher. On 22 May the workforce went on strike and occupied the refinery, for the same reason the Breguet workers had: demanding the reinstatement of two militants who had lost their jobs. After just one day of occupation the strikers won their demand. The other strikes that took place in May were in Paris. There was then a pause and a second wave of strikes and occupations spread through the whole of France at the beginning of June. On 7 June at a meeting between the employers’ representatives and the leaders of the CGT held at the Hôtel Matignon, the seat of the Prime Minister in Paris, the employers accepted all the unions’ demands: the right for workers to join a trade union; the implementation of collective agreements; the right of workers to be represented by union delegates in dealings with management; a 15-17% increase in wages; and no penalty for having been on strike. In addition, the government agreed to pass legislation enshrining the right to a 40 hour week without loss of earnings and two weeks of paid holidays a year. If the government, unions and employers thought this agreement would put an end to the industrial action, they were wrong. Workers stayed on strike or came out on strike to make sure the Matignon Agreement was implemented in their workplace.

From 4 June workers in large and small factories in Le Havre began to go out on strike and occupy their workplaces to such a degree that, as one account of the strikes puts it: ‘reports from all sides [named] Rouen, Le Havre and Nantes as places where they had lost count of the number of occupied factories.’

For the workers to be in charge of their workplaces was an extraordinary reversal from the rigid regimes that had prevailed right up until that moment in most French factories. In the context of May - June 1936 it is important to

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136 Chapman, *State Capitalism*, 82
137 Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communistes*, 76
138 Jackson, *The Popular*, 87
139 Kedward, *La Vie*, 187
remember quite how unfriendly and hostile these places were right up until the start of May of that year. As we saw in Chapter One, most factories were not unionised and had strict regimes where the foreman with his stopwatch ruled over the workers at their benches. The health and safety of the workforce was not a priority and accidents were frequent; workplace nurses and infirmaries were rare. When the workers decided to occupy their factories this state of affairs was completely reversed. No longer was management in charge with little respect for either the workforce or the equipment; in all the accounts of the occupied factories the workers took great care of their workplace while they occupied it. At the electrical components manufacturer, the CEM, the strikers organised groups who were responsible for security; groups who were responsible for keeping the machinery well-maintained; and guards on the door.\footnote{‘Avec les Ouvriers des Usines Occupées: A la CEM’, \textit{L’Avenir du Havre}, 13 June 1936, BNF} The guard on the door at the occupied rope makers, the Corderies de la Seine, was so strict that when the journalists from \textit{L’Avenir du Havre} arrived to report on the occupation there, he shouted they could only stay for ten minutes and that was in the courtyard and not in the factory. The guard told them: ‘“We are in charge of the factory and we cannot make any exceptions.”’\footnote{‘Avec les Ouvriers des Usines Occupées: Aux Corderies de la Seine’, \textit{L’Avenir du Havre}, 13 June 1936, BNF} 

Since the workers now saw their factories as theirs and not management’s they also saw their workplaces as an extension of their own homes for the first time. A worker at the occupied Mazeline factory reported later: ‘Every day the wives brought the lunchbox, the food, often bringing the children with them. We showed them the factory, the workshop where we worked. It was all new for them. And then at night we slept in the factory. Honestly, we felt at home, the factory belonged to us.’\footnote{Perrot, \textit{Laisse-moi}, 33} This is a complete reversal from the situation described above in Chapter One where Simone Weil noted how the factory was absolutely not a home.

The factories ceased to be places where the main emotions were fear and boredom; they became places to have fun. The workers brought into the occupied workplaces activities that they enjoyed outside of work, notably

\footnote{Perrot, \textit{Laisse-moi}, 33}
pastimes that were enjoyed in cafés. Cafés were central to workers’ social lives. They were the places where workers came to talk, read the paper, play cards and other board games. There was often also music from a gramophone player or live musicians, maybe a pianist or accordion player, and sing-alongs for the customers. As Jean Legoy writes: ‘The café is “the reverse of the factory”, the place where subjugation stops and where one can raise one’s voice.’144 In the factory occupations of May - June 1936 the café was no longer the opposite of the factory, it became part of it.

At the Tréfileries et Laminoirs, L'Avenir du Havre reported that the strikers played cards or football to pass the time but that there were also displays of traditional dancing from the Algerian workers which were much enjoyed by everyone.145 Some factories went further than displays of dancing. Here is an account from the Mazeline factory: ‘A band was created with all those who knew how to play an instrument. It marched through the factory and through the streets… In the general mechanics workshop the fitters built a stage… This was used for improvised theatrical performances, songs, stories. Dances were also organised with an accordion.’146 The workers at the CEM put on a parade where the different sections of the factory produced banners. Music was provided by a group of bigophonistes, playing a type of cheap wind instrument often found at French celebrations, and individual workers wore fancy dress. Some of the characters they represented were fond tributes to local people: the alter ego of local author, Gaston Demongé, Maître Arsène, was represented. Demongé wrote poems and stories in the local dialect about people from the Normandy countryside. L'Avenir du Havre reported that ‘Maître Arsène, who had come straight from the market in Bolbec, joined us with his maiden and her basket of butter. He was awarded the ‘Ordre du Camembert’ and surrounded by bicycles decorated with flowers.’147 Others dressed up as figures from current events: two people were Haile Selassie and his son who had both supposedly come to seek refuge from Mussolini at the CEM; Italy having invaded Ethiopia the previous year. Other characters were religious figures; the Pope, his cardinals

144 Jean Legoy, Cultures Havraises (Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray: Éditions EDIP, 1986), 94
146 Perrot, Laisse-moi, 31
147 ‘Le cortège fleuri de la CEM’, L'Avenir du Havre, 27 June 1936, BNF
and Abbé Mazarin were all represented blessing the crowd. These were all characters known for their wealth despite supposedly caring about the poor, particularly Cardinal Mazarin who was famous for being the richest man in seventeenth century France.

The use of parades and performances, whilst evidence of the creativity that these workers possessed was not in itself a new form of workers' entertainment. These were types of cultural activity that were organised by neighbourhood committees within Le Havre to celebrate the various festivals throughout the year. However, these committees were usually run by shopkeepers keen to use the opportunity to advertise their own businesses; during the factory occupations it was the workers who took charge, with no ulterior motive other than to enjoy themselves.

In the absence of any first person accounts of these occupations it is interesting to examine what these cultural representations reveal about the workers involved. In the accounts of the occupied factories in Le Havre, as reported by L'Avenir du Havre, we see humour used, in the form of irony and satire, to both entertain and to make serious points about the hypocrisy of the rich. The strikers, at least at the CEM, appear proud of their Norman culture; knowledgeable about world events; desirous to help the victims of fascism; and scornful of religious hypocrites.

These occupations were notable because they marked a new relationship between the workers and their workplaces; no longer were these workplaces alien spaces but places where workers felt comfortable and at home. This is a significant change in itself but it was not the actual reason for the strikes in the first place. It must be remembered that the reason why the workers were occupying their factories was because they had real and pressing demands. And, for the first time for many of these workers, they actually won. Unlike the 1922 strike where the workers finally ended their action having won nothing, the 1936 strikers went back to work because they were successful. And this was true for the strikers all over France. The Matignon Agreement represented an unprecedented improvement in workers' conditions and brought France into line

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148 Legoy, Cultures, 119
with other countries which had passed similar legislation at least twenty years earlier.\footnote{Henry W. Erhmann, \textit{French Labor: From Popular Front to Liberation} (New York: Russell & Russell, 1971), 42}

**The situation of the port workers**

Before we move on to what happened next for the factory workers in Le Havre, we need to look at one group of workers – the vast majority of whom did not go on strike in May – June 1936 – namely the port workers. These workers were not only completely different in their mentality and ways of working to the factory workers, their organisation was also different. Whilst metalworkers joined a union during periods of industrial struggle and then left when the struggle was over, dockers remained union members year in, year out. As outlined in Chapter One, the port was a closed shop due to a collective agreement with the employers which the workers’ union had signed in 1928. This meant that the port workers had no need to go on strike to obtain the union recognition and collective bargaining rights that factory workers wanted; they had already won them eight years earlier. This did not mean, however, that there was no longer any tension between workers and employers at the port.

Minutes from meetings of a committee formed of the Chamber of Commerce and the port administrators in 1934 - 1935, regarding the attempt to reduce handling costs, show to what degree the dockers’ constant threat of industrial action kept the employers careful and vigilant. The committee heard representatives from individual employers who all complained of the high costs of handling work at the port due to the collective agreement made with the dockers’ unions. One such representative, M Kuhnmunch, from the Société Commerciale d’Affrètement, was reported as saying that: ‘The work contract has been imposed on employers and satisfies neither the employers nor the workers. But one cannot envisage modifying it for the moment since it would not be possible to cope with the disturbances that such a measure could provoke.’\footnote{Annexe no 2 to the minutes of the meeting of 23 Feb 1935, 5Z238, MA} Another representative, M Arnaudtizon, of the Société de Travaux
et Industries Maritimes remarked that: 'The conversations which have taken place up to now between employers and workers have always happened following incidents and the employers have always had to give in because of a lack of solidarity between the employers, which encourages the workers not to respect the work contract.' 151 These two statements enable us to see that the dockers’ unions were able to thwart the employers’ desire to lower wages. They had their collective agreement governing wages and any threat to it would provoke industrial action, something that the employers wanted to avoid because they felt they could not win.

It was not just on wages that the dockers were strong enough to prevent any change. The committee also reported that the dockers refused to handle certain material. The minutes of a committee meeting held in January 1935 reported that there had been a drop in the number of ships using the port of Le Havre. One reason was that the dockers had refused to handle anything related to the arms trade. M Augustin-Normand from the shipbuilders bearing his name: ‘maintained that the explosives and the powders which are sent abroad no longer pass through Le Havre because the forwarding agents have too many difficulties with the workers.’ 152 Another member of the committee, M Watier: ‘declared that it was not only from the point of view of the handling of explosives that he has collected complaints: “I received,” he said, “the other day a visit from an agent from a foreign shipping company who complained bitterly about the indiscipline which reigns amongst the Havrais dockers.”’ 153

Despite the employers’ many meetings during 1934 and 1935 to reduce the cost of handling in the port, it is apparent that they did not produce a change in the relations between port workers and employers. Although the dockers did not go on strike in June 1936, 154 they benefitted from the Matignon Agreement: on 12 June 1936 they received a 12% increase in wages. When the right to paid holidays had still not been agreed by August of that year, the dockers went on a go-slow. The mayor had to intervene to enable a settlement to be made

151 Ibid
152 Minutes of the meeting of 26 Jan 1935, 5Z238, MA
153 Ibid
154 Except for 500 dockers who handled coal who did have to go on strike on 12 June in order to obtain the same pay increase.
between the workers and their employers. Those who worked 180 days a year were allowed twelve days paid holiday; those working 90 days were allowed six.\footnote{1936 ils ont osé, 32-3}

It would appear that the dockers had to constantly demonstrate their strength in order to safeguard the benefits they had won. This state of affairs carried on after 1936. In November of that year the port workers’ union, the Syndicat Général des Ouvriers du Port, Commis Auxiliaires et Similaires du Havre, passed a resolution to ‘vigorously protest against the delay to the implementation of the 40 hour law for port workers.’\footnote{Resolution of the Syndicat Général des Ouvriers du Port, Commis Auxiliaires et Similaires du Havre, 25 Nov 1936, SZ288, MA} The 40 hour week had been one of the demands agreed to in the Matignon Agreement. It had been implemented by June 1937, but apparently caused problems for the port as a committee was set up to work out how it could be applied better. Present at the committee were representatives from the port, the town hall and the trade unions. It is evident from the minutes of the first meeting that the port unions still held a huge amount of power at the port. At the start of the meeting the assistant secretary of the port workers’ union, M Carlier:

> asked to speak in order to express the astonishment of his comrades that only three workers’ organisations had been invited whilst there were many who contributed to the activity in the port. He cited in particular: the sail makers, the coal merchants, the warehousemen, the customs’ men etc. Since the Union des Employeurs de Main d’Oeuvre had been invited to participate in the Commission, he thought that the Union des Syndicats du Havre could equally have been invited.\footnote{Commission d’études chargée de rechercher les accords nécessaires en vue d’assurer la coordination du travail dans le port du Havre, 4 June 1937, SZ288, MA}

As a result, he said he could not participate in the meeting until the USOH had been invited. Maurice Hauguel, general secretary of the lorry workers’ union, also present, agreed. The chair of the meeting, M Despusjols, director of the port, accepted that the USOH would be invited to all future meetings.

These trade union leaders evidently felt in a strong enough position to insist on who else should be present at these meetings and confident enough that no decision could be made without them. This confidence is borne out by what
was said in the rest of the meeting. The director of the port ‘cited the shipping companies who had already abandoned the port of Le Havre because of the exaggerated slowness of the handling and how excessively high its prices were.’\textsuperscript{158} This then was the same state of affairs as revealed in the Chamber of Commerce and the port administrators’ committee minutes of 1934 - 5. Moreover, the president of the Chamber of Commerce and the mayor’s assistant both emphasised that they did not want to see any reduction in the improvements won by the workers in 1936 and that they wanted to find a way forward in agreement with the unions.

**The situation of the factory workers after June 1936**

As mentioned in Chapter One, factory workers tended to be union members only during disputes. However, in 1936, for the first time, these workers continued their union membership even when their strikes were over. And they did not stop fighting for what they now felt they were entitled to. However, whilst the port workers were able to keep hold of the concessions they had won, this was not so easy for the factory workers. After June 1936 the workers discovered that it was one thing to have an employer agree to demands but quite another to have them implemented.

At the Breguet factory, health and safety improvements were agreed but not put in place. On 5 June the workers submitted a list of demands to the director, Robert Lechenet, and the factory owners in Paris. They asked for a qualified nurse and an infirmary; a cloakroom with individual lockers; overalls and clogs for workers doing particularly dirty work; and enough toilets for a workforce of 850. Management in Le Havre and Paris both agreed to these demands. However, by 3 October that year, *L’Avenir du Havre* was reporting that none of these demands had yet been met.\textsuperscript{159}

Management tried to challenge the 40 hour week by telling the workforce that it would mean laying off workers. A secret vote was held on whether to have the

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid
\textsuperscript{159} ‘Chez Breguet’, *L’Avenir du Havre*, 3 Oct 1936, BNF
40 hour week or reduce the hours to 35 and keep everyone’s job. The workers defied management and voted almost unanimously (95%) for a 35 hour week so that no one would lose their job.\textsuperscript{160}

Then management tried to change the wage system. They introduced the Rowan incentive system in December 1936. This was a method of using incentives to push workers to increase their productivity. Workers would be paid on the basis of how much they produced rather than on how long it took them. There were several different types of wage incentive systems but, as Herrick Chapman writes: ‘In aviation employers tended to favour the Rowan system since its formulas ensured that workers would earn no more than double their normal hourly wage by working harder.’\textsuperscript{161} As L’Avenir du Havre outlined, it also meant that each team leader received a bonus taken from the workers’ wages. However, the team leader was liable for all broken tools and various penalties set by management and was responsible for making sure the workers worked as hard as possible.\textsuperscript{162} The system aimed not just at increasing productivity but at creating divisions between workers and between workers and their team leader and thus destroying the solidarity that had been so present in May 1936.

The workers at the Multiplex plywood factory also had problems with holding their management to the implementation of the collective agreement and the 40 hour week. In a reply to a letter from the union representing the workers to their national federation, the Fédération Nationale de l’Industrie de Bois et Similaires, in September 1936, the Fédération wrote: ‘We understand very well comrades’ impatience but the bosses here, as in all industries, are doing everything they can to delay signing the agreements.’\textsuperscript{163} In November, the Fédération, replying to a letter complaining that wages had not yet been increased, had to write: ‘You will understand as militants that the bosses will always try to violate the agreements, it is all about the balance of power.’\textsuperscript{164} By July 1938 the union was

\textsuperscript{160} ‘Chez Breguet’, L’Avenir du Havre, 5 Sept 1936, BNF
\textsuperscript{161} Chapman, \textit{State Capitalism}, 50-51
\textsuperscript{162} ‘Breguet : système Rowan, escroquerie’, L’Avenir du Havre, 26 Dec 1936, BNF
\textsuperscript{163} Letter from the Fédération Nationale de l’Industrie de Bois et Similaires to the Syndicat Ouvrier des Bois Contreplaqués, 8 Sept 1936, 5Z32, MA
\textsuperscript{164} Letter from the Fédération Nationale de l’Industrie de Bois et Similaires to the Syndicat Ouvrier des Bois Contreplaqués, 10 Nov 1936, 5Z32, MA
still writing to the Fédération regarding the non-implementation of pay
increases.\(^{165}\)

The reason why the workers did not simply go back on strike again to obtain the
pay increase due to them was that the Popular Front government passed a law
on 31 December 1936 which said that every dispute had to be presented to an
arbitration committee before a strike was called. These arbitration committees
were held at a departmental level and were made up of equal numbers from
management and from the trade unions. However, at the same time, the cost of
living was rocketing. Between November 1935 and November 1936 the cost of
living in France went up by almost 55\% making the pay increases vital.\(^{166}\)

A series of meetings and demonstrations were held in Le Havre in 1937 about
this arbitration process. An article in *L'Avenir du Havre* described the first one
in July of that year:

> Responding to the call from their union, the Le Havre metalworkers went
> in their thousands to demonstrate at the Palais des Expositions.
> That evening, every factory offered an unusual spectacle. Instead of the
> usual dispersal of workers going home for some rest, they gathered at
> the door to their factories forming a procession behind banners and flags
> under the supervision of experienced trade unionists.\(^{167}\)

At the Palais des Expositions, Louis Eudier spoke about the wage negotiations
to the 9000 metalworkers in attendance. He said that the claim for wages to
meet the increasing cost of living was made in June. The local employers'
organisation, the Chambre Syndicale Patronale, had discussed it for six weeks
before refusing the demand and sending it to the departmental arbitration
committee. This would delay a decision even further. But, said Eudier:

> “We can no longer wait… the working class of our city and our country
> cannot bear for much longer the arrogance and indifference of the
> controllers of capital. The constant rise in the cost of living is not down to
> the improvements given to the working class of this country, it is caused
> by the sharks of finance.”

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\(^{165}\) Letter from the Fédération Nationale de l’Industrie de Bois et Similaires to the Syndicat Ouvrier des
Bois Contreplaqués, 13 July 1938, 5Z32, MA

\(^{166}\) Erhmann, *French Labor*, 72

\(^{167}\) ‘Les Métallos du Havre manifestent pour leur salaires: Un Grand Rassemblement Syndical’, *L’Avenir
du Havre*, 29 July 1937, BNF
After Eudier had spoken, two members of the unions of white collar workers came to the platform to offer the support of their unions. Finally three letters were read out which would be sent to the Minister for Work, the prefect, and to the management of all the metalworking factories in Le Havre. This letter would be presented by workers’ delegations in each factory. The letter asked the factory boss to put pressure on their employers’ organisation to resolve the situation as soon as possible.

This evidently had not worked by September of that year for another huge rally was organised by the Syndicat des Métaux to protest, amongst other issues, the slowness of the arbitration process and the increase in the cost of living. More than 10 000 metalworkers listened to speeches at the Place des Expositions and then marched through the centre of town.168

Finally, in November 1937, the arbitration process came up with a result which was announced at a mass meeting held by the Syndicat des Métaux, attended by 6000 union members. The workers were told that their union’s executive committee had found the agreed increase to be so ‘derisory’ that, whilst they would accept it, they would also campaign to have it increased again. The union approached the Chambre Syndicale Patronale and told them that if they refused to increase their members’ pay, they would withdraw from the joint committee of workers and employers. The Chambre Syndicale Patronale put this to their members who all agreed that they would not further increase their workers’ pay. Nor would they meet with the Syndicat des Métaux, even when asked to by the sub-prefect.169

30 November 1938

This intransigence became even more pronounced the following year after the general strike of 30 November 1938. The Popular Front government finally fell in 1938 and Léon Blum was replaced by Edouard Daladier. Daladier’s government passed a number of decree-laws that year which ended many of

168 ‘Au Havre 10 000 Métallos manifestent en cortège contre les trusts affameurs’, L’Avenir du Havre, 23 Sept 1937, BNF
169 ‘6000 Métallos Havrais manifestent pour leurs salaires’, L’Avenir du Havre, 25 Nov 1937, BNF
the improvements to workers’ lives that their strikes and workplace occupations of 1936 had won them. Principally these new decree-laws put an end to the 40 hour week, the two-day weekend and increased pay for overtime, and they raised taxes for workers and reduced them for their employers.

The CGT announced a general strike for the 30 November to protest against these changes. Nationally the strike was a disaster. Not enough workers heeded the strike call and the police succeeded in breaking up strikes that did take place. Le Havre was one of the few places where the strike call was followed almost unanimously: 95% of metalworkers came out and 100% of workers at the port. However, by looking at how the employers dealt with this strike it can be seen to what degree the balance of power had shifted from the workers back to management since the heady days of May - June 1936.

The day before the strike, at the rope factory, the Corderies de la Seine, management called in the union delegation and warned them that they viewed the strike as political and that they would impose sanctions on all those who struck on the 30th. Despite the warning, which the union felt was baseless, all but three of the 900 workers at the factory went out on strike. In addition, a large proportion of the supervisors and technical staff joined them.

The next day work continued as normal but early in the morning it was announced that nine supervisors, two office staff and M Rigand, the assistant secretary of the workers’ union, had been dismissed. The union’s report on the situation relates:

There was a feeling of indignation in the whole factory and soon all activity stopped. The workers gave the responsibility to their representatives to reply to this provocation by approaching management to take back this sanction. This approach remains unfruitful, the employers claimed they had no conflict with its workers and so they have taken no sanctions against them. (The Rigand case above shows that this is untrue.)...
Since management would not lift its sanctions the staff decided to occupy the factory until the general secretary had returned from informing the sub-prefect of the situation. It was then 08.15.\textsuperscript{170}

At 10.15 the police commissioner told the union delegates to stop the occupation and tell the workers to go back to work whilst the sub-prefect tried to solve the situation. The delegates agreed, wishing to appear conciliatory. However, management was not so flexible. They decided to sanction the workers for their action by closing the factory until 5 December. The workers left the building and continued their protest outside.

The following day the sub-prefect failed to persuade management to change their mind and management refused to meet with the union delegates. The day after, 3 December, at a mass meeting, the workers voted unanimously ‘to only go back to work IF ALL WITHOUT EXCEPTION AND WITHOUT DISTINCTION OF JOB come back to work.’\textsuperscript{171} The following day management agreed to a meeting with the union where the factory director, M Pouillon, told the union delegates:

that after having carefully thought through the situation he had decided to keep his sanctions. Moreover he let it be known that if work did not start on Monday at 05.00 as usual the employees not there could be sacked. In the case of being re-hired, each case would be looked at individually.\textsuperscript{172}

In the face of such intransigence, the workers had no choice but to go back to work.

The situation at the Corderies was typical of what happened in the other factories in Le Havre. On 1 December the town’s metalworking employers closed all their factories and sacked all their workers. On 5 December they re-opened and started re-employing their workers one-by-one. Those trade union militants who were seen as troublemakers by their bosses were not re-employed. In all 372 trade union militants were dismissed.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{170} Report by the Syndicat du Textile: Section Corderies et Assimilés, région du Havre, 4 Dec 1938, 5Z406, MA
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid. Capital letters in the original.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid
\textsuperscript{173} 1936 ils ont osé, 91-93
For those workers who lost their jobs following the 30 November strike, the situation became dire. We can see this in just one example. The Standard Oil refinery was occupied by its striking workers but management told their union steward, Henri Messager, that if he could stop the occupation no one would lose their jobs. Messager and his members moved out of the factory and management immediately dismissed him. This left him homeless since jobs at the refinery came with accommodation. As André Augeray, union militant at the neighbouring Vacuum oil refinery, writes in his memoir: ‘[Messager] found himself on the pavement with his little family and a few pieces of furniture. He could not find work anywhere in this region where the grapevine worked well between company directors and he had to accept work breaking stones in a quarry in order to feed his family.’

The USOH set up a mutual aid committee in order to financially support those who had been dismissed and their families. They wrote to all the unions in the region asking for donations because: ‘The comrades who have been sacked are the best militants. They have been struck by the employers’ vengeance who, in reducing them to poverty, want them to stay quiet for a long time… Workers’ families must not suffer from hunger.’

The situation had become worse by the following year. The February 1939 edition of the USOH’s newsletter, Vérités, reported that since the failure of the general strike in November the employers had once more been exerting their power over their workforces. Some union militants who had taken part in the strike had been sent to prison, some were still being investigated by the police, and those that had lost their jobs were now effectively blacklisted. Two months later Vérités reported that workers’ rights were being further attacked as the country readied itself for war. It stated that employers could now ask their workers to work a 60 hour week if they deemed it necessary. They could do this instead of hiring more workers, despite the fact so many were desperate for work.

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174 Augeray, *Les Tribulations*, 17
175 Circular from the USOH, 22 Dec 1938, 5Z32, MA
176 ‘La Vindicte Patronale’ Vérités, Feb 1938, MA
177 ‘Déclaration de la CGT concernant les décrets-lois et la situation internationale’, Vérités, April 1939, MA
The importance of the memory of 1936 and its aftermath to Havrais workers during the Occupation has been discussed in the Introduction. This chapter details what actually happened in that year, highlighting why it was so important, and the lessons that workers drew from its events. 1936 was the year that many Havrais factory workers became attached, for the first time, to the concept of trade unions and learnt that working together in such an organisation, led by an experienced and effective general secretary, could win them substantial benefits. They also learnt something the port workers already knew too well, that in order to keep the improvements that had been won, they had to keep fighting, either to have them implemented at all or to keep them in place. This constant battle appears to have created a certain level of resilience amongst Havrais workers for their willingness to continue to make demands was not dampened by their increasing lack of success.

This account of the Popular Front era in Le Havre has underlined the impact that a skilled and imaginative trade union leader can have on his members. However, it was not just through his personal abilities that Eudier was able to lead but also his politics, namely his closeness to the PCF. This would become a source of increasing friction between himself and the leaders of the port unions as a growing divide opened between the Communists and anarcho-syndicalists following the events of May-June 1936. The next chapter examines these political rifts and how they affected the trade union leaders in Le Havre.
This chapter will trace the politics and ideologies that influenced the trade union leaders in Le Havre. Using editions of *Vérités* and the local Communist newspaper, *L’Avenir du Havre*, it will explore the points of difference and dispute about what the identity of a trade union movement should be, and over how best to defend the interests of its members. As shall become apparent, the anarcho-syndicalist and the Communist-influenced union leaders would react to the Spanish Civil War, the prospect of a wider European war, and the rise of fascism in very different ways. This would destroy the unity that had seemed so strongly forged in May - June 1936. Ultimately, these differences would become increasingly bitter and would have clear and direct implications for the choices union leaders made during the Occupation.

After the strikes and occupations of 1936 the trade union movement in Le Havre emerged apparently strengthened with a newly forged political unity. This can be seen in the make-up of the executive committee of the USOH. From 1936 to 1939 the general secretary and assistant secretaries - Jean Le Gall and Maurice Hauguel respectively – were both anarcho-syndicalists. Jean Le Gall, as was seen above in Chapter One, was the very popular general secretary of the Syndicat général des ouvriers du port du Havre. He was also one of the leaders of the Fédération des Ports et Docks, the national federation of port workers' unions. Maurice Hauguel was the general secretary of the Syndicat Général des ouvriers camionneurs, chauffeurs et suiveurs du Havre et de la région, the lorry drivers' union. The treasurer was Georges Gosselin, a PCF member and secretary of the postal workers’ union whilst the assistant treasurer, Louis Eudier, as seen in Chapters One and Two, was a Communist sympathiser and secretary of the Syndicat des Métaux.

**Spanish Civil War**

A month after the factory occupations ended in France, a civil war broke out in Spain marked by the fascist rebel coup organised by Franco against the
Popular Front government in Spain. This had a big impact on the French working class who could see clear parallels with their own country. In July 1936, at an event to mark the anniversary of the death of Jean Jaurès, 8000 Havrais heard a Spanish Republican talk about the military coup.\(^{178}\)

There were broadly two different responses to this conflict amongst trade unionists. The Communists chose both to go to Spain to join the International Brigades and to collect donations, whilst the anarcho-syndicalists focussed solely on collecting money. Rémi Skoutelsky, in his book about the French volunteers who went to Spain, confirms that this was the usual pattern throughout France.\(^{179}\) Of all the political groupings it was only the PCF who actively recruited people to the International Brigades. The socialists, anarchists and Trotskyists concentrated on collecting money and equipment for Spain and producing propaganda in support of the Republicans. For the anarchists this was, in general, because they were committed pacifists and so would not engage in the war as combatants.\(^{180}\)

Skoutelsky explains that the events in Spain were very important to militant trade unionists in France and that the trade unions became an essential structure, if not the main one, in creating solidarity with Republican Spain.\(^{181}\) Certainly in Le Havre this is borne out by the actions of both the Communist and anarcho-syndicalist-led trade unions. However, the information available about the activities of these two groups is rather uneven. *L’Avenir du Havre* contains article after article about the overall situation in Spain, the activities of the Havrais volunteers, and the efforts to raise funds and supplies. *Vérités*, however, never mentions what was actually happening in Spain. It does, however, detail how much money the unions raised, and they raised an enormous sum. This was particularly true of the Syndicat des Dockers, the union most closely associated with the anarcho-syndicalists. Each Havrais docker contributed half a franc every day for two years to the Spanish

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180 Ibid  
181 Ibid, 115
Republican cause. At the end of those two years they had raised more than one million francs.\textsuperscript{182}

\textit{Vérités} describes this largesse in two ways. It was for humanitarian purposes; destined for ‘the little orphans of that wounded country.’\textsuperscript{183} It was also as solidarity ‘for the workers of Spain so that they fight until they gain a victory which will be a victory for international pacifism over fascism, the purveyor of war.’\textsuperscript{184} Whilst \textit{Vérités} never proposes how this fight should be conducted, the sentiment is in keeping with the beliefs of the anarcho-syndicalists: their ardent pacifism and humanitarian concern for the needs of fellow workers. Whether there was an identification with the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists or simply a recognition that Spanish workers, like French workers, were defending their Popular Front is not articulated in \textit{Vérités}. Whilst the Syndicat des Dockers du Havre passed over half a million of the francs it collected to the USOH fund for Spain (which in itself made up three quarters of all the funds the USOH raised for this cause),\textsuperscript{185} it also donated money to the organisation Solidarité internationale antifasciste (SIA).\textsuperscript{186} This organisation was set up and run by prominent French anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in 1937 with the aim of encouraging anarchists and non-anarchists to collect money and vital provisions for Republican Spain. It also took over the running of an orphanage in Llansá, Catalonia, which housed 300 children. These were presumably ‘the little orphans’ mentioned above.\textsuperscript{187} David Berry, in his thesis on the French anarchist movement writes that:

\begin{quote}
the SIA was undoubtedly a success in terms of the support it attracted, and its constituency extended well beyond the borders of the anarchist movement... anarchists of or close to the UA [Union anarchiste], left-wing socialists, syndicalists, oppositional communists…. There were even cases of communist support at the grass-roots level, despite opposition by the party leadership.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{182} Dhaille-Hervieu, \textit{Communistes}, 114
\textsuperscript{183} ‘Sur le Port: Aux Dockers’, \textit{Vérités}, June 1939, MA
\textsuperscript{184} ‘La Solidarité du Havre Ouvrier au Peuple d’Espagne’, \textit{Vérités}, Aug 1938, MA
\textsuperscript{185} Dhaille-Hervieu, \textit{Communistes}, 114
\textsuperscript{186} David Berry, ‘The response of the French anarchist movement to the Russian revolution (1917-24) and to the Spanish revolution and civil war (1936-39)’ (DPhil Thesis, University of Sussex, 1988), 292
\textsuperscript{187} Berry, ‘The response’, 289
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid, 290-1
\end{flushleft}
Berry comments that ‘the SIA manifesto was clearly, if not explicitly, anti-Stalinist: its aim was to help “in particular, the victims of totalitarian states.”’

We do not know how strong a connection the Syndicat des Dockers du Havre had with the SIA. Of the 350 local groups that the SIA set up by 1939, none were in Le Havre. There was a group in Lillebonne-Gravenchon, just on the eastern edge of Le Havre, but we do not know what connection this group had with any of the Havrais workers. It is interesting to note that the Syndicat Produits Chimiques Le Havre donated money to the SIA and this union represented the workers at the oil refineries in the Gravenchon area. As we shall see below, we know that this union was aligned with the PCF in 1939 and was dissolved in December of that year after refusing to condemn the Hitler-Stalin Pact. Unfortunately, we currently do not know if the Syndicat Produits Chimiques had any connections to the local SIA group or when and why they decided to donate to the SIA. Local historian, Jean-Paul Nicolas, has suggested the following explanation for this Communist-aligned union donating money to an anarchist organisation:

In 36, 37, 38, 39, many CGT militants discovered the PCF and its strict rules. This discipline was not compatible with the libertarian spirit of French workers. As a result there were many different ways of thinking within this “monolithic” party. Also, even if under Communist influence, all CGT trade unions were sovereign i.e. they kept their autonomy especially with regards to their finances. This perhaps explains giving money to a group which did not follow the party line.

Even if there was some early involvement in the SIA by individual Communists, we know from Berry’s account that the organisation’s tone became increasingly anti-Communist from 1938. If the Syndicat des Dockers du Havre, or indeed the Syndicat Produits Chimiques, had wanted to find out about the SIA’s activities, its current number of donations and where the money was going, it could have read the anarchist newspaper, Le Libertaire, which was the only

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189 Ibid, 287
190 Ibid, 294
191 Ibid, 292
192 Email communication with the author, 19 July 2016
source of news about the SIA. David Berry writes that in the mid to late 1930s:

Le Libertaire and SIA are full of reports about intimidation [by Communists] of anarchists street-selling newspapers; about meetings being hastily arranged by communist cells in order to clash with those organised by the local... SIA groups; about SIA posters being covered by PCF posters; about how the communist press totally ignored successful public meetings.

In April 1937 Le Libertaire declared that ‘the Spanish revolution, the future of the Iberian proletariat, are threatened not only by the fascism of Franco but also and above all by the false socialist and communist allies who... are deploying the maximum effort to crush the Spanish working class in its struggle for emancipation.’ This was not a one-off allegation but the start of ‘an outspoken campaign against the communists in France and Spain’ in Le Libertaire.

None of this appears in Vériétés. We can only make the supposition that the leaders of the Syndicat des Dockers and therefore the leaders of the USOH read at least some issues of Le Libertaire because they donated money to the SIA and knew that these donations would in part be used to help run the orphanage in Llansá. Although there are no anti-Communist sentiments attached to mention of the Spanish Civil War in Vériétés, there certainly are, as we shall see below, when the issue of the coming war is covered. It is therefore not inconceivable that the dockers’ leaders shared the views of the SIA and Le Libertaire in relation to the Communists’ activities in Spain.

Whilst the anarchists were attacking the Communists in their national press, L’Avenir du Havre did not mention the anarchists in their coverage of the Spanish Civil War, reserving their vitriol for the fascists and Trotskyists. However, the Havrais Communists could not be accused of ignoring the plight of the Spanish Republicans. There were two aspects to their support: raising

193 Berry, ‘The response’, 291
194 Ibid, 310-11
195 Ibid, 313
196 Ibid, 314
funds and sending people to fight. The latter happened almost immediately. The first to leave were young Communists from the Spanish community.\textsuperscript{197}

*L’Avenir du Havre* gives us the account of one of these young Spaniards, Daniel Trobo, who worked at a local coal merchant’s.\textsuperscript{198} As soon as he heard of the fascist coup he dropped everything and went back to fight. When he was injured in the Battle of Irun he came back to Le Havre to recover and to report on the situation. The paper wrote:

> With his Spanish accent, he knew how to make us understand everything that was happening. Whether he was speaking of the fights of the rebels, of the Government or of the militiamen, we always understood that the Republicans’ cause was in good hands but that these frank and solid hands had no weapons.
> - No weapons!
> How many times did he repeat that?

