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The Struggle and the Conciliation

Church or sect? For French trade unions and socialist parties that seems to have always been the question. Two of the leading socialist leaders of the Third Republic, Jean Jaurès and Jules Guesde, even came to personally embody this choice. As their fellow socialist Charles Rappoport, who knew them both, wrote in his memoirs:

> Jules Guesde and Jean Jaurès, two men, two worlds: two psychologies, two characters, two philosophies; the struggle and the conciliation; the analysis and the synthesis; harshness and generosity; intransigence and suppleness. (Rappoport 1991, 185)

Trotsky described Jaurès as a "capacious spirit" with "a physical revulsion for all sectarianism" (Goldberg 1968, 329, his translation). In contrast, Jules Guesde was the "guardian of the dogma" for whom "all deviation inspired . . . the same horror as the Christian schism did Innocent III" (Willard 1991, 93; Lefranc 1963, 50).

Between 1884 and 1905, French socialists were organized as sects – the Guesdists, the Possibilists, the Allemanists, the Independent Socialists, the Blanquists, and the anarchists – fighting among themselves for influence with the unions. Then, in 1905, these socialist sects set aside their differences under the broad tent of Jaurès's ecumenical ministry – his intellectual synthesis of the competing "traditions" of French socialism. In 1920, this Jaurèsian synthesis unraveled: the French Communist party was founded in a schism of, in Léon Blum's words, "the Old House." To this day, the French Left remains fundamentally divided, albeit with important moments of alliance along the way – the Popular Front in 1936 and the Common Program in the 1970s.

In parallel with the socialist parties, the French unions have also struggled between church and sect. Between 1884 and 1902, the unions were balkanized by their allegiance to different political sects. But in 1902, the unions tentatively united in the Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labor; CGT); by 1906, in the famous "Charter of Amiens," the CGT further consolidated this unity by ratifying a principle of strict autonomy from political parties. But like party

unity, the solidarity of the unions was not to last. In 1921, approximately a half year after the party schism, the CGT itself broke into two rival blocs. Unions were again divided by their allegiance to competing parties. Contemporary French unions remain divided between several rival union confederations.

This book analyzes the organizational and ideological development of the French labor movement between 1872 and 1922. These were critical formative years for the modern French labor movement, institutionalizing a pattern of labor organization and ideology still visible in contemporary France. In trying to understand these developments, the book has two goals. The first is to describe the particular social, political, and economic conditions that explain these historical outcomes. From this perspective, understanding the formation of the French labor movement has its own intrinsic importance. The second is to provide a general framework for explaining a pattern of schism and solidarity common to many organizations and social movements. Here, French labor history has been used more instrumentally to develop and evaluate this general framework. Although sometimes tugging in different directions, these two goals are generally complementary. They will be discussed in turn.

Urban Populism and Communal Unionism

With its early appearance (alongside the British and American labor movements) and international visibility, the French labor movement has always been regarded by some as a critical comparative case for understanding the emergence of "modern" labor movements (Katznelson and Zolberg 1986). For others, the formation of the French labor movement provides insight into the political and intellectual development of a nation with enormous influence in Europe and abroad. From either perspective, the French labor movement has four distinctive (though not unique) characteristics that this book seeks to explain:

1. The development of a divided labor movement, rent by the schisms of 1920–1 into communist and socialist blocs
2. The establishment of one of the largest Communist parties (with Italy) in Western Europe
3. The mobilization of a prewar labor union movement around an ideology known as "revolutionary syndicalism," which had its intellectual counterpart in the theories of the philosopher Georges Sorel

4. The development of a form of strike and union mobilization that rejects bureaucratic unionism, eschews representation by political parties, celebrates grassroots "direct action," and makes broad-based social and political demands; in other contexts, this form of mobilization has been labeled "social movement unionism" (Seidman 1994)

This book argues that the distinctive evolution of the French labor movement in the late nineteenth century can be understood in the context of a populist tradition in France that reaches back at least to the Revolution. There can be no more succinct summary of the populist creed than this phrase from a manifesto written by French Republicans in 1848: "Hence, the State is the people, the producer . . . [I]s it not sovereign, the producer of all riches?" (cited by Sewell 1980, 250). The analytical value of the term "populist" resides in its similarities to and differences with "class mobilization" and "republicanism." On the one hand, like class mobilization, populism is oriented toward the mobilization of producers, although "the people" is a more elastic category than "the working class." On the other hand, in its concern for sovereignty and its suspicion of the state and representative institutions, populism is close to republicanism. Like republicanism, populism tends to attribute the economic woes of the people as much to political causes as to economic ones.

