

Towards a History of Workers' Resistance to Work

Paris and Barcelona during the French Popular Front and the Spanish Revolution, 1936-38

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April 1988

The study of workers' resistance to work – absenteeism, lateness, faking illness, theft, sabotage, work slow-downs, indiscipline and indifference – can deepen our understanding of two concurrent political events, the Spanish Revolution and the French Popular Front. An examination of resistance to work in the factories of Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Front governments in France and throughout the revolution in Spain reveal essential continuities in working-class life. Absenteeism, indiscipline and other manifestations of a reluctance to work existed before the victory of the Popular Front in France and the outbreak of war and revolution in Spain, but it is significant that this resistance persisted even after the parties and unions which claimed to represent the working class took over political and varying degrees of economic power in the two countries. In fact, the parties and unions or the left in both revolutionary and reformist situations were forced to confront countless refusals of workers to work.

Workers' resistance to work in the twentieth century has been largely ignored or underestimated by many Marxist labour historians and modernization theorists – two important, if not dominant, schools of labour historiography.¹ Although at odds on many issues, both orientations share a progressive view of history. Many Marxists view the working class as gradually acquiring class-consciousness, moving from an *sich* to *für sich*, making itself and eventually desiring to expropriate the means of production. Modernization theorists see workers adapting to the pace, structure and general demands of industrial society. Neither the Marxists nor the modernization theorists have taken sufficient account of the continuities of working class culture which are revealed by its ongoing resistance to work. Yet these progressive views of working-class history cannot adequately encompass the perseverance of absenteeism, sabotage and indifference. Nor

¹ For Marxist historiography cf. Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971), 46-82; George Rude *Ideology and Popular Protest* (New York 1980), 7-26; cf. also the recent restatement of Lukacs' position in Eric Hobsbawm, *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York 1984), 15-32. The views of modernization theorists can be found in Peter N. Stearns, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French Labor: A Cause without Rebels* (New Brunswick, NJ 1971) and *idem*, *Lives of Labor: Work in a Maturing Industrial Society* (New York 1975). For a critique of Lukacs' approach, see Richard J. Evans (ed.), *The German Working Class* (London 1982), 26-27.

can workers' resistance to work in both revolutionary and reformist situations in the second third of the twentieth century be dismissed as 'primitive' or as examples of 'false consciousness'. The persistence of many forms of refusal to work may indicate an understandable response to the long-term hardships of workers' everyday life and a healthy scepticism about solutions proposed by both the left and the right.

The first part of this essay will examine the revolutionary situation in Barcelona. It will seek to demonstrate the bifurcation of class-consciousness between militant leftist workers devoted to the development of the productive forces during the Spanish Revolution and the much larger number of non-militant workers who continued to resist work, often as they had done before. Thus, several types of class-consciousness confronted each other during the Spanish Revolution. The point is not to determine which was the 'truer' form of class-consciousness, but to show how the persistence of resistance to work undermined the revolutionary desires of the militants and called into question their claim to represent the working class.

The second part of this article will attempt to demonstrate the importance of resistance to work during the Popular Front in Paris. As in Spain, the refusal to work also had deep roots in French working-class culture and was to persist, and even increase, regardless of the significant social reforms initiated by the coalition of leftist parties and unions which composed the French Popular Front. As in Barcelona, members of the unions and the parties that wanted more production and productivity to overcome economic stagnation were frustrated by the refusal of many workers to work diligently. Again, different types of class-consciousness came into conflict, and the reformist experiment of the Popular Front, like the Spanish Revolution, was divided and weakened.

Of course, workers' resistance to work in Spain has a long history which stretches back to before the civil war and revolution. In the nineteenth century, Catalan workers, like their French counterparts, sustained the tradition of *dilluns sant* (Holy Monday), an unofficial holiday which was taken without authorization by many workers as a continuation of their Sunday break. Struggles over the work schedule continued into the twentieth century, even during the Second Republic. For example, in 1932 workers wanted to miss work on Monday, 2 May, because May Day had fallen on a Sunday. More importantly, there was also a constant fight over the 'making-up' of mid-week holidays which were often traditional fiestas. The largely dechristianized and anti-clerical Catalan workers persisted in celebrating these holidays. In 1927, the Employers' Association (Fomento de Trabajo Nacional), which was located in Barcelona, noted that, despite the law, employers who attempted to force their workers to make up fiestas that were not Sundays could expect trouble.² Indeed, strikes lasting a considerable number of days did occur in the spring and summer of 1927 in protest against the scheduling of work on feast days. In 1929, workers again fought to keep their traditional holidays. In the province of Barcelona the dispute was particularly intense, since 'working-class pressure was obstructing the making-up of mid-week fiestas, as the law allows'.³ 'Social tensions' had made the making-up of holidays impossible in Barcelona.

Barcelona workers fought hard for a shorter working week, the question of which was at the core of a multitude of strikes during the Second Republic. At the end of 1932 and the beginning of 1933, woodworkers struck for three months for a forty-four-hour week. In 1933, CNT (Con-

² Fomento de Trabajo Nacional, actas, 15 April 1932; Fomento, actas, 14 February 1927.

³ Federacion de Fabricantes de Hilados y Tejidos de Cataluna, Memoria (Barcelona 1930).

federación Nacional de Trabajo) construction workers went on strike for over three months for a forty-hour week, and at the end of August they won a forty-four-hour week, instead of the forty-eight hours previously required. In October 1933, the CNT and UGT (Union General de Trabajadores) water, gas and electricity workers won, without a strike, a forty-four-hour week.⁴ When the forty-eight-hour working week was re-established in November 1934, strikes erupted and workers left the factories after they had laboured for only forty-four hours.

Workers' resistance to work during the Second Republic took not only the collective forms of walk-outs and strikes, but also individual actions such as absenteeism, faking illness, and indifference. In 1932, textile industrialists accused their own foremen of unauthorized absences.⁵ The pride of Barcelona's mechanical construction industry, the *Maquinista Terrestre y Marítima*, reported that during a bridge-construction project in Seville, workers inflicted themselves through self-inflicted cuts, in order to take advantage of sick-pay. As a result, the *Maquinista* was dropped by its insurance company. Generally, Catalan employers resisted a government-imposed programme of accident insurance and indemnities which, they feared, would encourage workers to prolong their illnesses. They claimed that the experience of insurance companies had confirmed widespread malingering, in addition to self-inflicted injuries.⁶ In striking similarity was the assertion made by Catalan industrialists during the rightist *bienio negro* (1934-35) that workers often showed only 'a minimal desire to work'. Throughout the 1930s, employers fought the constant demands by both the CNT and the UGT for the abolition of piecework.

The anarcho-syndicalist militants of the CNT did abolish piece-work in their collectives when the revolution broke out in response to the *pronunciamiento*, but almost immediately anarcho-syndicalist and Marxist militants who had taken control of the factories were obliged to react to workers' resistance. After the defeat of the generals' revolt of 18 July, in the opening days of the revolution, the CNT repeatedly implored the workers to return to their jobs. On 26 July, a notice in the CNT newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, asked that bus drivers justify their absences from work. On 28 July, another article vigorously demanded that all workers at Hispano-Olivetti return to their posts and warned that sanctions would be applied to those who had missed work without good reason. Although on 30 July *Solidaridad Obrera* stated that in almost all of Barcelona's industries work had recommenced, on 4 August the anarcho-syndicalist newspaper called for 'self-discipline'. A day later, the Barbers' Union 'let all of its members know that they had an obligation' to work a forty-hour week and affirmed that it would not permit a reduction of the working day. Therefore, from the very beginning of the revolution, reluctance to work was a problem which had to be treated by the trades union militants who managed the factories and shops in Barcelona. Obviously, this resistance to work contradicted anarcho-syndicalist theories of *autogestión*, which called upon workers to participate, and to control their own workplace with the advent of the revolution. In other words, workers were asked by both anarcho-syndicalist and Marxist activists in Barcelona enthusiastically to endorse their role as workers. Yet they resisted the demands of the union militants, who sometimes lamented the unattended factory assemblies and unpaid union dues. In fact, activists claimed that the only way to get workers to attend assemblies was to hold them during working hours and therefore at the expense of production. For example, the collective, *Construcciones Mecánicas*, changed its plans to hold assemblies on

⁴ Alberto Balcells, *Crisis económica y agitación social en Cataluña de 1930 a 1936* (Barcelona 1971), 218.