Before he left to return to Spain a collection was made in the Notre Dame neighbourhood where he lived which raised 400 francs and a quantity of woollen goods needed for the cold weather. At the train station 50 local Communists came to see him off. *L’Avenir du Havre* reported: ‘When the train set off, taking them to Spain and to battle, the Internationale, in Spanish and French, rose solemnly from the group. Then all the length of the train, all sorts of travellers raised their clenched fists and sang the Internationale again.’

The non-intervention agreement advocated by France and Britain and signed by Germany, Italy, the USSR and twenty other countries meant that the Republicans officially received no arms from any country except the Soviet Union who chose to ignore the details of the agreement it had signed. Germany and Italy also supplied arms, but to the rebels on the other side. The Republicans’ lack of arms was repeatedly highlighted in reports in *L’Avenir du Havre* in contrast with *Vérités*’ emphasis on the plight of orphans and the fight against fascism. This was especially the case after the founding of the International Brigades in September 1936. The consequences of the Popular Front’s decision to not intervene were very real and immediate to the Havrais

\textsuperscript{197} Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communistes*, 112
\textsuperscript{198} ‘Daniel Trobo nous dit: Aidez-nous à sauver la République espagnole’, *L’Avenir du Havre*, 19 Sept 1936, BNF
Brigade volunteers who went to Spain. Their letters and visits home were reported in the paper and the need for arms became an increasingly desperate plea.

Trade unionists in Le Havre responded to this appeal not only with money but directly, in their workplaces. A proportion of the military supplies destined for both sides in the Spanish Civil War came through the port of Le Havre. The Syndicat des Dockers was alert to this traffic and, according to Jean Legoy, did what it could to make sure that military aid was only sent to the Republicans. Unfortunately, we do not know how they did this since he gives only one example: on 17 August 1936 the Havrais dockers prevented the ship, the Belle-Île, from leaving since they believed that the guns that had been loaded in Hamburg were destined for Franco’s rebels. The ship was only allowed to leave when the dockers were assured that the arms were being sent to Argentina. Members of the Syndicat des Métaux also did what they could to ensure that the Republicans had arms. Metalworkers involved in ship repairs in Le Havre obtained permission from their management to repair, for free and in their own time, a Republican warplane damage by the rebels. This earned their union an official letter of thanks from the ambassador of the Spanish Republic.

According to Marie-Paule Dhaille-Hervieu, about a hundred people from Le Havre joined the International Brigades. These included two leaders of the local PCF, Jules le Troadec and Roger Hauguel; the rest were mainly young workers without family responsibilities. She suggests that they were assigned to three different battalions which were involved in the defence of Madrid. She is not convinced that there were enough of them to form their own brigade, although there are several references to ‘la Brigade Havraise de la Colonne Internationale’ in L’Avenir du Havre. The first reference to a large group of Havrais in one company is in a letter by Jules le Troadec printed in December:

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199 Legoy, *Le peuple*, 342
200 1936 ils ont osé, 83
201 Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communistes*, 112
202 No relation to Maurice Hauguel.
6 Dec 1936
My dear Désiré
… We are in good health. In my company there are 31 people from Le Havre.
I would really like to tell you about the enthusiastic demonstrations which greeted us when we arrived in Spain…
In Barcelona we marched in the roads. I can't describe to you the magnificent and moving reception which the population gave us.
We then left for Valencia. At each stop we were offered oranges and mandarins.
It was midnight when we arrived in Valencia. Thousands of comrades were waiting for us…
Our fraternal greetings to all the comrades from the section [the Le Havre PCF].
Jules le Troadec and 31 volunteers from Le Havre who are defending Republican Spain, Freedom and Peace.\(^{203}\)

A month later, in January 1937, two photographs were published; one was of Roger Hauguel with a caption informing readers that he was returning (after a visit back to Le Havre to report on the situation) to 'la Brigade Havraise de la Colonne Internationale.'\(^{204}\) A week later the photograph is of a large group of men wearing flat caps and warm coats, the ones in front kneeling, the ones behind standing, all facing the camera, some with their fists raised and with one carrying, what appears to be, a large PCF flag. The caption reads: ‘Our comrades from the Brigade Havraise de la Colonne Internationale.’\(^{205}\)

In January 1937, Emile Grenier, president of the Havrais section of the Association des Amis de l’Espagne Républicain, a Communist sponsored organisation, went on a fact-finding trip to Spain. Grenier wrote accounts of his visit that were published in L’Avenir du Havre. He arrived in Madrid on 9 January and on the 11\(^{th}\):

We go visit the International Brigades… In the secretary’s office we meet a French comrade, Lamberger… He and Commander Hans speak of the courage of the “iron column of Le Havre”: they cite to us names. Excuse me for not telling you them, there are too many and all deserve to be cited. As comrade Lamberger says:

\(^{203}\) ‘Une lettre de volontaires Havrais’, L’Avenir du Havre, 26 Dec 1936, BNF
\(^{204}\) L’Avenir du Havre, 23 Jan 1937, BNF
\(^{205}\) L’Avenir du Havre, 30 Jan 1937, BNF
“With those men we will forge ahead.”

The letters and the visits from the Havrais who were fighting in Spain as well as the return of those who had been injured made the fight against the Spanish fascists very real for Communist sympathisers in Le Havre. Whilst it was the dockers’ union that collected the most money (and it is interesting to note that Jules le Troadec was himself a docker so maybe had some influence on the amount raised) money and goods were collected by a variety of Communist sponsored organisations. These included the Association des Amis de l’Espagne Républicain and the fund-raising committees run by a husband and wife team, Georges and Henriette Plougonven, the latter organising women-run committees. Moreover, as Dhaille-Hervieu writes: ‘there was not a meeting, a celebration, a sporting organisation…, a cell meeting, a Young Communist meeting… which did not make a collection and declare its political and financial support’ for the cause.

We can only speculate on what impact these experiences had on those involved. Skoutelsky comments that those volunteers who returned saw very clearly the parallels between their experiences fighting fascism in Spain with the need to fight fascism in the Second World War; the Hitler-Stalin Pact did not alter their perception that the war was a war against fascism. Indeed once the Soviet Union was involved in the war, the PCF also recognised the links between fighting fascism in Spain and the fight against Nazism. The party deliberately recruited amongst ex-volunteers for the lutte armée in 1941 because they already had military experience - they could use arms and mount an operation and had already proved their courage and ability to be separated from their families. Moreover, for many ex-volunteers, moving from fighting fascism in Spain to fighting fascism in France seemed an obvious move.

However, it is difficult to know if this is also true for the Havrais volunteers since we have no accounts of their state of mind when they returned from Spain.

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206 ‘Lettre d’Espagne’, L’Avenir du Havre, 6 Feb 1937, BNF
207 Dhaille-Hervieu, Communistes, 113
208 Ibid, 114
209 Skoutelsky, L’espoir, 298-9
For those who did not join the International Brigades but were involved with collecting money and goods, whether as an organiser or participant, the constant news about the war, made personal by people they knew or knew of, must have had an impact. The letters home, which appeared in *L’Avenir du Havre*, at first began with a confidence that they were on the winning side that was slowly superseded by a desperate acknowledgement that they could not win because they did not have enough weapons or resources. This must, I suggest, have made an impression on those who were around the PCF in those years and made concrete the necessity to fight fascism in France and Germany.

**Fighting fascism and the prospect of war**

Whether connected to its martial stance on the Spanish situation or not, the PCF began to have an increasing influence within Le Havre following the strikes and occupations of 1936. The cantonal elections of 1937 saw the town’s first two Communist representatives elected. The print run of *L’Avenir du Havre* increased by 50% between September 1936 and March 1937, up to 7500, indicating an increase of 2500 new readers. The increase of Communist influence was evident in the unions: the Syndicat des Métaux now had a membership of 10 000 and, as seen above, two of the four positions on the USOH’s executive committee were taken by Communist supporters. The growing influence of the Communists amongst workers was reflected by the growth of factory and neighbourhood cells. In 1937 there were 70 cells, making Le Havre the strongest centre for the Communists in the department of Seine-Inférieure.

In addition to these cells and sections, the PCF also created a range of sporting and cultural groups which attracted hundreds of local people. Marie-Paule Dhaille-Hervieu writes that the ‘new Communist cultural policy was very connected to the decision to fight against fascist ideology with the support of intellectuals and the working class.’ Hence there were film showings, boxing

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210 The cantonal elections are to elect those who will run the departments.
211 Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communistes*, 92
212 Ibid, 87
matches, cycling trips, and dances, which were held under the slogans of anti-fascism and support for Spain.

This growing Communist influence was reflected nationally, alarming a number of prominent members of the CGT. In 1937, René Belin, the CGT’s assistant secretary, created a weekly paper, *Syndicats*, in opposition to the Communist paper *La Vie ouvrière*. This latter had been the paper published by the CGTU and which had been maintained by the Communists after the CGT and CGTU had re-amalgamated. *Syndicats* attracted around it a group of trade unionists troubled by the increasing influence of the PCF within the trade union movement. The paper claimed to defend trade union independence in the face of Communist ‘colonisation’ and was strongly pacifist. As Henry Ehrmann writes: It ‘attacked… the stand on foreign policy which the communists had taken, and its columns served as a rallying point for all those who defended the cause of appeasement in the language of the labour movement.’

From 1937 the USOH’s general secretary, Jean le Gall, aligned himself with the *Syndicats* group within the CGT. Presumably after many years leading the most influential union within Le Havre as well as the USOH and helping run the Fédération des Ports et Docks, Le Gall was concerned by the growth in Communist influence in these organisations. He would also have been aware that the Fédération des Ports et Docks had seen its membership soar from 18 000 to almost 100 000 in the space of a few months and that a Communist dockers’ section had been created in Le Havre with 200 members as well as a dockers’ cell within the Notre-Dame neighbourhood.

There may have been a growing Communist influence amongst Havrais workers, but this is not reflected in the articles printed in *Vérités*. Instead, from 1938 onwards, the paper published opinion pieces which proclaimed its commitment to pacifism, trade union independence and anti-capitalism. These in themselves were a rebuttal to the Communists and their allegiance to a political line that came from Moscow. Communism was rarely mentioned.

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213 Ehrmann, *French Labor*, 103
215 Ibid
216 Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communistes*, 92
directly. Occasionally Communists were referred to as ‘demagogues’, as in this extract from an article published in July 1938: ‘Think about it, comrades, the one who is not sufficiently knowledgeable will never be free. The demagogues feed on the ignorance of the masses. The trade unionism of today must depend more and more on enlightened militants.’

We presume that these were the views of the anarcho-syndicalist leaders of the USOH. We presume because we do not know who wrote them as very few were signed. However, whilst anti-Communism was open and behind everything Syndicats argued, the USOH’s paper is not simply anti-Communist but developed its own anti-capitalist line.

Whilst the PCF declared that Nazism was a threat to peace and that appeasement would not stop Hitler’s plans, Vérités promoted an uncompromising pacifism. The following is from an unsigned opinion piece published in September 1938 which lays out the paper’s attitude to war:

War has resolved nothing; instead it brings ruin, death, desolation and injustice.
The First World War was fought by our side, it was said, to fight German militarism and for the right of people to govern themselves.
With all the different opinions on the subject it is difficult to say if it was the Germans or the Allies who started the war.
An appalling Treaty of Versailles cut up Europe; states were created and a lot of contradictions ensued…
Trade unionism can neither support nor use military tactics without debasing itself. German workers, like those of all countries, are our brothers; they are exploited like we are.
We cannot think of killing our brothers. As soon as possible, like at Kienthal, we have to talk to German workers. We have to help them get back their free and independent trade unions.
With this international tension it only needs the act of a madman, like in Sarajevo, to turn the world into a field of carnage.
The working class has nothing to win from war and everything to lose.
Its salvation, the means of pressure that it holds, is in the strength of its international trade union movement. This maxim must become reality: Workers of the world unite.

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217 ‘Le syndicalisme devant les problèmes actuels’, Vérités, July 1938, MA
218 The Kienthal Conference, 24-30 April 1916, was an international conference of socialists who opposed the First World War.
219 ‘Une conscience en révolte’, Vérités, Sept 1938, MA
We have here a real horror of war based on the memory of the First World War which had ended only twenty years previously. There is no indication, however, that the author recognises Nazi Germany as a very different proposition to the Germany of the previous war. This is because those writing for Vérités believed that all capitalist countries posed an equal threat to workers. We can see this in the following month’s issue which was the first to come out after the Munich agreement, signed on 29 September. A close analysis of this article, ‘We think we are dying for our country but we are dying for the capitalists!’ reveals what the paper was saying at this crucial time.

The piece starts with the trope which we saw in the previous month’s issue above, that the Treaty of Versailles was to blame for the current difficulties facing Europe but it then goes on to blame capitalists and bankers for causing the problems, helped by the politicians. The anonymous author writes:

Central Europe was cut up and, without taking account of customs, languages, or the ability to be economically self-sufficient, the unjust Treaty of Versailles created the borders of new states. There were protests from all corners of Europe. The socialists from Vienna demanded the Anschluss; the Germans living in Austrian Silesia, the part that is called Sudetenland, wanted to go back there; the Germans from Bavarian Silesia demanded a plebiscite and got it; this province was given back to Germany except for a few cantons which went to Poland.

This analysis was common in France in 1938. As Robert J Young comments in his book, France and the Origins of the Second World War: ‘Far from offering any relief, 1938 brought more and more tension with each ensuing month. As one succeeded another, as war seemed more imminent than ever, and as the desperation to avoid it grew more intense, the river that was French opinion became more turbulent.’

No one in France seemed particularly alarmed by the Anschluss that took place in March of that year. And the public were desperate to believe that once Germany had absorbed the Sudetenland then there would be no more need for war. There was an argument to be made by those, like the USOH, who believed in national self-determination, that

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Germany’s absorption of those areas of German speakers who wanted to join Germany was justified.

The author of the *Vérités* article though does not just see the international situation as a matter of self-determination but also as the product of financial skulduggery. He writes:

Czechoslovakia, which was made up of all sorts of peoples, became a vassal state of France, i.e. financial magnates placed their interests in the mines and factories of this country. Messrs Schneider221 and Mercier222 are big employers there…

The German people were condemned, by this stupid treaty, to paying war damages for fifty-two years. They are hungry and, to feed them, foreign capitalists will give them metal but never wheat…

Imperialist France, to keep its privileges, armed Poland and Czechoslovakia and, through credits, directed the economies of these countries towards enormous contradictions. Czechoslovakia sent to France shoes, porcelain, glassware, and objects said to be from Paris. These were all of a mediocre quality but were imported in large quantities, in competition with the goods produced in our country.

German capitalism improved and, after rejecting as well as it could, the Versailles Treaty, it tried to find the markets and resources to defeat competing economic groups.

The French industrial sector owns the mines of Sudetenland; the English monopolise the oil wells and Romanian wheat.

Which of the three is the most imperialist?

The author is referring here to how western capitalism ‘invaded’ Central Europe following the Versailles Treaty. British, French and American businesses all lost their Russian markets following the Russian Revolution and so looked for new countries with whom they could trade. The creation of Czechoslovakia provided them with a new market as well as a base from which to extend into Poland and Hungary. As Alice Teichova writes: ‘There can be little doubt that Central and Southeast Europe became, after the British Empire and South America, the third most important area for investment by the victorious Entente Powers in the post-war world.’223 As Germany recovered and started to break some of the terms of the Versailles Treaty it also wanted to expand its market into Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia became the battleground for competing

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221 The company Schneider & Cie was a major French iron, steel and armaments manufacturer.
222 Ernest Mercier was a French industrialist involved in the electricity and petroleum sectors.
financial interests in Germany and Western Europe. It is no coincidence that the ethnic Germans of Czechoslovakia that Germany championed lived in the industrial regions of that country. Germany wished to seize these areas not just to incorporate more Germans within its borders but to gain an economically rich region at the expense of its economic competitors. The Vérités author argues therefore that the Germans, the French and the English are all as bad as each other; they are all competing for Central European markets. Germany is not now a different case because it is run by the Nazis. All three countries are capitalist and capitalism, by its very nature, needs to spread out to find new markets and new suppliers and that means entering foreign countries.

The article continues:

The inhabitants of the Sudetenland want to be German, they proved that in the May elections.

In the municipal elections held in Czechoslovakia in May 1938 the Sudeten lobby made considerable gains but according to the right wing daily newspaper Le Petit Parisien: ‘nothing absolute nor triumphal.’ It is interesting that a national conservative paper would try and downplay the success of a movement with clear links to Hitler whilst Vérités used the same news to argue that Germany was within its rights to break up Czechoslovakia. However, for the Vérités author again it is not simply a matter of national self-determination, there is capitalist greed involved. He writes:

Looking at it closer, there is at Plzen a huge weapons factory. Who owns it? Skoda? Messrs Schneider, Skoda, Krupp, Mercier, Rothschild, all the international dealers in death.

We would have been quite mad to have our faces smashed in, to let the international working class kill each other for the sordid interests of these magnates. These interests have been hidden behind a screen called the struggle of democratic countries against fascist ones.

After the First World War, the French multinational Schneider & Cie took a major share of the huge Skoda armaments factory at Plzen. As we saw in Chapter One, Schneider & Cie also ran a factory making artillery material in Le

224 Le Petit Parisien, 30 May 1938, 1
225 German steel and armaments manufacturer.
226 Based in Czechoslovakia, it was originally an arms manufacturer and then after WW1 spread out into the manufacture of transport vehicles, steam turbines, tools etc.
Havre so was an employer familiar to the USOH. It was particularly galling for the USOH to know that it would be the working class who could soon be called on to fight and die in a war that was producing increasing profits for their employers.

Then comes a guarded welcome for the Munich accords; guarded because the author does not believe that they will stop the war from coming:

The Munich accords are the treaties of capitalist powers, for the working class they only mean that war has been moved back, but they have allowed us some time, and time is life.

War is death, ruin, weapons, blood, fascism.

Although it is a qualified endorsement of Munich it reflects what the then Paris correspondent of the Manchester Guardian, Alexander Werth, discovered was a common reaction: ‘Like every country in Europe France heaved a physical sigh of relief at the thought that war had been averted.’\textsuperscript{227} However, the \textit{Vérités} author is not content to leave it to the politicians to stop the war from coming. He ends his article by arguing that:

It is through trade union struggle that we will push back war. Workers have everything to lose from war and nothing to gain.

The working class of all countries must unite.\textsuperscript{228}

Despite the ideas expressed in this article, on page three of the same edition of \textit{Vérités} is a national appeal from the CGT calling for trade unionists to raise money for Czech refugees fleeing from ‘Hitler’s terror’. The appeal continues:

Thousands and thousands of men, women and children must flee from Hitler’s oppression.

To remain would mean concentration camps for all, and death for some. Czechoslovakia, whose economy has been ruined, cannot cope with extra expenses.

These unfortunate people, who are our own, must however live. For that to happen they must be immediately expatriated.\textsuperscript{229}

\textsuperscript{227} Alexander Werth, \textit{France and Munich: Before and After the Surrender} (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), 343

\textsuperscript{228} ‘On croit mourir pour la Patrie, on meurt pour les capitalistes!’, \textit{Vérités}, Oct 1938, MA

\textsuperscript{229} ‘La CGT lance un nouvel et pressant appel à la solidarité’, \textit{Vérités}, Oct 1938, MA
This appeal comes from the CGT nationally and there is no article in Vérités echoing its sentiments. Its content indeed appears incongruous; nowhere else in any issue of Vérités is there mention of Germany’s spread of terror and creation of concentration camps. It is interesting to contrast the concern shown for the Spanish working class in this paper with the lack of comment on the oppression German trade unionists were being subjected to at this time. Perhaps we can explain this by noting what French workers were dealing with concurrently. The beginning of the Spanish Civil War occurred at the same time that the Havrais working class was still riding the wave of euphoria produced by their victory in May – June 1936. They could afford to be generous to their neighbours in need. By 1938, and especially after the general strike in November of that year, the situation had worsened considerably.

As we saw in Chapter Two, many of the gains won in 1936 had been rolled back: the working week had been extended once more; those in work were employed for many more hours a week whilst significant numbers of their former workmates had lost their jobs. Working hours had been extended in order to meet the needs of the government’s preparation for war; a war which would simultaneously boost employers’ profits and turn workers once more into soldiers. The priorities of the USOH anarcho-syndicalist leaders at this time were not German trade unionists but their own members who they were desperately trying to save from becoming cannon fodder. It must therefore, have been galling to see the Communists not only capturing a much larger audience amongst the Havrais working class but arguing that Hitler could only be defeated by arms. This presumably explains why in April 1939 Vérités published an opinion piece entitled: ‘Trade Unionism is not a political ideology, it is life itself’ which was a full-scale defence of trade union independence against the perceived dangers of Communist ideology.

The article’s author is given as ‘Vérités’, the only time the newsletter’s name is given as an author. We can perhaps deduce from that that the views contained within it were particularly dear to those who produced the newsletter. In the article, the authors argue: ‘The whole history of the trade union movement is impregnated with [the] desire for self-determination, its whole structure is marked by this principle of independence in favour of which generations of
militants have single-mindedly battled.’ They then ask: ‘Can it be said that the attachment, still so alive in our ranks, regarding this principal, comes from some kind of ideology or from a savage traditionalism?’ The answer is no, workers want self-determination because it makes sense. No longer are workers taken in by ‘demagogues’ and ‘apprentice dictators’ who use workers to fight battles that they will lose.

The terms ‘demagogues’ and ‘apprentice dictators’ refer undoubtedly to Communists. One wonders what the atmosphere was like at this time within the executive committee of the USOH considering that one of its members, Louis Eudier, was there precisely because he had not fought battles that had failed, but instead had been successful. The PCF as a whole had attracted so many people to it because it had helped fight battles that had won.

The article then continues: ‘The working class now knows its strength and it uses it every day in its effort to organise its new energy to advance its liberation. The more it understands, the more it feels the desire to choose for itself the road to its destiny.’ This seems to be a sign that the USOH is turning its back on the collaboration with other forces that typified the Popular Front. The Popular Front failed and the workers are going back to relying on their own forces in order to effect change. The article concludes by refuting the need for workers to be represented by a political party, which is implicitly understood here as the PCF:

Who would dare argue that something else is better suited to [the working classes’] faculties and their power? Who would dare argue that [the workers] are not skilful enough to determine for themselves their own future? Freedom would be a meaningless word if its meaning, the right to think and the right to decide for oneself, was only applied to an individual and not a social class.230

The authors’ suspicion of Stalinism was understandable at this period and presumably reinforced their rejection of political involvement within the trade union movement. However, their rejection of taking a political stance combined with a single-minded focus on their members’ needs was starting to isolate

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230 ‘Le Syndicalisme n’est pas une Idéologie Politique, c’est la Vie elle-même’, Vérités, April 1939, MA
them from what was happening in the outside world. Although writing in 1947, and so with the benefit of hindsight, it is still interesting to read Ehrmann when he writes:

It is no accident that the trade unionists who at all times fervently advocated the ‘independence’ of the labor movement were the same ones who were addicted to pacifist doctrines… In so far as the plea for independence was anything more than a mere desire to counterbalance increasing communist influence, it implied an intentional isolationism which was preached in foreign affairs. The entire philosophy of trade-union ‘independence’ was based on an aloofness of labor from happenings outside the sphere of its immediate interests; the problems of politics and especially those of world politics were considered out of bounds. In this orientation were the deepest roots of the inability of many French trade unionists to understand the nature of international fascism, its methods and goals.  

Ehrmann is referring here mainly to the *Syndicats* group but his comments could also apply to those behind *Vérités*. They may well have wished to put their members first which meant an opposition to war and the vagaries of political ideology. But this meant that their objectives were becoming very parochial. Their understanding of the machinations of international capital plus their anti-Communism led them to an ‘isolationism’ and an ‘inability… to understand the nature of international fascism.’

Given this, one can imagine the delight and disbelief with which the USOH anarcho-syndicalist leaders greeted the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact on 23 August 1939. Since this was done with no prior warning to the Communist parties outside the USSR, French Communists were left scrabbling to explain why from one day to the next they went from calling for Britain and France to form a military front to stop German imperialist aggression, to claiming that the Pact had stopped the war. This position became even more difficult when Russia joined Germany in invading Poland and then went on to invade Finland. The invasion of Poland prompted a declaration of war by both France and Britain (who were in a military alliance with Poland) which made it appear that the Pact had directly resulted in France being sucked into another war. This was despite the fact that the declaration of war did not immediately lead to any actual fighting. Instead, what became known as the *drôle de guerre* or Phoney

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231 Ehrmann, *French Labor*, 110-111
War lasted for the next eight months. Workers were expected to sign up for active duty or be exempted on health grounds or have it agreed that their occupation was necessary for war preparations.

The Pact was a gift to the anti-Communists in the trade union movement. After years of being lambasted by Communist trade unionists for not seeing that Hitler was the biggest threat to peace and freedom, anti-Communists within the Syndicats group nationally and within the USOH in Le Havre, could now point to their critics and call them the worst kind of hypocrites. A month after the Pact was signed the CGT decided to force its ULs, UDs, and constituent trade unions to hold referenda on whether they supported or condemned the Pact. A failure to condemn it would lead to expulsion from the CGT. As Henry Ehrmann points out, in doing this they, in turn, laid themselves open to the charge of hypocrisy since fundamental to the CGT was the principle that members could hold any political view they wished as long as they did not raise those views within their union.\(^{232}\) The Syndicats group had used this principle to attack the Communists within the CGT and now themselves were attempting to expel members for their political views. There was an attempt to justify this by saying that the Pact had led directly to the outbreak of war and that central to the trade union movement was a desire for peace, but it would be reasonable to suggest that a call for members to decide whether or not they condemned Russia’s invasion of Poland would have been more in tune with this sentiment. A decision to vote on the Pact itself indicates that the real purpose of the vote was to exclude the Communists who had posed such a threat to the power bases of those in the Syndicats group. In fact, I believe, it was more than that: it was an attempt to publicly punish and humiliate Communist trade unionists, for if it were only to remove their power they could have left that to their members. As Ehrmann explains: ‘The communists’ simultaneous desertion of the cause of anti-fascism, of the national cause of France, and of the cause of peace was… sufficient to turn hundreds of thousands of French workers away from communism.’\(^{233}\)

A week after the CGT ordered its members to vote on the Pact, the Government outlawed the PCF and its affiliated organisations. The \textit{ministre de l’Intérieur}\(^{232}\)
wrote to the prefects and ordered the dissolution ‘of the trade unions recently rejected by the CGT.’ Whether they liked it or not the CGT now found itself working with the authorities to root out Communists from within its ranks, since a vote which refused to condemn the Pact now led not only to expulsion but to a legally enforced dissolution.

In Le Havre, nothing happened immediately. In November, an inspector of the Police Spéciale sent to find out what was happening regarding the CGT’s order for referenda reported back: ‘Because of the war and the disorganisation which results from that, for almost all the workers’ trade unions the consultations have been quite difficult and are dragging on.’ However, he added that: ‘It has, however, been possible to discover that three big unions: the Inscrits Maritimes, the Métallurgie, and the Produits Chimiques, who have not yet given a definitive opinion would be inclined to not adopt the CGT’s point of view.’

For the next month, the USOH was busy creating an anti-Communist consensus within both Le Havre and the department. The USOH’s general secretary, Jean Le Gall, was instructed by the CGT to form a new leadership for the UD which had previously been Communist-led. This was accomplished in December, as was the formation of new leaderships of all the ULs in the department. The USOH also submitted three articles written by the CGT to the local paper, Le Petit Havre, which appeared over a period of ten days at the end of November and the beginning of December, condemning those who refused to denounce the Hitler - Stalin Pact. The tone and language of these articles was inflammatory. For example, the Communists were described in this way:

The Stalinist Communists are... in the service not only of a party but of a foreign government which has made possible the aggression of Hitler’s government.

They dare today to align themselves with the workers, and they are just the servile auxiliaries of a new imperialism, of a politics of force, of aggression, of plunder which crushes the working masses in the countries which are its victims.

By their attitude they become the accomplices of National Socialism which reduces the workers of Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland to powerlessness and poverty.

234 Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 17 Nov 1939, 1M565, DA
235 Report from Inspector of the Police Spéciale Devaux, to the Divisional Commissioner of the Police Spéciale, 16 Nov 1939, 1M565, DA
They insult and slander the militants who are disgusted by this odious task but they have not a word to say against those who oppress and massacre the subjugated populations.\textsuperscript{236}

By having their name associated with this article written by the CGT, the USOH not only attached themselves to a worldview which they had not once expressed previously but were effectively sanctioning and carrying out government anti-Communist policy. This is in marked contrast to its previous denunciations of all regimes everywhere.

Not all trade unions in Le Havre voted against the Pact. Five unions refused to hold referenda and were dissolved. The Syndicat Produits Chimiques was dissolved in December 1939 and in March 1941 it was the turn of the unions of lorry drivers\textsuperscript{237}, pastry makers, those involved in the clothing industry, and shoemakers. The leaders of the USOH told the sub-prefect that the reason these unions had refused to hold referenda was that their leaders were Communists.\textsuperscript{238} The sub-prefect informed the prefect who then sent through the orders for dissolution; the homes of the unions’ secretaries and treasurers were searched as were the unions’ offices and then the unions’ property was sequestered and sold and the unions officially dissolved.

Alone of the unions in Le Havre, the Syndicat des Métaux attempted to find a way to both not condemn the Hitler-Stalin Pact and not be dissolved. They began a process of subterfuge which infuriated both the authorities and the leaders of the USOH. It began in December 1939 when the union held its referendum. Out of a membership of 5500 only 275 voted. Of these, 165 voted for the CGT resolution, 99 against and there were 11 spoiled ballots. As the sub-prefect wrote to the prefect, since only: ‘A tiny number of people voted…. the real significance of such a vote is quite difficult to work out at the moment.’ However, he added: ‘Whatever it is, in formal agreement with the USOH and having conferred in a personal capacity with the Député-Maire of Le Havre I have postponed any notification of dissolution with regards to this union.’\textsuperscript{239}

\textsuperscript{236} ‘En réponse aux apologistes de l’agression’, \textit{Le Petit Havre}, 3 Dec 1939, MA
\textsuperscript{237} A rival union to that run by Maurice Hauguel.
\textsuperscript{238} Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 26 Feb 1940, 1M565, DA
\textsuperscript{239} Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 18 Dec 1939, 1M565, DA
Despite the fact that very few people had voted, the USOH let Louis Eudier know that he could no longer lead the Syndicat des Métaux as, according to them, he no longer represented the views of the membership. In January 1940 the union’s executive committee replaced not only Eudier as general secretary but also his deputy and the treasurer and assistant treasurer; the four jobs that formed every union’s leadership. The USOH was informed of this change and also received the following declaration: “The newly constituted union leadership registers with satisfaction the result of the referendum condemning the German-Soviet Pact and undertakes, in the full independence of the trade union movement, to apply discipline and federal and confederal decisions.”

However, a few days after the change of leadership, the USOH was surprised to discover that the old leadership had taken all the positions on the union’s administrative committee and Eudier was now occupying the role of chief administrator. Under the cover of these new roles the old leadership was continuing to lead the union whilst the new leadership acted as a legal façade. According to the head of the Renseignements Généraux (RG) the discovery of this deception led the USOH to break off all relations with the union and to agitate amongst factory workers to overturn the leadership and bring in a new ‘legitimate’ one.

It seems however that the USOH did not completely break off relations as the head of the RG wrote again to the prefect at the start of February to say that the USOH had ordered the union to remove Eudier from his role as chief administrator. As a result the union’s executive committee organised an extraordinary meeting which voted to remove the administrative committee from the leadership. The USOH was pleased with the result, although the head of the RG believed: ‘this change has been done with no sincerity; it has only been done through fear that the organisation may be dissolved.’

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240 Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 22 Jan 1940, 1M565, DA
241 Letter from the commissaire principal of the RG to the prefect, 25 Jan 1940, 1M565, DA
242 Letter from the commissaire principal of the RG to the prefect, 3 Feb 1940, 1M565, DA
The USOH were so convinced that everything was well now with the Syndicat des Métaux that André Vaillant, the USOH’s assistant secretary paid the sub-prefect a visit in order to convince him too. The sub-prefect wrote of this visit:

M Vaillant declared to me that decisions taken regarding Eudier had been inspired solely by the desire of his comrades to not immediately take away from him the pay that he has been receiving up till now as secretary of the Syndicat des Métaux but that he was being kept on in this capacity very provisionally and, in any case, he had no authority within the leadership.243

Moreover, the sub-prefect wrote: ‘The secretary of the USOH has assured me that the new Syndicat des Métaux was entirely satisfactory to them and that we could trust it. I think that we should believe him while at the same time following carefully the attitude of its leaders in the weeks to come.’

It was a provisional state of affairs because Eudier was waiting to be seen by the Military Medical Commission in order to see if he was fit for military service or whether he would become a labour conscript. Not long after the extraordinary meeting he was deemed unfit due to having had a toe amputated after an accident when young.244 Although this meant that he would now be considered as a labour conscript he was not in fact sent anywhere until the end of May. Therefore, despite the USOH’s belief that it would soon be rid of Eudier he remained in Le Havre and involved in his trade union until that time.

Evidently, Communist propaganda at the time was both plentiful enough and potent enough for the USOH to feel the need to have published in Le Petit Havre another missive from the CGT. In the article entitled ‘Our Task’, which was published on 2 March 1940, the CGT refuted as slander claims that it had agreed to Government legislation which was undercutting workers’ standard of living. It maintained that it was independent of any political control and had not stopped defending workers’ interests.

Henry Ehrmann agrees that the CGT did not collude with the Government over its push to increase hours from the 35 hours a week won during the Popular Front to 60 hours, and even 72 in the defence industries. However, he argues

243 Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 5 Feb 1940, 1M565, DA
244 Handwritten note detailing phone conversation with Commander Moreau, 8 Feb 1940, 1M565, DA; Eudier, Notre combat, 5
that although they did not collude, their campaigning on behalf of workers had no effect on Government policy. Moreover, Communist propaganda blaming the CGT for the attack on living standards started to have resonance within the working class and Communists began to be seen ‘as the true champions of social interests and the defenders of civil liberties, [meaning that] they regained much of the terrain that they had lost by the volte-face of the Soviet Union.’

There continued to be some correspondence between the police and members of the prefecture regarding the true political nature of the Syndicat des Métaux until May 1940 but then nothing until March 1941. Eudier’s memoir fills in some of the gaps: at the end of May 1940 he was sent as a labour conscript first to Fécamp and then to Honfleur to exercise his profession of ship’s carpenter. Neither job lasted long. At Fécamp his employer asked him to pass a test first which he then deliberately failed to do in the time allotted. He was sent home after a week but was then sent immediately to Honfleur. The employer there set him no preliminary test (Eudier believed that he had been warned not to) but after a week the German army invaded and in the ensuing chaos he came back home.

Eudier’s situation in the immediate wake of the German invasion brings into sharp focus the new demands that individuals and groups now faced. However, they were to approach these demands from very different perspectives shaped by the years immediately preceding the war. This chapter has shown how these divergent perspectives were created following the high point of the strikes of May - June 1936. The anarcho-syndicalists’ and Communists’ ideological differences over the Spanish Civil War, the prospect of a new European war, and the rise of fascism became increasingly irreconcilable. Whilst the anarcho-syndicalists began with a clear opposition to all capitalist regimes, whether they be German, French or British, their anti-Communism became increasingly more important to them, to such a degree that by 1939 they were assisting the government in removing the Communists from their ranks. This commitment to

245 Erhmann, French Labor, 152
246 Eudier, Notre combat, 67-8
anti-Communism and the consequent co-operation with local authorities was to shape the choices they would make after the German army had invaded and this would have serious consequences for the workers' movement in Le Havre. However, before we can understand these consequences, we need to look more closely at what the German invasion meant for the people of Le Havre.
Two themes emerge in this chapter. The first is the importance of geography to the Havrais. The invasion of the German army would reveal how isolated Le Havre was from the rest of France. Whilst people in the north and west of the country took to the roads to escape, the Havrais were forced to wait for boats to rescue them. Whilst the town’s location was dangerous for its inhabitants, it was much prized by the Germans for its strategic position and they occupied the town in their thousands. Unfortunately, this was to mean that as the Occupation grew more repressive after 1942, it would become incredibly dangerous for anyone who resisted in Le Havre. This will be looked at in Chapter Seven. However, during the first eighteen months of the Occupation the townsfolk in general, and the workers in particular, were able to express their discontent, leading us to this chapter’s second theme: that of resilience. If times had been difficult for the working class before the war, it became even more so when faced with a range of new hardships: bombing, food shortages and low wages. The working class was quick to express its unhappiness at these new conditions. Workers were particularly incensed by any attacks on the collective agreements that they had won in 1928 and 1936; this was most clearly demonstrated in a riot that broke out at a local building site in June 1941.