In the late nineteenth century, the French labor movement was torn between its traditional republicanism, which organized a cross-class coalition in defense of Republican institutions, and a movement that sought to sever the link with republicanism by organizing workers strictly along class lines. Since populism overlapped with both Republican forms and class forms of mobilization, it provided a discourse that partially superseded this polarization. While populism is often thought of as a form of rural agrarian protest, the French working class was predominantly urban. French trade unions developed this urban populism into a doctrine known as revolutionary syndicalism, elements of which became a type of constitutional framework for the unification of the union movement. A form of "class populism" mediated between the republicanism of French workers and the pure class-conflict model advocated by Jules Guesde and, later, by the Communists. This class populism not only expressed the links of the labor movement to the Republican movement but also affirmed its position as a class movement within that larger movement.

Populism was a pattern of mobilization as well as a discourse. During the Third Republic, populism was associated with a series of strike waves

that erupted every ten years or so (Figure 1.1). These strike waves were contagious grassroots protests that expanded across the boundaries of trade, industry, and skill. As these protests snowballed, strike demands became increasingly political in character and national in scope. Their timing typically coincided with significant political crises and important episodes of republican state building. For the French labor movement, these populist strike waves were the "critical junctures" of both organization building and ideological articulation. They followed a distinctive pattern: increasingly expansive organizational and ideological solidarities developed in the ascending phase of the strike wave; then, during the descending phase, the movement tended to splinter into rival organizational and ideological camps. Sectarian groups like the Guesdists or the Communists were born in the descent.

This urban populism was associated with a second critical characteristic of French working-class mobilization: the strong tendency of French workers to mobilize and organize along territorial lines. Community-based labor movements were common in many countries in the nineteenth century. Many authors have described the local working-class subcultures that developed dense institutional infrastructures in neighborhoods and cities.[1] But the local "embeddedness" implied by these subcultures was challenged at the end of the nineteenth century, and in some cases much earlier, by the rise of powerful national organizations to represent labor. Although territorial unions organized by city or region thrived in many countries in the late nineteenth century, sectoral unionism emerged as the dominant trade-union structure in most nations by 1900. In the United States, for instance, the rise of national trade federations tended to undermine the autonomy of local unions and, consequently, the vitality of territorial unionism (Ulman 1966). Although territorial unions continued to exist, they played second fiddle to the sectoral unions. In France and a few other countries (like Italy), however, territorial unionism provided a strong counterweight to the power of the sectoral federations.

Political parties also posed a challenge for territorial unionism. Not only did political parties claim territorial representation for themselves, but the national scale of parliamentary representation also tended to "disembed" this representation from autonomous local working-class cultures. The famous German Social Democratic party, for example, devised institutional mechanisms that essentially disenfranchised vigorous urban subcultures (Schorske 1955; Nolan 1981). French parties

1 An important sample includes Bell (1986); Bonnell (1983); Greenberg (1985); Kealey (1980); Merriman (1985); Nolan (1981); and Oestreicher (1989).