⁵ *Federación de Fabricantes, Memoria* (Barcelona 1932).

⁶ Alberto del Castillo, *La Maquinista Terrestre y Marítima: Personaje histórico, 1855-1955* (Barcelona 1955), 464-65. Fomento, *Memoria*, 1932, 143.

Sundays, since 'no one would attend' and instead chose Thursdays.⁷ In revolutionary Barcelona, workers sometimes seemed reluctant to participate in workers' democracy.

According to the CNT's own figures (to be used with caution), it represented only 30 per cent of Catalan industrial workers in May 1936 (down from 60 per cent of Catalan industrial workers in 1931). Thus, the 'tens of thousands' of workers with supposedly little 'class consciousness' entered unions in search of social protection and stable employment.⁸ H. Rüdiger, a representative of the First International (AIT) in Barcelona, wrote in June 1937 that before the revolution the CNT had only between 150,000 and 175,000 members in Catalonia. In the months after the outbreak of civil war, Catalan CNT membership jumped to nearly one million. Rüdiger concluded that:

four-fifths are, thus, new people. A large part of these cannot be counted as revolutionaries. You could take any union as an example of this. Many of these new members could be in the UGT.⁹

The union activists did attempt to fulfill certain desires of their rank and file. As has been mentioned, at the beginning of the revolution the CNT union of the textile and garment industry responded to a demand which it had been making for years: the abolition of production incentives, especially piecework, 'the principal cause of the miserable conditions' of the workers, according to the union. However, because of poor productivity and worker indifference, the abolition of piecework soon came under attack from the union itself:

In the industrial branches that were in our [CNT] union and where before July 19 a great amount of piecework prevailed, now that there is a fixed weekly salary, productive output has declined.

With all this there is nothing to give our economy a firm base, and we hope that all workers will use with maximum care tools, raw materials, and will give their maximum productive output.¹⁰

Problems concerning piecework persisted in the clothing unions throughout the revolution. The tailoring collective F. Vehils Vidals, with over 450 workers who made and sold shirts and knitwear, imposed, as early as February 1937, an elaborate system of incentives to stimulate its personnel. In 1938, piecework was reintroduced in the newly concentrated shoemaking workshops and one shoemaker, a member of the CNT Textile Union, protested against its reinstatement by threatening to stop work. In May 1938, Barcelona railroad workers were notified of the nearly total re-establishment of Piecework:

⁷ Actas de Junta y los militantes de las industrias construcciones metalicas CNT, 25 February 1938, carpeta (hereafter known as c.) 921. Servicios Documentales, Salamanca (hereafter known as SD).

⁸ Balcells, *Crisis*, 196; Albert Perez Baro, *30 meses de colectivismo en Cataluna* (Barcelona 1974), 47.

⁹ H. Rüdiger, 'Materiales para la discusion sobre ta situacion espanola', Rudolf Rocker Archives, no. 527-30. International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. My own random sample of 70 workers gives somewhat different results. 54 percent of the worker sampled joined the CNT after June 1936. However, almost all others – 42 percent – became affiliated with the Confederation after March 1936. Only 4 per cent were members before 1936. This phenomenon has been described by Balcells as the 'recuperacion sindicalista bajo el Frente Popular'.

¹⁰ Boletín de Informacion, 9 April 1937.

The orders of the managers must be obeyed.

The workers will receive a reasonable rate per piece. They must not forget the *basic rule* of collaboration and must not try to deceive the management.

A list of work accomplished . . . must be presented monthly, and it must be accompanied by a report which compares the results obtained with those of previous months and which justifies work outputs and variations.¹¹

In August 1937, the Technical-Administrative Council of the CNT Building Union proposed a revision of anarcho-syndicalist theories on wages. The Council posed the following dilemma: either it restored work discipline and abolished the unified salary, or it would face disaster. The Council recognized 'bourgeois influences' among the workers and called for the re-establishment of incentives for technicians and managers. In addition, it recommended that only 'profitable (*rentable*) works' be undertaken: work should be inspected, the 'masses must be re-educated morally', and their work remunerated according to effort and quality.

In July 1937, a joint declaration by the CNT-UGT Construction Amalgamation of Barcelona agreed that pay should be tied to production. Technicians of each section should fix a 'scale of minimum output':

In the case of the non-fulfillment of this minimum by a comrade, he will be sanctioned and then expelled if he repeats his error.

The CNT-UGT report recommended the posting of graphs on output as well as propaganda to raise morale and increase productivity. It determined that low output often resulted from construction workers' fears that when a project was terminated they would face unemployment.

Both publicly and privately, the Marxist UGT advocated that salaries be linked to output and that sanctions be imposed on offenders. On 1 February 1938, the UGT told its members not to formulate demands in wartime and urged them to work more. Yet the UGT Masons' Union reported on 20 November 1937 that a pay dispute in the Construction Amalgamation had led to a work stoppage and even sabotage. It also noted that some workers did not want to work because they were not receiving 100 pesetas per week. The Masons' Union called the attitude of these workers 'disastrous and out of place in these moments'.¹² On 15 December 1937, it stated that lower-paid workers wanted to equalize their salaries and that the establishment of minimum outputs was under discussion between it and the CNT. In January 1938, the UGT Building Union reported that the president of the CNT Construction Amalgamation wanted to tie a proposed salary increase to an improvement of workers' discipline.

Faced with numerous wage claims, the unions adopted various tactics to increase productivity and attempted to tie pay to production. If salaries were increased in collectivized or union-controlled firms, a corresponding augmentation of output was required. In July 1937, the CNT Tinsmiths' Union asked that salaries be linked to production. The CNT Metallic Construction Union declared on 11 January 1938 that higher pay must be accompanied by more working hours. The small clothes-making firm, J. Lanau, with its thirty workers, found itself in a similar situation. According to its accountant's report of November 1937, the mostly female personnel had been

¹¹ Red nacional de ferrocarrile, Servicio de Material y Traccion, Sector Este, May 1939, c. 1043, SD.

¹² Libro de actas de Comité UGT, Sociedad de Albaniles y Peones, 20 November 1937, c. 1051. SD.

insured for accidents, illness and pregnancy. The workers reportedly enjoyed a good relationship with the owner and had a control committee composed of two representatives from the CNT and one from the UGT. However, production was down 20 per cent and, to correct the problem, the accountant recommended the establishment of 'clear production quotas' in both the workshops and in sales.

Wage conflicts and disputes over piecework were far from the only manifestation of worker discontent and the unions, like the employers before the revolution, were also forced to confront major problems concerning the work schedule. During the revolution, the largely religiously indifferent Catalan working class continued to respect traditional, mid-week religious holidays. The anarcho-syndicalist and communist press often criticized the workers' adamant defence of these traditions, which seemed to have been ingrained, as has been seen, in Spanish working-class culture. In January 1938, *Solidaridad Obrera* and in December 1936, *Sintesis*, the publication of the CNT-UGT collective Cros, proclaimed that the traditional religious holidays could not be used as an excuse to miss work. Yet the observance of religious holidays during the working week (observers never noted a significant attendance of Sunday mass by Barcelona workers), along with absenteeism and lateness, indicated a continuing desire to escape the factory, however rationalized or democratic.