The exode

The end of the war and the beginning of the Occupation was even more alarming for the Havrais than it was for much of the rest of the country who took to the roads in what became known as the exode. This was because Le Havre was the site of several air battles during May and June 1940 as the Luftwaffe tried to stop thousands of British troops from evacuating after the first successful evacuation at Dunkirk. The Luftwaffe’s bombing raids threw the town into chaos. On the orders of the ministre de l’Intérieur a lifeboat took the mayor and his team, the heads of department at the town hall, most of the town’s councillors and the sub-prefect across the Seine depriving the town of
any leadership. Public service workers abandoned their posts which meant no running water, no electricity and no trams. The German bombs caused a fire which spread through the centre of town. Since the fire fighters had already left, because their equipment had been irrevocably damaged by the bombs, there was no one to put the fire out and it continued to blaze for several days.²⁴⁷ All the shops shut, so there was no food, and looters used the chaos to steal what they could from empty houses and shops. The National Guard left, but before doing so opened the doors of their stables allowing fifteen horses to gallop round the centre of town.²⁴⁸

To add to the confusion, on the morning of Sunday 9 June, the three oil refineries on the edge of Le Havre were ordered by the French military to be destroyed plus the stocks of petrol kept by the Compagnie industrielle maritime. As we learned in Chapter One, the refinery built by Compagnie Française de Raffinage in Gonfreville-l’Orcher and the two built by Standard Oil and Vacuum Oil at Port-Jérôme, near Notre-Dame-de-Gravenchon, produced most of the petrol in France at that time. The military was therefore keen that their fuel did not end up in German hands. The effect of these three refineries being destroyed was enormous; the smoke could be seen in Paris.²⁴⁹ If it made an impression on the Parisians, the effect on the Havrais was nothing short of apocalyptic. It had the effects of a solar eclipse, plunging the town into darkness and sending the temperature plummeting. The townspeople felt that some kind of cataclysm had befallen them and they sought in desperation to leave the town.

At the beginning of June there seemed to be some kind of plan to protect the people of Le Havre. On 6 and 7 June those living closest to the port were evacuated. On 8 June the hospitals started to remove those patients who could walk. They were to leave that evening on trains headed for Brittany. However, before that could happen news arrived that trains were no longer passing through Rouen. This meant, in effect, that no trains could leave Le Havre as they had to pass through Rouen to go anywhere else. At the same time

²⁴⁷ Bengtsson, Le Havre. 42
²⁴⁸ Guillemand, L’enfer, 53
²⁴⁹ Hanna Diamond, Fleeing Hitler: France 1940 (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 49
conflicting reports of German army positions were coming in, each one sited them as being that bit nearer to Le Havre. Contingency plans were of no use and there was nothing to replace them.

With no clear instructions on what to do, the people of Le Havre took matters into their own hands. As the Germans continued to bomb their town, they gathered in their thousands on the quayside and at the ferry terminals trying to get on a boat that would take them away from the hell that had beset their town.

As we saw in Chapter One, Le Havre was not well connected to the rest of France at this time. The only way out by road was in a south-east direction which would mean heading towards Paris and the Germans. The only options were to leave by sea or cross the river to Lower Normandy. There were no bridges across the Seine until Rouen so the only way across was by ferry, of which there were three at different points outside the town. Although these ferries were capable of taking cars, the thousands of people who were trying to get on to the relatively small boats meant that many cars had to be abandoned so that their occupants could get on board.

For the thousands who could not get out of town to the ferry terminals, the only hope of escape was getting on a boat from the port that would take them out to sea and along the coast. This was not easy as the Luftwaffe were bombing the ships in and around the port.

One ship that managed to pick up refugees was the ‘Niobé’, a cargo ship that had been requisitioned by the French navy and was responsible for moving munitions between ports on both sides of the English Channel. At the beginning of June it collected a load of munitions in Dover and took them to Cherbourg. The cargo had not been fully unloaded when it was sent on to Le Havre to help with the rescue effort. Once docked in Le Havre, on 10 June, a British officer came on board and ordered that the rest of the munitions be unloaded. However, there were no dockers left to do the job as they, like everyone else in the town, were trying to leave. The ‘Niobé’s crew tried to do it themselves but they did not have the right equipment. At the same time, the

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250 Bengtsson, *Le Havre*, 39
townsfolk were massed on the quaysides trying to get on a boat, any boat. The crew knew the rumours that the invading Germans were planning to attack civilians and felt they had to rescue their compatriots despite the fact that their cargo was still on board. Eight hundred people boarded the ‘Niobé’ that day. After two hours at sea German planes bombed the ship and the munitions on board exploded. Of the crew and 800 passengers only eleven people survived.

Those who managed to cross the Seine, set out on foot to try and escape the invading German army. Some were heading towards family; some tried to follow their employers. We are fortunate to have a glimpse of what this was like for one factory worker from Le Havre. This is from a diary kept of this time by a 26 year old married woman called Paulette Fiquet who worked at the Schneider factory. Her husband was enlisted in the army and she lived with her sister - whose husband was also in the army - her mother and five year old niece. On 10 June, she and her family decided to leave their home after a bomb almost hit their house. With their essentials packed into two suitcases balanced on a bicycle and in her niece’s old pram, they headed first to the Schneider factory where they discovered: ‘nothing, the factory had been bombed the previous night. So, no way to get in and no more work. Someone told me that I had to get to Caen, to where the Schneider company had retreated. We took the decision to go there.’

The Schneider factory was situated between Le Havre and the oil refineries that had been destroyed the day before. Paulette and her family had to walk through the ‘wall of smoke’ that continued to rise from the petrol that was still burning, to arrive at one of the ferry terminals where, after a day’s wait, they finally managed to board a ferry to cross the Seine. They walked for three days, spending the nights in barns and empty houses, until they arrived in Pont-l’Evêque where Paulette was told that Schneider was sending lorries to take its workforce to Caen. They waited all day but when the lorries arrived they took only French and English soldiers and left them there. They set off again on foot.

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251 Éric Wauters, L’exode de 1940: Témoignages de Haut-Normands (Rouen: Éditions des Falaises, 2010), 53
252 Ibid
with occasional lifts until finally, ten days after they had left Le Havre, they arrived in Caen. Once there they tried to find some information about my work but we learn that the directors have left for Tarbes and that if we want to join them, that will be at our own expense and, moreover, we were told that they had sacked 2500 people so there was not much to hope for. So there I was with no work.  

There was nothing for it but to make their way back to Le Havre.

When Fiquet and her family arrived back they were relieved to discover that their home and possessions were still intact. Many Havrais were not so fortunate. While most people were fleeing the bombs and the approaching German army, some were taking the opportunity to loot empty houses and cars that had been abandoned at the ferry terminals. In the local paper, *Le Petit Havre*, from the end of June and through the summer, item after item appeared in the small ads from people trying to recover their stolen goods. Most of the ads were entitled ‘Reward’, indicating that many people were not going to the police to get their property back or that there were simply too many of these cases for the police to cope with. A number of the ads offered rewards for getting cars back that had been left at the ferry ports in June. If the car was still there, its contents often were not.

We can take just one ad to see what people were taking with them in the exodus: ‘Reward to the people who bring back the suitcase found in a car at the Berville ferry: linens, dresses, coats, sheets, jewellery, Alsatian doll, communion missal, photo of sailor named Georges-Maurice Doudet, including other objects and medicines. Contact Mme Doudet’ and a Le Havre address. From this we see that it was not just a matter of having something expensive stolen, which not many people yet owned – a car – but that people had their basic things like clothes and medicines as well as possessions of sentimental value stolen as well.

When the people of Le Havre looked back on the *exode* they saw chaos, panic, their fellow townspeople tragically killed on the ‘Niobé’, their houses attacked,
and their personal items stolen, and no help from the authorities. As we shall see below, the memories of those days became a touchstone for the local people who returned of everything to be feared from ever leaving their homes again.

Paulette Fiquet was just one of thousands of Havrais who left their homes and joined the exode. Many people did not return home but chose to stay with family elsewhere in France or follow the employers who moved down south away from the dangers of the Channel coast. Of the previous population of 160 000 only 50 000 returned. They came back to a very different town. The German army had arrived in Le Havre on 13 June. Since the mayor and sub-prefect were still on the exode, Hemann du Pasquier the president of the port, decided to act as if he were the sub-prefect and he, and Leibig, the police commissaire, were the first French officials to deal with the new occupant. Léon Meyer, the mayor for the past twenty years, was warned by friends not to return because he was Jewish and he made his way to the south of France. In his absence, the deputy mayor, Jean Risson, became the mayor by virtue of the fact that he was there when the Germans arrived. He was to be replaced the following year by Pierre Courant who was put in the post by Vichy and who would remain as mayor until the Liberation. However, the new authorities who really governed Le Havre were the Germans.

The German army moved in all along the Channel coast in order to prepare for its invasion of Britain. In Le Havre the army closed the port to all French trade and turned it into a German base. The ship-building workshops were requisitioned; business premises were transformed into German army cargo transport units; and a garrison was set up for 40 000 soldiers. German soldiers moved into many of the ornate red-brick mansions on rue Félix-Faure in the upper town, formally occupied by the wealthy Havrais businessmen and their families; or into the seaside villas in Ste-Adresse, the town adjacent to Le

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256 Malon, Occupation, 139
258 Malon, Occupation, 56
259 Claude Malon, ‘Le grand commerce havrais et ses entrepreneurs face à la guerre, l’État français et l’Occupation’, in Transports, 330-1
Havre further up the coast; or into several requisitioned primary and nursery schools in the centre of town.\textsuperscript{260} The influx of thousands of foreign soldiers changed the whole ‘rhythm of days and nights’ as local historian, Claude Malon, puts it.\textsuperscript{261} The franc was worth very little in comparison with the Deutschmark so soldiers went shopping to buy up good French products, china and crystal, wine and \textit{pâtisseries}. They frequented the bars, restaurants and brothels and packed onto the buses and trams.\textsuperscript{262} Whilst parts of France hardly saw a German soldier throughout the Occupation, Le Havre was well and truly occupied, in every sense of the word.

The first two years of the Occupation brought new hardships for workers in Le Havre. There were such severe food shortages that people began to die of malnutrition. As before the war, wages could not keep up with inflation, but now this meant an inability for workers to afford black market prices for essentials that were in short supply. The RAF began bombing Le Havre almost as soon as the Luftwaffe had stopped. These bombing raids were aimed at the port and the industrial areas making factory work even more dangerous than it already was. In fact it was dangerous for everyone in the town as the bombs often landed on civilian areas rather than strategic ones. And, in the immediate term, there were unprecedented levels of unemployment. However, as we shall see below, the \textit{Havrais} did not passively accept their new status quo but reacted with anger, stubbornness and direct action.

\textbf{Unemployment}

Whilst it was the RAF that bombed the town from July 1940 onwards, it was the Luftwaffe that first bombed the port and factories during the air battles of May and June 1940. The disruption this caused, plus the subsequent closure of the port to all French trade, threw thousands of people out of work. A sudden rise in unemployment was not unique to Le Havre. In the Occupied Zone as a whole, the number of people looking for work reached a million in October 1940; just in

\textsuperscript{260} Ibid, 126
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid, 127
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid, 127-9
Seine-Inférieure, unemployment rose five times from what it had been before the Occupation, up to 50 000.⁶⁶ In Le Havre unemployment was between 15 000 and 20 000 in August 1940.⁶⁷ As the town’s population had dropped to 50 000 after the exode this means that between 30 and 40 percent of the remaining Havrais were suddenly made unemployed. Since the 50 000 includes children and the elderly, the real unemployment figure was much higher.

By June 1941, most of the unemployed in the department had been found work either on farms, helping with agricultural work, or in towns, clearing the rubble caused by bombing raids, or on building projects run by the French or German authorities. These measures had led to a significant drop in unemployment everywhere in the department except in Le Havre.⁶⁸ The Departmental Director of Labour, whose job was to oversee the placement of the unemployed into work, wrote to the prefect about the discrepancy in the levels of unemployment in the main towns of the department:

The Departmental Office is experiencing certain difficulties in finding placements for the unemployed of Le Havre who seem to be showing a certain resistance to leaving the Le Havre region. The Havrais unemployed will not accept even an offer of work for French companies that have set up worksites… The opposition of these unemployed to work with German companies is explicable, even if it means having their unemployment benefit withdrawn as a result, but when they refuse to work for French companies, there seems to be no plausible explanation.

This refusal of a large number of unemployed Havrais to do what they were told to is an interesting anomaly and worth investigating. There is no mention elsewhere in the official reports, nor is it discussed or even mentioned in the secondary literature. However, I would like to suggest two reasons for this

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⁶⁶ Report by the prefect to the General of the Army Corps, General Delegate of the Government in the Occupied Territories, 18 Sept 1940, 51W 64, DA
⁶⁷ Report from the Departmental Director of Labour to the prefect 1 April 1941, 51W 65, DA
⁶⁸ Isabelle Raynaud, ‘Lutte contre le chômage et politiques de l’emploi en Seine-Inférieure de 1940 à 1944’, in Chevandier and Daumas, Travailler, 4
⁶⁹ Unemployment had dropped to 710 in Rouen and forty in Dieppe but of these none were capable of heavy labour. On the other hand, Le Havre’s figure still totalled 5695, of which about half were deemed fit for hard physical work.
⁷⁰ Bernd Zielinski, ‘Le chômage et la politique de la main d’œuvre de Vichy (1940-1942)’, in Peschanski, and Robert, Les ouvriers, 298
stubbornness. Firstly, as discussed above, the terrors of the *exode* induced a real fear of leaving home again for the *Havrais*. Secondly, I believe that the years of trade union militancy had created a certain obduracy within the population when faced with official orders that they did not want to follow.

In either case, however, it appears strange that a population which did not have enough to eat and was prey to persistent aerial bombing would be so attached to remaining at home. The reason for the unemployed refusing to take work outside Le Havre perhaps lies in the appalling conditions that unemployed workers found when they were sent to the Pont de Tancarville building site.

**The Pont de Tancarville**

There was no bridge crossing the Seine at Le Havre before the war, and in the 1930s the town’s Chamber of Commerce started to discuss the need for one. Historic rivalries between the ports of Le Havre and Rouen meant that the latter was opposed to such a venture, fearing, no doubt, that it would mean more business for Le Havre to the detriment of its own industry. Rouen wanted a tunnel to be built instead of a bridge and a pamphlet war began extolling the virtues of each opposing project. Amidst the facts and figures is also a remarkable degree of foresight as to the war to come. Although written in 1938, a leaflet by one of the pro-bridge groups claims that in a war a tunnel could easily be sabotaged or hit by an aerial bomb; it would still be badly damaged even if the bomb did not land on it directly. Although it seems counter-intuitive, the leaflet argued that a bridge could not be damaged by sabotage or a bomb. It also said, a bridge would be indispensable in terms of evacuating both goods and people in case of war. This proved tragically prophetic during the *exode*. In the end, the tunnel plan was defeated, being more expensive and allowing less traffic than a bridge. The site chosen for the bridge was at Tancarville, a village 30kms outside Le Havre.

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The project was supported by the USOH. With unemployment rising in 1938, Vériétés extolled the project as a solution:

> The press wants France to be back at work, to increase production. Workers want this too. There are people who are unemployed and their number is rising... We have in our region the chance to build a bridge which will link the banks of the Seine, which will help trade and transport. It is a big job which will demand a lot of thought; we have in our town qualified engineers who have voiced their opinion. It is possible, despite the difficulties; it is a profitable project which could, through charging tolls, pay for its construction. It would be a more useful project than building expensive warplanes whose only use is to spread death and ruin the country.\(^{270}\)

In January 1939 the CGT published their plan to prevent war and to re-energise the economy.\(^ {271}\) This included a plan for improving the country's infrastructure. Maybe with this in mind, the USOH formerly endorsed the bridge plan later that year, saying:

> Considering that the road bridge, whilst being built, will give work for the workers of Le Havre and the region, that it will make trade easier between Le Havre and the Eure and Calvados regions, and will increase economic activity which will benefit our city, we say that we hope that the project to build a road-bridge over the Seine at Tancarville is undertaken as soon as possible.\(^ {272}\)

It is interesting to note here that whilst the campaigns in favour of the bridge were already, in 1938, anticipating aerial bombing and the need to evacuate the inhabitants of Le Havre, the USOH were again revealing their growing tendency, noted in Chapter Three, to look inwards rather than globally. Here they are in 1939 advocating building the bridge solely in order to increase trade and jobs, as if these were the only important concerns at the time.

Whatever the USOH's thoughts about war, what does clearly come across in the two articles quoted above is their hopes for this project to provide a significant number of jobs in the local area. Although the declaration of war followed by the phoney war, the defeat, the exode, and the arrival of the Germans put the plans for the bridge on hold, they were revived surprisingly quickly after the start of the Occupation. The surge of unemployment in the

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\(^{270}\) ‘Défendons les 40 heures et les Chômeurs’, Vériétés, Oct 1938, MA

\(^{271}\) ‘Le Plan de la CGT’, Vériétés, Jan 1939, MA

\(^{272}\) ‘Pont-route de Tancarville’, Vériétés, Aug-Sept 1939, MA
Occupied Zone prompted the Vichy government to come up with solutions. Albeit from a different political perspective from the pre-war CGT, Pétain’s government also decided that big infrastructure projects would solve the country’s unemployment problem. It launched its plan for major works on 5 October 1940 and the Pont de Tancarville was given the go-ahead on 2 November.

The website for the Le Havre Chamber of Commerce gives a history of the bridge. It says that it asked for permission to build the bridge in 1935 and that: ‘from 11 December 1940, the State declared the project for building the bridge and its access roads as promoting the public interest. The Chamber of Commerce obtained the concession for its construction and operation after the last war, on 17 May 1951.’\(^\text{273}\) This account leaves some huge gaps in what happened, for example it gives the date of 11 December but does not say what happened a month earlier, on 2 November. This was the date that a delegation from Le Havre made up of two senators (members of the upper house of the French parliament), an engineer and three representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, including its president, went on an official visit to Vichy. Their aim was to speak to Pétain about the ports in Seine-Inférieure, unemployment and the bombings; and to Jean Berthelot, Secretary of State for Transport and Communications, about the project to build the bridge. In the event it was Pétain who brought up the subject of the bridge, saying that he was in favour of it if it could be proved to be profitable. One of the senators asked him if he would be the bridge’s patron and allow it to be named the ‘Pont du Maréchal Pétain,’ and he agreed.\(^\text{274}\) The original name and patron of the bridge does not appear in the online history.

Work started, not in May 1951 but a decade earlier in April 1941, on preparing the site and building the access road for the bridge. It was planned that a thousand local men would be employed to build the bridge. To accommodate this large workforce, 150 workers were taken on to build ten workers’ dormitories with the view to another twenty plus a large canteen being

\(^{274}\) Malon, *Occupation*, 172-3
constructed later on. Two hundred workers were employed to build the access road. The bridge had to be a suspension bridge, in order to allow ships to pass beneath it, so the end of the bridge was to be built into the cliff above Tancarville. This meant the access road had to be dug out of the cliff, back-breaking work at best. All seemed to go well, at first, when workers were employed from the immediate area around the bridge. However, trouble began when unemployed men from Le Havre were sent there to work. The authorities thought they were carrying out a charitable act in sending a convoy of men specially chosen because they had three or more children; it was assumed that they would be grateful for the work. However, according to the Departmental Director of Labour, it:

has not been the success we had expected; incidents have taken place, (shovels and picks thrown to the bottom of the site; breaking and entering buildings on the site and stealing roofing materials; violent behaviour in the surrounding area etc…) All this has created a regrettable atmosphere allowing others to work less hard and be less conscientious… Moreover a certain agitation reigns over the site.

The Departmental Director of Labour went on to say that in order to restore harmony to the site they would not be hiring any more men from Le Havre and he enclosed an article from the paper, L’Avant-Garde, which he felt ‘illustrates well what we’ve noted about the state of mind of certain Havrais unemployed’. Although, he does not say so, this paper was the publication of the Jeunesse Communiste or Young Communist Party. It is interesting that the authorities realised that the Communists understood the attitude of the Havrais unemployed.

The leaflet is entitled: ‘in the prison camp that is the Tancarville road-bridge’ and begins:

Last week… the municipal office of labour asked for workers. Everyone ran there. “It’s for Tancarville”. Everyone ran away.

Before this unanimous refusal, these gentlemen used strong-arm tactics: they went to Franklin and with no discussion took the first hundred names from the list of unemployed.

275 Bengtsson, Le Havre, 80
276 Report from the Departmental Director of Labour to the prefect, 30 June 1941, 51W 65, DA
277 The USOH offices were at this point being used by the council.
These police methods clearly show what it must be like on this building site, and the complaints that we receive from our young comrades working there only reinforce this.

There follows a list of these complaints. Money that was supposed to be paid as an allowance for people working away from home was being cut; men who found other work and wished to leave were being financially penalised; pay was docked if work had to stop due to rain; permission to visit home was being denied; and the canteen was providing inadequate meals (breakfast consisted only of a cup of ersatz coffee) and was shut at the weekends. The leaflet concluded:

But comrades at the Tancarville site you know well that complaints will not change your difficult situation. To make a combative management bend you must show your teeth. You have already understood this; you have elected three delegates who have already made a claim for improvements. It is through unity, only through your organisation, that you will get your demands satisfied.  

There is no mention in the prefectural archives of the election of these delegates. However, *L’Humanité Normandie* of 26 July recounts the following: ‘At the Pont-Route de Tancarville site the workers have claimed a pay increase and threatened action. They have obtained an increase from 0.50 to 1.00 an hour. Workers follow this example.’

Two pieces of correspondence in the USOH archives relate to this issue of pay at the site. However, although they refer to the reasons for the problems and that they were to be rectified, there is no mention of the issue being resolved due to a threat of workers’ action. Whether the Communists were being over-optimistic as to the power of the threat, or the employers did not want to admit that they had conceded because they were threatened, is not known. They certainly knew what the workers were capable of considering the violence of the previous month. Whatever the reason, the workers obtained a significant increase in their pay.

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279 *L’Humanité Normandie*, 26 July 1941, MA
The two letters are dated July 1941, the month following the accounts of the trouble at the site, and they refer to previous correspondence so we can assume that the issue had been discussed since the trouble started.

The first letter is from the engineer-in-chief at the Ponts et Chaussées, the Department of Roads and Bridges, for Seine-Inférieure to the general secretary of the Le Havre branch of the Syndicat Général des Ouvriers Terrassiers, the union of road workers. It appears to be a response to a query as to why the pay was so low on the site. The engineer reminds the general secretary that the pay was set before a collective agreement had been established but that a new law meant that half a franc could now be added to the hourly pay. Moreover, he had decided to award a loyalty bonus of one franc an hour for workers who stayed for more than one month. He concludes: ‘I hope that the provisions taken to improve the workers’ situation will contribute to giving a constancy of numbers which up till now has sometimes been lacking.’ Although the language is reserved it is evident that if the chief engineer needed to impose a loyalty bonus to keep workers there for more than a month there must have been a high turnover of staff.

The second letter is from a lawyer to Alphonse Gréaume, the general secretary of the Syndicat général des Ouvriers des Magasins Réunis, the union of dockers specialising in stocking the port warehouses. It seems that Gréaume had asked the lawyer to contact the Department of Roads and Bridges to ask about the low pay at the site. The lawyer quotes from the letter he had received from the Department: “There is no collective agreement concerning the works being done at the Pont de Tancarville. What has been applied to this site is the collective agreement relating to maritime and river work... This agreement was signed in Rouen on 1 December 1938.”

The sub-prefect for Le Havre tells us what happened next:

At Tancarville the workers employed in road building have complained that the collective agreement that has been applied is that of the Basse-Seine whose rates are clearly inferior to those of the port of Le Havre. An

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280 Letter from the engineer-in-chief Hupner of Ponts et Chaussées to M. Parisot, general secretary of the Syndicat Général des Ouvriers Terrassiers, 22 July 1941, 5Z447, MA
281 Letter from M. de Grandmaison, avocat au barreau du Havre to M. Gréaume, 31 July 1941, 5Z447, MA
increase has just been decided in the form of an allowance by the management of the Ponts et Chaussées, which has pleased them.\textsuperscript{282}

There are a number of points to take from these two letters and the sub-prefect’s report. First is that although it is the union of road workers who made the official enquiries regarding pay, a dockers’ union was also making its own enquiries, suggesting that a number of the unemployed hired to work on the access road were dockers. We know that in 1941 no members of the Syndicat général des Ouvriers des Magasins Réunis were working as warehouse dockers\textsuperscript{283} so they would have been looking for work elsewhere. We also know that their general secretary, Alphonse Gréaume, was a prominent figure within the autonomous majority of the pre-war USOH. Moreover, the sub-prefect says that the workers are unhappy that the pay at the bridge is much lower than the pay at the port which clearly suggests that many of those employed at the bridge used to be dockers. The violence employed at the site also suggests the involvement of dockers who, as we saw in Chapter One, had a reputation for violent behaviour.

Although we know that there were dockers working on the access road, we have no evidence of who else was working there, simply that they were unemployed and not necessarily with relevant skills. There were probably Communists there since, one, the \textit{L’Avant-Garde} article refers to ‘our young comrades’, and two, an RG report on the \textit{Havrais} building company, Grieux et Fils, refers to a former employee, M Turqueteil, who ‘was noted before the hostilities for his spirit of protest; he was probably in the Communist party and would seem to currently work in Tancarville on the road bridge worksite.’\textsuperscript{284}

As we saw in Chapters One and Two, dockers from Le Havre were used to working in a closed shop with good salaries, rights they had won by industrial action. In Chapter Two we also saw that other workers had recently won the right to collective agreements in the Matignon Agreement and therefore, for the first time, some expectation of having decent wages and conditions.

\textsuperscript{282} Monthly report by the sub-prefect for July 1941, 30 July 1941, 51W65 DA
\textsuperscript{283} From a questionnaire sent to the union, 5Z200, MA
\textsuperscript{284} Report by Inspector Castebert to the \textit{Commissaire principal} of the RG, 10 June, 1943, 51W69, DA
Is it possible from all this to make some deductions about the ‘riot’ at the Pont de Tancarville site? Could we say that workers had had their hopes raised over a number of years by the prospect of a huge building project, only to have them dashed again when it became apparent that this project’s employers were going to treat them as if they had never gained any rights over their pay and conditions? That it was significant that whilst other men worked on the site without complaining, it was only when the Havrais men appeared that the trouble began? That for these men, with their history of militancy, to be sent to work at a site with no collective agreement, for pitiful wages, and in appalling conditions was enough to provoke them to violence? Without any concrete proof these can only be suppositions but I would like to argue that even if we take just the facts – that unemployed men from Le Havre tried to destroy a building site where the pay and conditions were appalling and that they did this whilst being occupied by the German army – we see that these men were very angry and furthermore were not frightened of the potential consequences of their actions.

The access road for the new Pont de Tancarville was not completed during the Occupation. As the Germans put more and more of French industry to work for their own ends, they demanded that labour and materials, especially cement, be reserved for German war projects and not for the construction of French infrastructure. Vichy’s plans for big building projects collapsed in 1942 when money for public investment disappeared. The beginning of the construction of this bridge was airbrushed from the official history and its original name, the Pont du Maréchal Pétain, was replaced by the less politically loaded ‘Pont de Tancarville’. And yet this forgotten history is worth remembering because it shows a level of workers’ anger and a confidence to express it, even though the country was occupied by Nazi Germany and governed by a reactionary regime. It highlights that during the first two years of the Occupation workers were able, despite the lack of formal trade union organisation, to make demands and to win. It reveals that the confidence gained during previous industrial struggle, notably the strikes and workplace occupations of 1936, had not disappeared.

285 Dominique Barjot, ‘L’Industrie française des travaux publics (1940-1945)’, Histoire, économie et société, 3 (1992), 419
despite the radical change in circumstances. It also contrasts massively with how workers’ demands would be greeted in 1943 and 1944 when demands were rarely won and their suppression was brutal.

The ‘riot’ at the Pont de Tancarville was the only significant incident in 1940 - 1941 when *Havrais* workers took action to express their anger at the way they were being treated. This is not say that they were not vocal in their discontent over other issues, in particular food shortages, low pay and danger money. However, whilst the authorities worried that this anger would turn into action, as we shall see below, it rarely did.

**Food shortages**

In reports on public opinion drawn up by Le Havre’s sub-prefect and his police chiefs, food supplies were frequently described as people’s main preoccupation. A lack of bread, potatoes and meat are a constant feature of these reports. These essentials were rationed in order that everyone would receive a minimum, but this minimum often did not exist. The local council made land available for people to start allotments and this helped for a time during 1941, but a shortage of seeds and plants meant that this was not a solution to the lack of food. Instead, schools, factories and charities started to open canteens so that people could have at least one decent meal a day. By November 1941, 36 300 meals were being provided daily with the view to this being increased to 42 800.\(^{286}\)

However, the provision of canteens was not enough to stop a detrimental effect on the health of the *Havrais*; many young people became ill with tuberculosis.\(^{287}\)

When winter arrived in 1941, the police *commissaire* wrote: ‘The population worries a lot at the lack of fuel, and, under-fed, complain of finding it very difficult to bear the cold.’\(^{288}\) They were right to worry. In January the police *commissaire* remarked: ‘The population of our city has … been disturbed by the

\(^{286}\) Monthly report from the sub-prefect for November 1941, 1 Dec 1941, 51W66, DA

\(^{287}\) Monthly report from the sub-prefect for September 1941, 3 Oct 1941, 51W66, DA

\(^{288}\) Monthly report from the police *commissaire* for October 1941, 5 Nov 1941, Z28483, DA. Underlining in the original.
notices in the press announcing the deaths of elderly people, who had not been able to cope with the cold due to a lack of fuel, and by learning that many poor people were dead due to malnutrition.\textsuperscript{289} A report from the nursing homes of Le Havre of the admissions and deaths recorded for 1 January – 18 February 1942 noted that out of 294 admissions, 42 people had died, and of these 29 had died of malnutrition.\textsuperscript{290} In other words, of all deaths in that six week period, almost 70 per cent died because of a lack of suitable food. In March 1942, the mayor of Le Havre, Pierre Courant, gathered the mayors of the Le Havre region together to discuss the food shortage. \textit{Le Petit Havre} reported on the meeting: ‘M. Courant spoke openly, preferring to set things out honestly rather than presenting misleading illusions. There arrives a time when we must call something by its name and he was not scared to say, in front of this audience who had been warned, that this name was starvation.’\textsuperscript{291}

Food shortages were blamed on mismanagement by the government agency in charge; on Le Havre’s geographical situation; but rarely on the German occupation. In one rare honest appraisal, in October 1941, the sub-prefect wrote:

\begin{quote}
The rise in the cost of living is particularly bad in the occupied zone and definitely more so in the coastal zone where there are larger German units, of worrying proportions. The value of rationed commodities makes up only a small part of the family budget. What they have to buy elsewhere is unaffordable. The occupying troops with their high salaries can outbid for everything and the French consumer no longer has the means to deal with such competition.\textsuperscript{292}
\end{quote}

Interestingly, these comments are echoed by the sub-prefect’s political adversary, the PCF, in its regional newspaper, \textit{L’Ouvrier Normand}. In March 1942 it wrote: ‘Maintaining [existing] wages means restricting, as much as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{289} Monthly report from the police \textit{commissaire} for January 1942, 28 Jan 1942, Z28483, DA
\item \textsuperscript{290} Hospices civils du Havre – Mouvement des malades (entrées et décès) pour la période du 1er janvier au 18 février 1942, Z28483, DA
\item \textsuperscript{291} ‘Réunis au Havre, les maires de l’arrondissement décident de faire un effort immédiat pour le ravitaillement’, \textit{Le Petit Havre}, 8 March 1942, 51W67, DA
\item \textsuperscript{292} Monthly report from the sub-prefect for October 1941, 31 Oct 1941, 51W66, DA
\end{itemize}
possible, the amount people can afford to buy and allows the Nazi mercenaries to take an ever bigger quantity of food supplies.¹²⁹³

The lack of food caused much resentment and the official reports often mention the population’s unhappiness with the shortages, fearing that their discontent could turn into a more active form of revolt. The article in *Le Petit Havre* describing Pierre Courant’s meeting with the local mayors contains the following: ‘M Courant shared with his colleagues his conviction that there is still in their towns more [food] than they need and that what is extra must be sent to our town where, one suspects, that starting to rumble is an anger which must not explode.’²⁹⁴ At the same time, the police commissaire wrote: ‘The question of food supplies provokes more and more discontent… and, if this situation continues, we should possibly fear campaigns developing.’²⁹⁵

It does not appear that there were any public demonstrations over the food shortages but the authorities evidently believed that the Havrais were angry enough and capable of publicly demonstrating their discontent in a way that would have caused problems both for the French and German authorities.

‘Abnormally low wages’

Wages in Seine-Inférieure were officially classed as ‘abnormally low’ by the prefecture in relation to the sky-rocketing cost of living discussed above. In his report for May 1941 the sub-prefect wrote about the various pieces of propaganda produced by the Communists and the collaborationist parties and continued:

Of all these forms of propaganda only the Communist propaganda appears to be the most dangerous. However we cannot assess the extent of its influence in the absence of outside demonstrations, which is how we used to judge it.

²⁹³ ‘À l’action pour les salaires’, *L’Ouvrier Normand*, 30 March 1942, 2, 51W67, DA
²⁹⁵ Monthly report from the police commissaire for March 1942, 20 March 1942, Z28483, DA
The best way to deal with it is to make sure the collective agreements are strictly implemented, to make sure the unemployed are found work, and to harmonise salaries with the cost of living.\textsuperscript{296}

It is interesting that the sub-prefect advocated undermining the influence of the Communists by satisfying the very demands they were making. It suggests that he understood both that the population agreed with the Communist demands, and that it would be dangerous for the authorities if the Communists took the lead in forcing these demands to be met. Again we see here, as in the case of the Pont de Tancarville that the strict implementation of collective agreements was seen as important to the \textit{Havrais} working class and that their erosion could dangerously anger a class who had fought so hard for them in the first place.

Although the sub-prefect spelt out how to undermine the Communists, there was no quick response from the prefect. In September of the same year, the sub-prefect was again writing: ‘The working class… urgently claim a readjustment in salaries which, for the most part, were established in 1938.’\textsuperscript{297}

By the next month, however, it became clear that the abnormally low salaries that the sub-prefect was now concerned about were for those employed by the state and not for those in the private sector. This was because employment was starting to pick up again in the factories – due to orders from the German army – and these workers were better paid. The Germans could afford to pay well because, under the terms of the Armistice, the French government had to pay them 400 million francs a day for the costs of the Occupation. This enormous sum meant that in 1941 Germany demanded 80\% of the industrial production in the occupied zone. In Le Havre, according to Claude Malon: ‘if we count all types of company, from the big factories to the small businesses, more than two hundred were either willingly or forced to work for the Germans.’\textsuperscript{298}

The sub-prefect may have been more concerned about the public sector workers but the police \textit{commissaire} was also concerned about the wages in both public and private sector and noted in October: ‘The civil servants and the

\textsuperscript{296} Monthly report by the sub-prefect for May 1941, 30 May 1941, 51W65, DA
\textsuperscript{297} Monthly report by the sub-prefect for September 1941, 3 Oct 1941, 51W66, DA
\textsuperscript{298} Malon, ‘Le Monde’, 7
workers deplore that rapid measures have not been put in place to improve their wages which have no connection with the cost of living.’