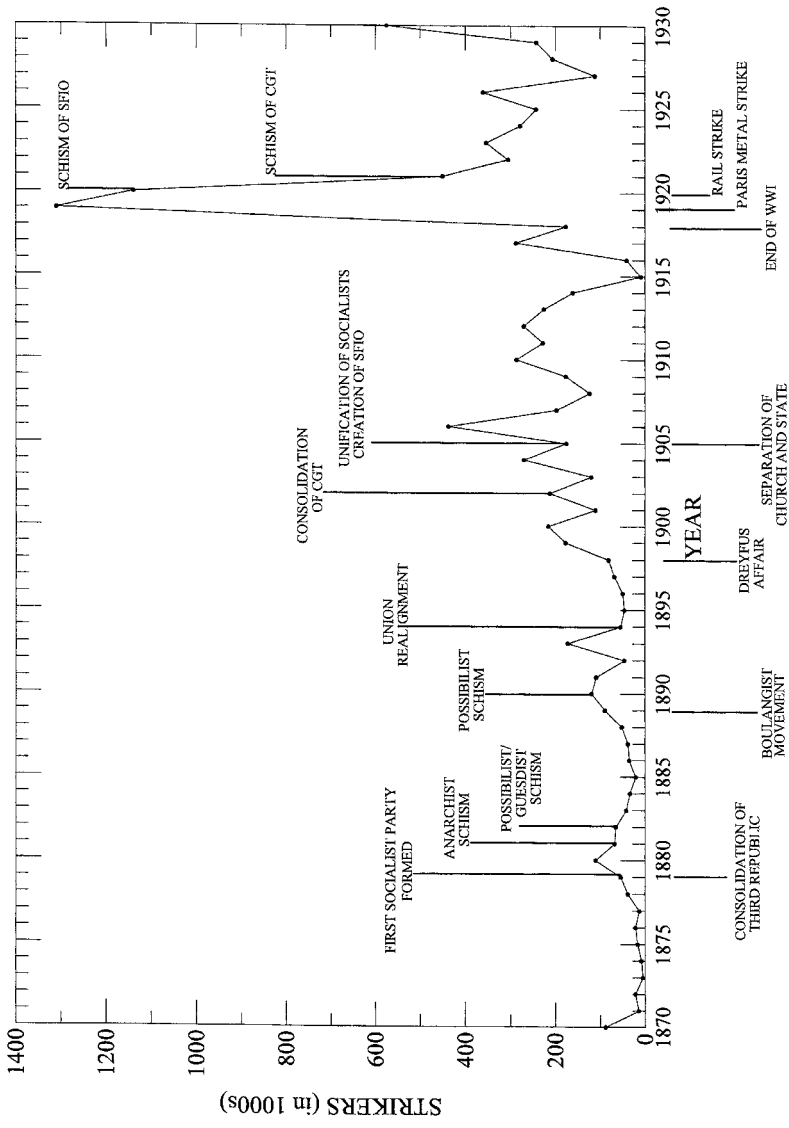

Figure 1.1. Strikes, politics, and organization building. *Source of strike data*: Shorter and Tilly (1974, 361–2).

mounted similar challenges, but territorial unions in France were able to establish and maintain an independent role in the labor movement. As examined in detail in this book, the relative importance of territorial unionism in France reflected the character of the nation's industrial organization and labor markets, its corporatist and mutualist traditions, and its republican electoral dynamics. Ultimately, territorial unionism both reflected and reinforced the populism of the French unions. By mobilizing unions around political issues that transcended the narrower economic concerns of sectoral unions, the territorial unions encouraged a type of communal solidarity more like that of political parties than of sectoral unions. Alfred Rosmer, a French revolutionary syndicalist turned Communist, observed that the pre-1914 French trade union confederation, the CGT, which gave a prominent place to territorial unions, was "something hybrid, at once a syndicalist organization and a political party, and more of a party than a syndicalist organization."[2]

Territorial unionism was the primary manifestation of a communal unionism that saw unions as a comprehensive moral agency – a role more commonly asserted by socialist parties, which saw sectoral unions as special-purpose associations designed to defend working-class interests at the workplace. Territorial unions portrayed themselves as centers for moral development and education (much as the Republican schools did for the larger society) and as champions of general ethical causes like antimilitarism (a position that inverted the traditional Republican celebration of military virtue). Communal unionism essentially fused two medieval institutions – the commune and the corporation – into one.[3] The medieval commune and the medieval guild corporation were both autonomous self-governing moral agencies built around fraternal fellowship. In the late-nineteenth-century context, communalism, as symbolized by the Paris Commune, represented political autonomy from the centralizing Republican state. Corporatism, as symbolized by modern unions, represented the economic autonomy of workers. Together, they embodied a populist challenge to more conservative Republicans. The link between urban populism and communal unionism drew its clearest expression from Paul Brousse, an important figure in the Third Republic labor movement, who argued: "The Commune and the Corporation are the only means that the people will have, one day, to make its will prevail."[4]

2 Cited in Wohl (1966, 43, his translation).
3 In *Work and Revolution* (1980), William Sewell developed the argument that the postrevolutionary French labor movement strongly continued the traditions of ancien régime corporatism.
4 Cited in Lefranc 1963, 22.

Sectarian and Segmentary Systems

The book's second goal is to use French labor history to develop a more general theoretical perspective on the dynamics of organizational schism and solidarity.[5] In the annals of many organizations and social movements, the history of the French labor movement represents an oft-heard story: hyper-politicization and ideological polarization followed by organizational schism and fragmentation. At the same time, the French labor movement (like other such movements) often exhibits a surprising capacity for broad-scale solidarity and mobilization. Under certain conditions, narrow sectarianism can evolve into the most surprising ecumenicalism, only to descend again into sectarianism. In both Protestantism and the French labor movement, schism and solidarity appear as the two sides of the same coin.[6]

As illustrated in Figure 1.2, three distinct alignments of union and party organization can be identified over the course of the fifty years between 1872 and 1922.