Struggles over the work schedule and holidays were not infrequent. In November 1937, a number of railroad workers refused to work on Saturday afternoons and were rebuked for indiscipline by the UGT.

The Central Committee of Workers' Control of Gas and Electricity wanted a list of those who had left their posts on New Year's Day of 1937, so that punitive measures might be taken against them.¹³ On 4 October 1937, at a special meeting of the General Council of Gas and Electricity, CNT representatives admitted that some of their members were not adhering to the work schedule. When asked by a UGT delegate if the Confederation could enforce the work schedule, the CNT representative replied:

I'm afraid not. They [the disobedient workers] will maintain the same attitude as always, and they will not want to compromise; it is useless to try anything when they ignore the agreements and instructions which come from the Building Committees, the Section Commissions, etc. They do not pay attention to anything, whether the orders originate from one union [anarcho-syndicalist] or the other [Marxist].

In many industrial branches comrades were often 'ill'. In February 1937, the CNT Metallurgical Union declared frankly that some workers were taking advantage of accidents at work. In December 1936, a prominent militant of the Tinsmiths' Union complained of the 'irregularities committed in almost all workshops with respect to illness and [work] schedules'. In January 1937, another tinsmith noted 'licentiousness' in several workshops:

There are many workers who miss a day or a half day because it suits them, and not because of illness.¹⁴

¹³ Letter from the Consejo Obrero, MZA. Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario UGT, 24 November 1937, c. 467, SD; Actas de la reunion del Pleno, 1 January 1937, c. 181. SD.

¹⁴ Sindicato de la Industria Sidero-Metalurgia, Seccion lampistas, Asamblea General, 25 December 1936, c. 1453, SD.

The CNT Technical Commission of Masons drew attention to one case where a worker who was certified as an 'epileptic' was surprised by a visit of members of the Commission while he was gardening.¹⁵

Stealing was reported in workshops and collectives. The CNT Non-Ferrous Metals Union asserted that a comrade working in a CNT-controlled factory walked off with tools when he left for the army. In December 1936, the Mechanics' Section of the famous Durruti Column notified the CNT Metallurgical Union of Barcelona that a comrade had departed with tools 'perhaps without thinking' and requested that the union make him return the missing equipment as quickly as possible. The CNT Shoemakers' Union reported other incidents of theft. Some union militants and officials of the collectives were even accused of embezzlement and misuse of funds.¹⁶

Faced with sabotage, theft, absenteeism, lateness, fake illness and other forms of working-class resistance to work and workspace, the unions and the collectives co-operated to establish strict rules and regulations which equalled or surpassed the controls of capitalist enterprises. On 18 June 1938, the CNT and UGT representative of the collective Gonzalo Coprons y Prat, which made military uniforms, reported a serious decline in production for which there was no 'satisfactory explanation'. The representatives of the two unions called for respect of production quotas and the work schedule, strict control of absences, and 'the strengthening of the moral authority of the technicians'.¹⁷ The tailoring collective F. Vehils Vidals, which had established an elaborate system of incentives for its 450 workers, approved a rather strict set of rules in a general assembly on 5 March 1938.¹⁸ A worker was appointed to control tardiness, and too many instances of lateness would mean expulsion. Comrades who were ill would be visited by a representative of the council of the collective. If they were not at home, they would be fined. It was forbidden to leave the collective during working hours, and all work done in the collective was required to be for the collective, meaning that personal projects were banned. Comrades leaving the shops with packages were obligated to show them to guards who were charged with inspection. If a worker observed stealing, fraud, or any kind of dishonesty, he had to report it or be held responsible. Technicians were required to issue a weekly report on the failures and accomplishments of their sections. Comrades were not permitted to disturb 'order inside or outside of the firm', and all workers who did not attend assemblies were fined.

Other collectives in the clothing industry issued similar sets of rules. In February 1938, the CNT-UGT council of Pantaleoni Germans established an intensive work schedule and penalties for lateness. A comrade was appointed to control entrances and exits. Work assignments and instructions had to be accepted 'without comment' and completed on time. All movements within the factory had to be authorized by the head of the section, and unauthorized movements would result in a suspension of work and salary from three to eight days. No tools were to leave the collective without authorization and a one-month trial period was established for all workers. The CNT-UGT control committee of the firm Rabat warned that any comrade who missed work and who was not ill would lose his pay. The workers of this firm, the majority of whom were women, were told that disobedience could lead to job loss in an industry where, it must be re-

¹⁵ Boletín del Sindicato de la Industria de Edificación, Madera y Decoración, 10 November 1937.

¹⁶ Actas de la reunión de Junta de Metales no-ferrosos CNT, 18 August 1939, c. 847, SD; Sección mecánica, CNT-FAI, Columna Durruti, Bujaraloz, 13 December 1936, c. 1428, SD; Actas de la Sección Zapatería, 13 May 1938, c. 1436, SD.

¹⁷ Gonzalo Coprons y Prat, Empresa Colectivizada, Vestuarios Militares. c. 1099, SD.

¹⁸ The following information is based on Proyecto de Reglamentación interior de la empresa, c. 1099, SD.

membered, unemployment was high. All Rabat workers were required to attend assemblies under threat of fines. Only conversations concerning work were allowed during working hours. Other collectives, such as Artgust, which had unsuccessfully asked workers to increase production, also enforced rules forbidding conversations, lateness, and even the receiving of telephone calls. In August 1938, in the presence of representatives, from the CNT, UGT and the Generalitat of Catalonia, the workers' assembly of the Casa A. Lanau prohibited lateness, fake illness and singing during work. The Magetzems Santeullia inspected all packages entering and leaving its factory. The CNT and UGT unions of Badalona, an industrial suburb of Barcelona, initiated control of the sick and agreed that all workers must justify their absences which, they claimed, were 'incomprehensible' and 'abusive', considering that the working week had been reduced to twenty-four hours.¹⁹

The severity of these rules and regulations would seem to have been a consequence of the decline in production and discipline in many textile and clothing forms. On 15 June 1937, the accountant of the CNT-UGT Casa Mallafre issued a report on its tailoring shops. He concluded that the administration of the collective had been honest and moral, but that production was 'the most delicate part of the problem' and that 'in production lies the secret of industrial and commercial failure or success.' If output of the workshops continued at its present, extremely low levels, the accountant warned, the firm – whether collectivized, controlled, or socialized – would fail. Current production did not even cover weekly expenses, and output had to increase if the firm was to survive. Another CNT-UGT garment collective, Artgust, wrote on 9 February 1938: 'In spite of our constant demands to the factory personnel, we have not yet succeeded in improving output.'²⁰ Artgust asked both the CNT and UGT for advice on the disproportion between high costs and low productivity.

In several collectives workers were fired or suspended. A comrade in a CNT shoemaking workshop was asked to leave because of his low production. A dissatisfied tailor, who had requested a transfer to another workshop, physically attacked a colleague, insulted the factory council and threatened the director and a technician. He was suspended in June 1938.²¹ A militant in *Mujeres Libres*, the CNT's women's group, was accused of immorality, unjustified absences, and even procuring by her comrades, who demanded disciplinary measures against her. This charge of 'immorality' was not infrequent during the Spanish Revolution and revealed that union activists considered inadequacies or failures at work 'immoral', if not downright sinful. Activities not directly related to production were also considered damnable. CNT militants wanted to end 'immorality' by shutting down such places of amusement as bars, music- and dance-halls by 10.00 p.m.²² Prostitutes were to be reformed through the therapy of work, and prostitution elim-

¹⁹ Projecte d'estatut interior per el qual hauran de regir-se els treballadors, c. 1099, SD. Assamblea ordinaria dels obrers de la casa 'Artgust', 6 September 1938, c. 1099, SD; Acta aprobada por el personal de la casa 'Antonio Lanau', 15 August 1938. c. 1099, SD. Magetzems Santeullia, c. 1099, SD; Boletín del Sindicato de la Industria Fabril y Textil de Badalona y su radio, February 1937.