Finally in November, René Bouffet, the regional prefect, passed a decree setting a minimum wage in Normandy for workers aged twenty and over. This meant that those earning less than this wage would be considered as having an abnormally low wage. This was followed, the following year by the setting of a minimum wage for specific groups of state employees.

Wages for factory workers began to improve once the German army started submitting their orders, but inflation continued to be a real issue for all workers as prices for food and fuel rocketed as a response to shortages. This became a significant problem after 1942 and will be looked at in Chapter Seven.

In the meantime the issue of danger money became the main concern for workers.

The bombing allowance

During 1940 and 1941, the RAF bombed Le Havre at night, and then from April 1942 both at night and during the day. Although the bombs were targeted at the port and factories, aiming in the dark was an imprecise science and often it was the town and its French citizens who were hit.

The aerial bombing raids would last a few nights or weeks, there would be a break and the population would relax, and then the bombing would start up again. In December 1941, Pierre Courant travelled to Vichy to update the government about the situation in Le Havre. He met with Pétain, members of his government and top civil servants and found that no one knew of Le Havre’s plight. In an interview with Le Petit Havre, on his return, Courant repeated what he had said to the Minister of Information: “No one here knows what is happening in Le Havre. Some think the town has been wiped out, demolished.

299 Monthly report by the police commissaire for Oct 1941, Z28483, DA
300 ‘Le relèvement des salaries anormalement bas’, Journal de Rouen, 26 Nov 1941, 51W66, DA
301 Prefecture of Seine-Inférieure. Division of Economic and Social Affairs. Research for the monthly report of April 1942, undated, 51W67, DA
302 See Guillemard, L’Enfer, for an account of the bombing and its inaccuracy during these years.
Others think that the damage is limited to military objectives and that the town is intact.” However, following his visit and the interviews he gave with the press: ‘everyone was talking about Le Havre.’ Moreover, he returned with a grant of almost half a million francs to help the victims of bombing.

The people of Le Havre may have been pleased to know that the whole country sympathised with their plight, but it is clear from the official reports that they soon felt forgotten again. On 3 March 1942, the RAF launched a huge bombing raid over areas of Paris. They destroyed the Renault factory in Billancourt, caused five hundred deaths, seriously injured over a thousand people and destroyed two hundred homes. Pétain announced a national day of mourning which was followed by an enormous gathering at the Cenotaph in the Place de la Concorde and a service at Notre Dame. The reaction to this was mixed in Le Havre. The police commissaire wrote:

Some pity the victims but reckon that the bombing of the Renault factories is only a fact of war. Others criticise the “ballyhoo” made about this catastrophe, whilst the bombing of Le Havre has passed in silence, even by the local press, and that no national movement has been set up for the Le Havre victims.

The commissaire principal de police spéciale added: ‘the majority of Havrais have felt surprise mixed with a certain bitterness at the government announcement of aid for the Parisian victims of the bombing, which compares unfavourably to help given to those regions already most affected by air raids.’

It was not just the general population who were demanding financial aid for being bombed, it was also workers whose workplaces were targets.

Two accounts of working at this time give us an idea of the perils. Max Bengtsson was sixteen years old in 1942 when he found a job with a local ship
repair company. Hundreds of local workers were employed by ship repairers paid by the Kriegsmarine to convert ships they captured as spoils of war into German warships. Max was employed to carry out cleaning jobs. It was dirty, difficult work as he recounts:

It’s hell! We have to clean an immense chamber, as big as a cathedral. We have to remove the fuel oil waste which lies on the bottom of this tank which gives out the smell of petrol. It’s very dark! We are isolated from the outside. In this dark “box” we are like woodlice. We have three portable electric lamps.

Whilst on this particular job there was an air raid warning. It took quarter of an hour to get out of this chamber and reach the outside just in time for the alert to be over and for him to have to go back down again.

Max was very aware of the risks of being bombed whilst at work. He was put to work in the machine room cleaning a fuel tank: ‘Another crazy job! The steel reservoir has a capacity of 500 litres. I can only get in there through a manhole… I spend, in this tank some sorrowful hours… Sometimes I think of a possible air attack and the risks that I run in such a situation.’

The firm employing Max does not seem to have made much provision for air raids, unlike the shipbuilders Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée who built a particularly solid bomb shelter in 1939 at their Mazeline factory. It was so big that it was used both by the workers and those living locally and it housed a hospital: there was a ward and an operating theatre, which were able to treat people injured in the bombing raids. On the roof of the factory, air raid sirens were installed and workers took turns to keep a lookout for planes. Each employee was also given a gas mask.

Workers were determined to have the risks they ran recognised by being awarded danger money; what was known as *une prime de bombardement* or ‘a bombing allowance.’ One workplace where the workers took action over this issue was the Compagnie industrielle maritime (CIM) which before the war stored and supplied petrol. It was their stockpiles that had been set on fire in

309 Bengtsson, *Le Havre*, 118
310 Ibid
311 Bengtsson, *Le Havre*, 119
312 Perrot, *Laisse-moi*, 36-9
June 1940. Despite this, it seems that the company continued to function during the Occupation. According to Malon’s research, the Germans paid them a fee of one million francs, although it has not been possible to identify the type of work done.\textsuperscript{313} It did seem to take place at various worksites around the town. One of these sites was in the Neiges part of town where many factories were.

The clandestine Communist newspaper, \textit{La Vie Ouvrière}, tells us that on Thursday 10 July 1941, a day when the town was bombed by the RAF, workers at this site went on strike for two hours to demand the payment of the bombing allowance which they were then accorded.\textsuperscript{314} However, when workers from the CIM site on the Cap de la Hève, just to the north of Le Havre, went on strike to have the allowance paid to them, they were forced back to work at the point of machine guns held by the German police. A German officer then ‘made the guys stand to attention in two lines while he told them that strikes would be considered an act of sabotage and punished as such.’\textsuperscript{315}

The sub-prefect wrote of the issue of danger money in his October 1941 report:

> In industry the workers have claimed several times for an extra allowance to compensate for the bombing. M. Bézin, accompanied by a delegation, came to tell me of this. He told me that the industrialists could not bear such a financial load. He hoped that you [the prefect] would ask the Government for help with this.\textsuperscript{316}

Émile Bézin was the director of the shipbuilding firm, Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée who, as we shall see below, had a workforce with a certain level of confidence. It is interesting again that no one here is saying that the workers do not have a valid claim and that there is no intention to just refuse the workers’ demands. The resolve of the employers to deal punitively with their workers after the failure of the 1938 general strike seems to have modified into an accommodation of their demands.

Just as the previous mayor, Léon Meyer, had positioned himself as a friend to the workers, so his replacement, Pierre Courant, seems to have continued the tradition. In January 1942 the government passed a decree awarding a

\textsuperscript{313} Malon, \textit{Occupation}, 293
\textsuperscript{314} \textit{La Vie Ouvrière}, 15 July 1941, Gallica, BNF
\textsuperscript{315} \textit{La Vie Ouvrière}, 20 Aug 1941, Gallica, BNF
\textsuperscript{316} Monthly report by the sub-prefect for October 1941, 31 Oct 1941, 51W66, DA
bomber allowance to those working in exposed areas. An article in *Le Petit Havre* asked the mayor what his reactions were considering that it was he who had made multiple requests to the government to instate such an allowance. Apparently keen to claim the credit, he reminded the paper that the decree had been passed only three weeks after he had been to Vichy to tell the government about the serious and dangerous circumstances in which the *Havrais* were living. Despite the determined resistance of the Minister for Finance that he had encountered, he said: “I note today that the promises that were made to me from all sides have been fulfilled.” The law was not perfect, he went on, but he was sure that it would be amended in the coming months.

The problems with the law became apparent immediately. The *commissaire principal de police spéciale* wrote only ten days after the decree had appeared in the *Journal Officiel*:

> The workers of the Le Havre region continue to display their discontent over the bombing allowance, always promised and never paid, they say. It is to be feared that these claims, presented with a certain vigour, as at the “Mazeline” factory, will be renewed if a decision does not come soon.\(^3\)

The “Mazeline” factory was one of the two factories owned by the shipbuilding firm, Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerrannée, whose director had gone to see the mayor over the workers’ claims for the allowance three months earlier. It is not clear what ‘a certain vigour’ actually means. A history of the factory, *Laisse-moi te dire, de Mazeline à Dresser*, does not refer to this incident although it does recall the workers implementing go-slow and sabotage. Claude Malon writes that this workforce sent worker delegates to the sub-prefect to try and get a pay increase.\(^3\) The claims for the bombing allowance, presented so ‘vigorously’, came despite the fact that the factory was fulfilling a substantial number of orders from the German navy for refitting their ships. Although the provisions supplied by the factory for its workers to remain safe from bombing were extensive, their work for the Germans made the factory a target for the

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\(^317\) ‘La prime de bombardement est accordé aux salariés du Havre’, *Le Petit Havre*, 20 Jan 1942, 51W67, DA

\(^318\) The monthly report of the *commissaire principal de police spéciale* for Jan 1942, 24 Jan 1942, Z28483, DA

\(^319\) Malon, *Occupation*, 185
RAF and so somewhere where the employees would want danger money. Despite it being a workplace where the Germans could exert reprisals, memories of this time recounted in *Laisse-moi te dire* exhibit a certain confidence and desire to thwart their German employers and it is useful to remember that the workers at this factory would have been members of the Syndicat de Métaux. Workers who were interviewed in the book recall spending weeks doing nothing. A ferry that they had built for the Newhaven-Dieppe line was in the factory when the Germans invaded; they seized the boat for themselves and ordered that it be converted into a minelayer. It was a job that should have taken six months but the workers dragged it out for two years. Metal was stolen from the factory in an act of sabotage but no one revealed who had done it and no one was punished; a German torpedo boat that they were supposed to repair was stripped of anything that could be used for heating and taken home. A strike called by the CGT for 11 November 1942 was followed at the factory; the Germans arrived but the workers refused to go back to work until the CGT said the strike was over.320

It is interesting that there is no recollection of being punished for any of these actions. There must have been some strength in their unity, evidenced by the fear expressed by the *commissaire principal* that there would be more ‘vigorou*s’ claims for the bombing allowance if it was not awarded soon. Evidently, it was not just the workers at the Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerrannée who were exhibiting unrest over the non-payment of this allowance. A meeting was held in March 1942 of the sub-prefect, the mayor and his assistants, the presidents of the Chamber of Commerce, the Port, the General Union of Commerce and Industry, the Association des Anciens Combattants, and delegates from the Secours National and La Jeunesse et de la Famille regarding the implementation of the bombing allowance. After congratulating the government for the establishment of the allowance, the report on the meeting continued:

But the adverse propaganda, which keeps coming, uses all opportunities that are offered to criticise the reform. A few general or particular objections have already appeared and, because of the confusion which still reigns in many minds, they could make the main interest of this law

be lost from sight if they are not quickly highlighted and examined.\textsuperscript{321}

The propaganda referred to here is presumably Communist. Once again this shows the authorities taking Communist statements seriously as they appear to either reflect or lead working class opinion to, what the authorities would consider, a dangerous degree. The report works through the objections raised, the main ones being that the allowance is not high enough and is not paid to enough workers affected by bombing. The first point was: ‘The clandestine Communist propaganda has not stopped demanding that the rate of compensation for bombing be fixed at 10 francs a day for single people, widowers or divorced men without children, and at 20 francs for married workers with 10 francs per child on top’. This was deemed to be excessive and ‘only mentioned for your information as reasonable employees perfectly realise that the effort made for them is already considerable and that an extra effort would be impossible.’ The second point, however, was a serious problem and one which the authorities agreed with the workers was unfair: the allowance was only paid to workers in Le Havre and Harfleur, the town right next to Le Havre along the Seine, despite the fact that the Le Havre agglomeration covered a much wider area with no obvious internal boundaries, the whole of which had experienced aerial bombing.

Complaints about this unfairness continued to pour in over the coming months. In April, the Division of Economic and Social Affairs at the prefecture in Rouen reported that there had been so many claims received on this subject that:

\begin{quote}
It is urgent, in my opinion, that the list drawn up on 6 February, has added to it areas which, due to the military targets that they contain (the Bléville, Sanvic and Sainte-Adresse air fields), are exposed to bombing; moreover, the majority of workers who work in these areas work for Le Havre companies which means that there is an inequality of treatment between workers at the same firm.\textsuperscript{322}
\end{quote}

The following month the claims were still arriving at the prefecture but now the issue was complicated by the fact that: ‘in certain towns not on the list of areas

\textsuperscript{321} ‘Mémoire sur l’application des textes réglementant l’indemnité exceptionnelle aux salariés travaillant dans des lieux exposés’, undated, 5IW67, DA
\textsuperscript{322} Prefecture of Seine-Inférieure. Division of Economic and Social Affairs. Research for the monthly report of April 1942, undated, Z28483, DA
benefiting from this allowance, workers working for the occupying troops are receiving the bombing allowance. This creates a lack of equality of treatment between workers in the same area which is provoking justifiable claims.’

A month later the allowance was abolished altogether. The sub-prefect wrote:

The emotion caused by the announcement of the brutal suppression of the bombing allowance paid to workers in the coastal towns seems to have been calmed by the promises made by M Gibrat, the Secretary of State for Communications, during his visit to Le Havre. The workers who continue to get their allowance, despite a circular from the Minister for Industrial Production ordering its abolition, would find it difficult to understand losing this allowance at the very moment when the cost of living seems to be increasing and the bombings are worse.323

Two months on, in August, the Germans stopped paying their version of the bombing allowance which ‘caused huge disappointment amongst workers.’ However, it was not just the loss of money that they feared but the fact that ‘they see in this measure a sort of formal notice that they [the Germans] are leaving French factories in order to favour hiring in German factories.’ This fear must have been compounded by ‘the call by President Pierre Laval to the workers of France to encourage them to go work in Germany’ which, the sub-prefect added ‘has met a certain hostility amongst workers.’324

This new threat - that workers might be sent to Germany to work - will be explored in Chapter Six. Beside the general fear of being sent to the enemy nation, found in all French workers, there was a fear specific to the Havrais: that of being forced to leave their homes. This particular fear was the product of the exode, whose horrors for the people of Le Havre have been discussed in this chapter. The new collective memory created by the townsfolk’s particularly harrowing experience of the exode would influence the Havrais’ behaviour during the rest of the Occupation. The exode was not the only hardship the people of Le Havre had to endure; there were also the difficulties of bombing, food shortages, and low wages. However, the working class were quick to express their discontent over their new situation. In so doing, they displayed the resilience that had been created by pre-war trade union struggles. Unlike those

323 Monthly report by the sub-prefect for June 1942, 24 June 1942, Z28483, DA
324 Monthly report by the sub-prefect for August 1942, 25 Aug 1942, 51W68, DA
struggles, however, the workers’ anger was not transformed into sustained political action by their trade union leaders. It is important therefore to establish precisely what these leaders were doing instead, and this shall be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

Resistance and collaboration by trade union leaders in Le Havre

The previous chapter showed how workers were prepared to protest about the hardships they were being forced to endure. Yet their trade union leaders, who had turned workers’ grievances into action in the pre-war period, were now either not able to provide the same level of leadership or were providing none at all. This chapter looks at what they were doing instead. Those who were Communists or Communist sympathisers attempted to openly provide leadership and to represent the grievances of workers, whilst also secretly carrying out resistance activities. Chapter Three began the account of Louis Eudier’s attempt to keep his union functioning; this chapter concludes that story, outlining how he used his legal union to act as a cover for resistance work. The USOH leaders, meanwhile, chose to work with the authorities, which had a direct impact on their former colleague, Louis Eudier. Their co-operation also included administering the local branch of the Comité ouvrier de secours immédiat, a fund that used money stolen by the Germans from French Jews, to support workers affected by RAF bombing raids.

In November 1940 the CGT was dissolved by René Belin, the former deputy leader of the CGT and new Minister for Work. This did not affect the unions locales or union federations which were allowed to continue for the time being. Local union branches were still able to function, as long as they had no Communist involvement. The USOH in Le Havre continued, although not at Franklin. The building had been occupied since the start of the war, first by the French army and then by the council. Jean Le Gall remained general secretary, but in name only. He had moved to Paris to become the secretary of the Fédération des Ports et Docks. André Vaillant was the assistant secretary of the USOH and Maurice Hauguel had become the treasurer.

Although there were still unions, the immediate impact of the Occupation meant they had little power. The dockers’ unions soon found they had no dockers to represent. After the closure of the port, dockers continued to unload the boats.

Erhmann, French Labor, 239-40
and barges that remained, but this work had dried up after about the end of March 1941. Dockers then found work as construction workers or in the factories. The petrol refineries were not working as all their stocks had been destroyed during the *exode*; a skeleton staff was kept on in order to maintain the machinery. The rest of the workers, like the dockers, had to find work in other industries. The construction sector was booming, but it was closely supervised by the Germans, as will be seen in the next chapter. The only sector that still had a functioning trade union was the factories, although the Syndicat des Métaux was in an increasingly perilous situation.

The USOH and the Communists continued representing workers' interests in the changing circumstances, but their approaches were completely different. The PCF was in limbo, as it tried to have its ban removed. It could not always provide visible leadership, often relying on its press to do this instead. In May 1941 the sub-prefect wrote: 'Communist propaganda is still very active in Le Havre. It intensifies with each suitable incident. The lack of food and the hiring of workers for sites outside of town are the themes which reappear periodically in 'L’Humanité' against the ‘exploiters’.' In October 1941, the sub-prefect reported that the Communists were urging people to claim the bombing allowance and in January 1942 the police *commissaire* noted that Communist leaflets and newspapers were being particularly targeted at the factories in Le Havre. In May the sub-prefect wrote that: ‘in Le Havre the tracts that are distributed contain, in an aggressive tone towards the employers, many calls for strike action. They are motivated by the inadequacy of certain wages and by the rate, judged insufficient, of the bombing allowance.’

The editorial line of the Communist press changed once Hitler declared war on Russia, in that their newspapers and leaflets could now openly call for protest against the German occupiers. However, this was accompanied by a

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326 Letter from the secretary of the Syndicat Général des ouvriers camionneurs, chauffeurs et suiveurs du Havre et de la région to Maître Guillon, 10 Oct 1941, 5Z238, MA
327 Monthly report by the sub-prefect for April 1941, 5 May 1941, 51W65, DA
328 Monthly report by the sub-prefect for October 1941, 31 Oct 1941, 51W66, DA
329 Monthly report by the police *commissaire* for January 1942, 24 Jan 1942, Z28483, DA
330 Monthly report by the sub-prefect for May 1942, 23 May 1942, 51W68, DA
consistent call for action over day-to-day concerns, so linking action on bread-and-butter issues with the overthrow of fascism.

A flavour of the kind of message the Communists were spreading comes from a copy of *L'Ouvrier normand* of March 1942 whose masthead slogans include: ‘Struggle always has a chance of victory, whilst submission never does. By strikes, by occupations, workers impose your right to life.’ The paper encouraged workers to both sabotage German production and fight for increased wages, arguing: ‘Maintaining wages means restricting as much as possible the amount people can afford to buy and allows the Nazi mercenaries to take an ever bigger quantity of food supplies.’ The paper linked personal concerns with the political context, so a fight for better wages to buy more food became a fight to deny the Nazi invader what he felt was his right. The paper tried to give its readers the confidence to engage in the struggle by listing what other workers had been doing in the region and the success they had had:

The Le Havre industrialists are scared. Before the growing dissatisfaction of the metalworkers they accept paying the bombing allowance…

The Boches who manage the garage businesses in Rouen are scared. To delay a strike they have increased pay by 1 franc an hour and promised 3 to 4 francs.

The mayors are scared. In Déville\(^{331}\) the women have got for everyone a cubic metre\(^{332}\) of wood after occupying the town hall.

Every day we note this: where there is action workers and housewives get their demands.\(^{333}\)

We cannot know what effect the Communist clandestine press had on the workers who read it. The police *commissaire* felt it had little influence whilst the sub-prefect took it more seriously and was concerned that it was tapping into real grievances. Whatever its effect, what is interesting here is to note that it was attempting to turn workers’ unrest over issues close to home into protest against the Occupation.

Whilst much of the Communist message had to be spread through its papers and leaflets, Communist trade unionists were still attempting to provide

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\(^{331}\) Déville-lès-Rouen
\(^{332}\) A cubic metre
\(^{333}\) ‘L’Ouvrier normand’, 30 March 1942, 51W67, DA
leadership, although not always in the workplaces they had operated in before the Occupation. André Augeray had been the union leader at the Vacuum Oil refinery and led the strike and occupation there in 1936. After he was demobilised from the army in September 1940 he returned to his home in the housing estate set up by the Vacuum refinery. He was unable to return to his job at Vacuum, for the reasons explained above, but still the conscientious trade unionist, he noted the poor conditions of the wives of workers who were now prisoners-of-war and went to the authorities to try and have them improved.\(^{334}\)

He eventually found work as a chief electrician with the Chéron company, in Beaumont-le-Roger in the Eure department, which had been contracted to provide electrical maintenance at various German airfields.

In his memoir, Augeray writes of what it was like early on to organise resistance. He was pleased to be given the job of team leader because it gave him a chance to talk to all the workers, whom he did not yet know, as he explains:

A lot has been written and a lot said about “the resistance”; in reality what happened often had little to do with what has been reported… For example it was through morale that we had to begin the work of organising the resistance: the call for solidarity for the families of prisoners. We gave people we were talking to a little piece of paper asking them for their small contribution, 1 franc, sometimes less, to make up a hardship fund. Some people pushed back the paper and refused, others gave 1 franc and gave back the paper; still others gave their money and put the paper in their pocket… We were happy when some put the paper in their pocket, we knew that they would look at it again, would think about it.

This painstaking work can seem childish to those who have not lived through those times where we had to grope in the dark, always on our guard, for the sole fact of being manual workers justified suspicion from the police and our arrest.\(^{335}\)

We can imagine that having been a trade union organiser, Augeray had the confidence and experience to carry out this sort of activity. However, it was not just organisational work like this that he carried out. There were other skills that he would not have learnt before the war, namely the distribution of clandestine propaganda and sabotage.

\(^{334}\) Augeray, Les Tribulations, 20
\(^{335}\) Ibid, 20-21
After some time in Beaumont-le-Roger Augeray was sent back to Le Havre to work at the Octeville-Le Havre airfield. It was here, he said, that he ‘was able to work the most effectively.’ His team were responsible for fitting the lights in the barracks occupied by members of the Wehrmacht. As we saw in Chapter Four, this was at a time when the RAF was regularly bombing Le Havre at night. Every evening Augeray, under the cover of taking a tour of inspection, would loosen all the light fixtures so that at the first explosion they would fall on the heads of the occupants. After every bombing raid they would have to replace half the lights. He also made sure that he placed the junction boxes in places where the damp would get in and they would short-circuit. He chose to do this work on his own as he felt it was too dangerous to involve his fellow workers. This is not because there were not others who would have been willing to help him, as he said: ‘there were men full of good will but not yet qualified to work out what to do and when to do it.’

Whilst Augeray did not feel he could involve his team in his sabotage work, he did openly provide leadership when it was a matter of their pay. Every week their employer, M Chéron sent him a money order with which to pay his team. When one week the money order did not appear and his workers complained, Augeray recommended that they wait until the Monday in case it was a delay in the post arriving. However, when Monday arrived and there was still no money he proposed to his team that they stop work until it arrived. When the German engineer was sent to find out what was happening, he replied: “Our boss hasn’t paid us, we can’t live on fresh air, until we’re paid we’re doing nothing.”

According to Augeray, the rest of the workers on the site, who were employed by other firms, looked at what they were doing, ‘a bit amazed, a bit worried’ but it turned out that their French employer had not paid them because the Germans had not paid him. Finally the money arrived and they went back to work with no repercussions.

We can see from this account that Augeray continued in some respects to act as a trade union leader (despite there being no trade union) whilst also carrying out clandestine resistance work within his workplace. Unfortunately neither was

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336 Ibid, 24
337 Ibid, 26
able to continue for much longer; on 21 October 1941 he was arrested, spent a year at the Bonne-Nouvelle prison in Rouen, then went to Compiègne and from there to Sachsenhausen where he was sent to do forced labour as an electrician in the Heinkel aeronautical factory.

The actions of local Communist trade unionists – like André Augeray - were diametrically opposite to the strategy of Maurice Hauguel and André Vaillant, the USOH leaders. Hauguel and Vaillant did nothing to provide leadership to focus the anger of their members over food shortages, wages and the consequences of the bombing raids. Instead they worked - very politely - with the authorities. The sub-prefect noted that they approached him over the bombing allowance but they do not appear to have done this with the ‘vigour’ that was attributed to the workers at the Mazeline factory, discussed in the previous chapter. The sub-prefect wrote: ‘The USOH... is interested in the awarding of the bombing allowance to employees in the private sector, but I should point out that the requests that they have sent to me were written very respectfully.’

The authorities were certainly not troubled by anything that the USOH leaders did. Indeed the leaders were keen to show that they could be trusted to not cause trouble, as the sub-prefect wrote in his October 1941 report: ‘The USOH maintains good relations with the administration. I think its leaders are sincere when they disapprove of Communist action and when they declare that they don’t want to be involved in provoking disorder.’

They were evidently so little a threat to the authorities that the mayor of Le Havre decided to give them back their headquarters at Franklin. He even ‘had these offices done up again as they had suffered a bit from the bombing’ before organising a meeting on the premises to personally hand them back to Hauguel and Vaillant. As the mayor wrote to the prefect:

I explained to them the significance of this handing-back and they thanked me and told me that they would always be grateful, not only for the fact of having them handed back but the way in which I had done it in coming out myself to show the interest I had in them.

338 Monthly report by the sub-prefect for Jan 1942, 28 Jan 1942, 51W67, DA
339 Monthly report by the sub-prefect for Oct 1941, 31 Oct 1941, 51W66, DA
The mayor added:

I see Messrs Vaillant and Hauguel regularly and they seem very keen to rely on us at all times. They have helped the municipality with the evacuations and they bring me the support of the Syndicat ouvrier du Cammonage who work every day for 10 hours instead of 6 ½ without being paid extra.  

The difference between their actions and those of the Communists could not be starker, as cited in this letter and the previous reports. Of course, the Communists believed in the involvement of politics in trade union activity and the anarcho-syndicalists believed that they should always be kept separate. However, even if the USOH leaders believed that they had no place in protesting against the Occupation, and that their only role was to protect their members, they do not seem to have done a very good job of that. There is no sign of them coming to the authorities to represent their very serious concerns about lack of food, only that they were happy to rely on the local authority in all matters. Moreover, at a time when workers needed all the money they could earn to pay for scarce food and provisions, the USOH allowed members of the Syndicat Général des ouvriers camionneurs (whose general secretary was Maurice Hauguel) to work three and a half hours a day for no pay.

Not mentioned in the letters above was one area of cooperation between the USOH leaders and the authorities which had started before the Occupation and which continued into it. This was the attempt to remove Louis Eudier from any trade union involvement.

**Louis Eudier**

Not long after Eudier returned home after the *exode*, he dispensed with the cover of a fake leadership committee and took over the leadership of the Syndicat des Métaux himself. This may, in part, have been because the rest of the leadership had been conscripted and had not yet returned to Le Havre after the defeat. However, it was also because metalworkers who were returning home from the war were finding themselves in severe financial difficulties and in need of trade union representation in order to get their former jobs back. The

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340 Letter from the mayor to the prefect, 23 April 1942, 51W67, DA
clandestine paper of the Jeunesse Communiste, *L’Avant-garde*, published an article at the beginning of March 1941 that gives an insight into the problems they were facing:

When there is work available, the gentlemen of the CEM and the Tréfileries rush to bring their good friends in and quickly shut the door in the faces of the others, having exploited them so much in ‘38, ‘39 and ‘40.

But the organised and aware metalworkers do not let themselves be restrained so easily and certain that they have the priority to be re-hired, they are already thinking of the blows they will inflict.

This is why, aware of this permanent danger, the worksites have been created. Lost in the forest near Compiègne or Villers-Cotterets, the young metalworkers will no longer be dangerous to the [employers]…

Young metalworker comrades, Warning. You don’t have to go. Don’t let them confine you illegally, for the Tréfileries and the CEM do not have the right to remove the priority for being re-hired as long as the Consultative Commission on Unemployment in Le Havre is there.342

A law passed in December 1940 gave workers who had been called up the right to be re-hired when they returned home.343 Eudier took up the cases of these young metalworkers who were, apparently, being passed over because of their militancy before the war in favour of workers whom the employers liked. He made many approaches to the Inspector of Work and then asked for a meeting with the metallurgy employers’ organisation in order to discuss certain cases. The president of this organisation was Emile Bezin, director of the shipbuilding firm, Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée, who, as we saw above in Chapter Four, had a confident and militant workforce. He was, no doubt, well acquainted with Louis Eudier, as the other employers would have been, and they refused to meet with him. They were able to do this at this time because the Government had issued a directive encouraging trade unions and employers to work together once again: just as former leaders of the CGT, notably René Belin, were now working with the Vichy Government. This directive assumed that trade unions, now shorn of their Communist leaders, would be disposed to working hand-in-glove with the employers. However, in Le Havre, the employers’ organisation considered, ‘that the secretary of the

341 Forests to the north-east of Paris where the unemployed were being used to cut wood.
342 Letter from the Commissaire spéciale Teissonnière, deputy head of the special police, to the sub-prefect, 15 March 1941, 1M565, DA
343 Letter from Charles Lesueur to his former employer, a haulage contractor, 29 May 1941, 5Z238, MA
Syndicat des Métaux has abandoned none of his previous opinions or methods and that he is in no way qualified to establish a friendly and fruitful collaboration between employers and employees. 344

At this point Eudier was nominated by his union to take a place, vacated by a member of the union’s executive committee, on the Parity Commission on Unemployment in Le Havre. 345 This was presumably the same commission as that mentioned in the leaflet quoted above which was safeguarding the rights of workers to be re-hired after serving in the army.

Eudier was simply doing what any good trade union official would do in defending his members’ interests. However, it appears he was unique in France in doing so as a Communist sympathiser who was also running a legal trade union. According to Stéphane Courtois, no other Communist or Communist sympathiser managed to continue to openly lead a trade union in 1941. Courtois claimed this in his book, Le PCF dans la Guerre: De Gaulle, la Résistance, Staline…, which was published almost 40 years ago. Although it is possible that research done since then has uncovered other examples of a Communist-led legal trade union, I have not discovered one in the course of my research.

The only unions that were allowed to continue functioning were those shorn of any Communist involvement; a situation that the clandestine PCF was keen to rectify. They attempted to encourage workers to join the trade unions which had been officially set up to replace those which had been dissolved. The Party believed that if enough former union activists joined these unions they could turn them into truly militant organisations. However, workers were not convinced as Courtois explains:

If workers were ready to defend their standard of living, they were opposed to the idea of returning to the unions which had miserably collapsed at the crucial moment when war was declared. Participate in making a specific demand: yes. Go back into the legal trade unions, subject to the leadership of reformists and the surveillance by the police,

344 Letter from the Divisional Inspector of Work to the prefect, 28 March 1941, 1M565, DA
345 Commissaire spéciale Teissonière, deputy head of the special police, to the sub-prefect, 5 March 1941, 1M565, DA
and to which the government, employers and the occupiers no longer respected: the workers’ good sense replied no!\textsuperscript{346} The few militants who tried to be active in the legal trade unions in 1940 were soon arrested or very quickly forced to operate secretly. All except Louis Eudier, as Courtois points out: ‘There exists one exception, the case of Louis Eudier, secretary of the Métaux du Havre, who was not yet then a Communist and who managed to keep almost 1100 members in the union at the start of 1941.’\textsuperscript{347}

For Courtois, the fact that the only legal trade union in France to manage to carry out Communist activity in 1941 was the Syndicat de Métaux is explained thus: ‘But this was in Le Havre, bastion of anarcho-syndicalism and the trade union tradition.’\textsuperscript{348} However, this explanation does not give Eudier the credit he deserves in managing to keep his union functioning. As we saw during the Breguet strike in May 1936, it was Eudier’s talent for leadership that meant he was able to do something no other local trade union leader could have done. Moreover, it was the anarcho-syndicalists of Le Havre who, far from aiding Eudier’s pioneering trade unionism, were, as we shall see below, the architects of his failure.

It is perhaps no surprise that other trade union leaders were not operating openly, given how dangerous it was. This was especially the case in that Eudier and other Communist militants, like André Augeray above, were also working clandestinely for the Resistance. Eudier explains in his memoir the thinking behind openly running a legal trade union: ‘Our idea was to form a legal trade union, take over the leadership of the legal trade union in order to organise Resistance groups in the factories, then to use the union’s materials, machines, paper.’\textsuperscript{349} They nominated a trade unionist, mainly Communists, to organise in each of the big factories. This group of militants met, under the guise of being in a legal trade union, at the union office. These militants included Louis Richard who had been, before the war, the secretary of the local union branch at the Tréfileries et Laminoirs and who continued to organise

\textsuperscript{346} Courtois, \textit{Le PCF}, 177
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid
\textsuperscript{349} Eudier, \textit{Notre combat}, 71
there; Eugène Thépot at Augustin Normand; René Baheux at the CEM and Louis Le Flem at the Breguet factory. Because of their Resistance activity these men would all lose their lives before the end of the Occupation; the particular case of Louis Le Flem will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

The decision to use the Syndicat des Métaux’s materials for both legally sanctioned and illegal activity was facilitated by moving their office away from those unions allied to the USOH. When Franklin had been requisitioned in September 1939 by the military authorities, the majority of unions had moved their offices to the union print shop at 101 rue Hélène. The Syndicat des Métaux moved just under a kilometre away to rue Fulton, into the building which already housed the Syndicat des Marins, the sailors’ union, another union sympathetic to the Communists. 350

The police suspected that they were producing clandestine Communist tracts and papers, and since they were acting in the open they were an easy target. Eudier reported that not a week went by when the police did not come looking for Communist propaganda at the union offices and at his home, which he shared with his mother. Despite the fact that he and his comrades were scrupulous in making sure no clandestine literature ever stayed in their homes or union offices, three local Communists were arrested in the first half of 1941 on suspicion of being involved in distributing Communist tracts and papers. One of these men was Jules le Troadec who was mentioned in Chapter Two for his involvement in the Spanish Civil War; he would be sent to Auschwitz but returned home when the camp was liberated. 351

Eudier’s nomination to the Parity Commission on Unemployment triggered a process that would lead to the discovery that Eudier’s legal union was in fact carrying out illegal activities.

In March 1941 there was both a new prefect and a new sub-prefect who knew nothing of the backstory to do with Louis Eudier. So although the police were well aware of him, when Eudier was nominated to the Parity Commission on Unemployment the prefect and sub-prefect had to make enquiries into his

350 Ibid, 70
351 Ibid, 72-76
suitability for the post. These enquiries set off a flurry of correspondence between the prefecture and the police, revealing - yet again - that Eudier was a suspected Communist. Eudier was also shown to be leading an organisation that had avoided ridding itself of all Communist militants thanks to clever manoeuvrings before the Occupation.