The first alignment, which was complete by 1882, was sectarian in the sense that a number of groups, arising through schism, competed for the heart and soul of the French working class. The third alignment (c. 1922) also arose through schism, though it produced two ideological blocs (Socialist and Communist) rather than myriad small sects. In both the first and the third alignments, unions were divided by their allegiance to different party groups. The second alignment (c. 1906) was the mirror image of these sectarian alignments: unions overcame their disagreements to unite in a broad-based union confederation, and party sects united into a single integrated Socialist party. A division between unions and parties replaced the division within unions and parties.

As chaotic as these organizational alignments and realignments may appear, the purpose of the book is to demonstrate that they have a type

5 There is a limited but interesting theoretical literature focusing on schism. In social movement theory, see Gerlach and Hine (1970), Defrance (1989), Gamson (1990, 103–8), Zald and Ash (in Zald and McCarthy 1994, 121–41), and Balser (1997). In the sociology of religion, see Wallis (1979), Bryant (1993), Bruce (1990), Stark and Bainbridge (1996, 121–49), and Liebman, Sutton, and Wuthnow (1988). In social psychology, see Sani and Reicher (1991). In anthropology, see Bateson (1958). Among studies of political parties, see Nyomarkay (1967, 145–50) and Schorske (1983). For an important theoretical discussion linking schism and solidarity, see Lockwood (1992).

6 A number of authors in different fields have remarked on the sometimes surprising juxtaposition of fragmentation and integration in social systems. Examples include Chisholm (1989), Eckstein (1966), Gerlach and Hine (1970), Kaufman (1967), Oestreicher (1989), Padgett and Ansell (1993), Perry (1993), and Price (1997).

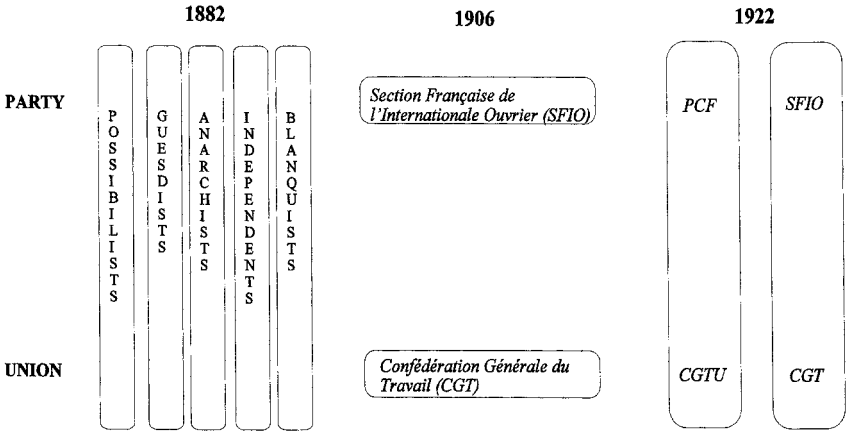

Figure 1.2. Three party–union alignments, 1882–1922.

of systemic logic. This logic is demonstrated by drawing an analogy between the organizational evolution of the French labor movement and that of two other social systems: Protestantism and segmentary lineage systems. Like the French labor movement, Protestant sects and lineage segments are known to have a propensity to schism. Yet they are also known, like the French labor movement, to recombine into broader solidaristic alliances. Protestant sects are able, on occasion, to shift from narrow sectarianism to more inclusive ecumenicalism. Segmentary lineage systems can shift from systems in which cousins fight cousins to interclan alliances.

As analogies, Protestantism and segmentary lineage systems bring different but complementary insights to bear on the pattern of schism and solidarity. The core dynamic of Protestant sectarianism is the tension, first noted by Weber (1946, 1978) and Troeltsch (1956), between church and sect. From this perspective, the central dynamic producing organizational schism is the tension over the institutional intermediation of religious salvation. In the Reformation, rebellion against the Catholic doctrine of immanence and against the priestly hierarchy of the Catholic Church led to the formation of schismatic religious sects. At the heart of this conflict was always the tension between whether the "invisible church" (*ecclesia*) resided in the concrete visible institutions of the Church or with the faithful themselves (Wach 1972, 191–2). Once the Reformation began, it spawned increasingly more radical challenges to

Church institutions leading to what has been described as a "revolution within the revolution" or a "reformed" reformation (Lewy 1974; Moeller 1982, 103). New organizational schisms (and civil wars) followed, creating a plethora of new churches divided by doctrine and organizational structure. Whereas the Catholic Church lodged authority in a sacerdotal hierarchy crowned by the patriarchal authority of the pope, Lutheran and Anglican churches sought to lodge authority in the more collegial, though still patriarchal, authority of bishops. Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists sought to decentralize further, placing authority in the hands of elders, of ministers of the presbytery, or of local congregations. Quakers went still further by rejecting any ministerial intermediary between people and God.