²⁰ Letter from Artgust to Sección Sastereria CNT, 9 February 1938, c. 1099, SD.

²¹ Actas de la Sección Zapatería, 29 September 1938. c. 1436, SD; Letter from Consejo de Empresa to Sindicato de la Industria Fabril CNT, Sección Sastrería, 23 June 1938, c. 1099, SD.

²² 10.00 p.m. is quite early for Barcelona. Minutes of CNT metallurgists, 11 March 1937, c. 1379, SD. Letter from Comité de la Fábrica No. 7, (n.d.) c. 1085, SD.

inated as it had been in the Soviet Union. Sex and childbirth were to be delayed until after the revolution.²³

The CNT and UGT metallurgical unions tried to control indiscipline which had been reported in several collectives. In 1938, a worker was expelled from a collective, again for 'immorality', i.e. missing work without justification. Another collective wanted to fire an 'unconscious' woman, who had repeatedly given false excuses for her absences.²⁴ In August 1936, the CNT Metallurgical Union warned that comrades who did not complete their assigned tasks would be replaced 'without any consideration'. As in textiles, several metallurgical collectives issued pages of rules controlling sick leave:

The council is obligated to check the absences of the ill through a comrade whom all the comrades of the factory must admit into their homes. The inspection may occur several times a day, as the council judges necessary.²⁵

The Collective Elevators and Industrial Applications declared that any attempt at deceit concerning sick-leave would be punished by expulsion. The assembly of the firm Masriera i Carreras, which had a UGT majority, noted on 1 September 1938 that 'some comrades have the habit of entering work fifteen minutes late every day,' and it unanimously agreed to subtract a half-hour's pay for each five minutes missed. In January 1937, the Tinsmiths' Union stated that if a worker entered the factory half-an-hour late, he would lose half a day's pay. In July 1937, the collective Construcciones Mecánicas established a penalty of a loss of fifteen minutes pay for washing hands or dressing before the end of the working day. In public utilities the problems were similar. On 3 September 1937, the General Council of the electricity and gas industries noted a 'decrease in output' and declared that it must defend the common interest against a minority which lacked 'morality'. Workers would be suspended or fired for frequently arriving late or being absent. Meetings of workers during working hours were expressly forbidden, and the Council asserted that it would take disciplinary action whenever it was needed.

In January 1938 at its Economic Session, the CNT determined the 'duties and rights of the producer':

In all occupations, a task distributor will be officially responsible for the quantity, quality, and the conduct of the workers.

This task distributor was able to dismiss a worker for 'laziness or immorality', and other officials were to check if minor accidents at work of 'suspicious origin' were legitimate or 'make-believe':

All workers and employees will have a file where the details of their professional and social personalities will be registered.²⁶

²³ Dr Felix Marti Ibanez, *Obra: Diez meses de labor en sanidad y asistencia social* (Barcelona 1937), 77; Ruta, 1 January 1937.

²⁴ Letter from Comité de Control, 16 July 1938, c. 505. SD; Letter dated 29 November 1938, c. 505. SD

²⁵ *Fabrica de articulos de material aislante, Normas para el subsidio de enfermedades*, 1937, Pujol Archives, Barcelona.

²⁶ Jose Peirats, *La CNT en la Revolucion española*, 3 vols. (Paris 1971). 3; 21.

The unions supplemented their coercive rules and regulations with extensive propaganda campaigns to convince and compel the rank and file to work harder. This propaganda revealed the widespread existence of low productivity and indiscipline. The collective Vehils Vidal ringingly called for 'love of work, sacrifice, and discipline'. The CNT-UGT collective Pantaleoni Germans wanted its personnel to 'dedicate themselves to work'. The shoemakers demanded 'morality, discipline, and sacrifice'.²⁷ In April 1937, the review of the large textile firm, Fabra i Coats, published an entire page beseeching its workers 'to work, work, and work'.²⁸ The CNT often warned the rank and file not to confuse liberty and licentiousness and declared that those who did not work hard were fascists.²⁹ The Confederation admitted that workers often had a 'bourgeois mentality' because they did not work as hard as they should. According to the CNT, workers had to choose between immediate benefits and real improvements in the future. The moment for 'self-discipline' had arrived.

In February 1937 the CNT-UGT collective Marathon, a motor vehicle manufacturer, claimed in its journal, *Horizontes*:

There are many workers who see in collectivization nothing more than a simple change of beneficiaries and believe simplistically that their contribution to the factory is limited to lending their services no differently than when the industry was private. They are only interested in the salaries at the end of the month.

In May 1937, Marathon militants tried to convince their rank and file that it must extract 'maximum output' from machines that it had once detested.

In January 1938, *Solidaridad Obrera*, the CNT daily, published an article entitled: 'We impose a strict discipline in the workplace', which was reprinted several times, by both CNT and UGT periodicals:

There are those who, lamentably, have confused the meaning of the heroic struggle which the Spanish proletariat is waging.

They are not bourgeois, nor military officers, nor priests, but are workers, authentic workers, proletarians accustomed to suffering brutal capitalist repression

Their indisciplined behaviour in the workplace has interrupted 'the normal functioning of production. Before, when the bourgeois paid, it was logical to damage his interests, sabotaging production and working as little as possible. But today it is very different. The working class begins the construction of an industry which is capable of serving as the base of the new society.

In a confidential conversation with CNT members of the optical collective, Ruiz y Ponseti, one of the most important UGT leaders and a prominent communist, agreed that it was the conduct of the workers which most endangered the collectives. According to this UGT director, although it was not stated publicly, the workers were merely 'masses', whose co-operation was unfortunately necessary for the success of the enterprises.³⁰

²⁷ Projecte Reglamentacio Interior, 5 March 1938, c. 1099, SD. Projecte d'estatut interior per el qual hauran de regirse els treballadors, February 1938, c. 1099, SD; Actas de la Seccion Zapateria, 15 May 1938, c. 1436, SD.

²⁸ Revista dels treballadors de Filatures Fabra i Coats, April 1937.

²⁹ Boletín del Sindicato de la Industria de la Edificación, Madera y Decoración, 10 September 1937.

³⁰ See Informe confidencial, 27 January 1938, c. 855, SD.

Therefore, in revolutionary Barcelona, the leaders and the militants of the organizations which claimed to represent the working class were forced to combat workers' continuing resistance to work. The continuation of workers' struggles against work in a situation where workers' organizations managed the productive forces calls into question the degree to which these organizations actually embodied the interests of the working class. It would seem that the CNT, the UGT and the PSUC (Catalan Communist Party) reflected the view of those whom these organizations considered the 'conscious' workers. The 'unconscious', who outnumbered the 'conscious', had no formal or organizational representation. These workers were largely silent about their refusal to work, for understandable reasons. After all, their resistance to work was subversive in a revolution and a civil war where a new managing class was fervently devoted to economic development. Workers' silence was a form of defence and a kind of resistance. This silence impedes quantification of resistance to work. Many refusals must have gone uncounted and unrecorded.

The history of their resistance to work can be partially reconstructed through the minutes of the meetings of the collectives and, paradoxically, through the criticisms of the organizations which purported to represent the class. Struggles against work reveal a distance and separation between militants devoted to the development of the means of production and a great many workers who were unwilling to sacrifice wholeheartedly to fulfill the militants' ideal. Whereas militants identified class-consciousness with the control and development of the productive forces, the creation of a productivist revolution and an all-out effort to win the war, many workers' expression of class-consciousness included avoidance of workspace and worktime, as it had often done before the revolution.