Added to this pre-Occupation information was new intelligence. Along with the news that the metallurgy employers’ organisation was now refusing to work with the Syndicat des Métaux, came the information that Eudier was not the only Communist sympathiser in the union’s leadership. The police commissaire informed the sub-prefect that although the treasurer, Louis Verdière, had ‘anarchist ideas’, Félix Panel, the assistant general secretary, was a ‘Communist sympathiser’; and Louis Richard, assistant secretary, was a ‘militant Communist’. However, the commissioner had to admit that none of them had openly expressed their political views since the start of the war.352

In June 1941 the new sub-prefect, Maxime Picharnaud,353 wrote a long letter to the prefect setting out the information he had collected on both Eudier and the Syndicat des Métaux, with recommendations on what should be done to rid it of its Communist influence.354 In this letter he stated that the police, the Police Spécial and the Inspector of Work all now thought that the union should be dissolved according to article 2 of the law of 26 September 1939, regarding the dissolution of Communist organisations. This article stated: ‘the Communist Party… [and] all associations affiliated, or not, to this party who conform in the exercise of their activity to the orders of the Third International are automatically dissolved.’ Unfortunately for the sub-prefect, he had not yet been able ‘to establish absolute proof of the affiliation of the Syndicat des Métaux to the Third International’. However, he went on to say that maybe that did not matter since ‘[this] proof was equally not established in other cases of dissolution in Le Havre’. This revelation leads one to speculate as to why they were dissolved. Was it simply because refusing to condemn the Nazi-Soviet Pact made them?

352 Letter from the police commissaire to the sub-prefect, 14 March 1941, 1M565, DA
353 In post 30 October 1940–28 May 1942.
354 Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 5 June 1941, 1M565, DA
likely, in the eyes of the authorities, to harbour pro-Communist views? Or was someone else, as we shall see below, feeding the authorities with information?

In any case, the police believed that the leaders of the Syndicat des Métaux were continuing their Communist activity which, wrote the sub-prefect: ‘leaves no doubt as to the nature of their collective action, however well “camouflaged” it is at the moment.’ This suggests that any illegal activity had not actually been discovered as yet – just suspected.

According to the sub-prefect’s letter it was not just the police who were telling the sub-prefect that the union should be dissolved, Maurice Hauguel and André Vaillant were adding their voices too. It would appear that the leaders of the USOH visited the sub-prefect, either on his invitation or of their own free will, in order to denounce their former colleague, Louis Eudier. This visit leads one to speculate as to whether they did the same thing with regards to the unions that were dissolved in 1939 and 1940 for which there was no real evidence of Communist influence. In the case of the metalworkers’ union, the USOH leaders told the sub-prefect, firstly, that they ‘would be pleased to see the disappearance of the Syndicat des Métaux.’ Moreover, they would be able to find metalworkers who could run a union ‘whose activity would only concern the defence of the professional interests of the corporation of metalworkers.’ Then they offered the evidence that the sub-prefect had so far been lacking as regards Eudier’s connections to the clandestine PCF:

[they] declared themselves convinced that Eudier was continuing his political goals – which they condemned – and they insisted on the fact that Eudier’s resignation in 1940 when he was instructed to give his attitude regarding the German-Soviet Pact, was revealing of his tendencies and his current activity, however well hidden. They also declared to me that they find, almost constantly, in the revolutionary tracts and papers the point of view given by Eudier, even his own words.355

With these words they condemned Eudier to certain arrest and whatever terrible fate lay beyond that.

355 Ibid
The prefect was persuaded by the sub-prefect’s arguments. He turned down Eudier’s nomination for the Parity Commission on Unemployment and asked the sub-prefect to start the procedure for dissolving the Syndicat des Métaux. On 9 July 1941, Louis Eudier was arrested. After a stay at Compiegne, where he finally joined the PCF, he was deported to Auschwitz where he would stay for two years and finally be liberated from Dachau in 1945.

The German soldiers who came to his home said he was being arrested for being a Communist and then added: “It’s not us who say this but your French friends.”356 Eudier was very clear in his memoir as to who these ‘French friends’ were. He believed his arrest was due to the metallurgy employers’ organisation; to Marcel Roy, leader of the Fédération des Métaux; and to his former colleagues in the leadership of the USOH. But was he right about all of them? The metallurgy employers’ organisation may not have arranged for the arrest, but in declaring that they would not work with Eudier - because his views and methods remained unchanged from before the war - they were saying clearly that he was a Communist. The USOH leaders had gone one step further by actually going to see the sub-prefect to tell him that Eudier was still an active Communist. Louis Eudier was right to blame these two groups for his arrest. But what about Marcel Roy, was he also culpable?

Before the war, Roy had been a prominent member of the Syndicats group within the CGT and he continued to be someone who worked closely with René Belin when he became Minister for Work. He helped produce the Charte du Travail, a major piece of legislation aimed at reorganising labour relations and was made a member of the Conseil National, the consultative assembly created by Vichy to provide advice to the new government. In other words he should have desired the removal of Eudier as much as the USOH or the employers’ organisation. However, this turns out not to have been the case, quite the contrary.

Eudier writes in his memoir that in April 1941 Roy summoned him to his office in Paris. Roy showed him the newspaper and the tracts that the Communists

356 Eudier, Notre combat, 82
were producing in Le Havre and asked him: “Do you know who has produced these tracts in which I am insulted and called a supporter of Hitler?” Eudier replied that although he had seen these publications he did not know who had produced them. Roy countered that he knew very well who was behind them, saying “It's you.” Eudier said this was not true but Roy warned him, “I know it’s you but if you are caught, you will pay dearly.”

Eudier, it would seem, took this as a threat. However, in hindsight, it was actually a warning to take care.

In June 1941, at the same time that he was planning to dissolve the Syndicat des Métaux, the prefect received a letter from the head of René Belin’s cabinet, Raymond Froideval, who had been René Belin’s right-hand man in producing the paper Syndicats. He wrote to say that they had heard from the Fédération des Métaux that the local union was having difficulty moving back to their old office at Franklin. The letter asked if the prefect could facilitate the move back to the original office, reminding the prefect that: ‘You are not unaware that the Government attaches a certain importance to the taking up again of activity by trade unions as long as they stay within the limits of professional and corporative issues.’

This came after a number of circulars from René Belin and the ministre de l'Intérieur at the start of the year, reminding prefects that trade unions were still legal and that they should facilitate their activity by making sure they had suitable premises. The prefect wrote in response to inform the Minister's office that the local metalworkers’ employers’ organisation was refusing to work with Eudier, that Eudier was a known Communist and had been since 1936, and that the leaders of the USOH had confirmed this. Moreover, he, the

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357 Ibid, 59
359 Letter from the head of the cabinet of the Secretary of State for Work to the prefect, 12 June 1941, 1M565, DA
360 Circular from the National Federation of Workers in Timber and Building Industries, 25 Feb 1941, 5Z31, MA
361 Letter from the prefect to the head of the cabinet of the Secretary of State for Work, 18 June 1941, 1M565, DA
prefect, was in the process of having the union shut down and its belongings sequestered.

The Minister for Work’s head of cabinet wrote back:

I immediately gave Monsieur Marcel Roy, Secretary of the Fédération des Métaux, the information that you gave me [regarding Louis Eudier]. But Monsieur Roy says that although it is true that Eudier has belonged to the Communist Party, his feelings have changed significantly since the war and he has become, at this time, someone serious who can be trusted.

For my part I have great confidence in Monsieur Marcel Roy’s judgement and I would be most obliged, before you take any steps regarding Eudier and the union that he leads, if you would meet with him. Just let me know the day and time which are best for you and I will immediately inform Monsieur Marcel Roy who is, I remind you, a member of the Conseil National.362

We know from Eudier’s account of his meeting with Roy less than three months previously, that Roy was convinced that Eudier was an active Communist and yet from this letter we can see that, far from, condemning him, he is trying to protect him. Despite this letter, which must have come with the endorsement of the minister himself, it would seem that no date or time was given for Roy to come and plead for Eudier. A week later, the minister’s head of cabinet wrote again to the prefect:

Monsieur Marcel Roy… informs me that the Syndicat des Métaux has been searched and that Secretary Eudier has been informed that the organisation was dissolved in respect of article 2 of the law of 26 September 1939.

Monsieur Roy has reserves as to the legality of this dissolution as the decree of 26 September 1939 only targets organisations attached to the Communist Party whilst he can confirm that this organisation was definitely not under the control of the Third International. I am writing to ask you to consider again the request in my previous letter from Monsieur Marcel Roy, member of the Conseil National, who is moreover a militant trade unionist worthy of the highest confidence.363

The prefect passed these two letters on to his sub-prefect in Le Havre for his opinion. His replies were categorical: whatever Monsieur Roy’s opinion on the

362 Letter from the head of the cabinet of the Secretary of State for Work to the prefect, 2 July 1943, 1M565, DA
363 Letter from the head of the cabinet of the Secretary of State for Work to the prefect, 9 July 1943, 1M565, DA
matter, he, the sub-prefect, was convinced, from all the research he had carried out into the matter, that Louis Eudier was a Communist and that the Syndicat des Métaux, if not a constituent member of the Communist Party, was carrying out the orders of the Third International. His letter of 16 July 1941 concluded:

To finish with this endless epistolary debate I can only ask you to advise the head of the cabinet of the Secretary of State for Work to invite Monsieur Marcel Roy, or one of his associates, to come investigate personally in Le Havre.
I will get him to meet people who will express very sincerely what they think of Eudier’s activity and I will make myself available to help him with his enquiries.364

This letter was written with no mention that Louis Eudier was already in German police custody, having been arrested by the German authorities, four days earlier, on 12 July. It would seem unlikely that the sub-prefect was unaware of this fact. Whether or not he had already personally informed the prefect is not clear as the letter informing the latter of the arrest came from the French police and was not sent until 17 July.365

The prefect did not inform the head of René Belin’s cabinet immediately. He waited for almost two weeks after he had been officially informed of Eudier’s arrest before writing. And he did so, it would seem, only after having received another letter. This time it was from the Minister himself who wrote to ask him why the Syndicat des Métaux had been dissolved.366 The prefect replied first to the head of the minister’s cabinet replying to all of Marcel Roy’s reservations and the steps taken in which the union was dissolved.367 Then he replied to the minister and gave him all the details of the case.368 Only in the last line of both letters does he mention that Eudier had been arrested.

The interest of the government ministers in this affair, however, did not stop there. A month later the prefect received a letter from the ministre de l’Intérieur’s prefect delegate questioning the dissolution of the Syndicat des Métaux. He wrote:

364 Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 16 July 1941, 1M565, DA
365 Letter from the police commissaire to the prefect, 17 July 1941, 1M565, DA
366 Letter from the Secretary of State for Work to the prefect, 22 July 1941, 1M565, DA
367 The prefect to the head of the cabinet of the Secretary of State for Work, 29 July 1941, 1M565, DA
368 The prefect to the Secretary of State for Work, 30 July 1941, 1M565, DA
I believe I have to point out to you that the fact that [Eudier] is suspect does not seem to me to lead, in principle, to depriving the metalworkers of their union organisation. Such measures being likely to harm the necessary collaboration between the Government and the trade unions, I would be grateful if you could let me know if you consider it possible to retract your order.\footnote{The Prefect delegate of the ministre de l’Intérieur to the prefect. 26 Aug 1941, 1M565, DA} 

The prefect replied and, once again, detailed the whole saga. How this was received is not known as the archives contain no further correspondence on this matter.

It would seem that the interest taken, first by the Minister for Work and then the ministre de l’Intérieur in the fate of the Syndicat des Métaux was instigated and maintained by Marcel Roy. In this the difference between his actions and those of the leaders of the USOH could not be clearer. The leaders of the USOH and Marcel Roy shared the same political views and yet the former volunteered information that would lead to Eudier’s arrest, whilst the latter went out of his way to try and save him. They all knew him personally and all had been insulted by propaganda they believed he had written. Were personal antagonisms behind the USOH leaders’ denunciation and a level of respect and affection behind Roy’s support? Or was it that Roy was more aware than the USOH leaders as to what would happen to Eudier if arrested? We cannot know exactly what the personal motivations were but we can see the choices they made. It would seem that politics alone was not an indicator as to how people would act during the Occupation; the USOH leaders chose to work with the sub-prefect, an official chosen by Vichy, to condemn their former comrade to arrest. Even if they were not yet aware of concentration camps, they must have known arrest would lead to imprisonment. Marcel Roy, on the other hand, a Vichy official himself, chose to do what he could to save his fellow trade unionist from a desperate fate, despite the fact that they were political adversaries.
The Comité ouvrier de secours immédiat (COSI)

The strategies conceived by the Communists and by the USOH regarding how to deal with the Occupation diverged even further in 1942. Whilst the Communists engaged in armed struggle against the occupier, blowing up premises frequented by Germans and shooting individual German soldiers, the USOH leaders co-operated even more with both the French and German authorities. They decided to help the Havrais who were suffering the consequences of being occupied by running a local aid group set up by collaborationist parties and using money which the Germans had taken from French Jews.

This money was funnelled through an organisation called the Comité ouvrier de secours immédiat (COSI) or Workers’ Committee for Immediate Aid: a national body which had been set up a few days after the RAF bombed the Parisian suburbs and the Renault factory in Billancourt on 3 March 1942. Workers in the collaborationist parties in Paris went to the German embassy and asked for help in setting up a committee which would provide help to those affected by British bombing. The Germans immediately gave the committee one hundred million francs which they had taken from Jews in the Occupied Zone in the form of a fine after the first German soldiers were attacked in France. This method of punishing Jews had first been implemented after Kristallnacht when the Reich fined German Jews a billion marks for the murder of a German diplomat.

Despite its unsavoury instigators and criminal methods of funding, the COSI had some features that could recommend it. Firstly, it had vastly more money than any other charity that worked with bombing victims. It had a list of fixed sums which it gave to applicants: 5000 francs for the loss of a spouse; 500 francs for the loss of a child; 500 francs for a person who was injured and up to 2000 francs if the injury was permanent. In the case of a home being completely destroyed, 3000 francs was paid. Secondly, as Jean-Pierre Le Crom has pointed out, it did not see itself as needing to embody Vichy’s conservative social values, unlike Vichy’s main agency for providing

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humanitarian aid, the Secours National. In contrast to the COSI, the Secours National worked slowly, assessing people in their homes to decide whether the applicant fulfilled the relevant criteria for receiving aid and discriminating against unmarried women who lived with their partners, not an unusual situation in poor areas. The COSI prided itself on paying money out quickly since the people who came to them needed the money immediately and paying out the same to married women as to ‘common-law’ wives. However, the vast sums involved and relatively easy way of claiming them meant that corruption was rife. The COSI’s leaders siphoned off large amounts of money both in salaries and in expenses to fund lavish lifestyles that involved expensive meals in grand Parisian restaurants and chauffeur-driven cars.\(^{371}\)

Le Crom explains that although the COSI described itself as apolitical, this only meant that it was not dominated by one particular collaborationist party. Its headquarters in Paris were run by members of the two main collaborationist parties, the Rassemblement national populaire (RNP) and the Parti populaire français (PPF). There were trade unionists involved in its leadership but they played an insignificant role; it was the RNP and the PPF who were in charge and it was no secret that they were. The Secours National understood that the COSI was an instrument of the collaborationist parties. A report written by one of the Secours National’s directors on 2 June 1942 reads:

> The few workers who immediately joined this committee were workers belonging to the PPF and the RNP, i.e. they have no respect amongst the working masses of the country… The current trend is to… mask its real nature by adding in elements taken from the trade union milieu. No one will be fooled by this.\(^{372}\)

Despite this, by 1 October 1943 a total of 87 local committees had been formed. This is perhaps because at a local level the COSI was not always run by the RNP and PPF. In many departments it was ex-CGT trade unionists close to the Syndicats group who dominated. They justified their involvement by stressing the humanitarian aspect of the COSI or by arguing that if they did not run their

\(^{371}\) Ibid, 201-5
\(^{372}\) Ibid, 218
local committee the PPF or RNP would, which would give them undue influence.\textsuperscript{373}

By March 1942, when the COSI was formed, Le Havre had been undergoing regular bombing raids. According to a local newspaper, \textit{Havre-Éclair}, in an article printed in 1945 about the COSI in Le Havre:

\begin{quote}
Le Havre was bombed more than sixty times before March 1942. Several thousand victims lost not only their home but their furniture, their linen and their savings. They were thrown into the road without money and in their nightclothes... March 1942 was particularly critical. There were more bombings, particularly at the end of the month. For seventeen consecutive nights the \textit{Havrais} had only three without bombing.\textsuperscript{374}
\end{quote}

As was seen in Chapter Four, the people of Le Havre were very concerned that their plight was not being recognised by the rest of the country and that financial aid was not very forthcoming. Initially, at least, the council set up a department to assist the bombing victims. Employing around 40 people, an office on Avenue Foch, in the centre of town, opened to provide people with housing and ration cards. According to local historian, Georges Godefroy, housing was provided in empty flats or in a dormitory in the Hôpital Pasteur, the town’s general hospital. A claimant could also ask to be moved to another town in Seine-Inférieure or in the neighbouring department of the Oise. If they had lost their ration cards in the bombing they could be issued with replacements; if they had no clothes left they could be given new ones. They would also be given 30kgs of coal and meal tickets for the Salvation Army canteen.\textsuperscript{375}

It would seem, however, that by March 1942, money for this service was in scarce supply. The council had appealed to the Government for money to help the bombing victims and had been given a one-off payment of 800 000 francs which was soon used up. According to Godefroy, the USOH also set up a fund to help prisoners-of-war, the unemployed and victims of bombing. By March

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{373} Ibid, 220-1
\textsuperscript{374} ‘L’affaire du COSI’, \textit{Havre-Éclair}, Sat 23-Sun 24 June 1945, MA
\textsuperscript{375} Georges Godefroy, \textit{Le Havre sous l’occupation 1940-1944} (Le Havre: Imprimerie de la presse, 1965), 82
\end{flushright}
1942 their members had donated 1 200 000 francs, one and half times the amount given by the government.\textsuperscript{376}

After the bombing in March 1942, Pierre Courant, sent a telegram to Vichy asking for more aid. The \textit{Havre-Éclair} article reports what happened next:

On 5 April, Easter, Roger Paul, \textit{conseiller national}, general secretary of the Fédération des Textiles, came to Le Havre saying that he had been sent by the government to distribute aid which could amount to 10 000 francs per family…

The next morning Roger Paul organised the distribution of aid in Le Havre, entrusting the distribution of this aid to trade unionists known and trusted by the workers.

This article was written in order to justify the activities of the COSI after the war when its organisers, both national and regional, were tried for collaboration with the enemy. It does not therefore mention that Roger Paul, who came so quickly to the aid of the \textit{Havrais}, was a prominent member of the RNP.\textsuperscript{377}

The Le Havre COSI was set up immediately after Roger Paul’s visit. Its committee, however, contained no members of collaborationist groups but only prominent \textit{Havrais} trade unionists. Despite the success of the USOH’s own fundraising efforts, André Vaillant and Maurice Hauguel took the main roles, president and treasurer respectively. The committee also contained two inspectors who were Alphonse Gréaume, the general secretary of the Syndicat général des Ouvriers des Magasins Réunis (who was discussed in Chapter Four with regards to the Pont de Tancarville) and Alfred Salin, from the builders’ union. As Claude Malon comments: ‘this meant that the most powerful trade union representatives in the town were part of the COSI.’\textsuperscript{378} The honorary president was the mayor, Pierre Courant, and the vice-presidents, the mayors of the surrounding towns.

The \textit{Havre-Éclair} article claimed that there was no reason for the mayor and the USOH leaders to be initially suspicious of the COSI, but then admitted that two days after the local group was formed, the Germans revealed where the money came from. Despite the fact the fund would be handling money stolen from the

\textsuperscript{376} Godefroy, \textit{Le Havre}, 79
\textsuperscript{378} Malon, \textit{Occupation}, 198
Jews, the paper was keen to wipe away any taint of anti-Semitism or collaboration from the mayor and the USOH leaders:

It was obviously impossible for the mayor of Le Havre to refuse this appointment [as honorary president of the local COSI] without depriving the bombing victims of aid which they could not do without. Pierre Courant agreed to it while posing one precise condition on the Havrais representatives of the COSI: that no propaganda would be made regarding the distribution of funds. He found himself in agreement on this point with the Havrais representatives who were good Frenchmen.

In June 1945 Pierre Courant and the trade unionists who ran the Le Havre COSI were put on trial for ‘belonging to the COSI and giving direct or indirect help to Germany.’ In their trial the defendants were keen both to claim they had taken no part in spreading collaborationist propaganda and to justify the necessity for the fund. Pierre Courant tried to distance himself from the COSI, saying he had never been an actual member: “I was named in the list of the patrons of the COSI because I was the mayor; I don’t think that means I can say I was a member of the COSI.” However, he knew it was in good hands and that the committee were “good Frenchmen” who would never collaborate. Moreover, the money had been vital for the Havrais bombing victims since there was no other money forthcoming to help them. André Vaillant claimed that they had not spread any collaborationist propaganda, saying: ‘that at the time that the COSI was being constituted there was nothing to warn them of the direction that it was to take – elsewhere as in Le Havre – and the brochures, leaflets and other propaganda tracts were used to light the fire and other things.’ The latter may have been true but as we saw above, the national leaders of the COSI never made any secret of their political persuasion. Maurice Hauguel, went even further in trying to justify their actions by claiming ‘that Jews also benefited from the COSI money even though it was absolutely forbidden.’ One wonders who these Jews were since Jewish property and possessions had been ‘aryanised’ in 1940 - 1 and the rafles had begun in Le Havre in February 1942. There is no sign of the USOH leaders helping local Jews when they

379 M. Pierre Courant est acquitté, Havre-Eclair, Mon 27 June 1945, MA
were being first deprived of their property and jobs, and then rounded up and deported.

The court was convinced and they were all acquitted. However, if the prosecutors had looked through the police reports and the reports on the COSI that appeared in *Le Petit Havre* during the Occupation they would have seen a different picture appear. In the police *commissaire'*s monthly reports during the Occupation, comments on the activities of the COSI were put in the section devoted to the activities of the collaborationist parties and groups. To his mind, evidently, the COSI was not a neutral humanitarian organisation. He would certainly have seen who the local COSI organisers shared their platforms with and indeed heard what collaborationist propaganda was being spread in their meetings.

In *Le Petit Havre* of 27 July 1942 there was a report of the inaugural meeting of the local Union des Sinistrés or Union of Disaster Victims. The COSI organised these local groups which appear to have had no function except to hold meetings. This particular meeting attracted 500 bombing victims and was chaired by Pierre Courant. On the platform were local COSI representatives and USOH leaders: Vaillant, Hauguel and Gréaume. Also on the platform was Jean Brunet, the national head of the Unions des Sinistrés. We do not know if Brunet was a member of a collaborationist party but given the dominance of these parties in running the COSI it would seem likely. The speech he gave certainly used their language; the paper reported that he: ‘paid tribute to the occupying authorities for the generous and spontaneous gesture that they made with regards to the French in their misfortune… the Germans came to them and offered the sum of 100 million francs, French money, taken from Jewish capitalism in France.’

Six months later, in *Le Petit Havre* of 15 February 1943, there was a report of a meeting organised by the local Union des Sinistrés which 400 bombing victims attended. On the platform were Vaillant, Hauguel and Henri Quesnel, president of the Union who had been the secretary of the USOH during the 1922 strike in Le Havre. Alongside them was Adolphe Ambrogelly, director of the COSI in Paris. Even if the USOH leaders were

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381 ‘L’Union des Sinistrés du Havre et de la Région a tenu samedi sa réunion constitutive’, *Le Petit Havre*, 27 July 1942, MA
unaware that Ambrogelly was a member of the central committee of the collaborationist party, *Parti ouvrier et paysan français*, they would have heard him say in his speech: “We take money from wherever it comes…This 100 million francs that Germany spontaneously gave us is not German money. This money was taken from the Jewish capitalists who for years have contributed to the ruin of French savings.”

Whilst the USOH leaders appeared to find nothing immoral in running the local COSI, the Communists were very clear from the beginning that it was a disreputable organisation. The local edition of the clandestine Communist newspaper, *La Vie Ouvrière*, published its opinion of the COSI in May 1942 under the title: ‘The Thieves…!’:

The so called “Workers’ Committee for Immediate Aid” founded by the Boches with Mesnard, Roger Paul, Teulade and other prostitutes, distributes to bombing victims aid which comes from money given by the Boches from the fine imposed on French Jews. It also distributes furniture stolen from the Jews.

“Le Petit Havre” announces that a local Committee has just been formed in Le Havre with Vaillant, Hauguel, Greoume, Salin & Co. When it’s a case of filling their pockets, these sad individuals are shamelessly always ready for the most pitiful tasks. Bombing victims, refuse the money and the furniture stolen from the Jews. Demand aid and furniture from the powers that be.

It does not appear that the casualties of bombing in Le Havre responded to the paper’s plea although in some parts of France this did happen. For example, in Lorient the victims of bombing refused help from the COSI and set up their own self-help organisation; and in Chaville, in the Parisian suburbs, recipients of furniture taken from Jewish homes brought it back when they found out where it had come from.

Perhaps the main explanation as to why the Havrais accepted the COSI was that there was a huge need for the money it provided and that the money was

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384 René Mesnard, RNP member and president of the COSI.
385 Jules Teulade, PPF member and vice-president of the COSI.
386 Whilst this happened in other regions, there is nothing that suggests that furniture was distributed in Le Havre.
387 ‘Les Voleurs…’, *La Vie ouvrière*, Le Havre edition, 1 May 1942, 2Z85, DA
388 Le Crom, *Au secours*, 203-4
plentiful. At the February 1943 meeting of the Union des Sinistrés at which Ambrogelly spoke, Vaillant gave an account of the effect of the bombing raids on Le Havre: “Up to today,” he said, “we have counted 388 killed, 798 seriously injured, 800 others more lightly injured, 2,720 buildings destroyed and 2,733 others damaged.” As a result the COSI had distributed from April 1942 up to 31 Jan 1943 7,336,536 francs to 2,571 people with another 1,724 files being processed. When one remembers that the Government had previously only given 800,000 francs to help the Havrais bombing victims, the fact that the COSI had distributed almost eight million francs makes it a significant local organisation. It is not, however, clear from the archives whether the COSI replaced the municipal service for bombing victims or ran alongside it.

There was never any secret that the money had been taken from Jews so we must ask how the Havrais recipients reconciled themselves with this uncomfortable fact. The Jewish community had been small pre-war (156 Jews were listed in the first census carried out in 1941) but not invisible, especially to workers and their families, as many had run small businesses making and selling clothes to the working class. Moreover, if one looks on a map to see where these businesses had been situated, it is striking how many were on the same road as Franklin, the headquarters of the USOH. A report by the RG written in 1943 commented on the Havrais Jews that: ‘their attitude was correct and the population showed no hostility towards them. The workers and the lower middle class willingly frequented the Jewish commercial establishments which specialised in low-cost goods. The measures taken against them have been, generally, criticised.’ One explanation as to why the Havrais, although unhappy with Vichy’s anti-Semitic measures were still able to take Jewish money is given by Julien Guillemard, in his memoir of living in Le Havre during the Occupation. He wrote that although people knew where the money came from they thought “Let’s take it anyway; if we don’t take it, it’ll just fly off to Germany...”

389 ‘La Réunion générale des Sinistrés’, Le Petit Havre, Mon 15 Feb 1943, MA
390 Malon, Occupation, 205
391 Ch 14 ‘Juifs’, Fichier départemental des RG, arrondissement du Havre 1943, 40W173, DA
392 Guillemard, L’Enfer, 216
This opportunism may have come from living at a time when ethical behaviour was in short supply. Although there is no evidence that the Le Havre COSI was blighted by the embezzlement common elsewhere, the behaviour of those running the local Secours National was corrupt. The author of the RG report quoted above had this to say about the organisation: ‘If the Secours National is considered an admirable venture and a very praiseworthy social organisation aimed at improving the lot of the working class, the action of its organisers in Le Havre has often been discussed and criticised.’ This was because their activity was frankly fraudulent. There were three main accusations. The first was: ‘Various articles [of clothing] have been bought in shops at a fixed price and then resold, either to the bombing victims themselves or to the Office of Victims at much higher prices, sometimes twice or three times the value they were originally bought at.’ Secondly, the amount of petrol that the Secours National was using was much higher than its official allowance. And thirdly: ‘Various sums, varying on average from 1000 to 4000 francs have been passed, at least until the middle of 1942, between employees who, with no supervision, were responsible for buying and fetching food and other products.’ Given as an example of this was the case of M Lebescond who: ‘was arrested on 14 August 1942 in Quatre-Chemins in Le Havre whilst he was driving a Secours National lorry in which there was, it seems, 50 litres of petrol, seven pigs, one veal calf and one bullock.’ Although this produce was supposed to be supplying a soup kitchen, it was in fact going to a known black market trafficker. The report’s author commented: ‘Such are the general accusations made against the leaders of the “Secours National” and which, for right or for wrong, have been spread through the Havrais public.’

From this we see that people in financial need in Le Havre could take money or other forms of aid from the Secours National which was known to be involved in trafficking and embezzlement; or they could accept support from the COSI based on stolen money. It was not an enviable choice. The fact that the COSI was being run by trade union leaders who had worked hard for their members before the war and who obviously had the confidence of the mayor – well-respected in the town for campaigning for improvements in the lives of the Havrais – made the COSI appear to be an acceptable option.
It must be questioned why the anarcho-syndicalist leaders of the USOH chose to run the COSI rather than to join the Resistance. In Chapter Three, we saw how the result of their anti-Communism and pacifism was an increasing emphasis on so-called ‘trade union independence.’ In reality this meant turning their back on world events – the growth of fascism and the coming war – and devoting themselves more and more to parochial matters. Their decision to run the COSI is a result of this policy. Their focus on local matters with no regards as to what was happening nationally or internationally, meant that they seemed to be able to act without any reference to any standard of ethical behaviour. Their actions became purely opportunistic: the Havrais were being bombed, they needed money; the Germans were offering them huge sums – never mind if that money had been stolen from Jews – nor if it were part of a propaganda effort against the British RAF.

This chapter has shown some of the consequences of the ideological paths taken by the Communists and the anarcho-syndicalists, described in Chapter Three. However, it has also demonstrated how ideology did not always predict the choices made by individuals during the Occupation. The USOH leaders did not have to tell the sub-prefect they suspected Louis Eudier was an active Communist; that was a choice they appear to have made freely, with no apparent concern for the serious consequences this would have for their former colleague. This decision and, more generally, their decision to co-operate with the authorities had the wider consequence of denying the local workers’ movement the leadership that it had trusted and which had enabled it to win valuable concessions in the pre-war period. The next chapter will return to a focus on the experiences of the wider working populations of Le Havre. In particular, it will examine the new set of state-sponsored schemes that would cause particular anguish to the Havrais since they all involved forcing them from their homes; an act that recalled the suffering they had experienced during the exode.
Chapter 6

Being forced to leave home - the consequences of occupation

Up to now, we have looked at the period during the Occupation when it was still possible to win concessions from both employers and the French authorities. Havrais workers had been angry at the new adverse conditions brought by the Occupation and had been quick to voice their discontent. However, 1942 marked a new phase, when life would become not just difficult but perilous for many workers. The relève scheme sent French workers to Germany to aid their war effort and the Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) sent young people to work on building the Atlantic Wall. The memory of the exode had instilled a fear in the Havrais of being forced to move away from their homes and these two schemes did exactly that; provoking a fear particular to the people of Le Havre even before the resentment engendered by being forced to aid the German war effort. For those who were not affected by the relève or the STO, there was still the threat of being forced to leave as, despite a let-up in the aerial bombardment of the town, the Germans were keen to evacuate whole swathes of the Le Havre region. Despite the terror that these schemes provoked it is still possible to see signs of resilience amongst those who were affected. Where possible, the working class either gave voice to its anger or simply refused to do what it was told to. There was no apparent leadership behind this behaviour and the resilience that was displayed continued to remain just that and not turn into organised defiance. However, these three state-sponsored ‘projects’ provoked a profound hatred towards the German occupier; the expression of which ultimately became more organised, as will be explored in the next chapter.

Evacuation

From March 1942, the aerial bombing of Le Havre began to take place during the day, as well as at night. In April, the town was bombed on ten separate occasions, killing 33 people and injuring 83, making 120 buildings
uninhabitable, and damaging many commercial and industrial premises. The *commissaire principal* of the RG noted that month:

> The frequent RAF bombing, during both day and night, which has been going on for three weeks over Le Havre and its suburbs, has produced a serious unease in the population. The evacuation of certain areas of Le Havre, and the anxiety that this decision created in these localities, is producing a feverish uncertain atmosphere in our town which greatly resembles the terrible days of June 1940.

Eight thousand people were evacuated from Le Havre, along with their furniture. About a third of this number were sent by train to the neighbouring department of Oise but the rest had to be housed in other areas in or around Le Havre. In a separate move, children were sent out of town, many to centres being set up in the neighbouring department of Eure. Some were even sent as far as Algiers, whose local authority, on seeing Le Havre’s plight, had decided to ‘adopt’ the town and had already sent it aid of 100 000 francs.

Whilst this was only a partial evacuation of some of the worst hit areas, moves were afoot to evacuate the whole of the population. The German authorities asked the prefect to draw up evacuation plans for the whole of Dieppe, Le Tréport and Le Havre: in other words, all the main towns of the Seine-Inférieure coast. This would indeed replicate the *exode* of June 1940. In a telling passage by the prefect, he reported that:

> The *Feldkommandant* has stressed, because of the dangers to which the *Havrais* population are daily exposed, that there should be a way of putting pressure on the inhabitants in order to obtain the departure from this town of everyone who, not having overriding reasons to stay, could find somewhere else to live.