The analogy to Protestantism has concrete historical referents in the French case. If the Protestant Reformation failed in France, it reappeared in political and secular form in the French Revolution.[7] The parallel between the Reformation and the Revolution was voiced by Tocqueville, who wrote:

> In all the annals of recorded history we find no mention of any political revolution that took this form; its only parallel is to be found in certain religious revolutions. Thus, when we seek to study the French Revolution in the light of similar movements in other countries and at other periods, it is to the great religious revolutions we should turn. (Tocqueville 1955, 10)

Much like the earlier English Revolution, the French Revolution fused political and religious protest. And much like English Protestantism, French republicanism demonstrated a strong tendency toward sectarianism. Eduard Bernstein drew the parallel in reverse between the French Revolution and the more obviously religiously inspired English Revolution: "Its Girondists were the Presbyterians; its Hébertists and Babeuvists were the Levellers, whilst Cromwell was a combination of

7 Although Te Brake's (1998) study of the Reformation does not go beyond the seventeenth century, his argument suggests that the relationship between these religious upheavals and patterns of nineteenth-century popular mobilization in France may, in fact, have been historically connected. In France, the Counter Reformation's consolidation of territorial sovereignty over cities left a legacy of urban sectarianism. This contestation penetrated directly into the heart of popular politics. Religious confraternities, for example, were instruments of the Counter Reformation, though they often cultivated a form of popular religiosity that escaped the control of both religious and secular authorities (Te Brake 1998, 92–3; Truant 1994, 68–9, 288). These religious associations influenced the development of the journeymen's associations known as the *compagnonnages*, which in turn influenced post-Revolution working-class formation (Sewell 1980; Truant 1994). The *compagnons* were often fiercely sectarian, and Icher suggests that divisions between Catholic and Protestant *compagnons* were at the root of their critical historical schisms (Icher 1992, 253; Truant 1994, 288–9). I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the possibility of these connections.

Robespierre and Bonaparte, and John Lilburne the Leveller was Marat and Hébert rolled into one" (Bernstein 1963, 10). French Republicans were avowedly anticlerical but nevertheless took on many of the trappings of quasi-religious movements.[8] The labor movement of the Third Republic inherited the tendency toward sectarianism that grew out of the Republican revolutionary tradition.[9]

Although Protestant churches have a propensity for schism, they can sometimes join in broad ecumenical alliances built upon a respect and tolerance for religious differences. The sociology of religion points to a distinctive organizational form around which ecumenicalism is built: the denomination (Wach 1972, 191–6). Like the sect, the denomination organizes itself in opposition to both the Catholic Church and the reformed ecclesiastical bodies (e.g., Anglican or Lutheran churches), but its defining feature is "an insistence upon the independence of the local congregation, with correspondingly less emphasis on unity and universality." It is more radical in doctrine than that of the ecclesiastic bodies but less exclusive "owing to a less institutional and more spiritual notion of Christian fellowship." Whereas one approach to religious denominations views them as routinized sects, another interprets their evangelism and decentralized congregationalism as promoting broad-based solidarity.[10] The covenantal theology that grew out of the Protestant Reformation also encouraged solidarity. A covenant is a morally binding pact that rejects hierarchical organization and embraces the moral autonomy of multiple sovereignties. It leads directly to a theory of federalism (Elazar 1998). In the French case, territorial unions were the equivalent of decentralized congregations and the basis for strong federalism within the broader labor movement. The "myth" of the general strike, as Georges Sorel called it, was the equivalent of an evangelical and morally binding covenant.[11]

8 See Brinton (1957, 1961), Mazlish (1976), Talmon (1955), and Walzer (1965); cf. Yack (1986).

9 A number of authors, including Bernstein (1963), Engels (1926), Gramsci (see Fontana 1993, 39), and Mannheim (1985) have drawn the parallel between Reformation sects and early working-class organizations. For other studies on sectarianism in labor organizations, see Coser (1970, 1974), Hobsbawm (1959), Lipset (1963, 97–100), O'Toole (1975, 162–89; 1977), and Pope (1942). For additional examples of political sectarianism, see Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) and Apter and Sawa (1984).

10 The first approach is represented by H. Richard Niebuhr (1957), and the second is expressed in Richey (1977).

11 The early civil rights movement in the United States provides a nice parallel example to this denominationalism and ecumenicalism. Aldon Morris describes the way that the creation of local umbrella organizations, like the Montgomery Improvement Organization, helped to overcome factionalism and "organized schisms" in black communities in the mid-1950s (Morris 1984, 42). These city-based umbrella organizations corresponded to the French territorial unions.