In the very different political and economic situation of Paris during the Popular Front, many factory workers conveyed a form of class consciousness which was very similar to that of the Barcelona workers whom we have examined. However, before we examine workers' resistance to work during the French Popular Front, it should be noted that French workers, like Spanish, also have a rich history of refusal to work which is, fortunately for the historian, well charted. Studies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century workers have shown the importance of sabotage, lateness, drunkenness, theft, slow-downs, struggles against piecework and insubordination.³¹ In addition, examples of absenteeism, unauthorized holidays and conflicts over work schedules were all documented before the first world war.

Less is known about the interwar period. However, in the 1930s, France's relative political and economic stability, in comparison with its Iberian neighbour, seemed to have tempered workers' resistance to work. At Citroën, work slow-downs, absenteeism and sabotage appeared to have been 'rather limited and to have been confined to turnover and resignation', even though several important strikes occurred.³² Yet in 1932, Renault embarked upon a serious campaign against

³¹ See Michelle Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en greve: France 1871-90*, 2 vols. (Paris and La Haye 1974). Roland Trempe *Les Mineurs de Carmaux, 1848-1914* (Paris 1971), I, 229; Yves Lequin, *Les Ouvriers de la région lyonnaise*, 2 vols. (Lyon 1977).

³² Sylvie Schweitzer, *Des Engrenages à la chaîne: Les usines Citroën 1915-1935* (Lyon 1982), 145-70.

waste, shirking and poor quality production.³³ Large sums were spent on the mechanical supervision department which employed 16 inspectors and 279 examiners to check on the output of approximately 9,000 workers. In addition to this effort to restrict shoddy production, Renault also employed its own physicians to control workers who claimed to have been injured in work accidents. The company attempted to stymie workers' efforts to find a permissive or sympathetic doctor who would allow the injured to remain on sick leave longer than management desired. On the shopfloor, strict controls were established to reduce theft and pilfering. Workers frequently protested against this discipline and often referred to the factory as the *bagne* (convict prison), as they had done in the nineteenth century.

Yet if rank-and-file behaviour in Spain and France in the early twentieth century was frequently similar, the situation of Spanish and French working-class organizations was not at all the same. For various reasons that cannot be elaborated here, a revolutionary situation did not exist in France in 1936, and during the Popular Front neither the unions nor the parties of the left expropriated the factories. Unlike the CNT, the CGT, the major French union, was not directing collectivized and controlled firms. Although the CGT (Confederation Generale du Travail) was associated with the Popular Front government and sympathetic to it, the Federation had to respond to the needs of its rank and file for less work and higher pay. Sometimes the appeals for hard work and intensive effort by higher-ranking CGT leaders, who were more sensitive to the national and international implications of economic weakness and military unpreparedness, were countermanded by lower-ranking union delegates who supported or acquiesced in incidents of lateness, absenteeism, faked illness, production slow-downs, theft and sabotage.

During the spring of 1936, a wave of sit-down strikes followed the electoral victory of the Popular Front. Even after these occupations had ended, resistance to work intensified during the Popular Front governments. Many workers took advantage of the relaxation of the military-style labour discipline which had characterized factory life during the crisis years of the 1930s to arrive late, leave early, miss work, slow down production, and disobey their superiors. In fact, some workers interpreted the Popular Front's alliance against fascism, not so much politically, but in terms of their everyday life. In other words, for many Parisian workers, 'fascism' became associated with iron discipline on the shop-floor, intensive productivity and a long and tiring working week. A foreman who demanded strict obedience, a boss who established longer working hours, or an engineer who quickened the pace of production might be labelled a 'fascist' by a number of workers.³⁴

A letter written by a Parisian worker to his deputy revealed the connection between work and fascism in some workers' minds.³⁵ The writer, who was a 'convinced supporter of the Popular Front', protested against the dismissal of a young woman who had refused to work during a legal holiday on 11 November. He accused the director of the company, the luxury store Fauchon, of being a 'notorious fascist' (*fasciste notoire* [sic]) and claimed that the firing of the woman was illegal and intolerable 'under a government of the Popular Front, elected by the workers for the defence of their interests'. Although the writer was wrong concerning the illegality of the dismissal (the prohibition on work during legal holidays did not apply to luxury stores but to factories and mines), his letter – despite its misspellings and insufficient knowledge of labour

³³ 'Campagne', Archives Nationales (hereafter known as AN), 91AQ3.

³⁴ 'Declarations de Madame X', 14 January 1937; 'P.', 1 February 1937, AN, 91AQ65; 'Incidents', AN, 91AQ16.

³⁵ Letter to J. Garchery, 9 December 1936, AN, F22396.

law – disclosed the identification of the Popular Front with the protection of holidays. It is also significant that charges of fascism were levelled against an employer who wished to 'recuperate' a holiday. As in Barcelona, in Paris too, struggles over the making-up of holidays were widespread.

The Popular Front – like other periods of French history when a 'weak' or perhaps permissive government tolerated increased strike activity, such as the beginning of the July Monarchy, the end of the Second Empire, the early years of the Third Republic, and Bloc des gauches³⁶ – provided an opportunity to defy the work pace and to struggle against work itself. After the sit-in at Renault, these struggles embraced various forms, and workers altered their schedules, arriving late and leaving early.

In different workshops the workers have modified, on their own initiative, their working hours, entering an hour earlier or later and leaving accordingly.³⁷

Many union representatives also missed work:

The delegates do not perform any real work. Some appear in their workshops only incidentally. Most of them leave their jobs at any moment without asking the permission of their foremen. The delegates meet almost constantly and, despite the numerous warnings issued, they persist in acting this way.³⁸

Delegates were known to enter the factory 'in a state of excessive drunkenness', 'engaging in clowning, preventing workers from working normally'. On 5 February 1937, a delegate ordered that machines be turned off during his mealtime, and the result was the 'difficulty, if not impossibility of working during meals'.³⁹

Both union representatives and workers attempted to control hiring and firing at Renault. In September 1936, the personnel of *atelier* 147 demanded the dismissal of their foreman 'with the plea that he made them work too much'.⁴⁰ On 8 November 1937 *Syndicats*, the organ of the anti-communist tendency of the CGT, complained when the Renault management refused to hire an inexperienced young worker for a highly specialized job: 'The industrialists want to employ only workers capable of maximum output.' The journal called for CGT control of hiring. Delegates demanded that management fire personnel who refused to join the CGT.

It was often quite difficult for management to dismiss workers who had committed 'grave professional errors':

When a foreman made a simple observation to a worker, this worker, without speaking, punched him twice in the face, giving him contusions which appear to be serious.⁴¹

On 8 September 1936, the delegates of the workshops where the incident had occurred threatened to strike if the worker who had been fired for hitting his foreman was not immediately

³⁶ Perrot, *Ouvriers*, 1, 180.

³⁷ 'Autres manquements', 4 September 1936, Archives Renault (hereafter known as AR).

³⁸ 'Note', 11 September 1936, AR.

³⁹ '5 fevrier 1937', AN, 91AQ16.

⁴⁰ 'Les Violations', 21 October 1936, AR.