It seems evident here that Germans were less concerned for the well-being of the townsfolk than keen simply to empty the town so they could have it for their sole use. Indeed, it did appear that the German authorities were preparing to

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393 Monthly report by the prefect for April 1942, 4 May 1942, Z28483, DA
394 Monthly report from the *commissaire principal* of the RG for 20 March–20 April 1942, 20 April 1942, Z28483, DA
395 Monthly report by the prefect for February 1942, 2 Mar 1942, Z28483, DA; Godefroy, *Le Havre*, 73
396 Monthly report by the prefect for April 1942, 4 May 1942, Z28483, DA
turn Le Havre into a battlefield where the presence of civilians would be unwelcome. In June the sub-prefect wrote:

Military structures are being built on the Plateau de Caucriauville, which overlooks Le Havre and controls the floodplain around the Seine. These, which include putting up barbed wire and chevaux-de-frise, and the construction of walls 3 or 4 metres high to stop access from the evacuated areas of the town, are of a nature to make the town reflect on the situation to come.\(^\text{397}\)

The police \textit{commissaire} also noted that these fortifications were worrying the Havrais; an anxiety not helped by the BBC which apparently had advised everyone in the coastal zone to evacuate.\(^\text{398}\) However, the \textit{commissaire principal} of the RG took a more upbeat view of how the population were feeling when he wrote:

Time has progressively removed the desperation which reigned at the announcement of the evacuation of certain areas of Le Havre, and the majority, despite the uncertainty of events, are trying again to find courage and hope by calculating that military operations will take place somewhere else other than the Le Havre region and the neighbouring coast.\(^\text{399}\)

Rumours about evacuation accompanied by anxiety and dread, followed by partial evacuations and then a period of calm, was a pattern that repeated itself from 1942 until the Liberation. Aerial bombing of Le Havre in fact stopped in December 1942 and did not resume until March 1944. Despite this, in April 1943, rumours and fears about evacuation again began to swirl, bringing back, once more, painful memories of the \textit{exode}. The sub-prefect wrote to the prefect that month saying:

The civilian population has shown a courage which I must particularly praise. Very attached to their towns and villages, after three years of hardship and having borne the heavy load of occupation along the coast, they envisage with difficulty abandoning their homes to go to other, less exposed, departments. The experience of the \textit{exode} in June 1940 and the more recent evacuation to the Oise, have very often discouraged people and not created a favourable climate for leaving. That is to say

\(^{397}\) Monthly report by the sub-prefect for June 1942, 24 June 1942, Z28483, DA
\(^{398}\) Monthly report by the police \textit{commissaire} for June 1942, 20 June 1942, Z28483, DA
\(^{399}\) Monthly report from the \textit{commissaire principal} of the RG for 21 May–20 June 1942, 19 June 1942, Z28483, DA
that the orders for a partial evacuation have met opposition from the municipalities and the population.400

The first group to be affected by evacuation were all the children aged 6-14 who remained in the town; they were evacuated in May, accompanied by their teachers. This was a measure particularly feared by working class families, according to the commissaire principal of the RG. This was because children who had previously been evacuated to an educational camp in Chamonix had just returned home 'in a deplorable state of uncleanness.'401 After the children, it was the turn of those who were deemed 'inutile' or 'useless', by the occupying authorities, i.e. the elderly and all those who were unable to work. By 21 May, 18,219 people, of which 8386 adults and 9833 children, had been evacuated.402

Life for the evacuees was not pleasant. The surrounding departments to which they were sent were not given enough time to prepare for their arrival and the evacuees were not given their ration cards which meant problems accessing food.403 As local historian, Georges Godefroy writes:

> The fate of some of [the adult evacuees] is unenviable. Some are only given a bale of straw to sleep on and in some villages in the Eure-et-Loir the peasants even refuse them this… The problem of food supplies for the refugees is in fact critical which surprises. Become country-dwellers despite themselves, our Havrais no longer receive their town-dwellers’ ration cards which allow more rations than for those in the country; and they do not receive the food that the peasants grow for themselves.404

These evacuees soon decided that they would prefer to be home and by August the sub-prefect was noting that many were attempting to come back to Le Havre. He wrote:

> To leave the town where they benefit from town rations, where they have created their own support network and where they regularly receive parcels, to move into the hostile countryside with officially smaller rations, has produced an ordeal that lots of refugees cannot bear: their health and their morale have been affected. So they attempt to return to their

400 Two monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 April 1943, 51W69, DA
401 Commissaire principal of the RG to the Intendant Regional, 24 April 1943, 51W69, DA
402 Commissaire principal of the RG to the Intendant Regional, 22 May 1943, 51W69, DA
403 Two monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 24 June 1943, 51W69, DA
404 Godefroy, Le Havre, 116
original home and they do not bring back in their hearts a love for nature nor for their neighbour, “the peasant”.405

New plans for a total evacuation of the town were drawn up in the winter, but people did not believe that they would be carried out because they thought it was likely the Allied landings would occur by spring 1944. It would seem that the Germans also thought this a possibility as in January 1944 they ordered that all the areas next to the Seine and the port be evacuated. The next month they wanted all remaining children (even those under six years old), elderly and disabled people to leave. We have no official reports from February 1944 until after the Liberation, so we do not know from the sub-prefect or the police how the Havrais took to these new orders. According to Godefroy, those being told they had to evacuate were again reluctant to go. This time it was because there had been no bombing of the town for sixteen months, and because buses and trains outside Le Havre had been shot at by British planes. It would seem that the authorities were driven to forcing people to evacuate: on 15 March the town hall issued a statement that those people who were supposed to evacuate but had not yet done so would not receive their ration cards for April.406

Many of the orders to evacuate did not concern factory workers themselves as they were seen as vital by the Germans to their war effort. However, even if they were allowed to stay put they were expected to send their children and elderly relatives away. We can imagine the anxiety this separation must have produced in the Havrais workers, especially when rumours arrived telling of how poorly received refugees were in the countryside and in the neighbouring departments.

The next time that the Havrais would be ordered to evacuate was in August when the Allies started to liberate the town. This will be looked at in the Epilogue.

405 Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 20 Aug 1943, 51W70, DA
406 Godefroy, Le Havre, 130-1
The relève

Whilst workers were often not directly affected by plans for evacuation, they were very much directly affected by the relève. This was a scheme, announced by Pierre Laval in June 1942, which would allow the return home of French prisoners-of-war in exchange for skilled workers volunteering to work in Germany. Since this scheme attracted very few volunteers, a new law was passed three months later, on 4 September, announcing that men aged 18 - 50 and single women aged 21 - 35 could be requisitioned to do any work the state required them to. Although the law did not specify where this work might take place, Fritz Sauckel, the Nazi organiser of labour, demanded 150 000 skilled French workers be sent to Germany and this law was used to fulfil this demand. In October, 51 000 workers were sent to Germany and in November almost 3000 left every day. By the end of the year almost 135 000 workers had left France, although fewer than 15 000 of them were skilled.407

Whilst unemployment had declined, Le Havre, with its many factories, was a place from which the Germans were keen to appropriate many skilled workers. It would appear from the official reports that, by December, at least 1000 men had been sent from Le Havre to Germany, leaving by trains from the town’s station.408

Workers were notified that they had been selected for the scheme by receiving a Notification de Mutation, or transfer notice, in the post. This letter informed the recipient that they must attend the German employment office on Boulevard François 1er the following day or, at the latest, the day after that.409 There, they would be given a work contract to sign which would state the town in Germany they were being sent to and the company they had been assigned to work for. If they were a skilled worker, the contract would usually specify that they would continue to do the same work in their new workplace.410

408 Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 24 Dec 1942, 51W68, DA
409 Godefroy, Le Havre, 120
410 Arnaud, Les STO, 68-9
From the beginning of the scheme, the penalties for not showing up at Boulevard François 1er could be harsh. An RG report to the sub-prefect in November tells what happened to eleven workers, including nine from the big metalworking factory, Tréfileries et Laminoirs, who were reluctant to go. They were taken to the German employment office where they refused to sign their work contract. One said he could not go because he had only got married the day before; another said his father had been killed in the First World War and he did not want to work for those responsible for his father’s death. The rest did not give a reason but the RG suspected that: ‘the influence of Gaullist-communist propaganda was behind this refusal.’ They were then escorted to the detention centre where they were:

- taken into the main corridor… where “some Germans”, during almost an hour, explained to them that if they carried on refusing to sign the contract they would only leave prison to go to the train station to take a train to Germany and would not see their families again.
- The eleven workers then agreed to sign the contract.\(^{411}\)

It seems fair to surmise that the German soldiers used violence to persuade the workers to sign their contract.

The report went on to say: ‘I have to tell you that this incident is well known in the town and that it raises a certain emotion, not only amongst workers but also in other milieus who do not mind saying, “workers leaving for Germany are made to sign their work contract.”’ Talk in the town about this incident did not stop there. The Commissaire principal of the RG added:

- The rumour is going round Le Havre that cries of “Down with Pétain”, “Down with Laval” were shouted on the station platform when the workers cited above left Le Havre. This rumour is false. I was personally on the platform at that time.
- I do have to add, however, that without the presence of the German Sûrété a demonstration, which could be sensed was ready to burst out, would have done.\(^{412}\)

The anger that this incident provoked in the town only intensified as more and more workers were forced to go.

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\(^{411}\) Report by the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 2 Nov 1942, 51W68, DA
\(^{412}\) Ibid
Despite the 134,976 French workers supplied to Germany by the end of 1942, Germany’s demand for labour remained insatiable. Sauckel ordered Laval to supply another 250,000 workers (of whom 150,000 were supposed to be skilled) by April 1943.\(^413\) This figure was unaffected by the law of 16 February 1943 which instigated the Service du travail obligatoire (STO), a scheme for all young people born between 1 January 1920 and 31 December 1922 to work in Germany. The law of 4 September 1942 continued to apply to older workers until the end of the war.\(^414\) In Le Havre, young people affected by the STO were sent, at least at first, to work locally on the Atlantic Wall; therefore the departures from Le Havre to Germany continued, for the time being, to be local workers up to the age of 50.

The demand by Germany for a quarter of a million French workers had an immediate impact on requisitions from Le Havre. The *Commissaire principal* of the RG wrote at the beginning of January:

> Some factories which, up till now, have supplied relatively modest contingents for the “Relève”, see themselves now obliged to send quite a large number of their workers. This is why the Société Tréfileries et Laminoirs, which has three factories in Le Havre, has been asked by the relevant authorities to supply 150 skilled workers, who will leave, under the leadership of one of their engineers, on 11 or 12 January and will be replaced, as far as it is possible, by skilled workers.\(^415\)

Only a fortnight later the sub-prefect noted: ‘Generally, the number of workers working in the various factories in the *arrondissement* is declining especially because of the departure of skilled workers for Germany as part of the “Relève”. Only the factories that are working for the occupier are assured of a certain consistency.’\(^416\) The sub-prefect could make this last statement because the Germans designated a category of businesses as working for the Germans and therefore protected from having their workers sent to Germany.\(^417\) However, as Claude Malon points out: ‘On the eve of the Landings, the reports from the prefecture highlight that all the Havrais factories working in metallurgy and ship

\(^{413}\) Arnaud, *Les STO*, 32
\(^{414}\) Ibid, 33
\(^{415}\) Letter from the *Commissaire principal* of the RG to the sub-prefect, 7 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
\(^{416}\) Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
\(^{417}\) Malon, *Occupation*, 146
repair were carrying out a lot of work for the Germans.\textsuperscript{418} It would therefore seem that even factories working for the Germans saw their skilled workers being sent to Germany despite any official restrictions. For example, on 8 January 1943, the sub-prefect reported that 105 workers from the Breguet factory had been sent to Germany.\textsuperscript{419} During the Occupation this factory was building seaplane parts for the Germans. The Breguet factory was part of the Société nationale des constructions aéronautiques du Nord which had five factories in total and 86.5\% of their business from 1940 to 1944 was for the Germans.\textsuperscript{420}

Week after week from January 1943 onwards the official reports contained accounts of how many workers had left Le Havre for Germany as can be seen in the following figures from January to March:

15 January: 129 workers departed\textsuperscript{421}

5 February: 65 specialist workers departed\textsuperscript{422}

9 February: 55 workers departed\textsuperscript{423}

23 February: 16 workers departed\textsuperscript{424}

26 February: 130 workers departed\textsuperscript{425}

5 March: 120 workers departed\textsuperscript{426}

6 - 12 March: 540 workers departed\textsuperscript{427}

The workers leaving on each of these dates did not leave quietly. At practically every departure, the Commissaire principal of the RG and the sub-prefect noted that either the Internationale was sung\textsuperscript{428} or slogans were chanted like: “Down

\textsuperscript{418}Ibid, 105
\textsuperscript{419}Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{420}Malon, Occupation, 135
\textsuperscript{421}Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{422}Ibid
\textsuperscript{423}Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 10 Feb 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{424}Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 23 Feb 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{425}Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 26 Feb 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{426}Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 6 March 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{427}Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the Intendant Régional of the RG, 13 Mar 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{428}Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 26 Feb 1943, 51W69, DA
with Germany, Down with the Boches, Hang Laval, For France, hip hip hurrah!”. According to Patrice Arnaud, requisitioned workers all over France often sang or chanted slogans as their train was leaving, however, the songs were not always political. In some places it was even the song that celebrated Pétain, ‘Maréchal, nous voilà’, that was sung. However, the song most often sung, was the traditional song of parting, ‘Le chant des Adieux’. It is therefore interesting to note that it was only subversive songs and slogans that were recorded by the police as coming from the Havrais workers. It testifies to the existing mentality of militancy that existed amongst the workers of this town.

It was not only those who were leaving who were angry. The sub-prefect wrote in January: ‘The “Relève”, it must be said, keeps exasperating people and makes the workers abhor the Germans more and more and criticise President Laval.’ By March, tensions had intensified, especially with the advent of the STO. The Commissaire principal of the RG wrote:

> The departures of young people to Germany still hold everyone’s attention and provoke very strong anxiety in all milieux… People often think that this civilian mobilisation is only a first stage before the military mobilisation of all the young men “deported” to Germany. The “Relève” today is the subject of everyone’s obsessive fear and everyone, young or old, dreads seeing the departure of either one of their family or themselves.

The families and those who were eligible to be sent to Germany were evidently concerned about what happened to the men who had been requisitioned. Some of these worries were based on actual information from those who had already gone. The sub-prefect wrote in January: ‘The information reported by some workers who have come back from Germany or that has been transmitted in letters, make those who remain believe that their comrades, although mostly well housed, are badly fed and often do not have much to do.’ Some of the

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429 Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA  
430 Arnaud, *Les STO*, 64-5  
431 Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA  
432 Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the Intendant Régional of the RG, 13 Mar 1943, 51W69, DA  
433 Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
fears seem to have been based on rumours, as when the *Commissaire principal* of the RG reported in March: ‘The “Refère” continues to worry the families of those who have left or who are likely to be sent to Germany where, it is said, many French workers are dressed in clothing from the Todt Organisation before being sent to the Eastern Front to be employed in building fortifications.’

Patrice Arnaud makes no mention of this happening. This rumour may have had as its basis the 3000 French workers who were sent to work for the TO carrying out levelling work in Norway; descriptions of the freezing temperatures could have been confused with conditions also to be found in Finland and the Soviet Union.

We have the account of one young *Havrais* worker’s experience of the *relève*, which illustrates the severe hardships endured by those who were forced to take part. Jean Hazo was nineteen in 1942 and working for a factory in Le Havre that made microscopes. One Thursday night at 11pm the French police knocked on his door, gave him his requisition papers and told him he had to report on the Saturday to an office in Rouen. At the office:

> there were lots of unfortunates like me who were waiting there. We were transported to Dieppe. We stayed there two months. The food, the work, everything was absolutely pitiful… There were three of us from my factory that went… We were sent to the Duquesne barracks in Dieppe to work on the beach collecting pebbles, shingle, to build the bunkers.

Hazo’s account continues:

> One evening we heard some lorries arrive. They were lorry-loads of soldiers who surrounded the barracks. They made us have a quick medical. They drove us not to the station in Dieppe but to the annexe, a marshalling yard where there was a circle of soldiers waiting for us. I was sent straight to a camp [in Germany]; they put us in tents. I stayed in this camp for a year to rebuild the Eder dam in Westphalia… I did a little bit of everything; I broke stones; for a long time I carried out drilling. We worked twelve hours a day and on Sunday. We had one hot meal a day, in the evening, plus a piece of bread which was a third of a round loaf with a little square of margarine on top and a slice of pâté. Blows, lashes. These were common because we were supervised by German ex-convicts. There were deaths, but accidental. If you didn’t work you were sent to a concentration camp… People were so scared they accepted everything…After this camp I worked for a year

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434 Letter from the *Commissaire principal* of the RG to the *Intendant Régional* of the RG, 20 Mar 1943, 51W69, DA
435 Arnaud, *Les STO*, 78
at the Krupp factory. I was freed on 16 April 1945... I had lost thirteen kilos in weight while I [was in Germany].”

On 9 April 1943 Sauckel demanded another 220,000 French workers be sent to Germany and he wanted them to be sent quickly: 120,000 in May and the rest in June. In order to not remove too many workers from the factories that were working for the Germans, Vichy was forced to remove the exemptions that it had previously given to primary school teachers, tax inspectors and bank staff. When those designated to go to Germany kept refusing to turn up at the appointed time, more exemptions had to be removed: young agricultural workers, students and finally workers who were working for the TO.

The impact of this new requisition order in Le Havre was soon felt. Whilst no workers left the town during April the departures started up again with a vengeance in May and were despised by the general Havrais public. The sub-prefect wrote:

The massive departure of workers to Germany provokes a violent discontent which is freely expressed. No one wants to believe that from now on one serves France by going to work in Germany and the successive removals of workers makes the Government’s policy unpopular. The civilian mobilisation of the classes 1940, 41, and 42, at first considered as a measure of social equality, has stopped being welcomed when one sees that the rhythm of departures of the older classes has not noticeably reduced.

In August 1943, Laval told Sauckel that France wanted to suspend the relève and the STO for several months in order to “re-establish order.” Instead they would concentrate on rounding up the réfractaires, those who had refused to show up when summoned to go work in Germany. Furthermore, the following month it was agreed that all companies who were providing at least 75% of their

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437 Arnaud, *Les STO*, 37-8
438 i.e. the designated classes for the STO.
439 Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 24 June 1943, 51W69, DA
440 Arnaud, *Les STO*, 40
production for Germany would be protected from all future requisitions of labour.\textsuperscript{441}

The impact of these decisions was soon apparent in Le Havre. By August the official reports were noting a slow-down in the numbers of people being sent to Germany and the numbers continued to be reported in the ones and twos in the remaining reports that we have (up to February 1944). It appears from the reports that people’s anxiety shifted from who would next be requisitioned to what was happening to those who were already in Germany. In August the sub-prefect wrote:

The public note with satisfaction the slow-down for the last month in the departures of French workers to Germany but the families of those who have left are very worried about the massive bombings of Germany by Anglo-American air forces\textsuperscript{442} and worry about their relatives, some of whom have not sent news for several months.\textsuperscript{443}

Families worried when they did not hear from their loved ones, and they worried when they did. The Commissaire principal of the RG reported on what happened when some of the men who had been sent to Germany came back to Le Havre on leave:

The situation of French workers in Germany has been the subject of much comment since the arrival of some men on leave who have spoken over and over again of the way in which they live in the factories and in the camps. They have spoken of their worries regarding cleanliness. Also, they say, the lack of doctors does not always allow for the necessary care to be given. This is why some epidemics like diphtheria threaten to spread dangerously; the sick sometimes not receiving treatment until after three or four days.\textsuperscript{444}

These reports from requisitioned workers soon stopped as leave was withdrawn in October 1943. This was because large numbers of workers had refused to return to Germany when their leave was over.\textsuperscript{445} Those who did not return became the target for police raids. Every issue of local Resistance paper, Le

\textsuperscript{441} Ibid, 40-1
\textsuperscript{442} This presumably refers to the bombing of Hamburg that took place during the last week of July 1943.
\textsuperscript{443} Two monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 20 Aug 1943, 51W70, DA
\textsuperscript{444} Weekly report by the Commissaire principal of the RG, 28 Aug 1943, 51W70, DA
\textsuperscript{445} Two monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 26 Oct 1943, 51W70, DA
Patriote, from the end of 1943 onwards, reminded those readers who were trying not to be sent back to Germany not to spend time in any public place like cafes or cinemas.\textsuperscript{446} They were right to do so as we see in the following report of a phone call made from the police station in Le Havre in February 1944:

1/ This morning at 7.00, two guardians of the peace requisitioned by the German authorities, went to the German military police. They accompanied two German police officers to look for labour conscripts who had not returned to their work. Seven of these individuals were found and sent back to the German military police.

2/ During the afternoon some armed German soldiers were placed at the doors of the Empire, Carillon and Rex cinemas. They had lorries ready at the Empire and Carillon. They arrested at the exit about 80 men aged 20-50. At the Rex they arrested 23. Forty had just been arrested at the Palace cinema.\textsuperscript{447}

Meanwhile, Sauckel continued to demand that more French people be sent to work in Germany. When the head of the RNP, Marcel Déat, was appointed to the post of Minister for Work in March 1944, the public worried that he would make sure that this happened. However, there were no more large contingents of newly requisitioned workers sent to Germany. Those who were sent in 1944 were volunteers or those caught after not returning from leave.\textsuperscript{448}

**Working for the Todt Organisation**

1942 was not only the year that saw workers being sent to Germany to work, but also the year that Havrais workers started being employed - at first voluntarily and then by force - by the Germans nearer to home, building the Atlantic Wall. This was a project overseen by the Todt Organisation (TO).

The TO was the brainchild of German engineer and prominent Nazi, Fritz Todt. Set up in 1938, it was responsible for conceiving big building projects in Germany and then commissioning private companies to undertake the work.

\textsuperscript{446} Le Patriote, Gallica, BNF
\textsuperscript{447} Telephone call from the police station, Le Havre, 17 Feb 1944, 51W71, DA
\textsuperscript{448} Arnaud, Les STO, 42-3
The TO started work in France as soon as the Occupation began. Initially it commissioned French and German firms to build the infrastructure necessary for the planned invasion of Britain: submarine bases for the Kriegsmarine and airports for the Luftwaffe. We saw in Chapter Five, how André Augeray found work as an electrician on the construction of the airfield at Octeville, just to the north of Le Havre. From spring 1942 onwards it was the building of the long stretch of coastal fortifications known as the Atlantic Wall that became its major project.\(^{449}\) The French section of the TO decided on how the Atlantic Wall would be constructed, where it would be sited and who would provide the labour, but it was still French and German firms who managed the work, either through choice or because they were requisitioned.

There were two ports on the Channel coast that the Germans recognised would be invaluable to the Allies, after a landing, in establishing their hold in France: Cherbourg and Le Havre. Cherbourg was already well-fortified whilst Le Havre was not.\(^{450}\) To rectify this, a big construction project was conceived, as part of the Atlantic Wall, forming a triangle of fortifications across the town. To the north a series of minefields were established along the coast behind which a line of bunkers were built and a battery of heavy artillery installed. To the east of the town, on the Caucrauville plateau, which provided an excellent view of the whole port and Seine estuary, four batteries were established: two with four guns each; one for shells; and one with guns that was built under a series of bunkers. Forming the third point of the triangle was another battery which was installed on the beach.\(^{451}\)

In September 1942, at least 4000 workers were employed by French and German firms working for the TO in Le Havre; by the following year, 12 000 were working along the Seine-Inférieure coastline.\(^{452}\) This number, according to the RG, included most, if not all, of the Havrais dockers; the Commissaire principal wrote in May 1943: ‘The Le Havre dockers, who numbered 4500


\(^{450}\) Godefroy, \textit{Le Havre}, 88


\(^{452}\) Malon, \textit{Occupation}, 141
before the war, are today labourers or warehousemen on the German building sites.\textsuperscript{453} Those working for the TO, however, were not just from the local area. Workers came from all over France and were housed in eight camps set up in Le Havre.\textsuperscript{454} From 1943 onwards these workers came from several sources. A decree by the Regional Prefect ordered that young people born in 1923 should work on the Atlantic Wall in Seine-Inférieure as part of the STO.\textsuperscript{455} North Africans were also recruited; some directly from North Africa, some from the Frontstalags, the prisoner-of-war camps the Germans had built in France for black and North African soldiers. In addition to this largely unskilled labour, the Germans demanded that the prefects requisition skilled workers from the building trade. By the end of 1943 many of the workers who came as part of the STO were sent to Germany to help repair flood barriers, so the TO was allowed to requisition local people to work on the Atlantic Wall sites.\textsuperscript{456}

Many workers who were requisitioned for this work were reluctant to take part. A report in January 1943 informs us that:

\begin{quote}
The workers requisitioned for this organisation [the TO] respond with difficulty to the notifications which are sent to them. This is why the 45 workers from Le Havre who were supposed to present themselves in Rouen on 15 February at the welcome centre on rue Poisson did not go until the 19\textsuperscript{th} and were missing ten people.

The police have been instructed to find the missing workers.\textsuperscript{457}
\end{quote}

The young people compelled to work as part of the STO had an even higher no-show rate. A letter from the RG in September 1943 stated that: ‘250 young people from Le Havre, born in 1923, replied to the call for their class in order to be sent to work on the Seine-Inférieure coast. The total number of those concerned being almost 600, the percentage of those not turning up is over 50\%.\textsuperscript{458} At first, working for the TO in France gave a certain amount of protection to young people in that it stopped them from being sent to Germany

\begin{footnotes}
\item[453] ‘Fichier départemental des Renseignements généraux, arrondissement du Havre 1943’, 4, 18 May 1943, 40W173, DA
\item[454] Malon, Occupation, 141
\item[455] Letter from Inspectors Le Fur and Rannou to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 22 Sept 1943, 51W70, DA
\item[456] Peter Gaida, ‘Les camps de travail de l’Organisation Todt en France’, in Chevandier and Daumas, Travailler, 242-3
\item[457] Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
\item[458] Letter from Inspectors Le Fur and Rannou to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 22 Sept 1943, 51W70, DA
\end{footnotes}
as part of the STO.\textsuperscript{459} However, following the order for all young people to work on the coast came the rumour that this would: ‘soon [be] followed by their departure to Germany.’\textsuperscript{460} This evidently discouraged young people from showing up.

Much has been written about how the STO réfractaires swelled the numbers of the Resistance, in particular the maquis. This is much more the case in the South than in a department like Seine-Inférieure which had no maquis. Indeed, Michel Baldenweck, in his research on the Resistance in Seine-Inférieure, has found that not one of the 1400 people in the department awarded the medal honouring resistance work, the croix du combattant volontaire de la Résistance, had been a réfractaire.\textsuperscript{461} The lack of resistance activity amongst these réfractaires is not necessarily a reflection of their lack of willingness to resist but more the lack of sufficient weapons with which to arm such large numbers. The local Resistance certainly did not ignore these STO réfractaires, instead it helped them. Baldenweck’s research is for the whole department and does not give details for what happened specifically to the young people escaping the STO in each town. Therefore we will have to take his research only as a guide to what probably happened to the young Havrais réfractaires. He noted that: ‘The local Resistance had to take charge of several hundred young people and, above all, try to find them false papers.’\textsuperscript{462} Some found refuge in the forests around Rouen: the Forêt domaniale de Lyons, to the east of Rouen, and the Roumare and Rouvray forests to the west.\textsuperscript{463} Many tried to find shelter and/or work in the countryside although they were not always welcome. The local Resistance paper, Le Patriote, of June 1943, appealed to farmers to be tolerant of their new lodgers. The anonymous author wrote:

\begin{center}
You are the masters of your own homes. If by chance some [of those escaping being sent to work in Germany] do not behave correctly, do not
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{459} Jérôme Prieur, Le mur de l’Atlantique: Monument de la Collaboration (Paris: Editions Denoël, 2010), 145
\textsuperscript{460} Two monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 26 Oct 1943, 51W70, DA
\textsuperscript{461} M Baldenweck, ‘De la Résistance au rétablissement de la légalité républicaine en Normandie: histoire de la Seine Inférieure (1943-1946) de l'occupation à la Libération’ (PhD dissertation, University of Rouen, 2012), 39
\textsuperscript{462} Ibid, 40
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid, 41
hesitate to use your authority, but they are, in the great majority, good
guys who are in difficulty who are only asking to be of use to you.\footnote{Le Patriote, June 1943, Gallica, BNF}

It would not be surprising if farmers found these young men from Le Havre
difficult to accommodate: they had no agricultural skills; and there had been
much bad feeling within the town regarding what was seen as the farmers’
greed with regards to the price of food.

For the workers who did show up for work on the Atlantic Wall, the camps they
were housed in were usually school buildings. This meant that the schools
themselves were closed and no education could be provided to local children
who had not yet been evacuated.\footnote{Report on the primary schools in the department from the Inspecteur de l’Académie de la Seine-Infrérieure to the Secretary for State for National Education, 11 Sept 1943, 51W70, DA}
The workers were not free to come and go but were patrolled by guards. These guards were at first recruited by the sub-
prefecture and placed under the jurisdiction of the local RG\footnote{Monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 April 1943, 51W69, DA} who were
concerned that there were: ‘a large number of extremist elements in these
camps likely to provoke the most serious trouble in case of social or political
events.’\footnote{Monthly report from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the Regional Intendant of the RG in Rouen, 20 March 1943, 51W69, DA} However, from the start of 1943 these guards were replaced by the
TO with a new type of guard. These were former members of the Légion des
volontaires français contre le bolchevisme, French men who had fought in
Russia as part of the Wehrmacht. They were given official uniforms, ‘in black
serge with the German insignia and epaulette with a white border’ and were
made responsible for the surveillance of the camps alongside the guards from
the sub-prefecture. However, they were ‘directly responsible to the central
service of the Todt Organisation in Paris and give all their information to their
chief, M Zenniger, who is French.’\footnote{Letter from Commissaire Lesénéschal to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 23 Feb 1943, 51W69, DA} This incensed the local RG who wanted to
be party to this information, especially when the TO guards were given sole
responsibility for guarding the camps later in 1943.

These TO guards were not just there for surveillance but were also given the
job of distributing propaganda to the workers, such as the German magazine,
Signal, and the collaborationist papers La France Socialiste, and Le Cri du
People. However, according to the RG: ‘the workers are not interested in what they deem to be German propaganda.’\textsuperscript{469} According to Peter Gaida, these guards also organised talks at the camps and another group called Kraft durch Freude (Strength through Joy) organised musical and theatrical tours, film showings and sporting events.\textsuperscript{470} However, in Le Havre there was just a series of dances organised by the guards. These dances took place during 1943, at one of the TO camps which was based in a boys’ school near the Atlantic Wall installation on the Cauteret plateau. Both the TO workers and local people were invited; the dances were not just for pleasure but to form a captive audience for a speech given by a member of a collaborationist group. For example at a dance in November 1943:

M Branger Jean, Social Inspector of the TO and member of the PPF gave a short speech in which he blamed Jewish capitalism and spoke about Communist influence in our Mediterranean colonies. Speaking of the Allies, the speaker declared that they were suffering severe attacks from Germany and that they were incapable of entering our territory for six months and even a year.\textsuperscript{471}

Between 30 and 120 people came to these dances. They were described as being young; 18-20 years in one report, and variously as ‘working class’\textsuperscript{472} or ‘of dubious morality.’\textsuperscript{473} It would seem they did not come for the propaganda; after M Branger had spoken, the RG inspectors reported that: ‘There was some scattered applause to the speech but the audience had come to dance and not listen to palaver.’\textsuperscript{474}

It does not appear that many of the TO workers came to the dances. The head of the local RG added a comment for the director of the RG in Vichy, at the end of a report by two of his inspectors, to say: ‘Almost everyone is united in condemning these dances, even the workers working for the TO.’\textsuperscript{475}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[469]{Letter from Commissaire Lesénéchal to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 9 June 1943, 51W69, DA}
\footnotetext[470]{Gaida, ‘Les camps’, 245-6}
\footnotetext[471]{Letter from Inspectors Lamey and Jouen to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 30 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA}
\footnotetext[472]{Letter from Inspectors Gozzi and Deltour to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 8 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA}
\footnotetext[473]{Letter from Inspectors Lamey and Jouen to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 30 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA}
\footnotetext[474]{Ibid}
\footnotetext[475]{Letter from Inspectors Gozzi and Deltour to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 8 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA}
\end{footnotes}
final dance at the end of November, the head of the RG again added a comment aimed for his superior in Vichy which said: ‘This… event, organised by M Branger, was much criticised by the good workers themselves although they know that it is PPF propaganda.’

The conditions that the workers lived in in the camps were mediocre. Whilst a school building was probably secure and fairly warm, it would seem that clothing was not provided. A report in June 1943 commented that some of the workers: ‘are dressed in worn-out and torn clothes and wear shoes which are in a very bad state.’ This report went on to say that the food served at the camp was acceptable to the workers but ‘that is not the case for the soup served at midday or in the afternoon at the worksites. The workers complain about its quality and say that it is sometimes inedible.’ According to Peter Gaida, this was a common complaint in all the TO camps. It was called the ‘soupe Todt’ and the recipe was issued from the TO headquarters. This recipe involved adding vegetables and bread to a bouillon but if these were not available then it was advised that vegetable waste be substituted. This evidently was not a suitable meal for people doing heavy construction work and it must have been difficult to carry out this work without eating a more substantial and calorific diet. Moreover, whilst accommodation was free, the workers were charged for this food at twelve francs a day out of a salary of between seven francs an hour for a labourer and twelve francs for a foreman.

Workers could be suddenly removed from their location and transferred elsewhere in France to carry out work before being brought back to continue their work in Le Havre. On 29 March 1943, 700 workers were thus affected, as we see in the following RG report:

During the afternoon of 29 March several coaches belonging to the Todt Organisation went to the various worksites in the region and took, from each of them, a certain number of workers and brought them to the camps.

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476 Letter from Inspectors Lamey and Jouen to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 30 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
477 Report by Commissaire Lesénéschal to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 9 June 1943, 51W69, DA
478 Gaida, ‘Les camps’, 244-5
479 Ibid, 244
A meal was served to them and each man received a sum of money – 300 francs for the French and 200 francs for the foreigners – then the coaches took them to the station at Le Havre where, with members of the Todt Organisation, they got onto a special train “to go to Rouen to pick up rubble” which in fact left Le Havre at 22.00 for Auxerre (Yonne).480 When the train left a few workers shouted hostile slogans, notably: “Down with Laval”.

When they arrived in Auxerre the next day at 14.00 they were taken to barracks and garages, unprepared to receive them, and the Todt Organisation collected the men’s ID cards and work cards.

From information collected, it appears that these workers were to be used building an airstrip in the Auxerre region.

427 workers came back yesterday, 16 April, at 21.00, after having been replaced on the Auxerre worksites, by labour recruited locally or in the region.481

Despite the poor conditions and the apparent presence of ‘extremist elements’ in the camps there are no reports of any trouble except that on 20 July 1943 it was reported that ‘a dozen workers working on the Todt Organisation worksites at Octeville-sur-Mer … sang the Internationale.’482 By then, many TO workers had already been removed from their camps in Le Havre and the Seine-Inférieure coast and sent to work in Germany. This was to help rebuild the dams on the Ruhr that had been destroyed by the RAF bombing raid on 17 May 1943. The destruction of the dams had led to water and electricity supplies being disrupted in this key industrial area of Germany where a high proportion of the army's munitions were being manufactured.483 Those sent were both young workers in the STO and older requisitioned workers. On 21 May at midday 400 workers were collected from various TO worksites in Le Havre and ‘gathered together at 18.00 at the harbour station where they spent the night in the train’s passenger compartments. They were surrounded by five members of the NSKK484 armed with guns and belonging, as French volunteers, to the TO.’ At the same time 250 workers were collected from TO work camps in the

480 Over 350km away from Le Havre.
481 Letter from Commissaire Lesénéchal to the Commissaire principal of the RG 16 April 1943, 51W69, DA
482 Two monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 20 Aug 1943, 51W70, DA
484 The National Socialist Motor Corps, a Nazi paramilitary organisation that had a French section made up of French volunteers.
Fécamp area. When their train was about to leave at 20.30: ‘there was a stir amongst... the conscripts and the Marseillaise was sung at the same time as several shouts against the Government. Some carriage windows were broken. The German police arrived and re-established order.’ The train finally left at 23.15.485

Two large convoys were sent on subsequent days in June 1943 and they too did not go quietly. On 17 June, 271 workers were assembled in a TO camp in Fécamp, put on coaches and driven to Dieppe where they joined a convoy of workers going to Germany. Of this number only 60 were from the STO, the rest were made up of older men aged 24 - 40 and therefore probably requisitioned skilled workers. According to the RG: ‘These men were assembled in a camp for 48 hours; they were quite nervous at the time of departure but they contented themselves with the usual shouts: “Down with the Relève”, “Down with Laval”, “Vive la France.”’486 The following day 500 men from various TO worksites in Le Havre were to be at the train station to board a special train for Germany, however, only 302 turned up. The RG reported what happened next:

A few minutes before the departure, we saw on the carriages, drawn in chalk, the croix de Lorraine and the words: “Long live free France”, “we are leaving but we will be back soon”, “Down with Laval”…

When the train set off we heard the shouts: “Long live Russia”, “Down with Laval”, “Down with the boches, we will have them”, and the singing of the Internationale.487

The day after that, yet another 500 young people from the STO in Montiviliers, a suburb of Le Havre, were sent by train to Germany.488 The sub-prefect was evidently worried about trouble occurring at the stations in Le Havre and Montiviliers as he asked the Commissaire Divisionnaire of police in Le Havre and the Gendarmerie ‘to keep order on the station platforms.’489

485 Letter from the prefect to the Head of Government, the Ministre Secrétaire d’Etat à l’Intérieure and the Direction Générale of the national police, 1 June 1943, 51W69, DA
486 Letter from the head of the RG to the Director of the RG in Vichy, and the Commissaire Divisionnaire in Rouen, 18 June 1943, 51W69, DA
487 Letter from Inspectors Petillon and Le Fur to the head of the RG, 19 June 1943, 51W69, DA
488 Letter from the head of the RG to the Director of the RG in Vichy, and the Commissaire Divisionnaire in Rouen, 18 June 1943, 51W69, DA
489 Monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 24 June 1943, 51W69, DA
We see here how Havrais workers and their families became pawns in the hands of the German army, moved from place to place in order to carry out work necessary to the German war effort. In this chapter, however, we have also seen that despite the ordeal that these workers underwent, they continued to display the signs of resilience that had been evident during the first eighteen months of the Occupation. Those sent to Germany loudly voiced their protests on the trains taking them; those meant to work on the Atlantic Wall simply did not show up; and those who were evacuated, came back home again. Common to everyone affected by these forced movements of people was a growing hatred of the occupier. This hatred meant that local resistance groups had a potentially receptive audience from which to extract support. In the next chapter we shall look at how workers’ resilience was turned, in some instances, into resistance.
Chapter 7

Workers action in Le Havre 1941 - 1944

The deportation of workers, through the *relève* and the STO, proved the catalyst for turning public opinion decisively against the Vichy government and its policy of collaboration with the occupier. In addition, the resilience that workers had shown up to this point, now became, in certain circumstances, active resistance. A minority of individual workers joined the organised Resistance, especially those groups organised by the Communists. The focus of this thesis is not so much the armed struggle carried out by these *résistants*, but the propaganda that they distributed, which called for the making of demands and acts of resistance. Workers continued to fight for better pay and conditions, despite many having no trade union and despite the introduction by Vichy of the Charte du Travail, which aimed to radically change the nature of employer-employee relations. The absence of the leaders they had previously followed, plus the severe repression against Communist militants, meant that the action that was taken failed to have the impact that workers’ action had elsewhere in the country. Nevertheless, those who organised and those who took part in this action showed huge courage, as the risks they ran were enormous.