⁴¹ 'Les Violations', 4 September 1936, AR. Perhaps this 'simple observation' of the foremen may have been more complicated and more aggressive than management was willing to admit.

reinstated. A company driver who had caused three separate accidents on three consecutive days could not be dismissed:

We had to keep this worker, under the pretext that his firing was not caused by his professional errors, because he was the chauffeur for the (CP) Deputy Costes during the strike.⁴²

Union representatives usurped management prerogatives concerning employment. In *atelier 125* rationalization of a process for making car interiors had meant a reduction in the number of workers needed, and the management wanted to dismiss those whose rate of absenteeism was high. The delegates, however, opposed management's selection. Union representatives even objected to subcontracting which, they asserted, was a *de facto* method of laying off Renault employees, and on 22 January 1937 workers left their jobs and stopped a truck which was delivering parts made by an outside firm.⁴³

Delegates used the gains of the May-June occupations in special ways. After the strikes of the spring of 1936, the regular searches of packages and suitcases of workers leaving the factories had ended, and in *atelier 243* a delegate threatened 'incidents' if management reinstated the checks.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the management quietly employed 'discreet surveillance' for several months. On 4 December 1937, a delegate and his partner were arrested as they entered a taxi. Both were carrying heavy bags and were conducted to the police station where they declared that, every day for several months, they had stolen five kilograms of anti-friction metals, which they later resold. Renault claimed 200,000 francs in damages, including both the cost of the stolen goods and the estimated price of the 'disorders affecting our manufactures'.

Stealing, indiscipline, lateness and absenteeism were all manifestations of the central problem: the reluctance of many workers to produce and work as hard as management desired. In the workshops of chromium and nickel plating and polishing, workers (mostly women) stopped production with a 'disconcerting ability' and formulated their demands only 'after the unjustified work stoppage'.⁴⁵ Work slow-downs and protests against piecework were frequent during the Popular Front. In *atelier 125*, union representatives petitioned against production incentives and for a salary 'by the day' (*la journee*). Adjustors on automatic lathes threatened to strike for the end of piecework and a 38 per cent salary increase. On 28 August in the spare parts workshop, there was a work stoppage in protest against a production pace that was 'considered too rapid by the delegates'. On 12 October 1936 in the polishing workshops, union representatives 'violently' objected to new piecework rates. After June 1936 in the aluminium foundry, new machinery – which was supposed to reduce costs by twenty per cent – was installed. But the new equipment succeeded in cutting costs by only four per cent, because after a 'long discussion', workers refused to 'work with this new material'. Work slow-downs took place in various *ateliers* and assembly lines throughout 1937 and 1938, and management claimed that output in 1938 was lower than

⁴² 'Autres manquements', 4 September 1936, AR.

⁴³ 'Rapport concernant le licenciement du personnel de l'atelier 125', (nd) AN, 91AQIS; 'Janvier 22 1937', AN, 91AQ16.

⁴⁴ 'Note do service no. 21.344', 6 December 1937, AN, 91AQ16.

⁴⁵ 'Incidents', AR.

in 1936. According to the employers, it was necessary to watch workers very closely to obtain a decent level of productivity.⁴⁶

Delegates frequently encouraged workers' resistance to production speed-ups. In 1938 in the polishing workshops, union representatives required that workers show them their pay cheques so that the CGT activists could determine if the workers were producing beyond the de facto quota which had been established. One semi-skilled woman conceded that she wanted 'to make the most possible' and stated in January 1937 that she was intimidated by the delegates from exceeding the de facto quotas.⁴⁷ One delegate declared, for all to hear: 'When there is any kind of disturbance in the factory, I put down my tools, and I go and check out what's happening.'⁴⁸

In aviation, despite partial nationalization, CGT participation on the Administrative Councils, and other changes favouring the unions, CGT delegates and the rank and file defied piecework and production incentives. At Salmson, a privately owned aviation firm, the CGT claimed that its secretary had been unjustly dismissed and that its delegates were prevented from exercising their functions. Such action by the management did not 'encourage the workers to augment the pace of production', and the CGT asserted that 'to obtain a normal output, one must have a normal attitude towards the workers.'⁴⁹ Even the president of the Societe Nationale de Constructions de Moteursat Argenteuil, who was a strong advocate of nationalization, warned his personnel that 'in the factory, one works'.⁵⁰ Output and production figures were to be posted in each workshop, and the president asked his workmen to respect authority based on knowledge and ability. Although Rene Belin, the CGT leader who represented the Federation on the Administrative Council of the Societe Nationale de Constructions de Moteurs, denied that he had 'imposed' on the workers a resolution concerning the length of the working day and output, he nonetheless stated that 'a satisfactory output' should be maintained 'in the aviation factories and especially at the Lorraine [company]'.⁵¹

While managers of the nationalized aviation firms granted salary increases, high overtime pay, August vacations, improved health and safety conditions, professional re-education, special transportation to work, and even CGT participation in hiring, the management nevertheless insisted upon tying pay levels to production through a system of piecework or incentives.⁵² Executives in both public and private enterprises were convinced that incentives were necessary in a situation where, despite the purchase of new machinery and the addition of new personnel, productivity had frequently declined. In 1938 the employers' organization, Constructeurs de Cellules, appealed to the Minister of Air, Guy de la Chambre, for 'the development of piecework'. Metallurgical employers maintained that:

⁴⁶ 'Incidents', AR. Note from M. Penard, 22 April 1938, AN, 91AQ65; 'Series de diagrammes du puissance absorbe par les ateliers', 22 April 1938, AN, 91AQ65; 'Freinagedes ... Cadres Camionettes'. 'Freinage ... des Cadres Celta et Prima', AN, 91AQ116.

⁴⁷ 'Declarations de Madame X', 14 January 1937, AN, 91AQ65.

⁴⁸ 'Incidents aux Ateliers', AR.

⁴⁹ La Vie Ouvriere, 21 July 1938.

⁵⁰ C. Bonnier, 'Huit Mois de nationalisation', AN, 91AQ80.

⁵¹ Syndicats, 22 June 1938.

⁵² Usine, 21 April 1938; Societe Nationale de Constructions Aeronautiques du Nord (hereafter known as SNCAN), 11 May 1938.

piecework [in aviation] is practically abandoned. The Federation des Metaux (CGT) constrains workers not to go beyond a 'ceiling' of fixed salaries.⁵³

In February 1938, the Minister of Air declared that aircraft production had been hindered, not primarily because of the forty-hour week, but rather because of the 'insufficiency of hourly production in the nationalized factories'.⁵⁴

The struggles against piecework and a fast rate of production occurred not only in modern enterprises, such as aviation and the motor industry, but also in the smaller and more traditional construction trade. Construction was commonly a refuge for the craftsman. Compared to the 'militarized territory of the factory', the independence of, for instance, plumbers or roofers was remarkable. Construction was largely decentralized and family-run; whereas in 1931 in metallurgy 98.3 per cent of workers were employed in firms with over 100 workers, in construction and public works only 23.8 per cent of workers were employed in firms with more than 100 workers.⁵⁵ About 40 per cent of construction workers were employed in establishments with less than fifty workers. In 1931, this industry employed one million workers, approximately 10 per cent of the work-force.

In the largest construction project during the Popular Front, the World Fair of 1937, which involved hundreds of firms, CGT delegates set production quotas and restricted the effectiveness of piecework incentives. Delegates limited, for instance, the number of bricks which a bricklayer could lay or how quickly a plasterer could work.⁵⁶ It was difficult to fire these workers because of the power of the CGT and the administration's fear of disruptive incidents. For example, when the management of the Algerian pavilion dismissed nine roofers, workers retaliated by occupying the site, despite the presence of police. Officials then decided to keep the dismissed labourers on the job. Although Arrachard, secretary-general of the Federation du Batiment, claimed that he had intervened frequently so that workers would produce normally and complete their jobs on schedule, his intervention would seem to have been ineffective.⁵⁷ Several weeks after the scheduled opening date of 1 May had passed, the delays in construction became increasingly embarrassing to the government, which wanted the Fair to be the showcase of the Popular Front. On 13 May 1937 Jules Moch, Leon Blum's right-hand man, told Arrachard that the 'comedy had gone on long enough', and that order must be restored. In June 1937, Moch threatened to 'go public' and tell the press that the union was responsible for the delays, if work on the museums was not quickly completed.⁵⁸ Some foreign nations attempted to employ non-French workers, to finish their pavilions, but the CGT effectively opposed not only this practice but even the hiring of provincial French workers.⁵⁹ For instance, the Americans wanted to finish their pavilion by 4 July, their Independence Day, and concluded a contract with a Belgian firm to finish a metal roof because of the 'impossibility of obtaining a sufficient output from French workers'. However, the

⁵³ Conseil d'administration, Chambre syndicale de constructeurs, 17 March 1938, AN, 91AQ80; Usine, 9 June 1938. See also Robert Frankenstein, *Le prix du rearmement francais, 1935-1939* (Paris 1982), 278.

⁵⁴ Usine, 19 February 1938.

⁵⁵ Alfred Sauvy, *Histoire economique de la France entre les deux guerres*, 4 vols. (Paris 1982), 278.

⁵⁶ AN, Exposition 1937, Rapport, Contentieux, 34, (n.d.).

⁵⁷ AN, Exposition 1937, Comite de contentieux, 20 July 1939; *La Vie Ouvriere*, 30 March 1939.

⁵⁸ AN, Exposition 1937, Commission Tripartite, 13 May and 10 June 1937.

⁵⁹ AN, Exposition 1937, note des ingenieurs-constructeurs, (n.d.) Contentieux, 37; Letter from administrator, 21 April 1939, Contentieux, 40.

CGT, with the agreement of the Labour Inspector of the World Fair, demanded that a certain number of its workers be hired. These newly employed French labourers:

have only disorganized the [construction] site and discouraged the Belgian workers by their absolute inactivity resembling a slowdown strike.⁶⁰

The building of the roof took twice as long as planned.

Nevertheless, the decline in production and the unsettled state of the factories should not be attributed entirely to the actions of the delegates. Management tended to blame production problems on 'trouble-makers' and 'agitators'. Yet at Renault these meneurs, as they were called by employers, found a solid base of support among many workers. After all, CGT delegates had frequently been elected by overwhelming majorities. In July 1936, the Federation des Metaux received 86.5 per cent of the votes of those registered; whereas the other unions combined polled only 7 per cent, with 6.5 per cent abstaining.⁶¹ In July 1938, the CGT continued to retain the support of the vast majority. It polled 20,428 out of 27,913 votes or 73.2 per cent. The other unions – Syndicat Professionnel Francais, CFTC (Catholic), and 'independents' – obtained a total of 10.9 per cent. In July 1938, abstentions jumped to 15.9 percent, more than double the 1936 rate. Although one cannot exclude the possibility that CGT militants intimidated voters, it is probably safe to assume that the delegates of the Federation des Metaux, which won such lopsided majorities (71 delegates out of 74 in 1938), expressed many of the desires of their constituents.

Indeed, the power of the delegates was sometimes limited by the rank and file. In one case, delegates required that management end a certain incentive in return for a formal pledge that productivity would not suffer; nevertheless, output fell.⁶² As early as 30 June 1936, during negotiations between the Labour Minister and metallurgical employers, a CGT delegation promised to help increase output, but this commitment also remained unfulfilled. Intervention by the delegates to improve production risked arousing the 'anger of the workers against the delegates'. High-ranking CGT and Communist Party officials were often ignored by many workers. On 16 September 1936, the Renault management reported a work stoppage 'in spite of the intervention of the Secretary of the Federation des Metaux of Billancourt and of M. Timbault', an important CGT leader. Even lower-ranking delegates would sometimes disobey union superiors or renege on agreements:

With the consent of the delegates, it was agreed that the painters would work two hours overtime to finish the vehicles for the Automobile Show. At 6.00 p.m. the delegate M., dissatisfied with his pay, gave them an order to leave in the name of the CGT.⁶³

Even after offending delegates were dismissed, production slowdowns continued among the rank and file.

Certain communist militants were irritated by the workers' actions. During a cell meeting, one militant:

⁶⁰ AN, Exposition 1937, note (n.d.), Contentieux, 37.

⁶¹ 'Resultat des elections des delegues ouvriers', AN, 91AQ116.

⁶² 'Atelier: Evacuation des copeaux', 30 September 1936, 91AQ16.

⁶³ 'Les Violations', 21 October 1936, AR.

protested against the abuses perpetrated by the comrades: work stoppages before the whistle. The punching-in at noon had been ended, but the comrades were in the streets before the noon whistle had blown. [He noted] work stoppages 20 or 30 minutes early.⁶⁴

One communist militant was seen speaking to his foreman while intoxicated and admitted having 'un tout petit coup dans le nez'. He was mildly reprimanded by his cell.

With or without the support of the delegates – whether communist or not – workers fought to preserve the forty-hour week, which many of them considered one of the major gains of the Popular Front. Because of sluggish production and increasing international tension, throughout the spring and summer of 1938 aviation managements pushed for longer working hours. In March 1938, the administrator of a nationalized enterprise, the SNCASE, insisted upon:

the necessity, in order to accelerate production, of working forty-five hours in the planning department and in tool-fabrication.

Other aviation industrialists asserted that, to be effective, the forty-five-hour week had to be extended to suppliers of raw materials and semi-finished products.⁶⁵ In July 1938, the *Chambre Syndicale des Constructeurs de Moteurs d'Avions* debated whether to accept only 100 hours of overtime per year or to strive for 'a permanent end' to the restrictions on the working week:

Mr X thinks that it is not more overtime but a permanent repeal that must be obtained.

I would share his opinion if this permanent repeal had some possibility of being enacted, which it does not. Therefore if we insist upon this, which we will certainly not get, we risk losing the advantages of the extra credit of 100 hours of overtime. Sometimes when you want to do something better, it turns out worse.⁶⁶

Despite claims by many in the Popular Front that workers would be willing to sacrifice for national defence, the government found it difficult to expand the working week beyond forty hours. On 2 March 1938, *Syndicats* reported that 'metallurgical workers are too attached to the forty-hour week to let it be violated.' The *Societee d'Optique et Mecanique de Haute Precision* received an authorization from the government on 1 September 1938 permitting five hours of overtime, increasing the working week from forty to forty-five hours.⁶⁷ The management established that the workday would begin at 7.30 instead of 8.00 and finish at 18.00 instead of 17.30. On Monday, 5 September at the ateliers du Blvd. Davout, 59 per cent of the workers disobeyed the new work schedule by arriving late and 58 percent left early. On Tuesday, 57 per cent of the workers arrived late. At the ateliers de la Croix Nivert, 36 per cent arrived late on Monday, and 59 per cent on Tuesday. 'The great majority' of skilled workers disregarded the new schedule and lacked discipline. Other companies reported numerous refusals by workers to obey the

⁶⁴ 'Assemble Generale des Sections et Cellules d'ateliers', (n.d.), AN, 91AQ16. This document was probably the report of management's informer.

⁶⁵ SNCASE, (*Societe Nationale de Constructions Aeronautiques du Sud-Est*), 29 March 1938; 'Note de la Chambre syndicale des industries aeronautiques du Sud-Est remise a M. le Ministre du travail', 31 March 1938, AN, 91AQ80.

⁶⁶ 'Note', 8 July 1938, AN, 91AQ80.