The activities of the Communist-organised resistance will be looked at briefly before moving on to the larger subject of the action of workers in their workplaces.

The Resistance

Of the four largest Resistance networks active in Le Havre, only the Communist resistance groups actively recruited workers. Until 1943 those active in these groups had been members of the PCF before the Occupation. However, as the repression against the Resistance became more and more

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490 The three largest non-Communist groups were the SOE Salesman Circuit with 200 members; Heure H with about 115 members; and the Vagabond Bien Aimé, with 50-60 members.
acute, these members were either forced to leave Le Havre and become clandestine or were arrested, shot or deported. Fresh recruits were needed and whilst recruitment was done amongst a variety of groups – teachers, young people, shopkeepers – the largest number of new members were manual workers. From 1943, as new recruits were arrested by the Germans, it appears that there were always more who were willing to join, despite the dangers involved.\textsuperscript{491}

There were two main activities carried out by members of the Communist Resistance: participating in armed struggle; and producing and distributing propaganda targeted directly at workers.

Marie-Paule Dhaille-Hervieu gives an account of those who were involved in the Le Havre Franc-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP), the Communist-run resistance group that carried out armed struggle against the German occupier. The main people involved were metalworkers, railwaymen, lorry drivers, construction workers and sailors. From December 1941 onwards not a month went by, sometimes not a week, when they did not carry out train derailments, attacks on German soldiers or attacks on premises that Germans used.\textsuperscript{492} The train derailments were more successful than the attacks on soldiers and buildings. Soldiers were rarely killed just wounded, often only slightly or not at all. This was probably because their attackers were usually on bicycles and it was very difficult to aim whilst on a bike. The bombs that were made to damage buildings were also not very successful; a bomb thrown through the door of the Brasserie Alsacienne, a restaurant frequented mainly by Germans, damaged the door\textsuperscript{493} whilst a bomb thrown at the German bookshop on rue de la Paris only broke the window.\textsuperscript{494}

It is difficult to know what relationship the organisers of the armed struggle had with workers in their workplaces. Two incidents illustrate a link. The first is an attack on the ship repairers, Fouré Lagadec, a company that was working largely for the German navy. According to the RG, relations between

\textsuperscript{491} Dhaille-Hervieu, \textit{Communistes}, 148-155
\textsuperscript{492} Ibid, 140-154
\textsuperscript{493} Letter from the commissaire de police de permanence to the commissaire divisionnaire, 9 Jan 1943, Z28483, DA
\textsuperscript{494} Report by the commissaire de police, 21 Dec 1941, Z28483, DA
management and the workforce were tense due to perceived close relations of management with the occupier. Two RG inspectors wrote that ‘when the Relève was brought in, the management of Fouré Lagadec were the first to designate workers.’ Furthermore, when one of the owners, M Fouré, had visited the factory he:

manifested his discontent to the workers by telling them harshly that they should go work in Germany if they did not want to do reasonable work. These observations did not go down well amongst the workers at this factory where there has since reigned a certain unease against M Fouré who is considered a collaborator.\textsuperscript{495}

This incident reveals that the workers were complaining about the work that they were being given to do, suggesting an unhappy workforce. The RG inspectors wrote this report in order to learn why the factory had been the target for an act of sabotage. This took place on the evening of 12 November 1943 when four armed men broke into the factory, tied up the night watchman and left ‘a dozen time bombs’ which went off and ‘exploded in various parts of the factory breaking all the window panes and damaging lots of tools in the workshops.’\textsuperscript{496} This was a well-planned attack by people who evidently had knowledge of who would be in the factory at the time and the layout of the building. Without any further information (the police never discovered who the perpetrators were) it would appear that the factory had been targeted by résistants who were either themselves workers at the firm or knew people who worked there. If so, it follows that they knew both that the owners were deemed to be collaborators, and how best to attack the premises to hamper the work carried out there without endangering the workers.

The second incident that shows a link between the armed resistance and a particular factory workforce is less obvious, but perhaps more intriguing. We have two fragments of information regarding the rope and wire making factory, the Corderies de la Seine. The first is from an interview conducted with Claude Flandre in 2000/1. His father, Marceau Flandre, was one of the leaders of the FTP in Le Havre before being forced to flee to the neighbouring department of

\textsuperscript{495} Report by Inspectors Lamey and Le Ber to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 17 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
\textsuperscript{496} Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the Director of the RG in Vichy, 13 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
the Eure in March 1943. His son, Claude, was a member of a different resistance group made up of students. In his interview he recounted the following:

Once… I was told: “There is a militant who is going to speak at the Corderies de la Seine, tomorrow morning. You must be there to protect him.” So I warned my group, that is to say, two youngsters, and we go to the Corderies de la Seine and it was my father who was coming to speak.

Claude gave this anecdote to demonstrate how he and his father did not speak about their resistance activities with each other. However, what is intriguing is to know that a leader of the armed resistance came to this factory, over half of whose 650 strong workforce was female, to speak at a meeting. It invites many questions to which we have no answer: who was at the meeting? What was discussed? How could a meeting be held without management finding out? Marcéau Flandre had been a trade union militant before the war but in the gas industry and the Corderies workforce were in the Syndicat du Textile. We know that these workers had been militant in 1936 and 1938; if it were to encourage them to be militant once again in terms of making demands, one imagines that this would be done by someone from within their own industry. So why was one of the FTP leaders sent there? There is no mention of any resistance activity happening at this factory in the official archives besides the second fragment of information in the sub-prefect’s report in June 1943: ‘On 13 May, a woman accompanied by three individuals distributed at the exit of the Corderies de la Seine clandestine copies of L’Humanité. Investigations have not yet found out the identity of those involved.’ We do not know if the two events are linked although this distribution of L’Humanité must have occurred after the meeting since we know Flandre had had to leave Le Havre two months earlier. The meeting cannot have happened any earlier than September 1941 since neither Flandre joined the Resistance until after this date.

Marcéau Flandre mentions that one of the jobs of his resistance group was: ‘the protection of militants who were going to speak in the factories.’ Therefore we

498 Barzman, Quelque part, 67
499 Two monthly report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 24 June 1943, 51W69, DA
500 Barzman, Quelque part, 67
can assume that the meeting at the Corderies was not the only one, but I have found no mention of any other such meetings that were held. Our only other clue as to what such meetings may have discussed is also in the interview held with Claude Flandre. He recounts that when the family had to seek refuge in the Eure they were dependant on money collected by trade unionists at the gasworks in Le Havre where his father had worked and previously been the trade union secretary. It is possible then to speculate that the aim of the factory meetings was at least partly to collect money to support résistants who were in hiding and who had no other source of income.

The second activity of the Communist resistance was the production of propaganda aimed at workers, which was distributed in the working class parts of town and around the factories.

Unfortunately, we do not have any copies of locally produced editions of the Communist press after 17 May 1942. This may be because none were produced or that they were produced on a very ad hoc basis. From the last copy of the Havrais edition of La Vie Ouvrière, dated 17 May 1942, we can see that the message being targeted at the workers was to both join the armed struggle and to engage in workers’ struggle. Below the masthead, the paper exhorts its readers to: ‘Make demands; demand an increase in wages… Havrais workers, go on strike! Demonstrate! Sabotage… Form groups of franc-tireurs!’ The front page of the double-sided duplicated sheet is a political analysis of the current situation and how it affected the working class, whilst the back page addressed different groups of local workers and encouraged them to make demands over particular issues that affected them. We see from this that the local Communists were linking armed resistance with what, pre-war, would have been deemed trade union activity.

We know that, from June 1942, the national edition of La Vie Ouvrière, which is what we will presume was being distributed in Le Havre in the absence of a local version, turned its attention from trade union issues to railing against the

501 Ibid, 68
502 La Vie Ouvrière, 17 May 1942, Gallica, BNF
relève and calling on workers to join the FTP.\textsuperscript{503} However, from November until the start of 1943, the paper returned to the theme of trade union unity and to encouraging workers to make demands over pay and conditions and linking these two activities to the struggle against the relève.\textsuperscript{504}

From January 1943, the clandestine Communist party started negotiations to reunite the CGT; negotiations which concluded in April with the reintegration of the Communists into the CGT. This was a significant moment for the party as it signalled the end of its exclusion following the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939. Furthermore, now that the Syndicats group was no longer part of the CGT, having decided to collaborate, the Communists were able, unopposed, to take a prominent role in the newly formed organisation. It was also a significant step for the Communists as it demonstrated that they now acknowledged trade union activity as a resistance tactic of equal and complementary importance to armed struggle. This was reflected in the Communist papers which all through 1943 contained long descriptions of strikes and demonstrations that were taking place.

We will see below whether the encouragement by Communist propaganda to make demands had any effect on the Havrais workers. Before that though we need to look at two other circumstances that were to affect the action workers took and how it was taken; namely low wages and the Charte du Travail.

**Low wages**

In April 1943, the sub-prefect wrote in his two monthly report:

> Finally I note the important issue of wages. They are as insufficient for the workers as for the employees and low-level public servants. Every day the State gives the example of the rise in prices. The decrees and judgements coming one after the other confirm the big increases. Wages are not following these sometimes breathtakingly fast increases.\textsuperscript{505}

\textsuperscript{503} Courtois, *Le PCF*, 283–4

\textsuperscript{504} Ibid, 309

\textsuperscript{505} Report by the sub-prefect to the prefect, 23 April 1943, 51W69, DA
The problem that the sub-prefect outlines above becomes obvious when one considers that the average salary in Seine-Inférieure was 1500 francs a month in 1942 - 3 whilst a single man would have had to earn 2 700 francs a month in order to have enough to live on.\footnote{506}

One of the RG’s informers wrote a report in September 1943 which illustrates the grave situation endured by workers at this time.\footnote{507} Whilst a police informer’s report may appear a suspect source of information, I think we can accept what is written in this particular document. This is because the anonymous author is clearly an anti-Communist and is keen to impress on the RG that the Communists may well benefit from the very real suffering endured by the Havrais working class. He therefore gives concrete examples of how much it cost to live and how much money families had to spend. He writes:

Anyone who wants to make savings: savings in coal, food, time, goes to a restaurant run by the Secours National… Without his bread and his drink he will get by on 14 francs a day: 8 francs for lunch, 6 francs for dinner. He must then buy his breakfast, finish off his provision of supplies by honouring his tickets, pay his rent… etc. That is to say that the expenditure will rise very easily to 17 francs each for those who use the soup kitchens, and at least 20 francs for the others.

But some families do not have this minimum to spend; they thus have to live from day to day without being able to make provisions in advance.

The author gives some examples of how much money various differently-sized families had to live on:

A family of 9 people (father works in the town, one son at the factory, one son an apprentice painter) sees every month, including all allowances, 4920 francs: that is 18 francs 59 per day, per person…
A widow with 13 children receives 3000 francs (works at the highway department at Sanvic\footnote{508}) which gives 7 francs 14 a day…
A widow with 5 children (works at the tobacco manufacturer), 2600 francs a month, 14 francs 64 a day…
A widow with 2 children and an old man, 1300 francs a month, 10 francs 80 a day…
A family of 6 people (4 work), 4920 francs a month, 27 francs 33 a day…
A family of 2 people, 2140 francs a month, 35 francs 56 a day.

\footnote{506}{Malon, \textit{Occupation}, 148}
\footnote{507}{‘Situation des Ouvriers du Quartier de ……’ [original dots.], 1 Sept 1943, 51W70, DA}
\footnote{508}{A town just to the east of Le Havre; today a quartier within it.}
A family of 2 people (both work), 4420 francs a month, 73 francs 66 a day.

There are a few points to take from the above. The first is how little people had to live on whether we take the author’s guideline of needing at least seventeen francs a day if one was using the soup kitchen and twenty francs if not, or the much higher figure given above of 2700 francs a month. Not one of these examples is making 2700 francs per person per month and only the last three more than twenty francs each a day. The second point is that the family sizes could be very large. In a Catholic country at a time when there was no birth control this should not be surprising. However, being aware of how many mouths there were to feed makes the inadequacy of wage rates all the more obvious. Indeed, from the figures above we can see that the smaller the family the more money there is, even when several members of the larger families are in employment. The final point to take is that it was not just men who were responsible for feeding large families but women whose husbands had died. We will have to assume that the author was thinking of actual families when he wrote this and was not highlighting simply for effect the plight of widows left with large households to support. However, we have already seen how working class women could easily become widows: accidents at work and alcoholism were pre-war issues we saw in Chapter One; malnutrition, RAF bombing raids, execution or deportation were issues that came with the Occupation. Widows supporting their families through work also had to contend with wages that were lower than for male workers. For example, at the Corderies de la Seine, where out of the factory’s 650 workers 350 were women, the following wage rates applied, detailed in a report by the Commissaire principal of the RG in January 1943:

- Metalworkers: 7 francs 50 – 8 francs an hour; about 1500 francs a month.
- Rope-makers: 6 francs 50 – 7 francs an hour; about 1300-1400 francs a month.
- Women: 6 francs – 6 francs 50 an hour; about 1200-1300 francs a month.\(^{509}\)

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\(^{509}\) Report by the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 8 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
In must be pointed out that equal pay was not an issue that appears to have concerned trade unionists either before the war or when asking for higher wages during the Occupation.

The real hardship caused by low wages, combined with fury at the occupier meant that the Commissaire principal of the RG could write, in May 1943:

The result of the investigations which I have carried out is that the state of mind of the workers in Le Havre and the surrounding area is dubious, in general, if not to say, bad.

They reckon that their wages are abnormally low with respect to the general cost of living and in particular to the basic necessities. They see themselves still as bullied and the only people being sacrificed...

The occupier is still, more than ever the subject of violent criticism; [the Germans] provoke incessant recriminations and put at their door are all the misfortunes that the working class feel overwhelmed by.

The “Relève” itself contributes to maintain this state of mind, “this industrial deportation” which hits neither the supervisors nor the white collar workers is loathed by the families who see themselves separated from the head of their families often with very short notice…

This is why we must fear, under cover of international and national events… serious social movements, in a big industrial and working class centre like Le Havre.  

The possibility of these ‘serious social movements’ appears, especially in the larger workplaces, to have been influenced by the memory of 1936. For Havrais workers, the events of that year emerge in the RG’s reports as both providing a source of strength and inspiration for the workers, and a reminder to the employers of what their workforces were capable of. This is very apparent at the SNCAN (formerly known as the Breguet factory)511, where:

The memory of the agitation in 1936 and 1938 has not been erased either in the minds of the workers nor in the minds of management. Without, perhaps, wanting it individually, the workers are disposed, thanks to indeterminate social events, to again participate in this agitation, whilst management above all fear the consequences which could result, even if these demonstrations were short-lived.  

510 “Fichier départemental des Renseignements généraux, arrondissement du Havre 1943”, 79, 40W173, DA

511 The Breguet factory had been nationalised in 1937 and become part of the Société Nationale de Constructions Aéronautiques du Nord (SNCAN).

512 Report by the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 6 April 1943, 51W69, DA
At the scrap metal processors and dealers, the Etablissements Lepage Frères et filiales, Inspector Cariou of the RG informed the *Commissaire principal* that:

‘Management has fear for tomorrow, for there are many workers who say: “After the war we will have a second ’36, and we look forward to doing it.”’⁵¹³ And the report by an informer at the CEM commented that after a protest held at the factory in January 1944, the workers ‘were saying between themselves, with real pleasure, “that they had maintained their cohesion against the boss like in 1936.”’⁵¹⁴

Workers may well have been reminded of 1936 by the low wages that they had endured both in the 1930s and now, in 1943. However, unlike 1936, the situation regarding workers’ organisation was very different. This was due to the Charte du Travail.

**The Charte du Travail**

Vichy published the Charte du Travail in October 1941. This was a major piece of legislation which articulated Pétain’s desire to eradicate conflict between workers and employers. Indeed, as Jean-Pierre Le Crom points out, the authors of the report that introduced the Charte, claimed ‘that it is more than a text of law, it is “an element of belief”, realising the aspiration of a new order.’⁵¹⁵ The Charte abolished all independent trade unions. As Le Crom explains: ‘The avowed objective of this ban is to combat the one-upmanship and rabble-rousing promises that diversity favours. In the mind of the Charte’s authors, employees, poorly educated and unaware of economic constraints, tend to follow the most impassioned leaders, the “loud mouths”, which favours extremist organisations.’⁵¹⁶

The Charte also removed legal status from the ULs and the UDs. In their place new trade unions would be established, one for each type of work and each rank of job; workers, technicians, administrative staff etc. Membership would be

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⁵¹³ Inspector Cariou to the *Commissaire principal* of the RG, 21 April 1943, 51W69, DA
⁵¹⁴ Info from Informer no 11, 31 Jan 1944, 51W71, 2285
⁵¹⁵ Le Crom, *Syndicats*, 146
⁵¹⁶ Ibid, 147
compulsory, although it was possible to be expelled, and these unions could not negotiate salaries. This new system based on different areas of work, metallurgy, textiles, transport etc., removed the co-operation between unions that had been the feature of the ULs, UDAs and, indeed, the national confederations, like the CGT, that had lost their legal status in August 1940. Vichy saw this cooperation as having been the main instigator of class struggle by its ability to generalise demands and grievances.517

Whilst Vichy believed that abolishing independent trade unions, and their confederal way of working, would remove the need for class struggle, the Charte also reiterated the ban on the tools of such struggle: strikes and lock-outs. As Le Crom points out, these had been banned by the Germans in the Occupied Zone as soon as they had arrived in May 1940, and again, in November 1941, when they issued a ruling outlining punishments up to and including the death penalty for anyone who disturbed “the peace, at work, in any way at all.”518

The main vehicle for the new way of working, which would remove the combative style of pre-war labour relations i.e. workers versus management, was the comité social. These committees were to be made up of representatives from management, technicians and foremen, and workers, all chosen by the new trade unions. These committees would exist in the workplace, at a local and at a national level. Nationally they would fix wages and terms and conditions; locally they would solve workplace disputes.

Knowing the importance placed by trade unionists on being independent of the state and of political parties, on having the right to free and fair representation, and to being able to negotiate wages and collective agreements, one would imagine that the Charte du Travail would have been anathema to pre-war trade union leaders. However, those who had been part of the Syndicats group publicly accepted it. Jean Le Gall, nominally the general secretary of the USOH but running the Fédération des Ports et Docks in Paris, publicly supported the

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517 Ibid, 149
518 Ibid, 150
Charte. Labour historian, Michel Pigenet writes that Le Gall signed his name to a public appeal published on 1 May 1942 in which:

he expressed all at the same time his “attachment” to the Charte, a few criticisms of it, and emphasised the adherence of trade unionism to a freedom inseparable from “discipline” and “order”. The text proclaimed the “pride” of the signatories in the traditions of the workers’ movement, notably its campaigns to bring different peoples together – against the Treaty of Versailles, for Munich…-, then condemned “all the attacks and the acts of violence which aim to stir up trouble” before wishing for reconciliation “in a new and peaceful Europe.”

When called upon after the Liberation by the Commission nationale de reconstitution des organisations syndicales, the body charged with purging the trade union movement of collaborators, to explain his collaboration, Le Gall wrote:

Like all the other industrial Federations affected by the law of 4 October 1941 called the Charte du Travail, the national Fédération des Ports et Docks was invited to enforce the law. The Fédération proposed candidates, as it had been asked to, of which I was one. The comrades who had been proposed were instructed to remain involved and to delay as much as possible the implementation of the Charte.

Trade unionists who had decided to work with Vichy claimed they did so because they felt that, in so doing, they could still gain advantages for the workers. One can speculate as to whether their strategy was correct given that the Charte du Travail was never fully implemented. Whether this was due to their delaying tactics, or to the mistrust shown by many employers towards the legislation, or to any other number of reasons is not fully known. What we can do is agree with Michel Pigenet when he points out, that publicly supporting the government meant making more and more dangerous compromises. He writes: ‘Many [active members of legal trade unions] did not understand or understood too late how the policy of accommodation meant that they crossed the line, unforgivably, of compromise and complicity with the Vichy regime, even with the occupier.’

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520 Letter from Jean Le Gall to Lucien Jayat, President of the Commission nationale de reconstitution des organisations syndicales, 27 Nov 1944, 95 CFD 4, Institut d’histoire social, CGT, Paris
In Le Havre, workers were either uninterested or frankly hostile to the Charte. In January 1942 the prefect of Seine-Inférieure wrote to his sub-prefect to ask how the publication of the Charte du Travail had been received by workers in Le Havre. He replied that the workers ‘only have quite a rudimentary idea’ of what the Charte entailed. He went on: ‘Only the former leaders of the unions, who have stayed in contact with their Federations and who receive from them clarifications and directives, have a more precise opinion on the social organisation laid down by the Charte and on the role that the professional trade unions will play.’ This suggests that those workers who had been members of unions who had been disbanded due to their supposed Communist influence were seen as the most opposed to the Charte. This was either because they had no accurate information passed on to them by their Federations, as the sub-prefect would have it, or because they saw the Charte for the attack on workers’ rights that it was.

The sub-prefect went on to say that the workers were not interested in the Charte’s principles. Instead ‘the preoccupation, if not the only preoccupation, of the workers is to obtain qualified representation at the heart of the various organisations instituted by the Charte.’ Whilst the legislation “creates institutions able to produce an atmosphere which is more favourable to creating justice for all and prosperity for everyone”’ the sub-prefect wrote, ‘the publication of the Charte has raised concerns amongst both workers and employers [and] the favourable atmosphere has not been created.’ However, he added:

> If one can hope that, in certain professions in Le Havre, putting it into place will be done without much difficulty, this is because relations between employers’ organisations and workers’ were, from 1937, satisfactory and that a reciprocal trust allows them to take advantage of a text which, considering the terrain on which it lands will produce either discord or peace.\(^{522}\)

Again, this suggests that those workers whose unions had been dissolved, in particular, the metalworkers, would be hostile to the implementation of the Charte. It also suggests that, according to the sub-prefect, the Charte would be

\(^{522}\) Letter from the sub-prefect to the prefect, 12 Feb 1942, 51W67, DA
unenforceable if there were not already good relations between employers and workers.

**The comités sociaux d’entreprises**

Whilst the Charte de Travail was a very comprehensive piece of legislation, it appears that it was almost impossible to put in place. By 1943 none of it had yet been widely implemented, except for the comités sociaux d’entreprises, or workplace committees. As Le Crom explains:

> In theory, these should have been the last institutions of the Charte to be put in place since their composition was supposed to be agreed to by the local comités sociaux which had to be created first. In reality they were the first to see the light of day, the administration tolerating the creation ahead of time of provisional committees “in order to facilitate good will.”  

The workplace committees were for companies with more than a hundred employees. In Le Havre, most factories of this size had one by 1943 and they were instrumental in providing services to the workforce. The RG reports on individual workplaces give an account of the work of these committees. Some of this work was quite modest in scope, as at the building company, Camus & Cie, where, the Commissaire principal wrote:

> A comité social was created in 1941 and is made up of six people: the director, an office head, a foreman, an accountant and two workers, who meet every fortnight and try to ease the hardship of eighteen prisoners (company employees) as well as the situation of those who are temporarily facing difficulties. The relief fund is fed by a contribution of 1% of people’s wages and 1000 francs a month from management.

However, other workplace committees oversaw a much larger range of activities. At the SNCAN (formerly the Breguet factory):

> A Comité Social was created in February 1942 and it is comprised of fourteen people: the Director, the assistant to the Director…, the head of personnel, a foreman, a team leader, two technicians, two workers, the social assistant and four members representing the staff groups: the gardens, big families, prisoners, and sports.

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523 Le Crom, Syndicats, 317
524 Report by the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 6 April 1943, 51W69, DA
In principal this committee meets twice a month, once in a preparatory session, and once as a full meeting in order to avoid all lazy discussion. Every day a canteen serves 550 meals for 10 - 12 francs and a refectory has been installed for those workers who wish to bring their own food. A mutual aid commission has been created with a hardship fund for those workers who are temporarily in difficulty. A collective garden of three hectares on the outskirts of the factory produced, in 1942, potatoes and vegetables which supplied the canteen or which were sold to workers’ families, and 100 individual gardens of 200 - 300 square metres were shared out. Finally, it should be mentioned that a food co-operative will be established soon to get foodstuffs to workers at cost price.\footnote{525 Report by the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 6 April 1943, 51W69, DA}

Whilst these seem like useful and necessary services in a period where food was expensive and in short supply and therefore a happy outcome of the Charte du Travail, other workplaces made similar provisions without the need for a workplace committee. At the metalworking factories, Béliard and Caillard, which had the same administration, management provided a canteen and allotments ‘without’, as the Commissaire principal wrote, ‘the preliminary creation of a comité social as laid out in the Charte de Travail.’\footnote{526 Report by the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 24 February 1943, 51W69, DA} At the three building and scrap metal companies run by the Etablissements Lepage Frères et Filiales, the director created a mutual aid committee in May 1942, which by April 1943 had 352 members. Members benefitted from 90 allotments, and a five hectare plot of land in Gonneville-la-Mallet, just outside of Le Havre, which provided both them and a canteen with vegetables. Inspector Cariou of the RG wrote:

Management have just built a modern building including a kitchen, dining rooms, toilets, showers, a meeting room, a reading room, and an infirmary where there are two free weekly consultations a week. A workers’ co-op is also envisaged. All of this is constructed over a concrete shelter which can hold 300 people and has an infirmary.\footnote{527 Report by Inspector Cariou to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 21 April 1943, 51W69, DA}

One may have assumed that workers would have been pleased with these services. At the three metalworking factories run by the Tréfileries et Laminoirs,
the Commissaire principal wrote that the canteen and subsidised shop run by the workplace committee ‘seems even to be appreciated by the majority of workers.’ The use of the word ‘even’ seems telling as at both the SNCAN and the Etablissements Lepage Frères which had the most comprehensive array of services, the workers were reported as not happy. In the latter, Inspector Cariou wrote: ‘Despite these good works, initiated by the young energetic director M Maurice Lepage, and despite the comparatively high wages; the state of mind of the workers is mediocre.’ At the SNCAN where the services were provided by a workplace committee, the Commissaire principal wrote that it was the fact that they were not being represented on this committee by their chosen representatives that exasperated the workforce.

In December 1943, the worker delegates to the workplace committees had an opportunity to voice their concerns at a study day run by the Office des Comités Sociaux. Inspector Castebert of the RG gave the Commissaire principal an account of the day. In the morning there were three meetings held at the same time, one for company directors, one for about 50 managers and the other for a hundred workers. Inspector Castebert wrote of the directors’ meeting that it ‘was presided over by M Bezin, director of the Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée, assisted by M Romieu, Director General of the Office des Comités Sociaux. It was strictly private and we can only know that several bosses spoke about what the comités sociaux have done within their own companies.’ The managers’ meeting had ‘an exchange of views’ and came up with four uncontroversial conclusions which mainly said that meetings like this were good and that they would like more information to be distributed about the Charte du Travail and the comités sociaux ‘whose organisation and remit are still not fully known.’

As for the workers, the Inspector wrote, ‘the meeting was livelier.’ This is his account of the discussion regarding how their respective companies had taken to the idea of having workplace committees:

Opinions were much divided. The worker delegate from the Evers factory in Epouville, [just outside Le Havre] (asbestos, 185 workers)… declared that at his factory all the members of the comité social had

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528 Report by the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 8 Jan 1943, 51W69, DA
resigned because what they achieved was nothing, the delegates had been named by management, and the workers did not want charity but the means to live with dignity.

- The workers' representative from the Caillard factory in Le Havre (ship repairers, 525 workers), declared that at his factory the comité social did not even exist.

- The workers' delegate from the SNCAN (aeronautical manufacturers, 980 workers) regretted that management, in many cases, had the audacity to sabotage the organisation of the comités sociaux. At the SNCAN, in particular, management had refused to accept, on three different occasions, the delegate elected by the workforce. Moreover, it was to be noted that the issue of wages, the workers’ main preoccupation, could not be discussed during the comité social meetings.

- On the other hand, the workers delegates from the Maison Worms (coal, 50 workers), Electro-Mécanique (970 workers), Fourre et Lagadec (metallurgy, 176 workers) and the Teinturiers du Point-Noir (50 workers) recognised that the comités sociaux in their companies had made undeniable achievements when it came to mutual aid.

There are two interesting points to take from this. One was that the worker from the Caillard factory seemed resentful that there was no workplace committee at his factory despite the fact that, as we saw above, a canteen and allotments had been provided by management without the need for one. It gives the impression that he thought his workplace was missing out. And yet those who do have the committees in place are themselves aggrieved that there was no democratic selection of workers’ representatives nor ability to discuss wages.

The afternoon session was a series of talks about the Charte du Travail during which the Inspector commented that: ‘the public were beginning to lose attention and lots of workers left the room.’

From what the Inspector could gather, it would seem that the study day had done little, if anything, to convince both workers and directors that the Charte du Travail was a worthy project. The Inspector wrote:

According to the initial reactions gathered during the course of conversations which followed the meeting, it seems that the workers, whilst sometimes recognising the usefulness of the comité social d’entreprise from the point of view of mutual aid, were disappointed at not being allowed to speak about their trade unions and, thus, their wages, which is their sole preoccupation.

As for the bosses, they seem to consider, in the main, that they already make a big effort in favour of the comités sociaux and do not seem to believe in a total and imminent enforcement of the Charte du Travail.
which they consider as a complex entity whose operation will be hard work.

The Commissaire principal added his own comment at the end of this report which was then sent on to the Director of the RG in Vichy:

This study day had little impact on the workers who were disappointed at not being able to raise the issue of wages which is the only issue they have at heart.
They want, they say, a wage sufficient to allow them to live with dignity and in their own way, and not charity even in a material form.
On their side, the employers tend to envisage as problematic or at least a long way away, the strict application of the Charte du Travail that they persist in considering as a transitory entity especially in what concerns the trade unions of which they have a bad memory from the years 1936 to 1938, which the workers alone care about.  

From the account of this study day we can see that despite the government’s desire to see the end of class struggle and to promote new ways of collaborative working between workers and their directors, there was no similar desire to be found amongst employers and their workers. Regardless of all that had happened between 1938 and 1943, the Havrais, whether working class or management, were still ensconced in the memory of pre-war trade union activity. The employers might wish for the end of independent trade unions, but they knew too well what they were capable of achieving to believe that the government could easily get rid of them. The workers, on their side, also remembered what their unions had achieved and were determined not to give them up. As the Commissaire principal so clearly recognised, workers wanted their unions back, with leaders that they chose, who could negotiate adequate wages with which they could themselves provide for their families. They wanted this and not the provision of what they saw as charity: canteens and allotments.

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529 Report by Insp Castebert to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 6 Dec 1943, 51W70, DA
Workers’ action

Looked at below, will be the main protest carried out by Havrais workers – on 11 November 1943 – which was clearly an act of resistance. However, before that, some smaller disputes shall be examined, which appear to be solely about the making of demands and yet may well have also been acts of resistance. This is because, as was seen above, in 1943 the clandestine CGT and PCF were asking workers to make demands and equating this type of action with the armed struggle.

The first of these disputes was at the Schwartz et Hautmont firm. This was a Parisian company employed to dismantle the oil refinery, Standard Française des Pétroles in Port-Jérôme, following the burning of the petrol reserves there in June 1940 at the time of the exode. This work employed 150 men: 110 of whom were specialists and technicians and 40 were labourers from the local area. In his report, Commissaire Camps of the RG commented that: 'Most of [these workers] have worked for the company for a long time already, are known by their bosses, are conscientious workers but who have often kept a combative spirit from before the war.'

On 19 July, 29 workers assembled at 7am in front of the punch-clock at their worksite and waited for the two engineers in charge to arrive. When they did, two of the workers presented them with a list of demands which they said they had won when they had previously worked for the company in Dunkirk. Amongst other demands was one for an allowance for dirty work and another for having the costs of their accommodation reimbursed. As Commissaire Camps noted: ‘the German authorities have installed barrack buildings paid for by the company but a good number of workers, finding this accommodation not very comfortable, have preferred to rent, from private individuals, rooms that they would like to see reimbursed by their employers.’

The workers went on strike for 45 minutes while they discussed these demands with the engineers and then they went back to work.

\[530\] Report by Commissaire Camps to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 20 Oct 1943, 51W70, DA
None of the demands were granted. Instead, the director of Schwartz et Haumont asked the Inspector of Work to transfer fifteen of the workers that he felt were responsible for the demands being made, to TO worksites elsewhere in the country. On 22 August the fifteen were assigned to the TO in Brest but as of 7 October, when the report was written, none of them had yet shown up.\(^\text{531}\)

Then, on 15 October, a handwritten letter was passed around the worksite and 58 workers signed it. It was addressed to the company director and made various demands, including an increase in wages, free soap, and a paid half hour to have a snack. *Commissaire* Camps reported:

\begin{quote}
This letter was sent to Paris and deemed by the management of the worksites as unacceptable in its form and content. The engineer responsible for Schwartz-Haumont has published a reply to all these demands and has announced that there will be an investigation into who was behind this letter as sanctions will be taken against the leaders.\(^\text{532}\)
\end{quote}

Pre-war, these actions would have been described as trade union activity. Now there was no trade union, the union of oil refinery workers having been disbanded in 1939 because of perceived Communist influence. Yet the action is clearly influenced by trade union tactics. It was led by workers who, although they had no official representative role, acted as if they did; they made a list of demands; and they took strike action. None of this was accompanied by any anti-Occupation propaganda and yet it fits with what the clandestine Communist and CGT press were asking workers to do: make demands. I believe it can therefore be classed as an act of resistance. This is even more the case in that in going on strike, the workers had broken the law and risked serious repercussions.

Harder to classify were go-slows. These are often more inferred by what is written in the RG reports than actually named as workers’ action. For that reason there is no indication given as to how they were organised. For example, in a report, in April 1943, on three building companies owned by the Lepage family, Inspector Cariou from the RG wrote: ‘despite the comparatively high wages, the state of mind of the workers is mediocre and the productivity is

\(^{531}\) Report by *Commissaire* Camps to the *Commissaire principal* of the RG, 7 Oct 1943, 51W70, DA

\(^{532}\) Report by *Commissaire* Camps to the *Commissaire principal* of the RG, 25 Oct 1943, 51W70, DA
a quarter of what it was before the war.\textsuperscript{533} This low productivity rate could have been simply the result of a lack of enthusiasm for the work or a decision to go on a go-slow.

At the German building company Oltch et Cie, its 900 workers, according to the informant there, were promised a bonus of 50 hours’ worth of wages if they completed, by 1 February 1944, a project to build a dome which would bear a large piece of artillery. Instead of a go-slow, in this case, it would appear that the workers continued to work at their previous pace, despite the bribe, and the dome was not completed in time. The workers felt able to make this kind of passive protest despite working for a company that was punitive towards its workers: workers were searched on leaving the building site and fined if found with a piece of wood or coal that they were taking home; they were also fined 200 francs if they refused to work on a Sunday.\textsuperscript{534}

Go-slows at another building company, Grieux et Fils, however, appear to be in response to a given directive. Inspector Castebert of the RG wrote: ‘the mood of the workers is rather bad and the directors have noticed several times slow-downs of work on the building sites that seem to have come from an order somewhere.’\textsuperscript{535}

 Practically all the work carried out by the construction industry was for the German army. However, whether workers at these companies were taking action because of the directives given in the Communist press; or whether they had decided on their own to impede the German war effort; or whether it was simply due to frustration at poor conditions is not known.

Now we come to the main display of workers’ action taken in Le Havre during the Occupation. Whilst it stands out in comparison with other smaller actions taken locally by workers, it is not as large or perhaps as striking as actions taken by workers elsewhere in France. This points partly to the absence of the leaders that workers had respected and followed before the war, discussed

\textsuperscript{533} Report by Insp Cariou to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 21 April 1943, 51W69, DA
\textsuperscript{534} Report by Informer no 20, 31 Jan 1944, 51W71, DA
\textsuperscript{535} Report by Insp Castebert to the Commissaire principal of the RG, 10 June 1943, 51W69, DA
above in this thesis, and partly to the very dangerous circumstances that
Communists, in particular, faced in Le Havre at this time. Many Communist
trade unionists who had been active in their workplaces before the Occupation
had by now had to leave Le Havre, or had been arrested, shot or deported.
Those who were still present ran very serious risks, as shall be seen below.

11 November 1943

The PCF in Seine-Inférieure asked all resistant groups to carry out "patriotic
demonstrations" on 11 November 1943, the 25th anniversary of the Armistice
that ended the First World War. At the same time the BBC invited French
workers to commemorate the 11 November by stopping work for an hour, from
11am to midday. Two days before the 11th, the Commissaire principal of the
RG wrote to the sub-prefect to tell him that, according to the information that he
had received: 'in the factories... and the main industrial centres', the 11
November would be marked only with small gestures like 'a tricolour flag with a
croix de Lorraine placed on the top of a public building.' However, he added:
'There is not the same to be feared in other towns in the arrondissement.'
There would be no strikes in the factories because, he said: 'in most of the
factories that have a canteen the first lunch service begins at 11.30.'

On 11 November the gendarmerie reported that someone had indeed placed a
flag on the top of a public building, specifically the building which housed the
offices of the RG. Moreover, the Commissaire principal of the RG had to
admit to his superior in Vichy that, in fact, there had been activity all over the Le
Havre region. Activity in the town itself had begun early in the morning.
Leaflets had been stuck on walls or left on pavements and strips of paper with
the words: 'French people! Today, 11 November 1943, demonstrate by not
working from 11.00 – 12.00!' were attached to a urinal and an electric pylon
near many of the biggest factories.

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536 Dhaille-Hervieu, Communistes, 150-1
537 Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to the sub-prefect, 9 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
538 'Communication de la Gendarmerie', 11 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
539 Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to Director of the RG in Vichy, 11 Nov 1943,
51W70, DA
The order to strike had been obeyed in the following workplaces:

- The Chantiers de Graville where its 384 workers struck from 11.15 to 11.45 except for seventeen people who worked in the fitting workshop.
- At the CEM all 949 workers struck from 11 to 12 except in the carpentry workshop where the twenty men there observed a minute’s silence.
- At the SNCAN the 969 workers stopped work from 11 to 12.
- At the Chantiers Augustin Normand the 893 workers stopped work from 11 to 11.30.
- At the Caillard factory all 519 workers struck from 11 to 12.
- At the Beliard factory the 267 workers struck from 11 to 12.
- And at the Fonderies Havraises all 80 workers stopped work from 11 to 11.15.

Some other workplaces did not strike but marked the event in their own way. The entire workforce at the department store, Magasin du Printemps, and all except one of the 420 workers at the building firm, Etablissements Lepage Frères, observed a minute’s silence. At the shipbuilders, Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée, of its 815 workers only twelve from the foundry stopped work 11 – 11.30 but a power cut from 11.35 to 11.45 stopped the rest of the workforce from working. Whether this was a happy coincidence or a deliberate ploy to enable the strike to occur without any repercussions is not known. It is interesting to note that the workers at the Fouré Lagadec factory did not mark the day at all but that the bombing of their factory, outlined above, took place the following day. We must question whether they knew that the attack was scheduled for then and therefore did not want to bring any attention to their factory beforehand in case it prevented the sabotage from taking place.

Beside the events above, the *Commissaire principal* noted that:

> a certain number of workers, wearing their work clothes, walked conspicuously for a few moments between 11 and midday in the roads in the centre of Le Havre as well as a few saleswomen…

Between 11 and midday quite a dense crowd stood in the vicinity of the war memorial in Le Havre and a good number of people, after having removed their hats, observed a few seconds of silence and then moved off.
These actions had evidently been well planned and yet the RG had neither predicted them nor caught anyone preparing for them. This takes us back to the discussion above regarding how much the *Commissaire principal* of the RG knew about resistance activity in Le Havre. His apparent inability to predict such a range of events happening on this one day would point to him either having very unreliable sources of information or being somehow involved in the activity himself.

Even more interesting, in terms of the focus of this thesis, is to speculate on the level of organisation required to carry out these strikes. There must have been at least one person in each workplace with the authority and respect to spread the word that the strike call would be followed. We saw in Chapter Five that in 1941, when the Syndicat de Métaux was still functioning legally, a union militant was assigned to each of the four big factories in Le Havre to organise resistance: Louis Richard at the Tréfileries et Laminoirs; Eugène Thépot at Augustin Normand; René Baheux at the CEM; and Louis Le Flem at the SNCAN. By November 1943, the first two men were in Auschwitz, having been deported at the same time as Louis Eudier. The latter two were still in place and may well have been responsible for the strikes in their workplaces. In fact, whilst we do not know how action was organised in the other factories, we do have an insight into what happened in the SNCAN, where the strike on the 11th was accompanied by the making of demands.

All the workers at the SNCAN went on strike but, unlike the other factories in Le Havre, they used this act of resistance against the Occupation to make their own demands to management. The *Commissaire principal* of the RG wrote that during the strike hour: ‘a delegation of a few members of the workforce presented themselves to M Lechenet, Director of the establishment, to ask him to get together with the *Comité Social* in order to present him with certain demands of the workforce.’ However, Lechenet refused, saying: ‘that the *Comité Social* had just met recently and that he did not want to listen to complaints in an atmosphere of threat or coercion.’

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540 Ibid
What this delegation had done seems to correspond to the clandestine CGT and PCF’s strategy of asking workers to make demands, discussed above. We know that besides Louis Le Flem, one of the leaders of the *Jeunesse Communistes au Havre*, Ernest Rault, was working at the factory\textsuperscript{541} and that one of the workers’ representatives on the *comité social*, André Gauthier, had two brothers who were Communists. One was Charles Gauthier, a fitter who worked at the shipbuilders Chantiers Augustin Normand,\textsuperscript{542} the other, Henri Gauthier had been a prominent Communist in Le Havre in the 1920s before leaving the town to continue his political activities elsewhere in France. He was a member of the Communist resistance, ran the clandestine Fédération des Métaux and died in 1945 in unknown circumstances after being imprisoned in a number of concentration camps.\textsuperscript{543}

We also know that although almost all the union representatives at the Breguet factory were sacked after the 30 November 1938 general strike, it was not as many union militants as had lost their jobs in other factories in Le Havre. This suggests that there were still a number of militants within the factory. Given that the work at the plant was highly skilled, the workers tended to remain in post as it was not easy for management to replace them. So at this point the workforce was the same one that had occupied their factory in 1936, and had spent the months and years following May - June 1936 in continuing to fight for what they saw as their due. Indeed, as was seen above, the RG had noted that the memory of 1936 was still very much present in the memory of the SNCAN workforce.

Two days after 11 November, the workers repeated an action they had carried out in July 1937, which was recounted in Chapter Two. This was when the Le Havre metalworkers sent trade union delegations to their directors with letters to ask them to look again at their claim for increased wages due to the increase in the cost of living. This time, however, the delegation did not come from the union, there being no union, but the *comité social*. And they did not take just one letter, but ten letters with demands from all sections of the workforce.

\textsuperscript{541} Dhaille-Hervieu, *Communistes*, 152-4
\textsuperscript{542} Information from Informer no 2, 31 Jan 1944, 51W71, DA
including the workers, foremen and technicians.544 As was noted in Chapter Two, before the war the white collar workers had been closer to the shop floor workers than to management, and this relationship continued into the Occupation. All sections of the factory had roughly the same demands, the main one being an increase in pay to cope with the rise in the cost of living. However, they had other demands which reveal the harshness of the regime within the factory, despite the provision of a canteen and allotments. It appears that when there was an air raid warning the workforce was not paid for the time spent taking refuge in a bomb shelter. All the sections demanded to be paid for this time. There was also a system of fines in place which, again, all sections asked to be ended.545

The delegation went to see Lechenet three days later to receive his response to their demands. He told them that he could not agree to them. He also reminded them that they earned more than other workers in Le Havre and that they could earn even more because of a recent introduction of performance-related pay. The director also used this meeting to refute the criticism that the factory was helping the German war effort by building parts for seaplanes, saying: seaplanes are ‘for saving lives, whoever they are.’546 It is not clear in the archives when and by whom this criticism was made. But the fact that he used this meeting to refute it suggests that it was during 11 November, either by the workers themselves or by the propaganda that was distributed that day.

The workers responded to this refusal by deciding to reduce their productivity by one hour of work which resulted in the factory losing about 800 hours of work a day.

In the events of 11 November and the few days after, we can see workers remaining attached to the idea of trade union organisation, even when there was no trade union. The workers at the SNCAN were attempting to turn the comité social into a quasi-trade union that they could use to represent their grievances. Almost all the workplaces that took action on the 11th had been members of the Syndicat des Métaux, which had been disbanded in 1941.

544 Commissaire principal of the RG to the Director of the RG in Vichy, 13 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
545 Copies of the letters to the factory director, 11 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
546 Commissaire principal of the RG to the Director of the RG in Vichy, 17 Nov 1943, 51W70, DA
However, there were still unions operating in Le Havre and it is useful to see what they were doing in contrast with workers at the SNCAN.

The trade unions still operating in Le Havre

Despite the proposal of the Charte to abolish existing trade unions and ULs, the USOH and the unions led by the leaders of the USOH, the COSI and their allies continued to operate during the Occupation. If one looks through the archive for the lorry workers’ union, whose general secretary was Maurice Hauguel, the treasurer of both the USOH and COSI, one can see correspondence from members asking for help with individual work problems; thank-yous from families who had received financial help from the union; letters to employers, the Inspector of Work and various lawyers regarding issues over wage parity and non-payment of holiday pay; and adverts in the local paper reminding members of their office hours and the allowances that the union could pay. In a reply to a letter from a member who had been evacuated to Angers and wanted news from home as he was feeling isolated in his new job, one can see both how apolitical was the work conducted by this union and how little there was to do given the lack of employment for its members. Hauguel wrote:

The activity of our union follows its course; as in the past, our union tries hard to serve its constituents on a strictly corporative terrain which displeases those who do not think like us, but that’s how it is. The work in lorry driving is quite limited since the port receives no goods. It is limited to some transport from the station, shops and clearing rubble.547

Alphonse Gréaume, the secretary of the union of warehouse men and one of the two inspectors in the COSI leadership, conducted some lengthy communication with employers and the Inspector of Work over issues to do with pay, some of which continued from before the Occupation. He began a correspondence in December 1939 over the non-payment of wages for public holidays which continued until August 1941. The issue was never resolved. A series of letters regarding the non-application of the collective agreement

547 Letter from Maurice Hauguel to Marcel L’Enfant, 17 June 1941, 5Z238, MA
regarding the wages of workers at a refrigerated warehouse company took up half of 1942 but that too was left unsettled.

Most of this type of correspondence reads as if the issues being discussed were not happening during a period of Occupation. They are simply the day-to-day concerns of union officials and the implementation of points of legislation. The most glaring example of this lack of reference to the outside world comes in the archive for the union of workers responsible for the machinery infrastructure at the port. On 27 July 1944 the union's secretary wrote to the German engineer involved with the running of the port:

We are writing to alert you that the management of the Kriegsmarine Barraufscicht has decided to give workers working directly or indirectly for them an increase in salaries of 20% backdated to 6 June 1944. The staff of the Port employed by your services work with workers who depend on the Kriegsmarine Barraufscicht, and do not benefit from the same advantages. We would be grateful if it is possible to examine our request so that our members can also be remunerated on the same basis.548

Here, we have the union looking for a parity in wages with workers working for the German navy who have had a pay increase dating from D-Day, with no apparent acknowledgement of what was currently happening in the war.

The leaders of the USOH did not only represent the workers of their own particular unions; they continued to assist other unions with their disputes, as they had done before the Occupation. This was the case when they represented the Syndicat des Tramways in their attempts to achieve a pay rise. Whilst doing this they did, for once, acknowledge the unusual times they were living in. In a letter to the sub-prefect in September 1941 they wrote:

From the rates of pay that you showed us, even after 20 years of service the pay could be seen as an abnormally low wage... The employees do not ask more than to bring, in the sad state that our town struggles, their loyal cooperation and even, if they are compelled to work more than 45 hours, to do it unreservedly, but they are keen that this extra work be remunerated as the law dictates.549

548 Letter from the Syndicat Général du Port Autonome to Docteur Ingénieur Everling Marinebauant, 25 July 1944, 5Z291, MA
549 Letter to the sub-prefect from the USOH, 17 Sept 1941, 5Z278, MA
Despite this very collaborative approach, the issue of a pay increase was still not fully resolved by February 1944, a full two and a half years later. Despite this, the Commissaire principal of the RG pointed out to his superior in Vichy:

> What should be noted... is how much the workforce of the Cie des Tramways du Havre, which numbers almost 500, is still attached to the idea of the trade unions of yesteryear and I have stressed this in my latest report in giving the details of the accord between the USOH and the Syndicat des Tramways.550

The contrast between those who organised the action at the SNCAN, described above, and the leaders of the USOH and COSI is very clear. The latter were conducting union work on a very administrative apolitical basis with no attempts to involve the members in fighting for their demands. In effect, they were leaders solely in name whilst the former provided actual leadership in that they involved the whole workforce in making demands and cleverly tied a range of demands to a display of resistance against the Occupation. The desire to have leaders who truly represented them was very deep within Havrais workers, as we saw above. We shall see below that workers were prepared to take action to be represented by delegates they had chosen, whether as part of a genuine trade union or simply on the comité social.

**Action over workers’ representation**

Workers at the Chantiers Augustin-Normand were not interested in trying to turn their comité social into a quasi-trade union, like the workers at the SNCAN; they just wanted their trade union back. In January 1944, when management tried to find candidates for seven positions on the comité social they asked men who had previously been CGT delegates. These men refused to stand after what the factory informer said was ‘pressure from their comrades.’ The informer went on to say that: ‘A secret command has been launched at the worksite to “distrust the Charte and demand the CGT trade union or nothing.”’ Furthermore, there had been a lot of graffiti on the factory walls and in the

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550 Letter from the Commissaire principal of the RG to Director of the RG in Vichy, 31 Jan 1944, 51W71, DA
urinals urging workers to: “Vote for the CGT or leave the ballot blank.”
Unfortunately, there is no further mention of this dispute in the archives so we do not know what happened next.

As was seen above, the union militant, Eugène Thépot, who had been assigned by the Syndicat de Métaux, in 1941, to organise resistance at Augustin-Normand, was dead by 1944, having been arrested at the same time as Louis Eudier and subsequently killed in Auschwitz in 1942. However, the union militant given this role at the SNCAN factory, Louis Le Flem, was still alive and at work. This may explain the different approach taken by the SNCAN workers to their comité social. For whilst the former CGT delegates at Augustin Normand refused to stand for their comité social, Le Flem stood three times for the position of workers’ representative on his factory committee, each time gaining more than twice the number of votes as any other candidate. However, whilst the Augustin Normand management actively sought out former CGT delegates to stand, the SNCAN management, and in particular the factory director, Robert Lechenet, kept refusing Le Flem a place on their comité social.

Lechenet, we remember from Chapter Two, was the factory’s director in 1936 who had been imprisoned in his office by workers who had threatened an expensive prototype during their occupation. He had then been resistant to implementing any of the demands that the workers had won that year. The hostility between Lechenet and his workforce continued into the Occupation. As was seen above, he refused to countenance any of the demands made by his entire workforce. Moreover, he was happy to take orders both from the Germans and from Vichy. A report regarding Lechenet written by Inspector Poupinel of the RG after the war, said: ‘it is well-known that he followed to the letter all the instructions relating to the use of his factory that came from the various ministries at Vichy and from the German authorities.’

The hostility was not simply political but also personal. It must have been particularly galling for the workers that whilst Lechenet refused any of their

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551 Report by Informer no 2, 31 Jan, 1944, 51W71, DA
552 M Botet, Inspector of Work to the Divisional Inspector of Work, 2 Feb 1944, 51W71, DA
553 Inspecteur Poupinel to the commissaire de police at the RG, 24 Oct 1944, 51W71, DA
demands, in particular a pay rise which would have helped feed their hungry families, he was seen several times dining with his mistress at Le Paradis de la Bière on rue Aristide Briand, from where he had been spotted leaving, drunk.\textsuperscript{554}

The continuing refusal of Lechenet to accept Louis Le Flem came to a head in 1944. At the time, Le Flem was 26 years old and had worked at the factory since he was seventeen. Although not a member of the \textit{comité social}, he sometimes attended their meetings as a member of the hardship fund committee. His role on this committee gave him the right to move, three times a day, around all the workshops in the factory. All the workers knew him and, as we saw in Chapter Two, the organisation of the factory meant that there was a great sense of solidarity and friendship on the shop floor. We do not know who organised the November 11 strike and the demands made subsequently, but Le Flem’s ability to move freely around the factory and talk to the entire workforce would have given him the ideal circumstances in which to organise such an action. Unfortunately, if Le Flem was known by all the workers, his frequent movements around the factory also drew the attention of the workshop head.

On 31 January 1944, Louis Le Flem finished a piece of work which he and his female assistant had taken 140 hours to complete as opposed to the expected 75 hours. This was presumably part of the general slow-down in work that the workforce had decided on the previous year. On seeing this, the workshop head decided to demote Le Flem. Louis Le Flem went to the \textit{comité social} to tell them that he recognised that he had made a mistake. The next day all the workshops in the factory went on strike for one hour to protest against the decision to demote him. The workers judged that the punishment was too harsh, especially given that Le Flem had recognised his mistake. Le Flem, however, did not want the workers to go on strike for him because he was scared of the consequences. Thus he continued to work during the strike with about 40 others whilst the rest of the factory stopped work.\textsuperscript{555}

Louis Le Flem was right to be scared. One week later he was arrested by the Gestapo for sabotage. What Le Flem had done, which appears as a minor act

\textsuperscript{554} Ibid
\textsuperscript{555} M Botet, Inspector of Work to the Divisional Inspector of Work, 2 Feb 1944, 51W71, DA
of sabotage, seems to have been turned by Robert Lechenet into an opportunity to have a ‘troublemaker’ removed from his factory. The rumour ran that it was Lechenet himself who had denounced Le Flem to the Germans. When Le Flem’s mother visited Lechenet to ask him to speak to the Gestapo to try and have him released, the director replied that her son had sabotaged his work and that he would do nothing for him.\textsuperscript{556}

After his arrest, Louis Le Flem was interned in the Prison de l’Arsenal in Le Havre. Ten days later he escaped, chased by German soldiers. According to the RG, he died falling from the top of a building in which he had been hiding.\textsuperscript{557} After his death there was a lot of graffiti inside the factory against management and especially the director. The graffiti threatened him with death and held him responsible for the death of Louis Le Flem.\textsuperscript{558} In October 1944 Lechenet was arrested on the orders of the Air Ministry, accused of high treason for having worked for the enemy and for denouncing Louis Le Flem to the Gestapo.\textsuperscript{559}

The case of Louis Le Flem shows us how risky and dangerous it was for those trade unionists who continued to provide leadership throughout the Occupation. It also demonstrates to what degree Havrais workers were attached to the concept of trade unionism and the support they felt for their leaders. Whilst a small minority of workers chose to join the armed struggle as part of the Resistance, a much larger minority displayed their anger at the Occupation through methods learned in their trade unions in the immediate pre-war period, specifically during 1936 and the struggles that followed.

It seems fitting to end our account of workers and their attachment to trade unionism with the SNCAN factory. This is the workplace that began our story of workers’ action in Le Havre back in May 1936. This previously non-unionised factory discovered at this time the importance of having trade union representation. For those working in a factory with a very strict regime and an

\textsuperscript{556} Statement, Procès-verbal, Commissaire de Police in the 4th arrondissement of Le Havre, 26 Oct 1944 51W71, DA
\textsuperscript{557} Inspecteur Poupinel to the Commissaire de Police at the RG, 24 Oct 1944, 51W71, DA
\textsuperscript{558} Ibid
\textsuperscript{559} The Commissaire de police at the RG to the sub-prefect, 10 Nov 1944, 51W71 DA
uncompromising director, the realisation that a trade union could provide some kind of protection appears to have been a huge source of comfort and support. It was evidently something the workers would not easily relinquish. Tragically, the desire of workers to have the representative they had voted for inadvertently led to Le Flem's death; one more union militant added to the long list of *Havrais* trade unionists killed as a result of the German occupation.\textsuperscript{560}

\textsuperscript{560} See Appendix for a list of those who lost their lives.
Epilogue

For the inhabitants of Le Havre, the Occupation ended as it began, with being bombed. In June 1940 they were bombed by the Germans, in September 1944 it was the RAF whose bombs rained down on the town. The *exode* of 1940 had been so traumatic for the *Havrais*, that for the rest of the Occupation they resisted any attempt at evacuation and when they were forced to evacuate they often, nevertheless, came back home.

In August 1944, the local German commander, Hermann-Eberhard Wildermuth, tried to evacuate the town in preparation for the arrival of the Allies and the battle that would then take place. As Andrew Knapp notes: ‘Wildermuth observes that the *Havrais* were reluctant evacuees, even when he tried to clear the town by force.’\(^{561}\) Of the many reasons Knapp found for this reluctance, the first was the memory of June 1940 and specifically the looting that occurred at the time. People felt safer in their own homes with their possessions around them.

Unfortunately, for the *Havrais* who decided to stay at home the RAF’s last bombing operation of the town was far deadlier than anything they had seen during the constant bombing raids of the first two years of the war. This time the British bombed the town for a week, 5 - 12 September 1944, from all sides: from the sea, from the land and from the air. The result was that Le Havre could claim the dubious honour of being the most damaged town in the whole of France: 82% of it was destroyed: 12 500 buildings were completely destroyed and 4500 partially. Over half the population was made homeless and 1536 people were killed with 517 missing.\(^{562}\) Most of the damage was done on the first day, 5 September, when the centre of Le Havre was practically razed to the ground.

A new chapter began for the town, one that is not for this thesis. Instead of dwelling on the reconstruction of the town’s port, homes and factories, we shall

\(^{561}\) Knapp, A, ‘The Destruction and Liberation of Le Havre in Living Memory’, *War and Society*, vol 14, no 4, November 2007, 485

\(^{562}\) Ibid, 477
end instead with the return to Le Havre of its two most prominent pre-war trade unionists, Jean Le Gall and Louis Eudier.

Jean Le Gall had remained nominally the secretary of the USOH during the Occupation, whilst having moved to Paris to run the Fédération des Ports et Docks as its only paid employee. He remained in this post throughout the Occupation, treading a fine line between working within the organisations set up by the Charte du Travail and carrying out a few services useful to the Resistance. These last were what saved him from being punished by the Commission nationale de reconstitution des organisations syndicales, the post-war organisation aimed at removing collaborators from the trade union movement. However, according to labour historian, Michel Pigenet: ‘despite an evident show of goodwill, the president of the trade union purge commission acknowledged that Le Gall’s lengthy support of the Charte’s structures was “unusual.”’

Le Gall remained in his post at the Fédération until 1946 when the delegates to the Fédération’s federal congress made sure that he was replaced by someone untainted by involvement in the Charte. In fact, most of France’s port unions had removed the leaders they felt had been discredited by their involvement in the Charte du Travail; replacing them, on the whole, with Communists. But this was not the case in Le Havre. Pigenet notes that: ‘on his return to Le Havre, Le Gall was warmly welcomed by the port’s trade unionists.’ No longer involved in national union affairs, he created a local committee of port unions and became its general secretary, remaining involved in local trade union affairs until his death in 1956.

If Jean Le Gall had a few uneasy moments during the Occupation, notably when he was threatened with deportation to Germany after refusing to join the Comité d’information ouvrière et sociale, a collaborationist organisation formed to support the relève, it was nothing when compared with what had happened

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565 Ibid
566 Ibid
to Louis Eudier. After his arrest in July 1941, he was sent to Compiègne where he finally joined the PCF. On 6 July 1942 he was deported to Auschwitz in the first convoy to be sent from Compiègne, known as the *convoy des 45000*. He escaped the gas chambers because, as a trained carpenter, he was needed by the Germans to help extend the camp. In September 1944 he was moved to Gross-Rosen, then Hersbrück and finally Dachau where he was liberated on 29 April 1945.567

Eudier arrived back in Le Havre on 19 May 1945, one of the only 119 people still alive out of the 1,170 he had arrived with in Auschwitz almost three years earlier. He was welcomed home by his family and the members of his former union and soon retook his post as general secretary of the reformed Syndicat des Métaux du Havre, and as deputy general secretary of the USOH. In 1982, he published his memoir *Notre combat de classe et de patriotes (1934-1945)* in which he contrasts an account of his harrowing ordeal in Auschwitz with the activities of Le Gall, Hauguel and Vaillant. It is a damming account of the consequences of excluding politics from trade unionism. Eudier identifies the expulsion of trade unionists in 1939 - for refusing to condemn the Hitler-Stalin Pact - as setting a course that would end with the deaths of almost 50 Havrais trade unionists by firing squad or in concentration camps. He blames Le Gall, Hauguel and Vaillant for their involvement in this episode. His implication is that if the anarcho-syndicalists had not shunned politics, they would have recognised that they had a part to play in fighting fascism before the war and then being part of the Resistance during the Occupation. If the unions had not been forced to choose sides in 1939, they could have provided true leadership for workers to resist the Occupation. Eudier felt deeply the death of his comrades and placed the blame squarely at the feet of the anarcho-syndicalists. Whether they should be blamed is up for debate, but they certainly never acknowledged the sacrifice their trade union opponents had made as *résistants*; as Eudier notes: ‘not a word about the concentration camps or the torture of patriots appears in the minutes [of the USOH]; that would have been no doubt too much like politics.’568

568 Eudier, *Notre combat*, 138
In the end, it was Louis Eudier’s politics which prevailed. He remained the assistant secretary of the USOH until 1962 and then became its general secretary until 1966. He was a local councillor for almost 30 years and served as the député for Seine-Maritime for two years in the 1950s. He has a road named after him in Le Havre and was awarded an array of medals including the Légion d'honneur. Of his opponents, there are no signs that remain.
Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this thesis, life was hard for Havrais workers both before and during the Occupation. In the years before the Germans arrived, wages were low and conditions were dangerous. In the 1920s, dockers had won significant gains through their trade union, but they had learnt that anything gained had to be constantly defended. Factory workers made the same discovery after their successful strikes and occupations in 1936 when, as inflation rose, they had to continue to fight to have the promised wage increases implemented.

These years of trade union activity instilled in the Havrais workers a resilience that was evident throughout the Occupation. Whilst the Occupation brought new hardships for the working class – bombing, food shortages, the relève and the STO – other problems were familiar from before the war, in particular low wages in the face of soaring inflation. Workers did what they could to protest against their worsening standard of living: from simply refusing to do what they were told, through chants and graffiti, to petitions and strike action.

Organised factory workers’ action often resembled trade union activity, despite the absence of their trade union. Workers showed a deep attachment to the concept of trade unionism that had, pre-war, brought them their first taste of victory over their bosses. Key to much of this success had been the trade union leaders who had, in some instances, been in their post for many years. They were well-respected for their ability to lead action that led to real gains for their members. The Havrais trade union movement was large, powerful and united, until a series of events strained this unity to breaking point and beyond. This movement had historically been dominated by anarcho-syndicalists, who led the formidable port unions. When the Communist-influenced Syndicat des Métaux, which represented the majority of factory workers, suddenly grew in size and influence, a serious ideological rift appeared. This was deepened by differing approaches to the Spanish Civil War, the increasing fascist threat and the prospect of a new European war. The effect of this split was that the anarcho-syndicalists became both parochial in their concerns and bitterly anti-
Communist. During the Occupation, they co-operated with the authorities; informing on the leader of the Syndicat des Métaux and running the Le Havre section of the collaborationist organisation, the COSI. The result of this was to deny the workers the leadership that they had become accustomed to. Despite the workers’ evident willingness to both make demands and to resist, the action they took did not have the impact of workers’ action elsewhere in the country. This, I argue was because of the lack of leadership. New leaders, mainly Communist, did emerge but Le Havre was a very dangerous place in which to organise. Occupied by thousands of German troops, the repression of Communists was savage and no new leader could organise for long.

This is the history of workers in Le Havre. However, the existing historiography shows us that the history of French workers in this period is not uniform. Each town and region had a specific set of circumstances that meant workers reacted in different ways. Perhaps this is why there is as yet no book solely devoted to the study of workers during the Occupation. The value of a thesis such as mine lies in its ability to focus on the influences specific to the workers of one town, and to examine how they shaped the action those workers took. Whilst the influences are different in different places, there are certain themes that I have highlighted, that can be used as a reference point to understand the actions of workers elsewhere in France.

These three themes are memory, influence and leadership. Memory was important both for providing evidence of what could be achieved and of what to avoid. The 1922 strike, outlined in Chapter One, provided memories of both the town united in struggle but also of the viciousness of the authorities. It instilled in the rising generation of militants a desire to find ways to win future disputes, which they then did in 1936. The strikes and occupations of that year gave the workers a taste of victory and provided a memory of what they could achieve which they took with them into the Occupation. The terrifying memory of the exode engendered a fear of leaving home which lasted all the way until the Liberation, making the anger provoked by evacuation, the relève and the STO all the more acute amongst the Havrais.
The greatest influence on Le Havre’s workers was trade unionism. The port unions were historically strong in the town; their closed shop and ability to decide which ships to load and unload, and how long they would take to do it were daily reminders of the power of being a trade union member. Factory workers had their first real taste of this heady sense of confidence when they occupied their workplaces in 1936. This turned them into loyal union members for the first time, having remained members in the past only for the length of a particular dispute.

The unions themselves were influenced by two vying ideologies: anarcho-syndicalism and Communism. These led their leaders in two different directions, affecting their choices during the Occupation. Whilst they were powerful influences on the union leaders, their effect on ordinary members was less decisive. It was the unions’ structure, their proven results and the leaders themselves who proved to be the more influential.

The confidence created by trade union activity meant that Havrais workers were, unlike in many parts of France, immediately able to voice their discontent at the conditions they were forced to live with once the Germans had arrived. However, these workers were also used to following their trade union leaders. When these leaders disappeared, either virtually because of their co-operation with the authorities, or literally because they had been deported, the workers were not able to turn their discontent into real and sustained action.

These three themes can be used as a framework for studying workers in other towns in France. Look firstly at what occurred before 1940: at the industrial disputes that took place, how they figure in the collective memory and how they shaped the local militants. Secondly, examine the main influences on workers in their particular town or region. Was it, perhaps, the Church or the Socialist party or, as in the case of Le Havre, trade unionism that influenced workers the most. Thirdly, ask who were the leaders that workers respected and were likely to follow; where were they during the Occupation and were they resisting, or co-operating or simply absenting themselves from any duty to lead. These three points, I believe, provide a way into understanding the specificity of different
towns and regions, providing explanations for why workers acted as they did in different parts of France during the years of the German occupation.

Workers were a significant part of the French population, yet their history during the Occupation has not been fully developed. Workers suffered under the hardships created by the Occupation and their suffering was often a continuation of adversity which existed before the war. Their stories deserve to be told, not simply because they highlight the harshness of those years, but because of the courage displayed in trying to improve their collective situation and to resist the foreign occupier. In Le Havre, many workers displayed a resilience and courage that demands to be remembered and celebrated. I hope I have done them justice.
Appendix

Havrais trade unionists who were killed in concentration camps
or executed by firing squad during the Occupation

Baheux, René: boilermaker-welder at the CEM; died 20 April 1945 in Buchenwald.
Basille, Maurice: town hall employee; killed 18 September 1942, Auschwitz.
Bellanger, Léon: docker; killed 18 September 1942, Auschwitz.
Blaise, Auguste: shipyard worker; killed 1 December 1942, Auschwitz.
Carpentier, Gaston: building worker; executed 10 June 1942.
Cauret, Jean: docker; died 31 July 1943 in Mauthausen.
Carrel, Auguste: electrician; killed November 1942, Auschwitz.
Certain, Robert: lathe operator at Schneider; executed 4 February 1944.
Couillard, Marcel: fitter; killed 9 September 1942, Auschwitz.
Delamare, Jules: rolling mill operator; executed 3 September 1944.
Derrien, Ernest: plumber; executed 8 November 1943.
Dupont, Félix: road-builder; killed 18 September 1942, Auschwitz.
Flandre, Marceau: gas worker; executed 13 August 1944.
Fleury, Arthur: road-builder; killed October 1942, Auschwitz.
Friot, Eugène: shop worker; killed 15 October 1942, Auschwitz.
Grosjean: carpenter; killed 18 October 1942, Auschwitz.
Guest, Louis: electrician and carpenter at the port; executed 23 December 1943.
Hascoët, Jean: welder; executed 22 July 1943.
Henri, André: sailor; killed 18 September 1942, Auschwitz.
Jouet, Lionel: bank clerk; executed 18 August 1944.
Landoas, Eugène: plumber; executed 3 September 1944.
Lebel, Roland: sailor; killed 18 December 1942, Auschwitz.
Le Brozec, Jean: fitter; executed 9 August 1943.
Le Flem, Louis: metalworker at the SNCAN; died escaping from the police 17 February 1944.

Legrain, Bertrand: labourer; executed 21 August 1944.

L’Hévéder, Roger: sailor; executed 14 February 1942.

Lioust, Henri: building worker; killed February 1945, Dachau.

Lioust, Léon: welder-electrician at the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique; executed 14 October 1941.

Madec, Joseph-Louis: road builder; executed 18 May 1941.

Mallard, Gaston: wireworker at Tréfileries et Laminoirs; killed 10 August 1942, Auschwitz.

Messager, Henri: refinery worker at Standard, Port-Jérôme; executed 21 September 1942.

Morvan, Robert: docker; killed in action 14 July 1944.

Emile Mutel: metalworker at the Mazeline factory; deported to Buchenwald 18 August 1944; died on return.

Nicol, Henri: sailor; executed 1 July 1942.

Richard, Louis: metalworker at the Tréfileries et Laminoirs; killed 9 August 1942, Auschwitz.

Robinet, Émile: refinery worker at Vacuum; killed 11 October, Sachsenhausen.

Rougeault, Marcel: worker; executed 3 September 1944.

Thépot, Eugène: metalworker at Augustin Normand; killed 31 October 1942, Auschwitz.

Toulouzan, Marcel: docker; executed 4 February 1944.

Van Hevel, Albert: docker; executed 30 June 1944.

Vasseur, Kléber: postal worker; deported to Mauthausen on 25 March 1944; died soon after being freed.

Venance, Raphaël: docker; killed 6 September 1942, Auschwitz.

Verhaeghe, André: docker; died 13 June 1941.

Vernichon, Maurice: sailor; killed 6 September 1942, Auschwitz.

Vigne-Salade, Henri: building worker; executed 1 July 1942.

Von Hoevel, Albert: docker; executed 30 June 1944.

Information for this list comes from:


http://maitron-fusilles-40-44.univ-paris1.fr/

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