⁶⁷ The following information is from a letter to the *Ministere du Travail*, 6 September 1938, AN, 91AQ80.

legal extension of the working week. During the second world war, a clandestine issue of the socialist newspaper, *Le Populaire*, reproached workers for failing to work overtime during the Popular Front. The CGT leader, Ambroise Croizat, admitted that the forty-hour week hindered aircraft production and that overtime was necessary, but he stated that 'the working masses' were 'insufficiently informed of industrial necessities'.⁶⁸

A distinguished historian has written that the forty-hour week was a 'symbol' to workers.⁶⁹ Yet the struggle to retain it was very real, and workers in the construction, metal-working and other industries fought hard to conserve it. The forty-hour week may have been a 'symbol' of growing working-class power for intellectuals and others, but for those directly involved – workers and employers – it meant working less. Likewise, Edward Shorter's and Charles Tilly's assertion that the 'strike was becoming a symbolic act' may render it overly emblematic.⁷⁰ A strike may have its symbolic side, but first and foremost it is a work stoppage. It may seem too obvious to mention, but since labour historians generally concentrate on the political and economic causes or the symbolism of a strike, it tends to be forgotten that the strike is a cessation of work.

The various forms of strikes during the Popular Front manifested a general hostility to labour and work. During the great wave of occupations and sit-down strikes of spring 1936, the French workers, unlike the Spanish militants, never attempted to run the factories themselves. Of course, more conventional strikes – whether wildcat or planned – also were quite clearly refusals to work. The strikes frequently meant taking advantage of the moment – the joy of not working even manifesting itself in dancing and singing in the factories during the occupations. The Popular Front was a period when this appropriation of the present, the capturing of time for oneself, by the working class was particularly intense.

Both employers and government officials compared the atmosphere of the Popular Front with that of the early 1930s. A major construction company, which was extending the metro line to the Gare d'Orleans, 'contrasted the attitude in 1934 when productivity increased with that of 1936'.⁷¹ A top official of a nationalized aviation company noted the 'vague generale de paresse' which unfurled during the Popular Front. The Inspecteur General du Travail stated on 8 September 1938:

The unions must use every opportunity to demand that the collective bargaining agreement be obeyed [by the workers]. No work is possible without discipline, and there is no discipline without authority. Now after the bargaining agreement has defined this authority, which must rule in the workplace, the workers must submit to it.⁷²

Because of the workers' challenges to their authority, the threat and reality of disorder, and a levelling of pay-scales, many supervisory personnel – foremen, superintendents, and perhaps engineers and technicians as well – became favourably inclined towards extreme right-wing

⁶⁸ Robert Jacomet, *L'Armement de la France (1936-39)* (Paris 1945), 260; Croizat quoted by Elisabeth du Reau, 'L'Amenagement de la loi instituant la semaine de quarante heures', in Rene Remond and Janine Bourdin (eds.), *Edouard Daladier: Chef du gouvernement (Paris 1977)*, 136.

⁶⁹ Claude Fohlen, *La France de l'entre-deux-guerres, 1917-39* (Paris 1972), 157.

⁷⁰ Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968*, (London 1974), 75.

⁷¹ SPIE-Batignolles, Comite de direction, 15 October 1937, AN, 89AQ 2025.

⁷² SNCASO, 27 September 1938; Speech to Congres national des Commissions paritaires, 8 September 1938, AN, 39AS830/831.

parties or 'fascist' movements that clamoured for the restoration of order and discipline in the workplace. A letter of 1 December 1938, which was probably written by Louis Renault himself, stated:

Our *maitrise* has suffered for two years the repercussions of politics. It has frequently been forced to accept a lack of respect for discipline and systematically restrained output.⁷³

Right-wing movements attracted those cadres (and even some workers) who, for either personal or patriotic reasons, insisted on hard work and heightened discipline. They regarded the parties and the unions of the left – no matter how reformist and patriotic in public – as effectively subversive in their inability or unwillingness to prevent strikes, re-establish discipline, and, in general, to control the workers.

The implications of workers' resistance to work are far-reaching. The study of their reluctance to work shows that the claim by unions and political parties of the left to represent the working class is somewhat questionable. French and Spanish workers continued their traditional ways of resistance to labour in spite of calls by communists, socialists, anarchists or syndicalists for greater production. The persistence of workers' resistance created tensions between members of the working class and the organizations which claimed to represent them. In both revolutionary and reformist situations, persuasion and propaganda which aimed to convince the workers to work harder was inadequate and had to be supplemented by force. In Barcelona, piecework was re-established and strict rules imposed in order to increase productivity. In Paris, only after 30 November 1938, when the state used massive police and army intervention to break the general strike designed to save the forty-hour week, was discipline restored and productivity raised in many businesses in the Paris region. Coercion had to reinforce persuasion to make the workers work harder.

Modernization theorists have minimized or ignored workers' resistance to work and the coercion used to assure increased output. A theory which views workers as progressively adapting themselves to the factory has underestimated the tenacity of absenteeism, sabotage, lateness, slow-downs, and indifference – phenomena which caused both Spanish revolutionaries and the French Popular Front coalition considerable difficulties. Unfortunately, it is perhaps impossible to measure precisely the countless refusals to work. Workers' silence has impeded the discovery of the most significant acts of the class. 'Subversive' activities – destruction of machinery, pilfering, work slow-downs, fake illness, sabotage – are seldom claimed and rarely publicized. Understandably, political parties and unions which claim to represent the working class are reluctant to portray their membership as anything but sober, serious, and hardworking in nations which value, above all, the development of the productive forces. What is most interesting and most essential is often the hardest to uncover, and usually only in management and police archives are these matters disclosed. Yet if workers' discretion impedes quantification of these phenomena,

⁷³ 'Note au sujet des effectifs', AN, 91AQ15.

resistance to work during the 1930s must be seen as an essential part of the lives of workers in Barcelona and Paris.

Not only modernization theory but also Marxist labour historiography has generally underestimated or ignored the persistence of workers' resistance to work in both revolutionary and reformist situations. Like modernization theorists, Marxists share a progressive view of history, and they postulate a movement from a class in itself to a class for itself or the making of the working class. Yet this progressive view of history which posits the growth of a working class imbued with an implicitly unitary 'class-consciousness' may also overlook the survival of various types of class-consciousness and, in particular, workers' resistance to work. Refusal to work was, as we have seen, an essential aspect of working-class culture as late as the second third of the twentieth century in two great European cities, when the left held varying – but considerable – degrees of power. In both Paris and Barcelona the truly committed party and union militants were a distinct minority of the working class. If many workers adjusted to the new social and political atmosphere by joining the union, most also adapted their traditional forms of resistance to work to the new situation. The so-called 'conscious workers' or militants were forced to confront the very different class-consciousness of what they sometimes called the 'unconscious workers'.

This passiveness or refusal of the working class cannot, of course, be dismissed as 'unconsciousness' or 'false consciousness'. As Jean Guehenno has suggested in his *Journal d'une 'Revolution'*, maybe this reserve of indifference and even confusion is a relatively healthy response. In a mean and untruthful world, scepticism is a strength, and the lack of commitment by many workers to the ideologies of parties and unions that depend upon the world of work for their organizational existence is not necessarily 'false consciousness'.

Resistance to work does not fit into a neat political category and persisted, although with varying intensity, during governments of both the right and the left in the 1930s. Indeed, refusal to work may have increased when regimes on the left responded to workers' demands, such as the abolition of piecework or the forty-hour week. More repressive policies, as were enacted in the *bienio negro* or the early years of the Depression in France, perhaps limited the struggles against work, but did not eliminate them. It seems reasonable to suggest that resistance to work responded to deeply-felt desires of many workers and remained a hidden but profound part of working-class culture in a variety of political situations.

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Towards a History of Workers' Resistance to Work
Paris and Barcelona during the French Popular Front and the Spanish Revolution, 1936-38
April 1988

Retrieved on 6 February 2024 from libcom.org.
Published in *Journal of Contemporary History* Volume 23, Issue 2, pp. 191-220, DOI:
10.1177/002200948802300203. Republished as a pamphlet by News From Everywhere, London,
September 1988.

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